

NJSIAA Boys' Tennis Preview: Aces on and off court lead Mercer County champions

Published: Wednesday, May 09, 2012, 11:51 PM Updated: Wednesday, May 09, 2012, 11:58 PM



By **Ann LoPrinzi/For The Times**

West Windsor-Plainsboro South is the team everyone wants to beat, but that has rarely happened in the past decade.

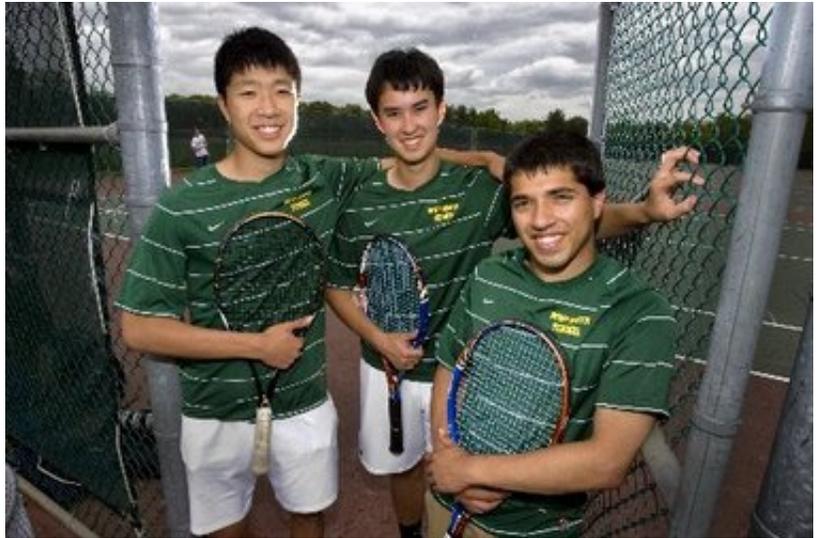
So far this season, the Pirates are undefeated, ranked No. 7 in the Star Ledger Top 20, and have already capped yet another county championship.

The talent on this squad, however, is not limited to the tennis court. It extends into the classroom and beyond. Three seniors — Peter Ku, Nikhil Gavai, and Paul von Autenried — are counted among the best students at South, with GPAs ranging from 4.65 to 4.81. Their interests and achievements vary.

While South is prepping for next week's start of a state tennis title run, Ku, who has decided to continue his education at Harvard, is preparing for the biggest tournament of the year, a mid-May National Science Olympiad in Orlando. His overall experiences and accomplishments are dizzying, starting with a science competition in 9th grade when he presented the topic, "Why the Sky is Blue," at the Goddard Space Center. He participates in various competitions in science and math, many at major universities with kids from around the world and is president of his school's math club, in which there are many in-school and away meets. In addition, Ku plays bridge competitively and finished first in a pairs event in a youth national tournament.

Ku has taken numerous challenging courses and, admittedly, has no secret for juggling everything that goes on in his busy life. "I guess I still have just as many late nights as other people. I'm always struggling and fighting against procrastination, but I do try to push and challenge myself."

The senior, who began playing at 6 or 7 years old, played tournaments from about 10-13 and earned rankings. A lack of spare time limited his tournament play once in high school, but Ku also challenges himself on the court. With doubles partner John Hu, they lost only one match last year to Holmdel and beat "some very good teams" along the



Michael Mancuso/The Times

From left, West Windsor-Plainsboro South High School tennis players Peter Ku, Paul von Autenried and Nikhil Gavai. To purchase this and other photos, visit <http://TimesofTrenton.zenfolio.com>.

way. Teamed again with Hu at first doubles, they fell to the same squad this season in a tournament and won the rest, including a repeat MCT doubles title.

Second doubles player Nikhil Gavai, whose partner is Mike Herelle, is planning to attend Carnegie Mellon in the fall, and his passion in high school has been the Model U.N. Team, of which he is president. The team debates political issues against schools from around the world, mostly at top universities, and recently received a ranking of No. 5 in the nation.

Ku, as well as teammate Daniel Vaysburg, the county champ at third singles, each qualified as semifinalists for the 2012 U.S. Physics Team earlier this year. And Paul von Autenried, the top JV player who has filled in and won three singles matches so far this season, is a pianist and headed to Princeton University.

"I've been pretty serious since I was 4 and it's a passion of mine," said the musician. "I compete and have performed with different orchestras. I'd say I'm reasonably accomplished."

As the Pirates head into this important part of the season, there is hope that South will even better last year's impressive run of winning a NJSIAA Group IV Central Tournament before falling in the Group IV finals. South is seeded No. 1 in the Group IV Central Tournament, which begins tomorrow, but has a first round bye and will play the winner of East Brunswick and Colts Neck on Tuesday. For full draws, including NJSIAA Group III Central in which Hopewell Valley is seeded first, visit <http://highschoolsports.nj.com/boystennis/tournaments/boystennis-2012>.

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To keep the dream alive, South needs Ku's mindset.

"I always put in 100 percent," he said. "Whatever I produce is the best work I can do and something I'm proud of."

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