

The tennis team regained their title of State Champions after a season of dedication, endurance, and grit.

As a cool breeze blew through the trees, a calm silence came over those sitting in the bleachers. The only sounds that could be heard were balls bouncing smoothly off of rackets and tennis shoes squeaking against the rough, hard court. This scene depicts the atmosphere of the very first tennis match of the season, and what a season it was. Although the players were unaware of this at the time, they would soon find themselves battling it out in the State Championship.

Beginning on the first day of school, the tennis team began preparing for the State Championship. Although the team did not begin practicing officially until the second semester, they spent much of their free time working out and practicing for the upcoming season. For example, they spent a large majority of their B-days exercising at the Healthplex after school.

Starting on January 7, these athletes began practicing for at least two hours every day. During these practices, they would typically start with a good warm up and stretches. For the next hour or so, they would focus on drills that targeted specific muscles and skills. The team would then play matches against one another. "I put about 15 hours a week into tennis," Walker Ellis (10) said.

After almost two months of nonstop practice, it was time for the team's first match against St. Andrews. Next up were district matches against Starkville, Murrah, and Northwest Rankin. The team swept through and won overall against Starkville and Murrah. The following week, the team participated in district individuals against all three of these teams. The team was very pleased with the results of these

matches, and this gave them a great energy and motivation to start the playoffs with. "My favorite part of being with the team on bus rides to matches are the jam sessions," Clay Fudge (11) said.

Starting off playoff season were matches against opponent Northwest Rankin. The team came out with an overall win, and this allowed them to compete in the second round of playoffs the very next day against Hernando. Conquering this team with an overall score of 6-1, they knew they were up for an intense challenge. They were to compete against Oxford, one of their biggest competitors, in the North State Championship. After several hours of hearing cheers from teammates, sweating, and working hard for the win, the team pulled through with an overall score of 5-2. This win took the team to what would be the most nerve wracking of all matches, and this match was the State Championship.

On Friday, April 26 at 2:00, it was finally time for the State Championship against Ocean Springs. The weather was ideal, the players were hyped, and Coach Brad Boteler was ready to help his team take back the title of State Champions. Being that Ocean Springs beat them in the State Championship in the very same place last year, the team was ready to take back what they thought was rightfully theirs.

They definitely did so, winning the State Championship with an overall score of 6-1. The team was so excited to finish off this season in this way, and this moment will be one that they remember for the rest of their lives. "Winning the championship was the best ending to my senior year. Seeing all of our hard work pay off and being able to get the title back felt so good and was so exciting," Courtney Reid (12) said.