St. Scholastica Men’s Tennis Notes – April 14, 2006

The Saints picked up a pair of wins over three matches on their road trip to Nebraska and South Dakota, but the loss to Sioux Falls will probably prevent the team from entering the NAIA Region III Tournament in May as a #1 seed. Versus Region opponents in 2006, the Saints are 2-1 with an early season win over Dordt, and this past weekend’s split with Concordia-Neb. and Sioux Falls. That mark will most likely put the Saints into the Tournament as either a #2 or #3 seed. If that proves to be the case, which seed it is will mean little in the four-team tourney. The top seed will play #4, and #2 will play #3 in the semi-finals.

In 2006, the Region Tournament is a spring event. Last season, however, the tournament was a fall semester event which favored teams and conferences that play in the fall - a choice via NCAA guidelines. The Saints won their semi-final but fell to Olivet Nazarene (Ill.) in the Region Final. Olivet made it to the second round of the national tournament before losing to #2 ranked, and eventual national champion, Azusa Pacific.

The Saints have won eight regular season UMAC titles in a row, and won the UMAC post-season tournament in 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004 before MN-Morris nabbed the 2005 tournament by a scant two points. All four individual conference champions from Morris graduated last spring, and only half of their conference champion #3 doubles tandem returns, though. The Saints received four of five first place votes in the pre-season coaches poll and look to be the clear cut favorite to win their ninth consecutive regular season title and to regain the tournament crown.

With only five matches remaining and tournament time approaching, Coach Patten is still rotating his lineup around. It is a sign of depth that he has been able to play so many combinations in the six different single slots. Two players each at #2, #4, #5 and #6 singles have seen significant action, while three players have split time in the #3 slot. This gives Patten a lot of flexibility when he pencils in a lineup during post-season tournament time.

Freshman Travis Jones has not only been consistent for the Saints all season but has also been consistently improving. He is 12-7 on the season but is currently riding a 7-match win streak and is 8-2 in his last 10 matches. He is 10-6 in doubles play with three different partners but has had the most success with Will Ruckle at #3 where the pair is 8-4 for the year and on a 3-match win streak.

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