Klemetz, Kruse Both Named to SBC 30th Anniversary Team

February 14, 2006 · MT Media Relations

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - Former Middle Tennessee All-Americans Manon Kruse and Daniel Klemetz have been voted to the Sun Belt Conference's 30th Anniversary Tennis Team, as announced by the conference office.

Kruse and Klemetz were major parts of Middle Tennessee's tennis success upon entering the Sun Belt Conference. Both players played No. 1 singles and doubles and were the leaders of teams that made NCAA Regionals and NCAA Individual Championships appearances.

Kruse ranks as the all-time leader in both singles and doubles wins at Middle Tennessee with 83 and 89, respectively. She owns the single-season record for doubles wins with 30 in 2002 and is tied with Carien Venter for best single-season winning percentage in doubles (28-4, .875) in 2004. She also ranks third in career singles winning percentage (83-26, .762) and second in career doubles winning percentage (89-34, .724).

The Hamm, Germany, native says her time at Middle Tennessee gave her valuable confidence not only in athletics but academics as well. "My collegiate tennis experience at Middle Tennessee was tremendous. It's very hard to describe with words how special the time was for me," Kruse said. "I gained at lot from the experience. Not only did I learn how to believe in myself on the court, but I also gained a lot of confidence in my academic capabilities. I have never really been very confident in my abilities, but at Middle Tennessee there were many people who believed in me and treated me with a lot of respect and love."

Kruse said her teammates became part of her family, pushing her play to another level.

"So many of us were from very far away from home, be it from other countries or from other regions within the United State. It brought us closer together and made me feel as if all of us were like a little

family," Kruse said. "Competing with and for this 'family' was a lot of fun but also came with great responsibility. Bearing this responsibility and not wanting to disappoint the rest of the team was a strong motivator that sometimes helped all of us to reach or even go beyond our potentials."

Kruse credits her coach, Randy Holden, with instilling confidence in her even when she wasn't so sure of herself.

"Honestly, when I first came to Middle Tennessee I was very afraid of becoming a disappointment to my new coach, my teammates and to myself. I was absolutely frightened," she said. "Then, after an injury during my first semester I thought that was exactly what I was going to be - a disappointment.

"Luckily our coach [Randy Holden] never thought of me that way. Despite my problems with my ankle he always put me at No.1 of the lineup in singles as well as doubles. We had a lot of talks in which he tried to convince me that I was a talented player with a lot of potential. I never really believed him. After a while I started to win a few matches and gained confidence. My goals progressed.

"Being the No. 1 player on the team for four years was a great responsibility. It was my goal to be consistent and reliable and lead the team to higher levels. To qualify for the NCAA Tournament in singles and doubles was a first step. I think this achievement also gave our team a lot more confidence and in the end helped us to perform well enough to receive a good ranking."

Kruse has nothing but fond memories from her four years as a Blue Raider and many friends from her time in Murfreesboro.

"Today, I can look back at my four years of competition with pride. I am proud that I was part of this team. I am proud to have made a lot of friends at Middle Tennessee. I am proud that I have been named to the Sun Belt Conference's 30th Anniversary tennis team. And I am very proud that I have rarely ever been what I had feared the most - a disappointment."

Klemetz was a two-time All-American at Middle Tennessee, playing in three straight NCAA Singles Championships and at one time vaulting to the No. 1 ranking in the nation. The Vanersborg, Sweden, native won the 2002 ITA/Icy Hot All-American Championships in Chattanooga, Tenn., becoming the first Blue Raider to win a collegiate grand slam singles title.

The lefthander was also honored as the national recipient of the Arthur Ashe, Jr., Sportsmanship and Leadership Award after his junior year. He is second on the career singles and combined wins list, as well as sixth in doubles wins and fourth in singles winning percentage.

Klemetz said it took some adjustment when he first came to Middle Tennessee because of the team setting in NCAA collegiate tennis. But it didn't take long to figure out it meant a lot to many people.

"The team environment was quite different than what I was used to in Sweden. Realizing how

important the team and its results were to a lot of people really inspired me to play well," Klemetz said.

"Some of the most heart-breaking losses were in the Sun Belt Conference tournament. The crowd, the rivalry, the attitude, the pressure, the team feeling, together forming the very essence of college tennis, came out at the conference tournament. You do not see grown men cry very often, but you could, more than once, following a heart-breaking loss or victory against a rival school."

Moving to the Sun Belt Conference was a major factor in his rise to the top of the NCAA tennis world according Klemetz, as were a host of other factors.

"Individually speaking, my tennis career really took off at Middle Tennessee. A different training environment, more conditioning, tough competition, and perhaps most importantly, the guidance of Coach Dale Short in different aspects of the game quickly made a positive influence on my game.

"Also, changing to the Sun Belt Conference helped. Moving from a conference in which we had been No. 1 for 15 years to a conference in which we really had to dig deep and fight to win our matches was not only exiting for the team but was also of tremendous help to my own progress."

Klemetz had a childhood dream of playing professional tennis, but says it wasn't until his time at Middle Tennessee that the dream really took shape with the help of Short.

"I was not all that good as a junior in Sweden. My highest ranking was No. 10," he said. "This meant that I had never really seriously considered professional tennis as a future career for me. Therefore, I didn't view going to Middle Tennessee as a step on my path to becoming a pro tennis player, but more like a way for me to get an education, live in the U.S. for a while and learn English while playing tennis at the same time.

"However, as a freshman, I developed my game a lot, and when I won the Southern Intercollegiate Championships and was ranked 10th in the country during my sophomore year, I changed my thinking a bit and realized that maybe I had a chance of achieving my childhood dream of playing professional tennis.

"These thoughts grew stronger during my junior year (as I got better and better) and when I won the All-American my senior year, I knew I had a chance. I am forever indebted and eternally grateful for the experiences and opportunities that college tennis and the Sun Belt Conference in general, as well as Middle Tennessee and head coach Dale Short in particular, has provided me."

Printed on May 24, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/4830