2008 National Championship Blog

Armstrong Atlantic State University

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Pirate Pride On Display Tuesday

Tuesday morning, the Pirates made three stops - complete with the National Championship trophies - as the Savannah community continues to welcome home the Armstrong Atlantic State tennis teams.

Senior Iuliia Stupak, junior Paul Bishop, head coach Simon Earnshaw and assistant coach David Secker were guests on Savannah’s First News with Ray Steele on 630 AM WBMQ. From there, the quartet went to the sets of Mid-Morning Live with Sonny Dixon and Jody Chapin at WTOC TV 11, Savannah's local CBS affiliate. They were preceded by former AASU VP Joe Buck, who is now the School Board President for Chatham County. You can view the interview from WTOC TV's web site.
Just past noon, the members of the team still in Savannah (a few of the players had early flights to return home for the summer - remember, final exams at AASU were back in the first week of May, so school has been out for as much as two weeks for many students here) were invited to join the Southside Rotary Club for lunch and a much deserved congratulations from some of the most well-respected pillars of the community in the Coastal Empire area.

And finally some celebration links to share with you - up first, Josh Centor of the NCAA, who runs the doubleazone blog posted about the championship celebrations at the NCAA DII Spring Sports Festival, including a video capturing the celebrations of all six champions who were crowned on the week. View the post here, including watching the women's team and men's team celebrate together after the Pirate men clinch their match, and watch head coach Simon Earnshaw get dunked.. with a little direction from assistant coach David Secker.

Second, links of video that I shot of the final points encoded thanks to Compass Interactive. You can view the women's here and the men's here.
The AASU men's and women's tennis teams returned triumphantly to a jubilant crowd at the Savannah/Hilton Head International Airport on Sunday afternoon, celebrating the teams' two NCAA Division II National Championship trophies.

WTOC-TV 11 was on hand to welcome home the teams along with the crowd, which numbered in excess of 100 friends, family and members of the Armstrong Atlantic State and Savannah community.

All week long in Houston, reporter Dale Robertson of the Chronicle talked to head coach Simon Earnshaw and some of the Pirate players about the face of DII tennis and its international flavor. His story appeared in today's edition of the Houston Chronicle along with photos.

Tuesday, coach Earnshaw and a few players will make local media appearances in Savannah, first on Savannah's First News with Ray Steele at www.wbmq.com at 8:00 a.m., then on WTOC-TV 11's Mid-Morning Live at 9:30 a.m.
DII Sports Festival Concludes - Pirates Bask In Championship Glory

The second-ever DII Spring Sports Festival concluded on Saturday night with the closing ceremonies at Discovery Green in downtown Houston. Food, games and a live band entertained participants from all six sports competed throughout the five day event.

The men's and women's teams were awarded (again!) their championship trophies and head coach Simon Earnshaw was asked to address the crowd after each team came up on stage. There have been only three DII Sports Festivals so far (2004 in Orlando, 2006 in Pensacola (fall sports) and 2008 in Houston) and AASU is the first school to win two National Championships in the same festival.

After the presentations, a spectacular fireworks display thrilled the crowd.
Sunday is travel day for the Pirates as they depart Houston at Noon, make a connection in Atlanta and return to Savannah at 6:57 p.m.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 8:58 AM 0 comments

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED! AASU Men's Tennis National Champions After 5-0 Win Over Barry
The Armstrong Atlantic men's tennis team has done it! A first-ever NCAA Division II National Championship!

Both teams will participate in the closing ceremonies tonight. We'll be back with more pictures and more stuff, but here is the release.

Undefeated all-season long, top-ranked for the last three months - the Armstrong Atlantic State men's tennis team is the 2008 NCAA Division II Champion for now and forever.

The Pirates clinched the first men's tennis national championship in school history with a 5-0 victory over No. 5-ranked Barry at the Memorial Park Tennis Center in Houston, Texas, on Saturday afternoon.

The win also gives Armstrong Atlantic State a rare double, winning the men's and women's tennis crowns in the same season for the first time since BYU-Hawaii accomplished the feat in 2003. The AASU women won the school's fourth NCAA DII tennis title with a 5-2 win over Lynn earlier in the day.

AASU (31-0) started quickly in the match by picking up two doubles wins. The 18th-ranked duo of Christian Bergh and Robert Jendelund notched an 8-3 win at No. 2 doubles over Emmanuel Fraitzl and Jakub Fejfar. The sixth-ranked duo of Rafael Array and Tim Johannsen also won, 8-3, at No. 1 doubles over the fifth-ranked duo of Patrick Rittenauer and Ales Svilaj. The Pirates led at No. 3 doubles, 7-5, but Barry fought off two break points before rain began to fall, halting play.

After a 42-minute delay, Barry's duo of Andrew Sharnov and Roman Werschel pushed the game to 7-6, but Paul Bishop and Davor Zink closed out on Bishop's serve with an 8-6 victory, giving the Pirates a commanding 3-0 lead.

Singles started with both teams taking three first sets. The Pirates enjoyed advantages at No. 1, No. 5 and No. 6 singles, with the Bucs taking leads at No. 2, No. 5 and No. 6 singles. Freshman Tim Johannsen, ranked sixth in singles, completed a 6-2, 6-3 win over 15th-ranked Patrick Rittenauer at No. 1 singles. Barely three minutes later, 50th-ranked sophomore Christian Bergh clinched the victory with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Roman Werschel at No. 5 singles.

The first meeting between the two teams was a tight affair, at Barry with Armstrong Atlantic eeking out a 5-4 victory. AASU's men's tennis title came in its first appearance in the championship match, and is also the Pirates' first-ever NCAA Championship in a men's sport.
AASU Now Leads Barry In Doubles... 3 to 0

The Armstrong Atlantic State men's tennis team captured two doubles points against Barry, and had an opportunity for the third point, but Paul Bishop and Davor Zink could not convert two break points at 7-5, 15-40 against Andrew Sharnov and Roman Werschel at No. 3 doubles. Once the match got to deuce, rains started to fall and play was suspended for 42 minutes. When play resumed, Barry held serve, but Bishop came up with an ace on match point to give the Pirates the 3-0 lead.

At No. 1 doubles, the duo of Patrick Johannsen and Rafael Array defeated Patrick Rittenauer and Ales Svigelj, 8-3, while Christian Bergh and Robert Jendelund defeated Emmanuel Fraitzl and Jakub Fejfar, 8-3, at No. 2 doubles in the other two doubles matches.

AASU is now two points away from its first-ever NCAA Men's Tennis Championship!

AASU WOMEN WIN NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP!
NATIONAL CHAMPIONS! More later, but here's the release. Now it's the men's turn!

NCAA Women's Tennis National Championship Match: No. 2 AASU 5, No. 3 Lynn 2

HOUSTON, Texas - A pivotal tiebreak point at No. 1 doubles provided the momentum to carry the Armstrong Atlantic State women's tennis team to their fourth NCAA Division II National Championship with Saturday's 5-2 victory over Lynn University at the Memorial Park Tennis Center in Houston, Texas.

With two doubles wins already in hand, the third-ranked duo of Iuliia Stupak and Gabriella Kovacs played an hour and 30 minutes at No. 1 doubles against the fourth-ranked duo of Victoria Weltz and Alexandra Schunk. The duo had three match points at 8-7, but Lynn's duo held serve, forcing a tiebreaker. On the fifth match point, Stupak blasted a cross-court overhand smash for a winner, giving AASU the 8-6 tiebreak win, a 9-7 match win and a commanding 3-0 lead after doubles.

AASU jumped out to a quick 1-0 lead in doubles with Johanna Dahlback and Alisa Kagukina’s 8-1 win over Alisson Siaci and Eleonora Ionozzi at No. 3 doubles, then the 10th-ranked duo of Martina Beckmann and Alida Muller-Wehlau picked up an 8-6 win over the 17th-ranked duo of Magdalena Ekert and Katerina Jiskrova.

Singles play started quickly in favor of the Pirates with first-set wins at No. 1 singles with Stupak, No. 3 singles with Muller-Wehlau and No. 4 singles with Kovacs. Lynn (27-3) battled back to take two first sets at No. 5 singles with Ekert and No. 6 singles with Ionozzi. Lynn picked up their first singles point as Ekert finished a 6-3, 6-3 win over...
Beckmann. Second-ranked Stupak picked up the fourth point for the Lady Pirates (32-1) with a 6-0, 6-1 win over 18th-ranked Weltz at No. 1 singles. Lynn recorded its second point with Ionozzi’s 6-3, 6-1 win over Kagukina.

Two Lady Pirates had Championship Point at the same time as Muller-Wehlau and Kovacs each had a chance to give the Lady Pirates the title. The freshman Muller-Wehlau watched a forehand by Jiskrova go wide, giving Armstrong Atlantic State the title with a 6-2, 6-1 victory.

Armstrong Atlantic State’s title joins the three other Championship trophies won in 1995, 1996 and 2005, and the Lady Pirates were making their ninth appearance in the NCAA Championship match. The title is the second for head coach Simon Earnshaw as well as senior Johanna Dahlback - who had the clinching point in AASU’s 5-3 win over BYU-Hawaii in the 2005 match as a freshman.

AASU Two Points Away From National Championship

AASU takes a 3-0 lead after doubles thanks to a gritty performance by the No. 1 doubles duo of Iuliia Stupak and Gabriella Kovacs. The duo were broken on the very first game and stayed behind most of the match, but fought back to have three match points at 8-7. Lynn held serve, however, sending the match to a tiebreaker. On the second match point of the tiebreaker and fifth of the game, Stupak smashed a cross-court overhand to give AASU the 9-8 win (8-6 in the tiebreak).

Johanna Dahlback and Alisa Kagukina gave the Lady Pirates the early 1-0 lead with an 8-1 win at No. 1 doubles, then Martina Beckmann and Alida Muller-Wehlau collected an 8-6 win at No. 2 doubles.
The Final Countdown

This morning brings an opportunity for the Armstrong Atlantic State tennis teams that does not come around often. A chance to win two NCAA National Championships in one day.

Only one other Peach Belt Conference school has won two NCAA Championships in the same season (Kennesaw State in 1996). BYU-Hawaii accomplished the "double" in 2002 and 2003 with the men's and women's tennis team.

All throughout the tournament, the Pirates have played on the "other courts" at Memorial Park, meaning the ones that aren't featured on the NCAA's live video coverage. Today should be different, so you can not only follow along with the live stats links at the left, but at NCAA.com, under men's tennis and women's tennis, look for the story with AASU's pictures (they're currently featuring a photo of Tim Johannsen with the men and of Iuliia Stupak - with an unfortunate ball location - with the women) and the links below the story should have the live video feed.

That way you can join us here in Houston in perhaps witnessing history today.

FRIDAY, MAY 16, 2008

Pirates In Title Match! 5-1 AASU Wins Over West Florida
AASU picked up singles wins from Rafael Array at No. 4 singles, 6-3, 6-3 over Luis Arboleda and Christian Bergh, 7-5, 6-1, over Luis Bernardi to give the Pirates their first-ever berth in the NCAA Division II Men's Tennis Championship match!

Both teams will now play tomorrow against teams they've already beaten in the regular season in an effort to bring home two national championship trophies to Savannah. But as we've seen earlier in this tournament (especially in the Lynn men's match), beating a school twice in the same season is a very tough task. Not to mention that for both teams, this will be the fourth match in four days in humid Houston conditions. Weather tomorrow should be beautiful.

The last time a team won both the men's and women's DII tennis championships in the same year was BYU-Hawaii in 2003. Here's hoping the Pirates repeat that feat!

Pirates Up 3-0 After Doubles On West Florida

The AASU men's tennis team looks to be well on their way to joining the ladies in the National Championship match after jumping out to a 3-0 lead on West Florida after doubles. Paul Bishop and Davor Zink completed an 8-2 win over Luis Arboleda and Diego Zorzi at No. 3 doubles, then Robert Jendelund and Christian Bergh completed an 8-5 win over Nicolas Barrientos and Patrick Bateman at No. 2 doubles. Tim Johannsen and Rafael Array were up, 7-4, at No. 1 doubles and were broken by the duo of Eduardo Cavasotti and Luis Bernardi, but the duo broke serve at 8-7 to clinch the match, 9-7, and the commanding lead in doubles.

Lady Pirates Knock Off BYU-Hawaii 5-1!

The Lady Pirates have done it, winning 5-1 after Gabriella Kovacs, Martina Beckmann and Alisa Kagukina take singles wins!
Armstrong Atlantic State University Tennis: May 2008

No. 2 AASU Advances To Finals With 5-1 Win over No. 1 BYU-Hawaii

HOUSTON, Texas - The NCAA Division II women's tennis semifinal matchup between top-ranked and undefeated BYU-Hawaii and second-ranked Armstrong Atlantic State had the potential to be one sided. It was - in favor of the Lady Pirates.

Armstrong Atlantic State advanced to its ninth NCAA Division II Women's Tennis Championship match with a 5-1 victory over the Seasiders, ending BYU-Hawaii's latest winning streak at 87 games and giving the Lady Pirates a shot at their fourth NCAA Championship.

BYU-Hawaii (28-1) started strongly in doubles, taking No. 3 behind Jenny Chin and Koko Ikeda, 8-2, over Johanna Dahlback and Alisa Kagukina. The Seasiders held leads at No. 1 and No. 2 doubles as well, but the Lady Pirates fought back as the third-ranked duo of Iuliia Stupak and Gabriella Kovacs won the last three games to close out an 8-5 win over top-ranked Elwen Li and Maggie Deng. AASU then took a 2-1 lead after doubles with Martina Beckmann and Alida Muller-Wehlau's 8-6 win over Ramona Husaru and Becky Lu.

The Lady Pirates (31-1) then won the first set in five of the first six singles sets to jump out to a commanding lead. Kovacs closed out a 6-1, 6-4 win over Becky Lu at No. 4 singles, then Kagukina won a 6-1, 6-2 decision at No. 6 singles over Koko Ikeda. Beckmann produced the deciding point at No. 5 singles with a 6-4, 6-1 win over Jenny Chin at No. 5 singles.

To the casual observer, the win may have seemed easy, but head coach Simon Earnshaw disagrees. "Absolutely not," Earnshaw said after the match in response to the question. "I think we had our backs to the wall in the first 45 minutes to an hour of doubles. I don't think we took the lead until we got to 5-5 at number one (doubles) and 6-6 at number two. We were struggling at the beginning, but obviously in the
big points and at the right times, we produced our best tennis."

The win was a reversal of last year's semifinal meeting in which BYU-Hawaii used the momentum to fashion a 5-1 victory en route to the national title. The key was the hot start to singles right after the doubles, according to Earnshaw. "We made the perfect start from singles. We used our momentum with doubles. I was a little surprised at how hot we came out. We were able to get through a couple of the tougher first-sets and run out the second sets."

Even though the match did not conclude, the top two singles players in the nation - second-ranked Iuliia Stupak and top-ranked Elwen Li staged a classic first-set battle, won by Stupak in a tiebreaker, 7-6 (10-8).

Ahead now for the Lady Pirates is Lynn University, 5-2 winners over Valdosta State in the other semifinal match. The National Champion will be decided at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday morning at the Memorial Park Tennis Center.

"I would say that in Division II women's tennis there are three premier programs," Earnshaw said. "BYU-Hawaii, Lynn and ourselves. We have to beat both of the other two to win a championship. It will not be an easy match, and I expect it to be just as tough - if not tougher - than today's match."

The two teams matched up in the regular season in Savannah, with AASU taking a 7-2 win back on February 23 in Savannah.

AASU Leads BYU-Hawaii 2-1 After Doubles

The Armstrong Atlantic State women's tennis team came out on a cool, overcast morning on Friday and started out slowly against top-ranked BYU-Hawaii, but rallied to take two doubles matches from the Seasiders after doubles play, giving the Lady Pirates a 2-1 lead. Iuliia Stupak and Gabriella Kovacs took an 8-5 win over the top-ranked doubles duo of Elwen Li and Maggie Deng, then Martina Beckmann and Alida Muller-Wehlau rallied from a 4-1 deficit to defeat Ramona Husaru and Becky Lu, 8-6, at No. 2 doubles. That means the Lady Pirates need to just split the six singles matches to earn the semifinal win.
Semi-Tough

Friday has arrived, which brings the NCAA Tennis Semifinals. The Pirates are the only school left in the field with a men's and women's tennis team still alive, but Friday brings two familiar foes for AASU.

The women face BYU-Hawaii for the seventh straight year in the NCAA Championships. AASU has beaten the Seasiders once - in the 2005 National Championship match - but since then BYUH has reeled off 88 straight wins. When AASU knocked off the Seasiders in 2005, it ended a 130-consecutive match win streak for BYU-Hawaii.

The men take on West Florida, who knocked the Pirates out of the 2005 and 2006 NCAA Championships. The Argonauts defeated the Pirates, 5-1, in the semis in 2005 en route to a national title and two seniors on this year's squad - Robert Jendelund and Davor Zink - have a chance to exact a little revenge for the semifinal loss they suffered as freshmen.

Today's NCAA News - a daily publication they are producing on site and distributing throughout the hotel and the venues - features AASU's men's tennis on the cover with a giant picture of freshman Rafael Array with the headline "Armstrong stays strong". Let's hope they have reason to repeat that headline tomorrow with two teams in the finals!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 8:46 AM 0 comments

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2008

Pirates Pick Up Hard-Fought 5-3 Win Over Lynn

It's always tough to knock off the defending national champions in any sport, and this afternoon was no exception. After the 2-1 lead in
doubles, the Pirates picked up first-set wins at 4, 5 and 6, but Lynn took the first set in 1, 2 and 3 singles. Junior Kevin Sijmons - playing in his first-ever NCAA Championships match for the Pirates - put AASU up 3-1 with a 6-2, 6-0 win at No. 6 singles over Alex Zara. Senior Davor Zink made it four points by winning a marathon tiebreaker in the second set and beating Axel Joachim, 6-4, 7-6 (11-9). Lynn fought back to win at No. 2 and No. 3 singles, setting up the freshmen, Tim Johannsen and Rafael Array with the deciding point.

Both matches went down to three sets, and as fortunes would have it, both faced match point at the same time. Tim broke the serve of Lorenzo Cava to win at No. 1 singles, 4-6, 6-2, 6-3, picking up a huge singles win over a former top-ranked NCAA Division II singles player and clinching the match. Rafael led in his match, 7-5, 4-6, 5-3, and was serving at match point when the match was decided.

The Pirates aren't the only men's team having to work for its victories - Francis Marion played yet another 5-4 match, but the Patriots could not knock off Barry, falling to the Bucs. AASU faces the winner of Hawaii Pacific and West Florida in the semifinals tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. AASU has never advanced to the Championship match in men's play - the Pirates are 0-3 in semifinal matches, including the latest back in 2005. The Pirates are going to try and start a winning semifinal tradition tomorrow!

AASU Men Lead Lynn 2-1 After Doubles

The men took the court at 2:00 p.m. and thanks to a clutch performance at No. 1 doubles by freshmen Rafael Array and Tim Johannsen, lead Lynn 2-1 after doubles. The duo watched as the Knights' No. 1 doubles duo of Lorenzo Cava and Tomas Racak jumped out to a 4-0 lead with two service breaks, but then won eight of the next nine points to claim an 8-5 win. Paul Bishop and Davor Zink closed out a 6-3 win over Alex Joachim and Kyle Hall at No. 3 doubles to give the Pirates the lead. Doubles are about to start.

On the other courts, Francis Marion's women's ride came to an end with a 5-0 loss to Lynn, but the FMU men are battling Barry right now in a tight doubles match with each team with one point and the third match in a tiebreaker.

AASU Completes Quarterfinal Win Over Barry, 5-1
After a 1:20 rain delay, the Lady Pirates finally took the court in singles against the Bucs. With three singles wins, the Pirates took a 5-1 victory, advancing to the national semifinals for the fifth consecutive year. Gabriella Kovacs took a quick 6-1, 6-1 win over Helen Wisniewski at No. 4 singles, then Martina Beckmann defeated Berit Peterson, 6-1, 7-5, at No. 5 singles. Freshman Alida Muller-Wehlau clinched the victory with a 6-0, 6-3 win over Angie Werschel at No. 3 singles.

AASU will now face top-ranked and defending national champion BYU-Hawaii on Friday morning at 9:00 a.m. It's the fifth time in the last five seasons that the two powerhouse women's programs will meet. BYU Hawaii won in 2004, 2006 and 2007 with AASU taking the national championship over the Seasiders in 2005.

AASU Women Leads Barry, 2-1, After Doubles

Good morning and welcome to the NCAA Division II Quarterfinals! We have moved locations over to Memorial Park, where we will be for the rest of the tournament. The courts were wet from overnight rains, but the Lady Pirates started their match around 9:20 a.m. against Barry. After doubles, the Lady Pirates are up 2-1. The women's live stats link to the right has our match today, thanks to the SID at Barry, Dennis Jezek.

The skies are cloudy and there was an hour rain delay at Memorial Park yesterday. We're hoping the rains hold off so that we can get in our matches - at least we were the first ones on the court this morning!
EDIT: Nope. As soon as the break between singles and doubles started, the skies opened up and it is currently raining. So our match is halted right now for rain... as well as Lynn and Francis Marion's women's match as well, which Lynn is leading, 2-0. But Head Athletic Trainer Daniel Hinely and Assistant Coach David Secker are on the case!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 11:23 AM 1 comments

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2008

Pirates Complete Texas Sweep With 5-1 Win Over ACU

The Pirates picked up three singles wins to close out a 5-1 win over Abilene Christian, giving AASU a sweep of two schools from the great state of Texas in Round of 16 action in Houston. Freshman Rafael Array defeated Brian Joiner, 6-3, 6-0, at No. 4 singles for the first singles point, then junior Paul Bishop followed with a 6-1, 6-3 win over Luke Hawk at No. 3 singles. Senior Davor Zink clinched the match at No. 6 singles with a 6-2, 6-1 win over Brett Proctor - with his father
watching from the bleachers, making the trip to watch him play his final matches as a Pirate.

Tomorrow brings Lynn University in a quarterfinal match, meaning AASU moves on to try and sweep the state of Florida in two matches. We also move back to Memorial Park where we -hope- to have more stable internet access!

AASU Leads Abilene Christian, 2-1, After Doubles

After another marathon 5-4 win by Francis Marion - this time the men took care of Cameron - the top-ranked Pirates finally took the courts against Abilene Christian. ACU has a huge crowd out for tonight from "nearby" Abilene and it's been an exciting match already, with the Pirates winning 9-7 at No. 1 doubles and Abilene Christian winning in a tiebreaker, 9-8, at No. 2 doubles. So we head into singles play with AASU leading, 2-1.

Doubles
#1 Array/Johannsen (AASU) def. Hawk/Jones (ACU), 9-7
#2 Hudson/Joiner (ACU) def. Bergh/Jendelund (AASU), 9-8
#3 Bishop/Zink (AASU) def. Farias/Nunez (ACU), 8-4

Lady Pirates Defeat Incarnate Word, 5-0

With singles wins from Gabriela Kovacs and Alida Muller-Wehlau, the Lady Pirates completed a 5-0 victory over Incarnate Word to advance to the Quarterfinals of the 2008 NCAA Division II Women's Tennis
Championships. AASU now advances to face Barry University, 5-0 winners over Northwest Missouri State, in the quarterfinals tomorrow morning at 9:00 a.m.

The men will take the court later this afternoon, following the Francis Marion / Cameron match that started just about 2:45 local time.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 4:20 PM 3 comments

AASU leads Incarnate Word 3-0 After Doubles

The Lady Pirates finally took the court after a 4:08 match, won by Francis Marion over Abilene Christian, 5-4.

AASU's doubles results against Incarnate Word:

Doubles
#1 Gabriella Kovacs/Iuliia Stupak (AASU) def. Capozzi/Carswell (UIW), 8-3
#2 Martina Beckmann/Alida Muller-Wehlau (AASU) def. Engberg/Trautman (UIW), 8-3
#3 Sofia Haggstrom/Alisa Kagukina (AASU) def. Passanisi/Pope (UIW), 8-1

AASU leads 3-0 and will need two wins in singles to clinch the match. Head coach Simon Earnshaw has decided to move his singles lineup up, giving Iuliia Stupak a rest, so Johanna Dahlback will play No. 1 singles and Alisa Kagukina will move into the No. 6 singles spot.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 2:35 PM 6 comments

First Round ... Delayed

We are at Homer Ford Park (borrowing the computer of another person who happens to have internet access) where we are waiting for the Francis Marion/Abilene Christian women's match to finish ahead of us. Our start has already been delayed by an hour and it looks like it will be a while before this one is finished. More updates when we available ...

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 12:30 PM 4 comments

TUESDAY, MAY 13, 2008

The Age of Aquarium
First things first - congratulations to Iuliia Stupak, who was named the ITA's National Women's Tennis Senior of the Year tonight! She joins three other former Lady Pirate greats (Sandra Van der Aa in 1996, Zsofi Golopencza in 2004 and Luisa Cowper in 2006) as recipients of this prestigious award.

After the ITA's awards ceremony, we all headed over to Houston's Downtown Aquarium for the Opening Ceremonies. All of the Aquarium's attractions were open, plus three bands playing (including a 70s show band on the top floor) as well as food and drink - as you can see below.

They halted all the attractions at 8:30 p.m. so they could allow the NCAA's speakers to address all of the student-athletes gathered - some still in line to ride the rides and to get food. When the speakers finished, the Aquarium shut down for the night to the NCAA, leaving some Pirates disappointed they did not get to ride the train or the ferris wheel.
The matches begin tomorrow, over at Homer Ford Park with the women taking on Incarnate Word at 10:30 a.m. and the men taking on Abilene Christian at 4:00 p.m. The live stats links we've been given are to the right - and we are told there will be coverage on the NCAA's website at NCAA.com.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 10:46 PM  5 comments

Practice Makes Perfect

The Pirates and Lady Pirates headed out to Memorial Park for their practice sessions this afternoon.

The Memorial Park complex is impressive - moreso since all six NCAA Championships will be decided within almost just a few feet of each other. The centralized aspect of this Festival is much better, in my opinion, than it was four years ago in Orlando where all the venues were scattered about Central Florida.
In about two hours, the teams will head to the ITA Awards Ceremony where national awards will be given out - AASU has the possibility of taking home five awards. Check out the list of the ITA's region winners here - the national winners will come from these award winners. After the ITA Awards Ceremony, the teams will head to the Aquarium for opening ceremonies for the Sports Festival.

**Pirates Arrive In Houston!**

After a "short" stopover in Atlanta, the Pirates finally touched down in Houston just before midnight local time. The teams have checked into the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Houston, the headquarters for all Division II teams competing this week in the Spring Sports Festival. Tennis is not the only DII championships that will be decided here. men's and women's golf, women's lacrosse and softball as well. In fact, several members of the Francis Marion softball squad were in the lobby as the Pirates checked in - FMU has three teams in Houston this week, both tennis squads and the softball squad.

Tuesday will feature team practices just after lunch, then the Opening Ceremonies for the DII Sports Festival, which will take place at the Downtown Aquarium. Check back here late Tuesday for pictures and a recap of all the festivities!

Before that, however, you can check out the brackets at the following links so you know who lies ahead for both the men's and women's teams. The women open up play first on Wednesday against Incarnate Word, a Texas team, at 10:30 a.m. The men take on Abilene Christian, another Texas school, at 4:00 p.m. on Wednesday.

**Welcome to the AASU Tennis Blog!**

My name is Chad Jackson, and I'm the Director of Sports Communications at Armstrong Atlantic State University. Monday, the AASU tennis teams depart for Houston, Texas, to try and bring home two NCAA Division II National Championships in men's and women's tennis. Please visit the blog often as I bring you coverage of the teams' journey to Houston.