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Sports

Emerald Dispatches Gilbert To Advance In Tennis

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Emerald's Sarah Seigler returns a shot Tuesday to Gilbert's Maddie Berkheimer in a Class AA girls tennis playoff match at Greenwood Country Club. Seigler won 6-0, 6-2. (Staff photo by Scott J. Bryan)

Playing at the No. 1 spot on Emerald High School's girls tennis team, Sarah Seigler often has to take the most punches against the best opponents each match.

Entering with a three-match losing streak in singles Tuesday, Seigler enjoyed a change of pace, winning her match 6-0, 6-2 to lead the Vikings' to a 6-0 rout of Gilbert in the second round of the Class AA state playoffs at Greenwood Country Club. The victory moves Emerald into the Upper State finals for the second straight season. The Vikings advanced to the state finals last season, where they fell to Bishop England.

Emerald plays at 4 p.m. Friday against either Woodruff or Keenan in the Upper State finals at Lexington County Tennis Center in Lexington. The Vikings swept all six of their matches Tuesday in straight sets, but Seigler looked especially dominant in dispatching Gilbert's Maddie Berkheimer.

Benefiting from an improved serve and deep groundstrokes, Seigler dropped just two games on her way to winning her first match since the Vikings defeated Walhalla on Oct. 14. Seigler lost Emerald's lone match against Southside in the first round of the playoffs last week and also fell to T.L. Hanna and Clinton's No. 1 players in the last week of the regular season. "(Opponents) pick on the No. 1 spot on any team because it's really kind of like the sacrificial lamb," Timmerman said. "You know you're going to be playing a tournament player playing at No. 1."

Playing at the No. 1 spot, Seigler often plays the most difficult role on the Vikings' roster, but she had no problems Tuesday. "It really is (nice), like I've had a hard time the last couple matches," Seigler said. "I lost last week and I just needed a good win. "I came out ready to

play.”

Timmerman said Seigler, usually one of the Vikings’ most even-keeled players, doesn’t let facing a talented opponents each match faze her.

“She’s pretty confident,” Timmerman said. “She’s just always anxious to play, keyed up and geared up for each match. “She’s just a bottle of energy.”

Seigler credited her improvement to the work she did on her serving game between last week’s match and Tuesday. “I went out and practiced my serve a lot this weekend, so that was a lot more consistent and it helped a lot,” Seigler said.

Along with Seigler, No. 2 Arielle Barraca won her match 6-4, 6-2 while No. 3 Claire Gillespie won 6-2, 6-4. No. 4 Maggie Elliott and No. 5 Elizabeth Mulkey gave up a combined three games on their way to winning 6-0, 6-2 and 6-0, 6-1, respectively.

The Vikings No. 2 doubles team of Sammie Jo Manning and Julianne Welch closed out the convincing win with a 6-3, 6-0 victory to give Emerald the shutout. As strong as the Vikings looked Tuesday, Seigler was ready to say this year’s team has an improved shot at a state title this season.

“I think we’re just as good as we were last year, if not better, so I think we have a really good chance this year,” Seigler said.