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Sports

Emerald Cruises Past Abbeville for Second Time in Two Days

By KEVIN FIORENZO/Index-Journal sports writer
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Emerald's No. 2 singles player Arielle Barraca returns a shot Tuesday during the Vikings' match against Abbeville at the Pete Smith Complex. (Staff photo by T.M. James)

ABBEVILLE -- Emerald High School's girls tennis team didn't have to struggle too much to win either of its matches the past two days against Abbeville, but in many ways, the Vikings' overall improvement relies on those wins. Following a 6-1 victory over the Panthers on Monday at Greenwood Country Club, Emerald did even better on the road Tuesday, shutting out Abbeville 7-0 to maintain its undefeated Region 1-AA record.

The Vikings, the 2007 Class AA runner-up, were clearly a step ahead of Abbeville, winning each match in straight sets and dropping just five total games over five singles matches. "We've had a good season, but this is the elite of high school tennis in (Class) AA," Abbeville coach Mike Culbreath said. "This is kind of the measuring stick here.

"Our girls have competed hard, but we're just in a different class."

Emerald's improved score Tuesday came thanks to Arielle Barraca's 6-0, 6-0 win over Abbeville's Blair Hammonds at No. 2 singles, a major turnaround after the Vikings sophomore fell 6-4, 6-1 on Monday. "It's just the like the (Emerald) boys (tennis team) -- (they learn) patience (and) how to approach new shots," Emerald coach Susan Timmerman said. "Like Arielle -- she had never faced anyone with a good slice, but she figured it out. "Blair's strokes are very unorthodox. She doesn't have the usual topspin, steady whacking at the baseline. She's very much touch and control."

Timmerman thought Barraca's ability to work through Hammonds' style was a sign of her development as a player. "She thought about it and she didn't make near as many mistakes, and she just decided that she was going to change up the pace," Timmerman said. "That's a big change in maturity for her. She's coming into her own."

Along with Barraca, No. 5 Elizabeth Mulkey also won her match against the Panthers' Caitlin Arnold without dropping a game, while No. 4 Maggie Elliott dropped just one game against Mary Beth Driver, winning 6-0, 6-1.

"You can tell a lot about what you need to do, what you need to work on, because I played

her (Monday) and she hits the ball real short, so this helped me to move up to the net because I don't really play up at the net," Mulkey said.

No. 1 Sarah Seigler won her match over Casey Powell, 6-0, 6-2, and No. 3 Claire Gillespie won 6-1, 6-1 over Caroline Bishop to round out the singles sweep. "(These matches) help them all to figure out what they need to work on," Timmerman said. "We just played them yesterday, so it's still fresh in their mind."

In doubles, Seigler and Barraca never took complete command of their match against Powell and Hammonds, but still came away with a 6-4, 7-5 win. Sammie Jo Manning and Julianne Welch won at No. 2 doubles without much trouble, 6-3, 6-2.

Though the Panthers won just one match over two days, Culbreath said playing stiffer competition will help Abbeville. "You get better playing people who are better than you," Culbreath said. "You don't really get anything out of beating people you're supposed to beat, but then again, it's tough to sit back and watch."