



Optimism and excitement surround the Liberty men's and women's tennis teams this winter in their preparation for the 2010 spring season.

The women's tennis team has five returnees from last season's squad, which bested the school record for season victories, compiling a 15-7 record. On the men's side, the Flames return four members of a team which posted the second most victories in school history with a 13-10 mark.

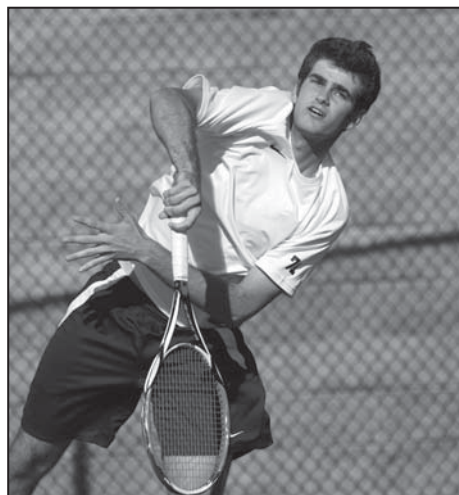
Add to those accomplishments, the strong play of both squads in tournament play this fall and head coach Chris Johnson continues to move the overall Liberty tennis program ahead.

"After having things turn out so well for both teams, we want to keep the momentum going," stated the four-year coach. "This fall, we saw some great results. That's where we want to go with our programs."

THE MEN

During each of its first three years under Liberty alumnus, Johnson, the Flames have improved their spring win total by at least four victories each spring. As mentioned earlier, Liberty fashioned a 13-10 record last season, up from 8-10 in 2008. The win total was the most by a Flames team since 1990, when a team, with Johnson as a student-athlete, recorded a 16-5 mark. In addition, the men's squad was ranked by the ITA for the first time in the 23-year history of the program at the end of the season, entering the listing at No. 155.

This season, the Flames' roster will be veteran laden. Liberty returns four players from last year with match experience, as all four played in at least 20 of the Flames'



Louis Steyn

23 spring contests in 2009. In addition, all four won at least 12 matches in spring to sport a winning ledger.

Heading the returners is a trio of seniors in Chad Simpson, Louis Steyn and Juan Reyes. Regular members of the Flames' line-up last year, the three each posted career highs in singles wins.

In his final season at Liberty, Simpson will enter the spring off a strong season in 2009. Playing mostly in the No. 3 singles slot in the Flames line-up, the Danville, Ill., native recorded a 13-8 mark. The senior seems to have picked up where he left off last spring, as he went 10-5 against a challenging tournament schedule this fall.

"Chad is one of two guys on the team who was here when I took over four years ago," stated Johnson. "He is a leader on our team."

"When you look at what a senior means to a team, you would put Chad's name and picture beside it as a definition. He is the kind of guy you want on your team. He is always motivating the other guys, holding Bible studies for the team and providing solid play. Chad is a leader on the court and off the court."

Another source of leadership for the men's team is Steyn. Last season, the senior returned from a redshirt year due to injury to post a 12-8 record in singles and paired with fellow senior Reyes for a 14-4 record in doubles. This year, he is serving as the team's captain.

"I always say you earn the right to lead," noted Johnson. "Louis played through some injuries last year. He just played all out despite being hurt with a match on the line last year and his teammates watching to win a singles match and give us the contest, 4-3. He has definitely earned the right to lead."

Completing the three seniors is the aforementioned Reyes. The Cali, Columbia native led the Flames last spring with a 15-7 record in singles, playing mainly in the No. 6 spot in the line-up. He also teamed with Steyn for the previously mentioned 14 victories in doubles, the most by any Liberty duo last spring.

"Juan is my other player who has been around for four years," stated Johnson. "He always brings a good attitude to the court," commented Johnson. "If you had to point to someone who consistently brings it under pressure, Juan is that guy for us."

The final returner on the men's team is Giancarlo Lemmi. In his first spring of collegiate tennis in 2009, the sophomore went 12-9 out of the No. 3 and 4 slots in the Flames' singles line-up. This fall, Lemmi went 8-6 in singles and paired with Simp-



Chad Simpson

son to go 9-1 doubles, capturing the Flight C bracket at the Old Dominion Collegiate Invitational, Oct. 2-4.

"Giancarlo really improved last season," noted Johnson. "This year, he is even stronger and faster, and will play in the top four places in the singles line-up."

Liberty added three new faces on the men's side this fall in transfers Benjamin Wirth and Trystan Styat and freshman Siim Tuus. All three are expected to make an impact this spring.

"Ben is a transfer from William & Mary, and he was playing in their line-up in doubles and sharing a spot in singles," stated Johnson on the 6-3 junior from Virginia Beach, Va.

"He is a good player and he wanted a more stable position. He felt led to come here and to have a guy come in like that during this summer is a real gift."

"Ben has a big serve, brings a higher level of play to doubles and a lot of consistency coming in as a junior in singles."

"Siim has a big forehand and when you see it, you can't believe he can hit so hard. Once he learns to put everything together, his potential is huge. He is already playing at a high level, so where he goes will be exciting to watch."

"Tristan is my ambassador for perseverance. He transferred in last year and had to sit out. He will share time in the top two spots in our singles line-up with Siim."

In January, the Flames welcomed another player to their roster, as sophomore Monte Tiller joined the squad.

With the additions, Johnson expects the Flames to have more depth this season.

"Chad and Louis, who have been playing in our two and three spots in singles, will be playing in our four and five positions



this year. And, we had a good year last year.

"We are going to have even a greater level of play up and down our line-up this year. I wouldn't be surprised, if we don't get some wins this season against some who didn't think they were going to lose."

THE WOMEN

For the second straight season, the Liberty Lady Flames women's tennis team eclipsed the school record for wins, besting the 13-4 mark of 2008 with a 15-7 spring ledger in 2009. In addition, the Lady Flames finished second in the Big South standings for the second consecutive year with a 6-1 record, the top conference record in the nine-year history of the program. They also received the program's first-ever ITA ranking, listing No. 130 in mid-April.

Liberty returns five players from last season, including all-conference singles performers Jordan Jenkins, Hannah Fick and Nadia Solomon-Burgess. The three each posted 12 or more wins in singles last spring, while Jenkins and Fick paired to win 12 out of their 13 No. 1 doubles matches in earning all-conference doubles honors.

Jenkins, the most decorated of the group, returns for her third season with the Lady Flames. Returning from illness last fall, she recorded a 12-7 mark in the No. 1 singles spot for Liberty and paired with Fick to lead the team in doubles victories. For the second consecutive year, the Sarasota, Fla., native was selected to the VaSID All-State tennis team in singles.

Jenkins has started her junior year strong, going 11-1 this fall and capturing three tournament titles, including the prestigious Billie Jean King Collegiate Invitational, Oct. 11-13, at the U.S. Tennis Center in Flushing, N.Y.

"We made a huge transition on the women's side two years ago, with a recruiting class which ranked No. 17 in the nation and Jordan was a key part of that," said Johnson. "She has just been outstanding in the fall, inspiring the whole team.

"No one wants to win more than Jordan and she comes prepared to play from the first point of the match on. If you are her opponent, you better come ready to bring your best game, because Jordan will."

Another piece of the 2007 recruiting class, Fick, comes off a breakthrough season in 2009. Playing at the No. 4 spot in the Lady Flames' singles line-up, she tied for the team high in wins with a 15-5 mark, winning 14 straight contests during the

spring. As mentioned earlier, she paired with Jenkins in doubles for a 12-1 record at No. 1 doubles.

"Hannah is a very talented and athletic player. Last season, she put it altogether and this year, she is more confident. Right now, she is exactly where a top three player should be," stated Johnson about the Hamilton, New Zealand native.

Solomon-Burgess is the final all-conference singles team member returning to the Liberty roster this year. One of two seniors on the squad, she tied for the team lead in victories with a 15-7 singles record in 2009 after transferring from junior college. She also was on the winning end 14 times in doubles with various partners throughout the 2009 campaign.

This season, Solomon-Burgess enters the spring expected to hold down the No. 2 position in the Lady Flames' singles line-up after a strong fall in which she went 7-2, winning the Flight B singles crown at the James Madison Invitational, Sept. 11-13.

"Everywhere that Nadia has gone she has succeeded, as she was a champion in junior college. She maybe be short in stature, but she is a tiger out on the court and has a never give-up attitude," commented Johnson about the 5-5 player.

Fabiana Gouveia is the other senior on the Liberty women's tennis roster. In her third season with the Lady Flames, she has held positions in doubles and singles in the Liberty line-up. Last season, she posted a 4-5 record in singles, while combining with different partners to record a 3-5 mark in doubles.



Nadia Solomon-Burgess

"I think I am going to have a meltdown when she leaves," stated Johnson about the Brazilian. "She is just a staple for our team. She is the glue which holds us together and provides senior leadership.

"Fabiana shows up everyday smiling, has a fantastic attitude and represents Liberty to the fullest. She really loves Liberty. She is definitely a big part of our team."

The final returner, Valeriya Klintsevich, joined the Lady Flame roster in January 2009 and moved into the line-up a quarter of the way through the spring. The Kalingrad, Russia native quickly made an impact, playing in the No. 5 and 6 spots in singles and compiling an 11-4 record. She closed the season with seven consecutive singles wins, helping to play a key role in the team's 11-match win streak at the end of the year.

"Valeriya has many weapons at her disposal," noted Johnson about the 5-11 junior. "She will play either the No. 4 or 5 position for us and probably secure double-digit wins. And when you are getting double-digit wins out of your No. 3, 4 and 5 spots, it makes it very difficult on your opponent to match up with you."

The lone newcomer to the veteran women's roster in the fall was Brittany Thomas. The sophomore from Petamula, Calif., has been a welcomed addition to the squad.

"Every coach is always fortunate to have someone who comes on to his team that brings a new level of potential and is willing to work hard," says Johnson about the newcomer to the women's team. "She doesn't come in with any expectations. She wants to beat everyone and just goes out and works.

"I see huge improvements from this year to last year, as she is more confident, a lot stronger and faster. If that tells us anything about her this spring, then I will be really excited to watch her progress."

In January, Carol Loeb joined the roster and has held a spot in the Liberty line-up since her arrival.

With a talented squad ready for the upcoming spring, Johnson's squad is drawing interest.

"When you start having success like our team did the past two years and Jordan did this fall, other coaching staffs from bigger and more successful schools take notice and want to get you on their schedule.

"It effects recruiting as we are able to get better players, which in turn helps us to compile more wins and continue to improve. It is a process that is so important to our program."