

THE INDEX-JOURNAL

Sports

Emerald Finishes Second In Class AA For Second Consecutive Season

By SCOTT J. BRYAN/Index-Journal sports editor
Published: Saturday, November 8, 2008 11:55 PM EST



Emerald's Elizabeth Mulkey returns a shot Saturday to Bishop England's Mary Jo Inman during a 6-2, 6-2 victory in the Class AA state championship match at Lexington. (Staff photo by Scott J. Bryan)

LEXINGTON -- Emerald High School's girls tennis team followed last season's successful runner-up finish in the Class AA state championship match with another solid campaign. The ending, however, was also all too familiar.

The Vikings closed out the season Saturday at Lexington County Tennis Center with a 5-1 loss to Bishop England in the Class AA state title match, the second consecutive runner-up finish for Emerald. The loss didn't dampen Susan Timmerman's mood. "I'm just about to bust," Emerald's coach said. "I'm going to bust at the seams. I'm so proud of them. They handled themselves very dignified and had good attitudes all around, and they played some really, really good tennis."

The "really, really good tennis," Timmerman talks about was evident when comparing last year's scores. A year ago, Arielle Barraca won the Vikings' lone match in a super tiebreaker at No. 3 singles, and the other five matches were hardly competitive in the scoring.

While Barraca was swept in her No. 2 singles match, four of Saturday's matches were much closer. Elizabeth Mulkey, a seventh-grader, claimed Emerald's lone victory at No. 5 singles, besting Mary Jo Inman 6-2, 6-2. The No. 2 doubles team of Sammy Jo Manning and Julianne Welch won its first set before falling in a close match, 4-6, 6-2, 11-9. Maggie Elliott, a

freshman, recovered from a 6-2 first-set loss to close the gap in the second set, only to fall to Shannon McManus 6-2, 7-5.

And Claire Gillespie, who was playing Hailey Weaver for the second year in a row, was narrowly defeated 7-6 (7-0), 6-4. "We were confident this year, because I feel like we have a more solid team," Gillespie said. "But it's still Bishop England, so it still made us nervous. But then again, we make some teams nervous, too."

The most telling part of the match came at its midway point. Gillespie was up 5-1 in her opening set, before faltering. While Gillespie had her lead, however, the No. 2 doubles team had won its first set, Elliott was just shaking off nerves and Mulkey was cruising. "I was getting relaxed," Timmerman said. "I thought Maggie would come back and Arielle would get it going in the second set. We're in good shape, I thought."

But Bishop England's experience coupled with unforced errors left Timmerman feeling anything but

relaxed. "Then Claire's match took a turn, so I was just sick," she said. "Then the doubles match took a turn, and I was even sicker."

Emerald, which has won two state titles in girls tennis (1994 and '96), finished the season 11-3. Seigler said playing closer matches against Bishop England, a private Catholic school in Charleston, should pay off for Emerald in the future. "This is really big for us," Seigler said. "We've only got one senior leaving, and we're going to have the same starting lineup, all the same girls. They have several seniors, so next year is going to be our year. "It gives us a lot of confidence for next year."

Timmerman agreed. "We're babies," Timmerman said of her starting lineup, which included two juniors, three sophomores, one freshman and a seventh-grader. "They have three seniors, and we don't have any seniors starting. I think we'll be in good shape for next year, as long as (the Bishops) don't get any recruits."

Gillespie said the team's focus next year will be on capturing the elusive state title. "It makes us want to practice even more and beat them next year," Gillespie said of the Bishops' three graduating seniors. "We want our rings. "We'll get it next time."