

Hinsdale's Caroline Dolehide plays 'a few really good matches' on one of tennis' biggest stages



Caroline Dolehide hits a forehand against Simona Halep during the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, Calif., on March 11, 2018. (Paul Buck / EPA-EFE/REX/Shutterstock)

By **Heather Rule**

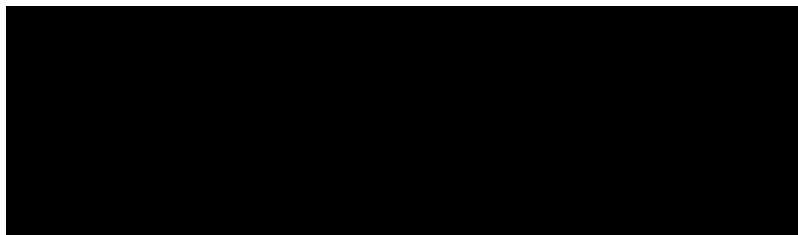
Pioneer Press

APRIL 5, 2018, 2:46 PM

Tennis player Caroline Dolehide had no clue she'd even be in the tournament.

The 19-year-old Hinsdale native, who turned pro last year, wasn't expecting a wildcard entry into one of the most prominent tournaments outside of the Grand Slams, the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, Calif., in March.

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"When the tournament directors came up to me and gave me (the wildcard), I just felt honored to take it because I've been waiting for a moment like that," said Dolehide, who reached the quarterfinals at the secondary tour stop in Indian Wells the week before the BNP Paribas Open.

One of the individuals running the tournament had watched Dolehide play and thought she had potential, so he gave her the entry, Dolehide said. She certainly took advantage of it, winning two matches before falling just short of upsetting Simona Halep, the world No. 1 and a three-time Grand Slam finalist.

Dolehide defeated fellow American Shelby Rogers 3-6, 7-6 (6), 6-3 in the first round March 7 and followed that with a second-round, 5-7, 6-3, 6-4 win over 30th-seeded Dominika Cibulkova on March 9. Cibulkova was ranked as high as No. 4 in the world a year ago.

Dolehide was ranked No. 165 in the world during the tournament. As of March 19, she bumped up 24 spots in the rankings to No. 141. She said her goal for the year is to reach the top 100. She plans to play in Europe this spring, including the French Open qualifying.

Her Indian Wells matches show how much the mental side of the game plays into the results. In her first two matches, Dolehide was down a set before winning the next two. She recalled trailing Rogers 4-0 in the first set. Being on such a big stage for the first time was nerve-wracking, Dolehide said, and took some getting used to. She said she trusted her game.

"Especially against top 100, top 50 girls," Dolehide said. "You just have to believe that you can beat anybody.

"I guess you just have to believe that it's not over until the last point is played."

For an encore, she pushed Halep to three sets and nearly won in two, but lost 1-6, 7-6 (3), 6-2 in the round of 32 on March 11.

"I'm really, really happy about this victory," Halep was quoted as saying in a [story on the WTA website](#). "It was tough down there, and much respect to her, because she's playing really good tennis."

Dolehide started off with a convincing first-set win, breaking Halep's serve twice with her powerful serve and forehand groundstrokes. She started off with solid serving and returns, something she said gave her hope the rest of the set. Dolehide won the first set with a backhand passing shot as Halep came into the net. Dolehide had to run across the baseline to get to the ball. She called it a "pretty lucky" shot.

The passing shot is one of five finalists for the [WTA Shot of the Month](#).

The opportunity to play the world No. 1 was amazing, Dolehide said, and it really helped to have a game plan and trust herself going into the match.

"I remember that day waking up, and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm actually playing Halep,'" Dolehide said. "I had to call my coach and talk through it."

Dolehide credits her parents for keeping her grounded from a young age. She watched some tennis "here and there," following the careers of the Williams sisters, Maria Sharapova and Sam Stosur. She played tennis, and had fun, but she never crossed the line into obsession.

"Because if I was obsessed with it when I was younger, I don't think I would be where I am today," Dolehide said.

Prior to Indian Wells, Dolehide had only made a couple of main-draw appearances at the Women's Tennis Association level. She's played in U.S. Open and Australian Open qualifying rounds. Slams aside, she said she's heard people say Indian Wells is the fifth or sixth biggest one in the world, and she relished the opportunity.

"I played a few really good matches and got my name out there," Dolehide said. "So I'm really proud of that."

Heather Rule is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.

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