TENNIS

Despite obstacles, Hampton keeps winning

By DAVID BULLA
Review Staff Writer

Although they faced the unenviable task of playing for the NCAA Division II tennis championships without their coach, the Hampton University men were among the favorites at the event in Los Angeles May 13-18.

Coach William Screen, on probation this year for a minor rules violation committed last summer, didn't expect the handicap to hurt his team.

"We are used to this role," Screen said by telephone from his Hampton, Va., office. "We've always played well under adverse circumstances."

The Pirates, who carried a 30-7 record into the national championships at Cal State-North Ridge, should benefit from a schedule that finds them playing most of their games away from home.

"We're essentially a road team because most Division I teams don't want to play us," said Screen, in his 16th year at Hampton. "If we play them, we have to travel."

"Hampton is 10-2 against Virginia Tech, 9-0 against William & Mary, 13-1 against Old Dominion, 5-0 against Richmond and 4-0 against James Madison."

Over the years, Screen's teams have posted an impressive record against the Division I programs in Virginia. Only one of those schools, the University of Virginia, holds a winning record (6-4) against Hampton. Hampton is 10-2 against Virginia Tech, 9-0 against William & Mary, 13-1 against Old Dominion, 5-0 against Richmond and 4-0 against James Madison.

Proof that Screen's players are undaunted by their precarious situation is their winning the school's 25th Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association championship last month. Although Screen can attend the team's matches on his own, he chose not to travel to the CIAA Spring Championships in Winston-Salem, N.C. The Pirates, playing without their top two seeds in YaYa Doumbia and Greg Williams, lost just one set in 18 matches.

Screen rested Doumbia and Williams, whose play has kept HU in the top four nationally throughout the season.

Rozelle Lightfoot, who plays No. 4 singles for Hampton, said that his coach's absence has changed very little on the court.

"We still do the same routine," said the Richmond, Va., product. "It (Screen's absence) doesn't bother us. We just go out there on the court and that's it.

"We just try to go out there and win the match, to work on things that we need to work on. Coach says, 'Work on your weaknesses and get off the court.'"

Opponents have tried to take advantage of the Pirates in a few matches. But Lightfoot said the ploy rarely works.

"Sometimes we go to other schools and the coaches try to take advantage of you," Lightfoot said. "They don't give you the respect they normally would if your coach was with you.

"Players also do that on the court. They figure we don't have a coach and they can get away with something like an out call when the ball is in. But we just keep on playing and don't let these things bother us."

The Pirates will be seeking the school's second national championship in the sport. The first was won in 1976 by a team led by Rodger Gettis and Bruce Foxworth, whom Screen calls the best players in his tenure as Hampton's coach.

Both players became professionals after their college careers. Gettis reached No. 77 in the world before quitting to begin a family, though he subsequently returned to the tour. Foxworth's pro career had mixed results.

"Foxworth played in a lot of big tournaments, including the French Open," Screen said. "But he was losing in early rounds and his ranking dropped. He needed more work than that."

Frequently, Screen invokes the names Gettis and Foxworth to push his players' games up several notches.

"Coach Screen says something like, 'With Gettis and Foxworth, it's three automatic points,'" says Lightfoot. "'I didn't have to worry about them.' He says it every match."

For much of his career, Screen has had the unusual distinction of fielding nearly all-white teams. This was because the best black athletes were being lured away from black schools.

"When I took over in 1970, there was a great push of black athletes to white schools," Screen said. "They did not recognize there were players available in other countries."

Not that Screen wanted to recruit non-blacks from abroad. But the available U.S. talent would have made it impossible for him to carry through on the dream of his predecessor, Dr. Herman Neilson.

"Dr. Neilson's charge to me! 'I want you to make Hampton tennis nationally recognized,'" Screen said. "To do this I had to recruit elsewhere."

Screen concentrated his efforts on South America, particularly Brazil. There he established a tie with Josephine Aten through former *World Tennis* editor Gladys Hellman, one of his many friends in the international tennis community. Through this connection, Screen has recruited 17 Brazilians to Hampton.

But that is changing. The success of the program has attracted the attention of black players who used to flock to the West Coast tennis powers, UCLA, Southern California and Stanford.

This year's team has an even balance of three American and three foreign players. Four of the six are black.

Even though his probation prevented Screen from recruiting this year, black prep players are coming to Screen now. Mid-Atlantic Tennis Association champion Steve Martin of Largo, Md., recently committed to Hampton.

Yet, while black tennis players are starting to recognize Screen's success, the majority sporting establishment has kept its distance.

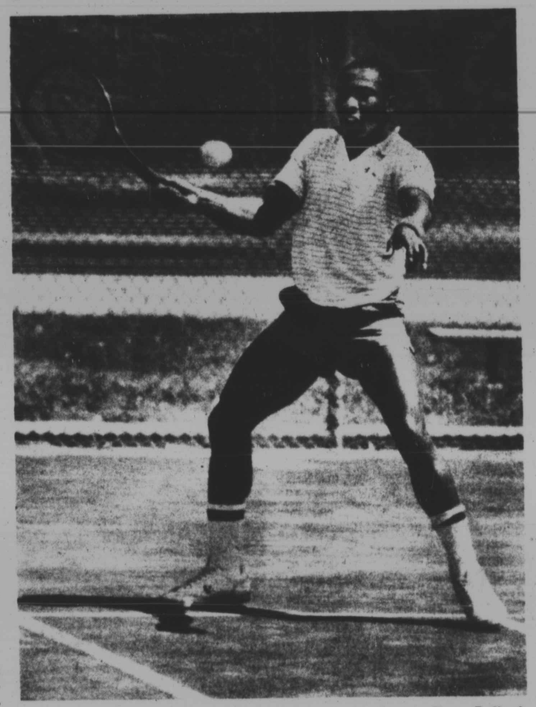
"I can't even get a free shoe," Screen lamented. "I've been in tennis all my life and I can't get a free shoe. We are involved in the Head program, but all colleges are part of it."

Matters like this leave Screen, who also is head of Hampton's Communication Disorders Department, more than a bit frustrated.

"I wake up some mornings with a rage in my heart and I want to scream," he said.

But Screen channels the energy that such frustrations breeds into a more

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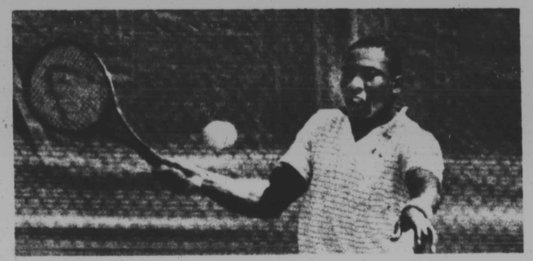
Hampton's Datus Murray finishes off Fayetteville State's Barry Bullock in straight sets in the CIAA championships (photo by James Parker).

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ON THE COVER: Hampton Institute's Greg Roundtree rounds a turn during a 400 meters qualifying heat in the CIAA Spring Championships (photo by Joe Daniels).

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