

# Serving **STATE**

Girls' doubles team advances to state, team faces challenges of new region

story by c. palmer

A new district, new region, and new team bred new champions as the tennis team took state and brought home a medal in girls' doubles. **Cayman Sutton** [11] and **Niki Barham** [11] won third place at the UIL State Tournament in College Station at their first trip to the tennis state championships. The duo, rookies to the division of girls' doubles, also won gold at the regional and district competitions.

"We've always wanted to play together, so at the beginning of the season we begged Coach [Tammy] Cloud to let us," Sutton said. "At the beginning of the year, our goal was to go to state, and we knew we could do it. We're best friends, so we work together on the court, and we stay positive and encourage each other when we are down."

For the rest of the team, the season was filled with success at both invitationals and UIL competitions.

"I think playing in tournaments with larger schools helped our team prepare for regionals and state," Barham said. "At these tournaments, the competition is a lot tougher than what we see at district."

With the Roughnecks advancing nine of the ten possible teams to regionals, a dominating performance at district epitomized the season for the team.

"[At district] we knew that everyone wasn't as talented as us and it made us have the 'we've got this' attitude so we played better," **Kailee Simmons** [12] said. "Plus, we are a close team and everyone was cheering each other on."

The regional tournament, held this year in College Station, brought new woes. Stiff competition from new schools knocked out the majority of teams with only **Nick McFarland** [11] and **Tanner Davis** [11] placing third in boys' doubles and Sutton and Barham bringing home the gold.

"I think the tennis team did very well this season," **Kasey Carr** [10] said. "With only a few seniors this year, I feel like our juniors and underclassmen really had to step it up. Overall, we really did great."

Capping off the season with the successful trip to state, the 'Necks will return all but three varsity players.

"I have high expectations in team tennis to make it to state my last year," McFarland said. "I also hope that as a doubles team we make it to state next year and hopefully come up with a medal. Honestly, I just want my last year to be memorable for Coach Cloud and the whole tennis team together."



At the net, doubles player Dax Davis [11] slices a ball toward the opposing team. Using this technique allowed the ball to drop in an inaccessible place. Being able to play the net efficiently helped force the opponents to make an accurate return which put pressure on them," Davis said. all photos by mike peery



Arm in arm, partners **Cayman Sutton** [11] and **Niki Barham** [11] pose with their medals after a successful state run. The duo earned the third place position at the state tournament in their first year as partners. "I was excited to have advanced to state with my bestfriend," Barham said. "After begging Coach Cloud, we finally were able to play together and work hard to get to the state level."



With a reach, **Alyia Hall** [9] reaches for a ball in the Gladewater Tournament. Attending several invitational tournaments helped the players, especially the freshmen, get a feel for what playing a real opponent felt like more than practice ever could. "Playing in a tournament has its advantages with much more competitiveness and a whole lot more playing time," Hall said.

In the air, doubles player **Tanner Davis** [11] hits his trademark topspin serve. The spin he put on the ball caused it to not only to shoot up when it hit the ground but speed up as well. "I felt that my serve was pretty difficult to counter as not many teams knew how to handle the serve going straight up," Davis said.



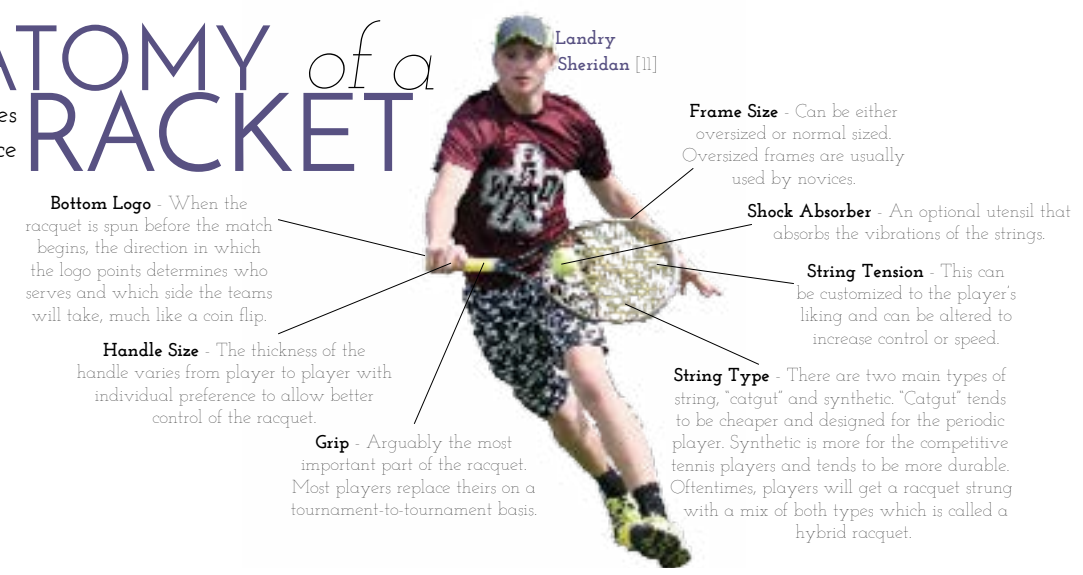
On his toe, doubles player **Nick McFarland** [11] hits a forehand return down the line. He, and his partner **Tanner Davis** [11] returned to regionals for the third consecutive year. "Even though my partner and I wanted to make it past regionals for the first time, I still think it was a success and an experience that we can learn from to make it to state next year," McFarland said.



On break, **Audrey Lunstedt** [11] and **Kailee Simmons** [12] discuss their current match with Coach **Tammy Cloud**. With multiple teams playing, Coach Cloud had to meet with players whenever she got the chance.

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