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## Visitation girls' tennis: Small size, big shots

By **DEAN SPIROS**, Star Tribune

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Those who know Meredith Lawrence best say it seems as though the Prior Lake native has grown up fast.

Her dad, Brent Lawrence, sees an extremely goal-oriented person, with the focus and determination of someone beyond her 13 years. Lawrence is playing her second season of high school tennis.

Her tennis coach at Visitation High School in Mendota Heights, Clay Sollenberger, sees a gifted athlete who has a repertoire of shots second to none at the high school level. Lawrence is 25-0 as the Blazers' No. 3 singles player and has qualified for the state tournament with her doubles partner, Jenny Mullen.

Then there are those who are less familiar with Lawrence. They get one look at all 4 feet 10 and 70 pounds of her and wonder what she is doing on the court.

They find out soon enough.

"I've heard people before a match say I must be really easy [to beat] because I am so small," Lawrence said. "A couple of weeks ago I had a girl shake my hand at the end of a match and say, 'You're really good. How old are you?'"

All signs point to Lawrence only getting better.

"She's an extremely talented two-sport athlete [basketball is the other], and I'm extremely fortunate to have her playing tennis for me," Sollenberger said. "It seems like she always finds a way to get herself balanced, even when she's on the run. That's a pretty tremendous asset for someone that size and that young.

"She's the type of kid who could pick up any sport and be good at it."

Lawrence has only been playing tennis for four years, getting the bug after playing at a summer camp. Her parents then enrolled her in a tennis program sponsored by USTA Northern section at Fort Snelling. It was love at first set.

Lawrence said she began watching the top professional players and became even more intrigued by the sport.

"I like the way they move, the way they put the spin and the power on the ball," Lawrence said. "Being athletic, I liked the fact that, even if I didn't have the shots everyone else had,

I was athletic enough to get to all the balls.

"Then I developed better shots, which has helped me develop as a player."

Lawrence was invited to practice with Visitation's junior varsity team as a sixth-grader. She began last season as an exhibition player on the varsity level and moved up to No. 4 singles before long. She finished that season with a 12-2 record.

"I was a little nervous for the first match because I didn't really know what I was doing," Lawrence said. "After I got the hang of it it was a little more relaxing, knowing my teammates were there for me."

Because she usually cannot match her opponent's power and strength, Lawrence said she relies on pinpoint shot-making and her quickness, which allows her to reach shots others can't.

"Watching her run around getting ball after ball, you forget she is so tiny," Sollenberger said. "[And] she's able to pack more than one might think into all of her shots. Meredith can do it all."

The top two singles players at Visitation are seniors, and Sollenberger said it is likely Lawrence will take over as the top singles player next season.

She'll be a third-season veteran by then. Maybe even 5 feet tall.

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