

Darryl Cummings' diary from men's 2005 NCAA Championship

I have always kept some sort of mental diary as one of our players at Old Dominion experienced success on the national level; however, this time I thought I would actually commit to putting the details down. During this tournament our top men's player, Izak van der Merwe would reach the semifinals of the singles. By doing so he has reached at least the semifinals of singles and doubles at the Triple Crown of collegiate tennis. The three national championships of collegiate tennis are the ITA National Indoor, ITA All-American, and the NCAA Championships.

Some of the ODU tennis program significant individual accomplishments include:

- Nataly Cahana: 2000 All-American semifinalist, 2001 All-American Finalist, 2002 All-American Finalist
- Izak van der Merwe: 2003 All-American semifinalist, 2004 All-American Quarterfinalist, 2004, National Indoor semifinalist, 2005 NCAA semifinalist.
- Zoltan Csanadi/ Izak van der Merwe: 2004 NCAA semifinalist, 2003 All-American semifinalist, 2003 National Indoor finalist, 2002 National Indoor finalist.
- Tzipi Obziler: The 1995 National Clay Court Champion and All-American finalist advanced to the second round of the 2004 US Open losing to the #1 seed Justin Henin-Harden in three sets on the Arthur Ashe stadium.

During these tournament runs either I or previously associate coach John Hill served as the coach. During these tournaments there have always been some defining moments and interesting experiences that are worthy of documenting.

Here is the diary of the 2005 men's NCAA championship in College Station, TX on the campus of Texas A&M.

Sunday, May 22

Our flight left Norfolk at 6:15 am going to Houston. In Houston we had a 2 hour layover and then we took a 23 minute flight to College Station to the George Bush airport. The plane had around 20-25 seats and was a prop plan. Upon landing the stewardess said "I am sorry I do not have any connecting flight info; however, we are the only flight leaving here today". Needless to say we were dealing with a very small airport.

After obtaining the rental car we went straight to the facility to practice. The facility is only one mile from the airport. It was very hot... around 95 degrees; however, it felt hotter. We were sweating bullets just getting out of the car. We started practice with the usually warm up and begin to do some live ball drills. Izak was getting a little frustrated because he was not moving well and we could not get a good rhythm. So we modified the live ball hitting to feeding drills in order to get him moving. The challenge with feeding drills is that in the heat the player does not last long. Izak has a set pattern of unique feeding drills he likes doing and we had been doing them for the last three weeks along with mixing in some practice matches and live ball hitting.

Monday, May 23

In the morning practice session he defeated Ken Skupski LSU 5-3 and then won a tiebreaker. In the afternoon practice session he defeated Arnaud LeClerc from VCU 6-2. The heat was not as bad today and Izak was adjusting to the slow courts. Arnaud was struggling a little because he was adjusting to the heat plus he just flew in today.

Tuesday, May 24

In the morning session he defeated Jeff Kader from William & Mary 6-4, 2-2. In the afternoon session he defeated Jonathan Chu from Harvard 7-6 after starting from 2-2. Both Jeff and Jonathan are great people and it is really good to see the camaraderie among the guys.

Izak's parents, Johan and Sarietjie, arrived.

We all sat and watched the men's team championship featuring Baylor and UCLA. The match started at 6 pm. Baylor won the doubles point to start off the match with a 1-0 lead and would later take a 3-1 lead. UCLA tied it up by winning two singles matches and it all came down to #3 singles. The Baylor player serves at 3-5 in the third and saved a team match point. The UCLA player nervously served it out when the Baylor player hit a lob long at 40-30. A collegiate tennis match at this level is very noisy and quite exciting. As soon as the UCLA player won the match he was piled on by his teammates. The crowd was very much pro Baylor to due Baylor (Waco) being so close.

Wednesday, May 25

Izak defeated Sam Warburg from Stanford today. He and Izak have never played before this day. Sam was the #1 player in the national rankings and the #2 seed of the tournament. Even though there was a difference in the ranking I and several other coaches felt Izak had a big opportunity. Izak has had very good national results during his career in both singles and doubles and has proven he is one of the better collegiate players. In addition, there has been a history of high seeded players falling in the first round of the NCAA tournament. Izak won the match 5-7, 6-3, 6-1. This would be the first collegiate match that Izak's parents would see him play. Izak's mother does get rather nervous during his matches. She sometimes looks like she is riding a rollercoaster and she would walk away for some of the match.

Thursday, May 26

Izak defeated Shannon Buck from the Air Force Academy 6-3, 6-2. I was concerned about this match because Buck is the kind of player that a competitor can take for granted. He is not a flashy player and he does look a little nerdy; however, he competes like hell. I have seen him beat Jesse Whitten for Kentucky the past two falls at the All-American tournament and Jesse is currently the #3 player in the country, plus Buck's records was 26-2. Izak started off the match with a 3-0 lead; however, he lost focus and let Buck get back on server at 3-2. From the point on Izak was able to dictate play with his serve and groundies to dominate the match. Buck had trouble with his first serve percentage and groundstroke penetration.

Joe and Lauren Antle arrived in the evening and would stay for the remainder of the tournament. Joe is a long time friend of mine who I would learn some valuable lessons from while competing against him as a junior. Jon, his son plays on the Old Dominion team. Lauren is Joe's very attractive daughter who will be attending UVA this fall. Even though Joe is a friend I believe the only reason they came was because of Izak.

Izak has never really explained to me about his and Lauren's relationship' however, they seem to be hanging out often. I guess a player does not need to seek permission from me... It is probably more important to have Joe and Jon's approval.

Friday, May 27

Izak defeats Benjamin Becker from Baylor 6-4, 7-6. Becker had won the 2004 NCAA tournament in Tulsa and he led Baylor to the team national championship in 2004 and the team runner up in 2005. Izak warmed up with Ashwin Kumar from Harvard. Ashwin and Chu would end up advancing to the semifinals of the doubles and becoming All-Americans.

This was a very exciting match because both players have a big game and they were showing it. Becker has a huge serve and does not bounce the ball before serving. This would throw Izak off a little bit. I first recommended slowing him down and taking more time; however, it did not matter because Izak would still end up not being set. We then decided it was more advantageous if he would move faster and get set before he was ready to serve. Izak told me on the cross over that if he could win the first point he had a better chance of getting ready because Becker would usually have to pick up the ball. On the crossover we compared it to an NBA team making a basket to keep the other team from fast breaking. During a collegiate match a coach can coach at anytime as long as they do not disrupt play. It is often during the cross over that a coach and a player will experience some unique exchange of information and emotions. During this tournament it was often hot and the coaches would put an umbrella over their player during cross over's. Izak on several occasions would accuse me of not sharing the umbrella enough with him.

After the match Izak would go to the interview room.

Today I was contacted by Tony Mercurio at ESPN 1310 radio to go on the air and talk about the match. We have always been very appreciative of our program being recognized and Tony is great to work with.

Saturday, May 28

Izak defeats Benjamin Kohlloeffel from UCLA 6-3, 5-7, 6-3 in the quarters. After the match I went over to tell the Kohlloeffel what a great year he had. He represented one of UCLA's singles wins during the team championship. I had a little chatter with Billy Martin about tennis camps and congratulated him on the team championship. Izak warmed up with Jonathan Chu before the match.

Many of the folks in Hampton Roads were watching the live scoring on the web site and my cell phone would ring with congrats for Izak. Dr. Jarrett (ODU athletic director) and his wife Sugie called after this match.

Our regular former Monarchs calling would be Miguel Rosa, Johan Varverud, Dave Howell, and Nataly Fleishman. Friends of the program would include Harvey & Dee Roberts, Roy Beskin, Chip Friedman, Eric Christianson. ODU staff would include Kim Zivkovich (ODU S.I.D.) along with Mark Brown, and my boss Deb Polca.

In addition, fellow CAA coaches Paul Kostin (VCU) and Peter Daub (W&M) would call along with UVA assistant Tony Bresky. Tony and Peter would offer some valuable scouting advice on the next opponent. Paul would just advise me not to screw Izak up.

As soon as the phone would quit ringing I would always talk to my wife, Julie, and sometimes I would get our boy's Clark and Connor on the phone. Winning at these tournaments is a lot of fun; however, being away from them is not. Our family is definitely part of the Monarch tennis program.

I am sure I went over my three hundred roaming minutes for the month.

Sunday, May 29th (Final Four)

Izak is defeated by Perrion Ysern (San Diego) 6-4, 6-4. Izak had beaten him in three sets two years ago at the All-American championships. All of Izak's previous opponents he had never played and most of his practice partners he had lost to at least once during his career. Winning practice sets against people he had lost to increased his confidence. I was concerned about the fact that he had beaten this guy before. Ysern is a lefty and gets around the court very quickly. Izak would be in charge of the activity during the match due to having a lot of forced winners along with a significant amount of unforced errors. A large part of his unforced errors were due to Ysern not making any while playing a high level of defense, neutral, and maneuver. He had a pretty tough force field.

The loss was filled with the typical kind of stuff a little moping around setting on the court and reflecting for a while. People would come up to Izak and remind him about his great tournament. It was during this time that we decided it was necessary to obtain a couple of the NCAA umbrella as an additional souvenir.

For some reason my phone did not ring as much this day??? Only Dave Howell called after the match and then Harvey Roberts called after we returned to the hotel.

Texas A&M and the NCAA did a great job hosting this event. The NCAA tournament is equivalent to an upper level pro event with the amount of effort, energy, and professionalism that go into this kind of event.

MONDAY, May 30th

Izak's parents, Joe, Lauren, and I watched the finals of singles and some of the doubles before saying our goodbyes. Izak will now begin his professional career while his parents return to South Africa. Joe was going to Dallas to hang for a day with one of his former college teammates from Lamar. I am sure Lauren will enjoy that experience.