



Ninth-grader's tennis future looking pretty promising

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Meredith Lawrence of [Prior Lake](#) has learned the game of tennis is much more than just being able to hit all the shots and make quality ground strokes. The game is a mental grind. It's about controlling your emotions and letting go of your mistakes all at the same time. Those are skills that many players take years to master.

Lawrence appears to have figured it out as a ninth-grader on the Visitation girls tennis team. She won the Section 3AA singles title this fall and took an 18-3 overall record in the Class AA state singles tournament Oct. 29-30 at the Baseline Tennis Center on the University of Minnesota campus. "This summer, I worked hard on different shots and different approaches," said Lawrence. "But the biggest improvement in my game has been the mental part. I've changed from being easily frustrated, letting my emotions get the best of me to keeping my emotions inside and not getting upset over a missed shot or mistake."

Lawrence didn't go into the state tournament expecting to win the singles crown. She was hoping to win a couple of matches and get some experience. The state field is loaded with some pretty talented players. Last year, Lawrence competed in the state doubles tournament, but she and her Visitation teammate lost both of their matches.

"That was a good experience," said Lawrence. "Playing at state last year certainly helped boost my confidence."

Lawrence's goal heading into this season was to be Visitation's No. 1 singles player all season long and then get to state come section time. "I've accomplished both goals already, so whatever happens at state is a bonus," she said.

Lawrence's most impressive win of the season was in the section title match Oct. 20. It was there she defeated Virginia Norder of Rosemount in three sets (6-3, 0-6, 6-1).

Norder had beaten Lawrence 12 days earlier in the section team competition.

"After I lost the second set 6-0, I just told myself the match was starting over with one set to go," said Lawrence. "I didn't get down. I just had to hit the shots I knew I could hit. The third set was one of best sets I've played all season."

Lawrence's mental toughness doesn't surprise Visitation coach Paul Jilek. He said from day one she's handled the pressure of being the team's top singles player at such a young age.

"Meredith has faced many different types of talent throughout the year, and she has been able to rise to the occasion and take care of business," said Jilek. "She has the drive for success, while always keeping positive attitude and belief in herself, regardless of the score."

Visitation has never had a state singles champion in its history. Could Lawrence be the first?

Lawrence said that's not something she's completely focused on. Sure, it's on her radar screen. But instead, she just wants to improve each year, each time on the court.

"It would be great to win a state title," said Lawrence. "I'd love to get into final four at state and have a chance to win it. But there are a lot of girls in this state who are very good."

Lawrence gets to face many of the state's top players playing on the junior circuit in the United States Tennis Association (USTA). She's played in the USTA for three years, playing in many tournaments across the Midwest against different players with different skill sets.

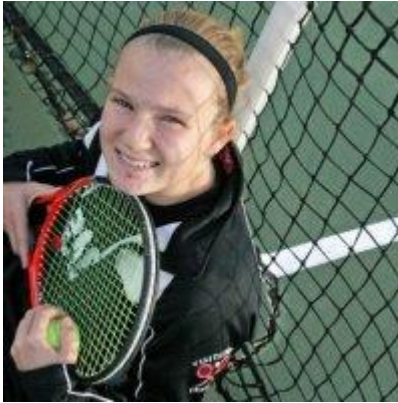
That's helped Lawrence understand her own game more.

"I'm getting to know my game better," said Lawrence. "I'm learning my strengths and weaknesses."

Following the state tournament, Lawrence will take her winter break from tennis to play her second-favorite sport, basketball. She said playing competitive hoops helps her tennis game.

It's good for footwork, helping her to go baseline to baseline to get to more balls. It keeps her in shape and helps with hand-eye coordination.

"Playing basketball definitely helps with tennis," said Lawrence. "It's a different sport, but there are similar things. It's a different challenge for me. I enjoy playing both sports, but tennis is my No. 1."



Visitation ninth-grader Meredith Lawrence of Prior Lake took an 18-3 record in the Class AA state singles tournament.

Photo by Tom Schardin