

New coach, same result for Rochester Lourdes

Steve Tacl took over after Kevin Rust's long tenure and led the team to its 12th Class 1A title in 14 years.

By **HEATHER RULE**, Star Tribune

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Some teams are no strangers to state tournaments and championship titles. Rochester Lourdes girls' tennis is one of those teams.

Lourdes won its 12th Class 1A team title in the past 14 years Wednesday. Under first-year head coach Steve Tacl, the Eagles beat Staples-Motley/Verndale 6-1 at Reed-Sweatt Tennis Center. Lourdes surrendered only three sets in the entire match.

Tacl said winning a state championship wasn't mentioned until about an hour or two before the final.

"You gotta get there first," he said.

Lourdes got there by beating Breck 5-2 in the semifinals Wednesday morning. Breck was looking for its first state title since 1996. The Eagles knew they had to come to play against the strong Mustangs lineup, and they pulled out some tight matches, Tacl said.

After such a big victory over Breck, the Eagles shifted

their attention to avoiding a letdown in the final. Tacl stressed fighting twice as hard and not letting up. That mindset seemed to do the trick -- all seven Lourdes matches started by winning the first set.

"I like how we continued even after the Breck match," Tacl said. "We had one more match, we had one more step to take to reach that goal. And it's maybe easy to have a letdown when you play a great team like Breck, and Staples is an awesome team."

Not long after the first match ended, the state title was clinched. The first and second doubles teams secured straight-set victories within minutes of each other. Junior Margaret Pearson sealed it with a 6-3, 6-2 victory at first singles.

The overall match was closer than a 6-1 score might suggest. Most of the matches had several long rallies. The two three-set matches each involved a tiebreaker. Staples-Motley had a strong lineup, but Lourdes players generally came through with the game- and set-finishing points.

In his first year, Tacl continued the program's success of former longtime coach Kevin Rust. Tacl said he didn't feel a lot of pressure because he knew Rust and his coaching style. The situation for Tacl was "somewhat comfortable."

"I just felt compelled to want to step into Kevin's shoes," Tacl said. "You want to show people that you're still a solid team."

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