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1994. Operation. Speculation. Rehabilitation.

1995. Determination. Domination.

That's the story of the past two years for men's tennis player Chris Numbers, who's been selected *The Daily Aztec* Male Athlete of the Spring semester.

Last season, Numbers was forced to sit out the entire season because of severe tendinitis in his knees. The left knee required surgery. The right knee needed rest – lots of rest.

After months of rehabilitation to get back on the court, he returned to action last October at the Fresno Invitational.

"He took a year off from competition," Aztec head coach John Nelson said. "He won the doubles and lost in the singles final – then turned around and won the Regional Rolex final.

"He had to make some technical changes. A lot of times when you change something at that level, it's tough on your confidence. He's worked really hard on his game, so I'm happy for him."

Happy because his ace was named NCAA Region VII and Western Athletic Conference Player of the Year. Numbers finished 36-10 in singles (20-3 in team matches) and 35-3 in doubles (21-2). Now he's seeking the second All-American selection of his Aztec career.

Pepperdine's Charles Auffrey, who ended the season ranked seventh in the nation.

"It was the first (dual) match and anything can happen," Numbers said. "I was eager and ready to compete."

Since Pepperdine isn't a regional foe, Numbers didn't get too caught up in the victory.

But when he knocked off Fresno State's Frederik Bergh 2-6, 7-6, 6-4 on March 4, everyone in the region noticed. Bergh was rated ninth in the nation at the time – and No. 1 regionally.

Numbers was fourth in the region, but didn't play like an underdog. He said he went in confident, expecting to win.

"That's the way I try to approach every match," he said. "(That match) boosted my confidence tremendously."

Numbers wound up defeating six out of the eight higher-ranked opponents he faced this season.

Nelson, who has coached national champions at UC Davis, called Numbers one of the most talented players he's worked with. After last Wednesday's loss in the opening round of the NCAAs, Numbers put his progress in perspective and looked ahead.

"This just shows how much further I have to go," he said.

Numbers and doubles partner Ryan Johnston will hit the satellite tour in Mexico this summer in search of ATP pro tour points.