

Parker eyeing top spot

By KEVIN YANIK
Sports Writer

Fremont Ross senior Eliot Parker went the last several months without swinging a racquet.

He isn't worried, though, as his final tennis season begins.

"I'm usually an all-season player, but this year I took basically all of the summer and winter off," Parker said. "I just started playing a couple of weeks before the season. I've matured a lot, I've gotten a lot stronger and my strokes are right there."

Parker proved that this week, when he beat senior teammate Jordan Will in a couple of challenge matches to determine who plays No. 1 singles. Parker owned that spot the past two seasons, and it's likely his again this year.

Still, a top singles spot with the Little Giants isn't an automatic bid to a state title. Last season, Parker was knocked out of the state tournament at districts.

"I'm usually just a few rounds away," he said. "We definitely have the toughest district in the state, and they only take two people."

The Greater Buckeye Conference won't be much easier. Lisa Wolfe, who's taken over for Rick LaFountain as Ross boys coach, expects Findlay, once again, to be challenging.

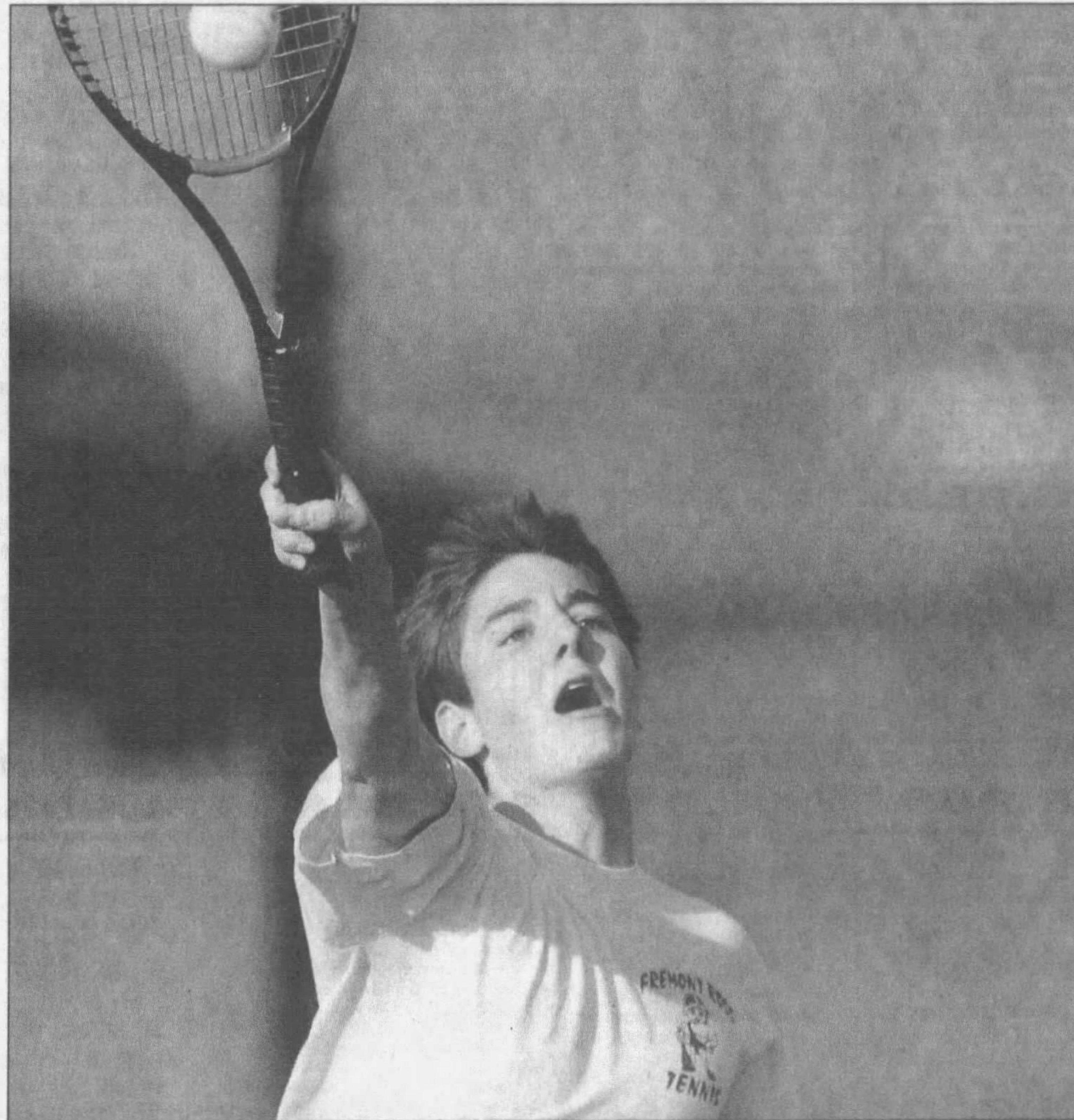
"It's going to be tough," she said. "I do a traveling team in the summer with the boys and girls teams from the [Fremont Recreation] Department, and Findlay is one of the teams that travels around. They'll definitely be a competitor."

Will, who will at least play No. 2 singles, agreed.

"Findlay's probably going to be the toughest team we've got to play," he said.

Besides Will, the Little Giants have nine players who could easily play varsity, Wolfe said. Mike Hollis and Cameron Mooney are vying for the No. 3 singles spot, as Bryce Huffman and Cody Zoller will play doubles.

"I want as many kids to play varsity as possible," said Wolfe, who coached the Ross



NM file photo

FREMONT ROSS' ELIOT PARKER hits the ball as he plays against Bowling Green last year.

girls team to a 99-31 record over seven seasons until 2003. "You'll probably see a different lineup in second doubles position to give kids a chance to play varsity."

At St. Joseph Central Catholic, junior Eric Barbour returns as coach Scott Knisely's No. 1 singles player. Sophomore Chris Wobser, who played at No. 2 singles last season, joins Barbour and about eight other newcomers.

"I enjoy coaching the team," Knisely said. "We get a bunch of kids who have never played tennis before. I tell them if they don't know how to play, I'll teach you. Today, I was playing with three kids who

never even gripped a racquet before."

Oak Harbor also has plenty of newcomers, but Bobby Lohotzki is back to handle No. 1 singles. Dereck Witt takes No. 2 singles, and Clifford Goetz and Andy Biggett are also guaranteed spots somewhere.

"We have 23 kids on the roster and 12 are freshmen," said LaFountain, who's in his first season coaching the Rockets. "Other than the youngsters, we have some upperclassmen who may be able to step right into the lineup and win some important matches for us."

Clyde won a few big matches last season, and it has most of last year's team intact. The

Fliers lost only one player, and coach Jeff MacFarland expects his team to continue its improvement.

"I'm really looking forward to the season," said MacFarland, whose Fliers jumped from 3-10 to 8-5 from 2005 to '06. "I'm hoping our experience pays off with some victories this year."

Bellevue coach Shana Young lost some of her most experienced players to graduation, but she expects Jon Stout and Matt Allen to step up in singles play. Her team went 9-9 overall a season ago.

E-mail Kevin Yanik at kyanik@fremont.gannett.com

Tennis Rundown

FREMONT ROSS

Coach: Lisa Wolfe, 1st season
Record: 12-7, (3rd GBC)
Key losses: Jacob Laurer, Jared Groot

Returnees: Eliot Parker, Jordan Will, Bryce Huffman, Cameron Mooney, Eric Hottinger, Cody Zoller, Mitch Langley, Matt Hershey

Outlook: The Little Giants return three district qualifiers, including Parker, who's expected to be the team's No. 1 singles player for the third straight season. Wolfe is back at Ross as a coach for the first time since 2003, but this time, she's coaching the boys team. The switch isn't too drastic from what she's used to, Wolfe said, although court etiquette has been one of her focal points this year.

SJCC

Coach: Scott Knisely, 2nd season
Key losses: Mike Wagner
Returnees: Eric Barbour, Chris Wobser

Outlook: Knisely lost three seniors from last year's team, but Barbour is back to handle No. 1 singles for the second straight season. The Crimson Streaks added three senior exchange students, but only one of those has previous experience playing tennis. The team has about eight total newcomers, including a couple of boys who have little or no tennis experience.

CLYDE

Coach: Jeff MacFarland, 15th season
Record: 8-5
Key losses: Bobby Hintz
Returnees: Derek Foreman, Matt Cammarn, Zak Minich, James Wott, Josh Bender, Ben Stickney

Outlook: Clyde's top three singles players — Foreman, Cammarn and Minich — return this season. So do Wott and Bender, who make up the No. 1 doubles team. MacFarland, who had six out of seven players return, is hoping his team's experience pays off with a few more wins. Last season, the Sandusky Bay Conference was loaded with seniors, which could benefit the Fliers. Still, Port Clinton should be the favorite entering the season, MacFarland said.

BELLEVUE

Coach: Shana Young, 3rd season
Record: 9-9, 7-7 NOL
Key losses: Andrew Kelbley, Chris Meadows, Austin Armaniti, Nathan Brock
Returnees: Jon Stout, Matt Allen, Tyler Buchanan

Outlook: A few Redmen played plenty of tennis over the winter, which should benefit a team that lost several seniors. Stout and Allen will be Young's No. 1 and 2 singles players, as Buchanan handles either No. 3 singles or doubles play. Norwalk is the league favorite, Young said, but she expects a lot of close matches between teams like Shelby, Columbian, Willard — and even Norwalk.

OAK HARBOR

Coach: Rick LaFountain, 1st season
Record: 3-17, 1-11 SBC
Key losses: Cody Brough, Adam Shoemaker, Mike Hanthorn, Devin Frank, Rico Vasquez, Alex Brickmanis, Nick Johnson, Ben Lakin
Returnees: Bobby Lohotzki, Andy Biggett

Outlook: Lohotzki will most likely be LaFountain's No. 1 single player, as Dereck Witt takes the No. 2 role. Clifford Goetz and Biggett will also have spots on the varsity lineup, while the other slots are still up for grabs. This Rockets team is extremely young, LaFountain said, but it has 23 boys on its roster. Twelve of those are freshman, which should make Oak Harbor a major factor in the SBC in seasons to come. This is LaFountain's first year at Oak Harbor after coaching Ross for many years.