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SportsTone.net

ASHEBORO - When it comes to high school sports, there are things you can control and things you can't control. The Uwharrie Charter Academy boys tennis team is succeeding in everything it can control.

That means the Eagles will be doing everything in their power to capture the Piedmont Athletic Conference championship in the next two weeks as UCA, which is a perfect 6-0 in conference play, will battle Wheatmore April 6 and finally Southwestern Randolph on April 18 to close out the PAC season.

Then there's the fight to continue a winning streak that has reached 15 straight matches over a two-year span. The Eagles dropped their league opener last year as a member of the Yadkin Valley Conference before winning their final seven matches and their first eight matches this year. Besides league meets remaining with Wheatmore and SWR this season, the Eagles have non-league tilts with North Stanly and Chatham Central.

"We have kind of a rule where there are really no expectations," second-year UCA head coach Drew Fortune said. "I knew a lot of teams lost a lot of seniors, but you can't tell with tennis because at any time a team could get two players who haven't played there before. We were looking for the challenge of the new league and we love playing Randolph County teams."

Winning matches is something the Eagles can certainly control. What happens after the regular season when it comes to the regional tournament is something the Eagles can't control, but Fortune said he is going to make the best of a weird situation.

Because UCA is the only 1-A team in the split-PAC, with the other five teams in the 2-A classification, UCA will automatically qualify one singles player and one doubles team into the 1-A regional. That means there may be some very talented UCA players unable to reach the regional round simply because there was no one to play in an attempt to qualify.

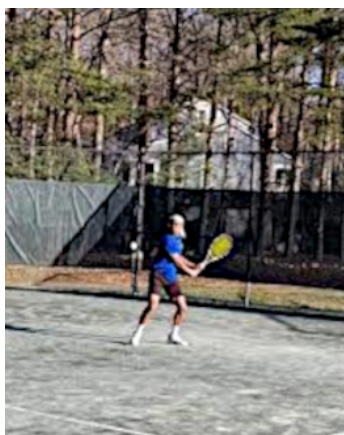
"This season, you can argue that some of these guys don't get the chance to play for regionals, if we were in the same conference as last year they would get that chance," Fortune said. "But there are some complicated scenarios when you have a 1-A, 2-A split conference. Hey, that's the way it is and we can't do anything about that. Our goal is to win out the season and if we can do that, we're



Uwharrie Charter Academy tennis coach Drew Fortune. Photo provided.

conference champions. We're not going to let that other stuff damper what could be a storied season for us."

Among the Eagles who are having stellar seasons are Joseph Phetmixay and Connor Kelly, both of whom qualified for regionals last year. Both are 8-0 this season. Drew Auman, who participated in last year's regional in the doubles competition, is also 8-0. Danny Palma (7-0), Benjamin Owen (6-0) and Ayden Green (5-1) are also having impressive seasons. Kelly became the first UCA player to win a regional match last year.



UCA senior Joseph Phetmixay. Photo provided.

The philosophy for success has been the same for the Eagles all season. Realize your talent and take advantage of what you do well.

"The further down the ladder you go, get the ball over the net and keep it in the lines," Fortune said. "When you get to the fifth and sixth singles, it's who makes the least amount of errors. You have to win 10 games. Every single point, you have to play like it's the last point."

Though the Eagles are unbeaten this year, Fortune said it hasn't been easy.

"It's been a challenge, it hasn't been easy," said Fortune, who has been at UCA eight seasons and has coached cross country, jayvee boys basketball, varsity girls basketball, girls soccer and boys soccer. "Some of these matches have been very hard fought. All these teams have good players. They have challenged the guys. We really stick to it and never give up."

The Eagles are also preparing for their first-ever run at a dual team title.

And that's something else they can control. And if they can control something, that usually means success.