2009 National Championship Blog

Armstrong Atlantic State University

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FRIDAY, MAY 22, 2009

The Pirates are back in Savannah, and this week the two time National Champions had a pair of opportunities to appear on local media morning shows.

First up on Tuesday was A.M. Savannah with Bill Edwards on 1290 WTKS AM, the only live and local morning talk radio show in Savannah. Edwards, a veteran of the Savannah media, asked coaches Earnshaw and Secker, as well as junior Paul Fitzgerald and freshman Kathleen Henry about winning back-to-back titles and even threw out the word “Three-Peat” to the Pirates!

Friday, the Pirates appeared on Mid Morning Live with Sonny & Jody on WTOC TV 11. Sonny Dixon welcomed both coaches Earnshaw and Secker, as well as Gabriella Kovacs and Fitzgerald. Dixon, a fixture with the St. Patrick’s Day celebration in Savannah and the Irish community, immediately latched onto Fitzgerald in between segments to discuss the homeland across the pond.

Finally, be sure to check out AASU’s Compass Interactive, where director of media productions Bruce Habersham has put together a celebration video of the Pirates’ national championships!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 11:21 AM 0 comments
AASU Welcomes Home National Champion Pirates!

About 75 friends, family and fans of Armstrong Atlantic State tennis braved the rainy weather and welcomed home the 2009 NCAA Division II Men's & Women's Tennis National Champions on Sunday at Compass Pointe on the campus of AASU!

Despite the weather, both teams were treated to a spirited welcome, and stuck around to meet members of the media as well as sign autographs for fans and take pictures. Not only were the 2009 trophies present, but the 2008 trophies were taken out of their display cases to present fans with a unique opportunity to see four trophies at once. again, it's an accomplishment that's only been achieved one time before in college tennis.

Members from all three local TV stations - WJCL-TV 22, WTOC-TV 11 and WSAV-TV 3 were there and covered the welcome home celebration tonight, including video from match points shot by AASU director of media productions Bruce Habersham.

The NCAA has also begun archiving the live video streams they provided for the championship matches. If you go to NCAA.com, you can see the women's highlights of the match against Lynn. I was told at the courts that eventually the full matches will be archived online, though it may be at a later date. Again, I'll forward those along as well when we get them!
In Houston in 2008, the Armstrong Atlantic State women’s tennis team won the national title over Lynn. That morning, both Alida Muller-Wehlau and Gabriella Kovacs had match point, with Muller-Wehlau scoring the deciding point in the 5-2 win.

This year, it was Kovacs’ turn.

The junior from Szazhalombatta, Hungary, closed out a 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 win over Jessica Yanoff at No. 4 singles to clinch the No. 3-ranked Lady Pirates’ fifth NCAA Division II Women’s Tennis National Championship, 5-2 again, over No. 1-ranked Lynn.

The Pirates entered singles play needing just three wins, but Lynn won the first set in four of the six singles matches.

AASU picked up points at No. 1 singles when top-ranked Sona Novakova defeated No. 11-ranked Katerina Jiskrova, 6-3, 6-3, and No. 16-ranked Alida Muller-Wehlau knocked off No. 15-ranked Magdalena Ekert, 6-4, 6-0.

Tessie Salame notched a 6-1, 6-0 win over Alisa Kagukina at No. 6 singles, but the Lady Pirates were able to push the other three singles matches into third sets.

AASU now joins BYU-Hawaii (2002, 2003) as the only teams to win Division II Back-to-Back National Championships with both the men’s and the women’s teams. The Lady Pirates have also won back-to-back titles twice in school history, the first coming in 1995 and 1996. AASU evened its mark in NCAA DII National Championship contests at 5-5 - this was the Lady Pirates 10th appearance in the final.

The players will take time to have dinner and celebrate tonight, then return to Savannah on Sunday. A special celebration reception has been planned at 3:30 p.m. on campus to welcome home the two National Champions, it will take place in the clubhouse of Compass Point housing. Be sure to come out and help join us celebrate the National Champions…. again!
No. 3 AASU Leads No. 1 Lynn, 2-1, After Doubles

After the emotional roller coaster ride of the men's title match, the women's title tilt began at 2:30 p.m. with the Lady Pirates and Knights meeting for the second time this season.

In the first matchup in Boca Raton, AASU won all three doubles matches but watched Lynn win five of six singles matches for a 5-4 victory.

Today, the Lady Pirates took two of three doubles matches, and pushed Lynn to a tiebreaker in the third, to take a 2-1 lead heading into singles play.

Martina Beckmann and Alida Muller-Wehlau picked up an impressive 8-2 victory at No. 1 doubles over Katerina Jiskrova and Eleonora Iannozzi in a matchup of top-five ranked duos - Beckmann and Muller-Wehlau currently ranked No. 2 and Jiskrova and Iannozzi ranked No. 5. Gabriella Kovacs and Sona Novakova followed with an 8-5 win over Magdalena Ekert and Alisson Siaci at No. 2 doubles.

Tina Ronel and Kathleen Henry fell behind at No. 3 doubles, 6-3, but battled back to force a tiebreaker. Laynn's Jessica Yanoff and Tessie Salame picked up the win, 9-8 (7-1).

The Pirates need three singles wins to make it a sweep of the national championships today!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 3:55 PM 0 comments
Barry, 5-4, In Epic Final

In a titanic championship match lasting exactly five hours, the No. 1-ranked and defending DII national champion Armstrong Atlantic State men's tennis team erased a 2-1 deficit in doubles to win, 5-4, over No. 2-ranked Barry and capture its second consecutive NCAA Division II Men's Tennis Championship on Saturday in Altamonte Springs.

The match came down to No. 5 singles, where sophomore Rafael Array and Barry's Roman Werschel played a three-set match to determine the title. Array won the first set, 6-4, but Werschel rallied to win the second set, 7-5, and set up one set for the title.

Array started off with a break, jumping out to a 2-1 lead. But the service game of the Spaniard was shaky during the middle games as he fought off several break points. at 4-3, Array held serve, then broke Werschel at 15-40 for championship point, sparking a mob pile on the courts as AASU celebrated the national title!

AASU's other singles winners were - Eudaldo Bonet at No.1 singles, beating Ales Svigelj, 7-6, 6-0; Mikk Irdoja, who knocked off Andrew Sharnov 6-2, 6-1, and Tim Johannsen, who defeated Jakub Fefjar, 6-4, 6-0.

The long match postponed the start of the Lady Pirates' championship match against Lynn - that match will now begin at 2:30 p.m. Time for the ladies to get it done!

No. 1 Pirates Have Work To Do, Trail No. 2
Barry 2-1 After Doubles

When Armstrong Atlantic State met Barry earlier this season in a neutral-
site match in Daytona Beach in March, the Bucs jumped on top 2-1 after doubles with wins at No. 1 and No. 2.

That day, the Pirates were able to win four of six singles matches to take a 5-4 win.

Fast forward two months later, and the top-ranked and defending DII national champion Pirates will have to accomplish the same feat if they are to come away with back-to-back national titles.

Early Saturday morning, Barry jumped ahead in doubles and leads the match, 2-1. The Pirates got on the board first with an 8-3 win at No. 3 doubles by Eudaldo Bonet and Akos Torok (pictured), over Jakub Fefjar and Sergio Velez.

Barry picked up a late break at No. 1 doubles and the duo of Emmanuel Fraitzl and Max Wimmer edged Paul Bishop and Mikk Irdoja, 8-6. At the pivotal No. 2 doubles match, Rafael Array and Tim Johannsen found themselves down, 6-3, but battled back to take a 7-6 lead, only to watch the team of Ales Svigelj and Andrew Sharnov come away with a 9-7 victory.

Singles play is beginning, and once again it will be an emotional match for both teams. Doubles play was chock full of spirited points and exchanges between players - more of the same to follow we are certain!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 10:29 AM 0 comments

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2009

No. 3 Lady Pirates Advance To National Championship Match!

The No. 3-ranked Armstrong Atlantic State women's tennis
team will play for their fifth NCAA Division II National Championship after knocking off No. 4 Valdosta State, 5-1, on Friday afternoon at Sanlando Park in Altamonte Springs, Fla.

The Lady Pirates took three straight-set singles wins to defeat the Lady Blazers. 19th-ranked Gabriella Kovacs defeated Kristel de Groot, 6-1, 6-2, at No. 4 singles, then top-ranked Sona Novakova (pictured) defeated No. 14-ranked Natali Grumbrecht, 6-3, 6-0, at No. 1 singles. 30th-ranked Martina Beckmann then closed out the match with a 6-0, 6-2 win over Tina Trautmann at No. 3 singles.

AASU will now match up against No. 1 Lynn in the final - like the men, a rematch of last year's national championship match. The two teams met earlier this season in Boca Raton, and Lynn overcame a 4-0 deficit to win, 5-4, handing AASU its only loss of the 2009 season.

If you can, make the short drive down to Sanlando Park in Altamonte Springs to root on the Pirates, as they try to win back-to-back men's and women's national championship matches!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 6:07 PM 2 comments

No. 3 Lady Pirates Lead No. 4 Valdosta State, 2-1

The No. 3-ranked Armstrong Atlantic State women's tennis team is gunning for its 10th National Championship
appearance, and the Lady Pirates are off to a good start with a 2-1 lead after doubles.

No. 12-ranked Kathleen Henry and Tina Ronel (pictured) got the Lady Pirates started with an 8-2 win over Sonya Haggstrom and Kristel de Groot at No. 3 doubles. No. 2-ranked Martina Beckmann and Alida Muller-Wehlau followed with an 8-1 win over Raphaelle Durante and Karen Redon at No. 1 singles. Valdosta State picked up its point with an 8-6 win by Natalie Gumbrecht and Tina Trautmann over No. 7 Sona Novakova and Gabrielle Kovacs at No. 2 doubles.

Looking over at the other semifinal match - No. 6 Abilene Christian has claimed a 2-1 lead in doubles over No. 1 Lynn, taking wins at No. 1 and No. 2 doubles - the No. 1 doubles win coming in a tiebreak. It's been a very interesting tournament so far and it's shaping up to be a fantastic finish to semifinal Friday here at Sanlando Park!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 4:33 PM 1 comments

No. 1 Pirates Advance To NCAA Championship Title Match!

The No. 1-ranked and defending DII national champion Armstrong Atlantic State men's tennis team will play for a possible back-to-back national title on Saturday after closing out a 5-1 win over No. 6 Hawaii Pacific on Friday at Sanlando Park.
The Pirates got off to a great start in singles with five out of six first-set wins. No. 2-ranked Eudaldo Bonet gave AASU its first singles point with a 6-2, 6-4 win over No. 28-ranked Nikola Petrov at No. 1 singles. Tim Johannsen then followed with a 6-1, 6-4 win over Aleksandar Markov at No. 6 singles. No. 50-ranked Paul Fitzgerald (pictured) followed with a 6-2, 6-4 win over No. 37-ranked Daniel Luedi at No. 4 singles to clinch the match and send AASU into the finals!

Fitzgerald, a native of Ireland and a transfer from Abraham Baldwin, has had an outstanding first year as a Pirate - his win today improves his spring dual match record to 22-0.

Up next - No. 2-ranked Barry, a 5-3 winner over Concordia (N.Y.), in a rematch of the national championship from a season ago in Houston.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 1:47 PM 0 comments

No. 1 Pirates Lead No. 6 HPU, 2-1, After Doubles

The NCAA Division II Men's Tennis semifinals are underway with more high drama as the No. 1-ranked
Pirates have taken a 2-1 lead over No. 6 Hawaii Pacific.

Doubles play began with the Pirates taking an early break in all three matches. Rafael Array and Tim Johannsen closed out an 8-4 win over Hendrik Bode and Sebastian Bader at No. 2 doubles to give AASU a point. But the HPU team of Aleksandar Markov and Anton Samuilau erased a 7-4 deficit to pick up a 9-7 win over Eudaldo Bonet and Akos Torok at No. 3 doubles.

That threw all the attention at No. 1 singles, where fifth-ranked Paul Bishop and Mikk Irdoja (pictured) fought off two match points during a tiebreaker to take the match and a pivotal point, 9-8 (9-7). AASU now leads HPU, 2-1, heading into singles play.

In the other national semifinal, a mild shocker as No. 12 Concordia (N.Y.) leads No. 2 Barry, 2-1, after doubles. Those doubles matches finished earlier than ours, so at the end of our No. 1 doubles matches, we had quite the crowd checking out the match - including members from both Concordia and Barry.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 12:06 PM 0 comments

Lady Pirates Move Into Semis With 5-0 Win Over Cal (Pa.)

Good morning from Sanlando Park! An early start to the day saw the Lady Pirates pick up two straight set singles wins to finish off a 5-0 victory over California (Pa.) and move into the semifinals. Gabriella Kovacs (pictured) started things off with a 6-1, 6-0 win over Nina Kowalski at No. 4 singles, then Alida Muller-Wehlau clinched the match with a 6-1, 6-2 win over Alina Stanila at No. 2 singles.

The Lady Pirates will head back to the hotel and rest for a bit before returning to the courts for a 3:00 p.m. semifinal match against Valdosta State, who won 5-2 over Hawaii Pacific. Also still playing are BYU Hawaii and Lynn - Lynn took two of the three doubles points, but BYU Hawaii has the lead in three of the singles matches and a fourth is all tied. Those two teams, undefeated on the year,
could be playing well into the late morning.

Next up, however, is the men's match against Hawaii Pacific. On paper an easier foe than Lynn, but we expect them to be fired up to face us this morning!

THURSDAY, MAY 14, 2009

**AASU 3, California (Pa.) 0, Mother Nature 9**

First lightning, then rain, and now the Lady Pirates' match against California (Pa.) will have to wait until Friday morning to finish. None of the women's quarterfinal matches were able to be completed on Thursday afternoon, meaning that at 8:00 a.m. on Friday, play will resume in all four quarterfinals. AASU will begin singles play at 8:00 a.m. holding a 3-0 lead over the Vulcans.

This also pushes back the AASU men's semifinal match against Hawaii Pacific, which will now take place at 10:30 a.m. The women's semifinal matches will now be played at 3:00 p.m. The forecast looks as positive as you can get for spring in Central Florida, so here's hoping we get back on schedule tomorrow!

**Lady Pirates Claim 3-0 Lead Over California (Pa.) In Doubles**

Under rapidly darkening skies in Altamonte Springs, the Lady Pirates have claimed a 3-0 lead over California (Pa.) in quarterfinals action on Thursday afternoon at Sanlando Park.
Gabriella Kovacs and Sona Novakova gave AASU its first point with an 8-1 win over Axelle Fernandez and Nina Kowalski at No. 2 doubles. Kathleen Henry and Tina Ronel then picked up an 8-5 win over Anastassiya Sherdeva and Galina Vishnikina at No. 3 doubles, while Martina Beckmann and Alida Muller-Wehlau (pictured) also collected an 8-5 win over Helena Van Eysendeyk and Alina Stania.

Close lightning strikes have suspended play, however, so singles play will have to wait until the current storm system has passed.

Keeping an eye on the titanic matchup of No. 1 Lynn and No. 2 BYU Hawaii, when play was suspended, Lynn had won No. 3 doubles and both the No. 1 and No. 2 doubles matches were in tiebreakers, with Lynn owning 4-2 leads in both matches.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 2:33 PM 1 comments

A Gritty Match, But Pirates Prevail 5-2

It was everything you would expect from two of the top three teams in the nation, but the Armstrong Atlantic men’s tennis team prevailed, 5-2, over No. 3 Lynn after singles play.

Lynn took the first set in four of the six matches, however, to set up high drama at the end. Rafael Array, at No. 4 singles, blistered Miloslav Navratil, 6-1, 6-0, to put the Pirates up, 3-1, but Lynn’s Tomas Racak defeated Paul Bishop, 6-2, 6-4, at No. 2 singles to make it 3-2. With four courts all in action, a turn of events favored AASU at No. 3 singles, where Alessandro Sarra - who took the first set, 6-1 - started to experience cramps and was clearly hobbled as Mikk Irdaja closed out the three-set win, 6-1, 6-1. Sarra could have easily retired, but my hat’s off to his effort as he willed himself to stay out on the court and finish the match.

The fifth point came down to No. 6 singles, where Tim Johannsen won a first-set tiebreak over Alex Voirin, then took the second set in a 7-6 (4), 6-2 victory to clinch AASU’s berth into the semifinals.
Next up for the Pirates - Hawaii Pacific at 9:00 a.m. tomorrow morning. Now, the women take the court against California (Pa.)!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 12:47 PM 0 comments

No. 1 Pirates Lead No. 3 Lynn, 2-1, After Doubles

Good morning from Altamonte Springs! Thursday brings us plenty of drama for the NCAA quarters, including our men's matchup of No. 1 AASU and No. 3 Lynn.

One break is all that separated all three doubles teams in this morning's match. Lynn came out on top at No. 1 doubles Julien Carsuzaa and Alessandro Sarra picked up an 8-5 win over Paul Bishop and Mikk Irdaja. The No. 3 doubles duo of Eudaldo Bonet and Akos Torok then gave the Pirates a point with an 8-5 win over Alex Voirin and Miloslav Navratil. AASU will go into singles play with the 2-1 lead after Rafael Array and Tim Johannsen (pictured, on match point) defeated Tomas Racak and Luca Pavanelli, 8-5, at No. 2 doubles.

The other big match we are watching in the men's as No. 2 Barry and No. 7 GCSU battle on adjacent courts - the Barry Bucs are enjoying a 3-0 lead after doubles.

Later today, your AASU women take on California (Pa.), but all eyes will be on another match as undefeated and No. 1-ranked Lynn takes on undefeated and No. 2-ranked BYU-Hawaii in quarterfinals action. This could be the first time that AASU does not face BYU-Hawaii in the women's draw since 2001 - every year since then, the Pirates and the Seasiders have done battle at the NCAA Championships.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 10:25 AM 0 comments
Pirates Close Out Hilltoppers, 5-1

With straight-set wins from Sona Novakova, Alida Muller-Wehlau (pictured) and Gabriella Kovacs, the Lady Pirates ended a long first day at the 2009 NCAA Division II Tennis Championships with a 5-1 win over St. Edward's (Texas).

AASU now advances to the quarterfinals, where the Lady Pirates will face California (Pa.) - 5-0 winners over Stonehill - at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday.

Special thanks to the staff at the NCAA and the Rollins College Sports Information staff for making the first day run smoothly, especially with the long matches and the rain delay. They also had to deal with yours truly feeding wrong score updates at times - the scoring system here at Sanlando Park doesn't use flipcards, but a tennis-ball system where you put the balls in the number slot 1-7. Except that they're not using tennis balls, but cut-up portions of blue and yellow fun noodles. Most of the afternoon, I thought the color of the fun noodle represented each team, when in actuality the side of the scoreboard (green - home, white - visitor) determined what the score was. Now that I have the fun noodle system down pat, Thursday should be error free! *Knock on wood*

Have a good night everyone, and we will talk to you on Thursday!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 9:57 PM 1 comments

Live, From Sanlando Park - It's Wednesday Night

After a 3:15 delay from rain and long-running action, the No. 3-ranked Lady Pirates finally took
the court in their first-round matchup with St. Edward's (Texas). The Austin school has plenty of vocal supporters for tonight's match, and the Lady Pirates came out a little bit tight at No. 1 and No. 3 doubles. The No. 1 doubles match between Alida Muller-Wehlau and Martina Beckmann of AASU and

Regina Del Bosque and Audrey Tompkins of St. Edward's saw four straight breaks of serve to begin things, before Beckmann and Muller-Wehlau settled down to deliver an 8-3 win. Gabriella Kovacs (pictured) and Sona Novakova had little trouble at No. 2 doubles, winning 8-1 over Mary Bain and Liz Jacobi. At No. 3 doubles, Kathleen Henry and Tina Ronel fell behind 7-3, and faced triple match point with Henry serving at 0-40, but the Pirates fought off five match points before succumbing to the Hilltoppers, 8-6.

A bank of lights on our courts has a missing lightbulb, so we are moving from the very back of the complex to the very front of the complex to compete in singles.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 8:33 PM 0 comments

Women's Match Delayed

A mid-afternoon rain shower, as well as a long men's match, has pushed back the start of the AASU women's match against St. Edward's. **Match is now starting!** You can follow along with the match when it starts via the live stats link from Rollins.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 4:50 PM 0 comments

Pirates Close Out Knights, 5-0

Mikk Irdoja (pictured) and Eudaldo Bonet each picked up 6-0, 6-0 wins
in singles as the Pirates closed out Queens (NY) to advance to the Quarterfinals.

AASU will now face No. 3-ranked Lynn, 5-0 winners over Kutztown earlier this morning, in the quarterfinals at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday. The two teams met earlier this season, in Boca Raton, with the Pirates taking a 7-2 win. The coaches and players both expect this to be a much closer match as Lynn is the closest school geographically to Sanlando Park and should have plenty of local support!

Today's win is also a milestone for head coach Simon Earnshaw as it represents his 200th as the head men's coach at AASU. In his 10th season, Earnshaw has a record of 200-70.

Off to lunch, then it will be the women's turn! They are slated to play at 4:00 p.m., but with another match yet to go on the courts, it looks like it will be a late start for AASU vs. St. Edward's.

**First Round Underway - AASU leads Queens (NY) 3-0**
State men's tennis team is in action against Queens (NY). The Pirates have taken a 3-0 lead after sweeping all of the doubles matches. The No. 1 duo of Paul Bishop and Mikk Irdoja won, 8-1, over Patryk Polus and Danilo Hiraoka, while the No. 2 duo of Rafael Array and Tim Johannsen defeated Fabio Minami and James Preston. No. 3 Eudaldo Bonet and Akos Torok completed the sweep with an 8-3 win over Dave Burstein and Jesse Smith.

This morning, the Savannah Morning News' Donald Heath wrote this preview of the men's and women's tennis teams. We also send our thoughts back to Savannah where head coach Simon Earnshaw's son Luke is ill and wish him a speedy recovery... we want to see Simon down here in Altamonte Springs soon!

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 11:49 AM 0 comments

TUESDAY, MAY 12, 2009

Pirates Earn The Hardware, Prepare For First Day Of Competition

Tuesday was a day of practice for both the Pirates and the Lady Pirates at Sanlando Park. This
afternoon, the ITA released its national awards. Congratulations to freshmen Eudaldo Bonet and Sona Novakova, who were each named the ITA DII National Rookie of the Year; head coach Simon Earnshaw, who earned his third ITA DII National Women’s Coach of the Year award, as well as assistant coach David Secker, who was the first recipient of ITA DII National Assistant Coach of the Year honors for both the men and women!

Read the release on all the honorees, and view all of the regional and national honorees from the ITA’s website.

Wednesday, play begins in the first round. Not only will Rollins College be providing live stats (men’s link) (women’s link) of both matches, but the NCAA.com will be doing live streaming of the AASU vs. Queens (NY) match here.

POSTED BY AASUPIRATESPORTS AT 8:32 PM 3 comments

MONDAY, MAY 11, 2009

**Pirates Hit The Road!**

The Armstrong Atlantic State men’s and women’s tennis teams are on their way to Altamonte Springs, Fla. ! The Pirates left campus today at 3:00 p.m. and will pull into the site of the 2009 NCAA Division II Tennis Championships tonight.
The tennis championships have been in Altamonte Springs three of the last four years, including in 2005, when the Lady Pirates captured their third NCAA Division II title.

Tomorrow, AASU will practice at Sanlando Park and then that night, the ITA's annual awards banquet will take place, honoring the best of Division II tennis.