

ALL-AREA BOYS TENNIS

Sharp as Glass

Hilltoppers' senior Scottie Taylor was on point his final season

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As a freshman at E.C. Glass, Scottie Taylor suffered one of the most agonizing defeats a player can experience on the tennis court, dropping the deciding doubles match in the Group AAA state quarterfinals.

"That was by far my worst loss in high school," said Taylor, The News & Advance player of the year as a senior this spring. "It was the clinching match and we had however many match points. It can't get much worse than that. I had no idea how

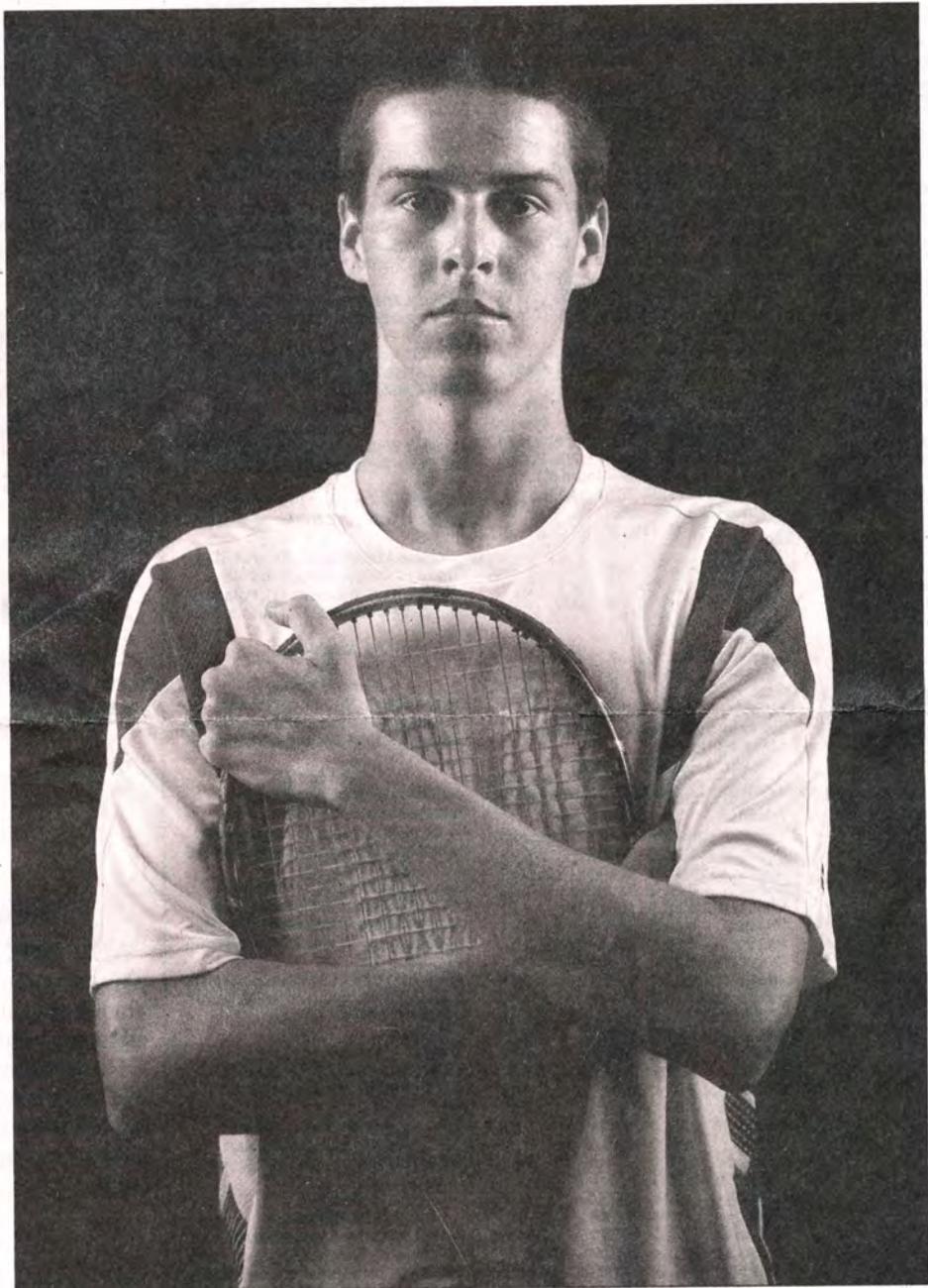
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» The entire All-Area boys tennis team. D3 continue just because I couldn't win a point."

Taylor, who graduated this spring after leading the Hilltoppers to the Group AA state championship match, was able to put that devastating loss behind him and enjoy the most rewarding season of his career as Glass's No. 1 player.

"I've always tried to have the same attitude and not to worry about one point," Taylor said. "If you win it, you win it, if you don't you don't. Take it one point at a time, don't worry about the outcome and play in the moment."

Glass coach Wistar Nelligan said that single-minded focus was key to the Hilltoppers' run to the state final, where they lost a hard-fought match to Western



PARKER MICHELS-BOYCE/THE NEWS & ADVANCE

In the Region III final, Scottie Taylor beat E.C. Glass teammate Wistar Nelligan III. "I didn't really expect to make it all the way through and then to play my best friend in the final was really tough mentally," Taylor said. "It was just a relief to get it over with."

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Taylor

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Albemarle, winners of four of the past five Group AA state titles.

"One of the best things about [Taylor] is his work ethic and he's a very coachable kid," coach Nelligan said. "His leadership on the team was very valuable, on and off the court."

After strengthening and toning down his already lean frame in the offseason through diet, weight training and running, as well as playing with doubles partner Wistar Nelligan III on a tour in Europe last summer, Taylor approached the game with more confidence and authority as a senior.

"He came in ready to play this year," coach Nelligan said, noting he dropped 15 to 20 pounds

and grew another couple inches to reach 6-foot-3. "His level of play increased tremendously between the end of his junior year and the beginning of his senior year through out-of-season tennis work and conditioning."

Taylor's improved fitness enabled him to serve and volley more frequently and cover the court more completely.

"It definitely helped with quickness and endurance, just being able to play longer at a better pace for a longer amount of time," he said.

He became a more assertive and aggressive player, setting up better finishing opportunities by getting to the net as well as putting opponents away more readily with passing shots from the baseline.

"My coaches tried to push me to come into the net a lot and I think that helped," Taylor said.

"It helped to start swinging out on the ball more rather than holding back. The more you swing out, you can almost be more consistent than if you get nervous and tighten up. Swinging faster and hitting the ball harder helped my mental game as well."

Taylor won three out of five challenge matches against Nelligan III to inherit the No. 1 seed from John James, his doubles partner as a junior.

"Wistar stepped up his game a lot and the intra-team rivalry between me and him boosted each other on," Taylor said, noting all but one of their challenge matches went to three sets.

"They were all incredibly close. The scores in the third set were all 10-8 in the tie-breakers."

Taylor lost only four singles matches all season — three to Western Albemarle's Cam Scot

— and beat Jefferson Forest's Joel Worford five times in singles and doubles, including 6-4, 6-0 in the Seminole District team final, a 5-0 Glass sweep.

"That's a heckuvan accomplishment because Joel's good," coach Nelligan said.

Taylor said his most satisfying win of the season may have been his Region III final victory over Nelligan III.

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All three of the Hilltoppers' team captains plan to play club tennis starting this fall at ACC schools — Taylor at North Carolina, Calvin Chueh at Duke and Nelligan III on a partial VHSL Citizenship Award Scholarship at N.C. State.