

Sports

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SECTION **B**

Numbers is no ordinary tennis statistic at SDSU

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SAN DIEGO — In the past five years, the San Diego State men's tennis program has almost entirely been a Numbers game.

Senior Chris Numbers, a 1990 graduate of Valhalla High, has overcome a pair of knee injuries to pace the Aztecs in both singles and doubles competition. He will compete in both venues next week at the NCAA Division I tennis championships, which will be held at the University of Georgia in Athens.

Numbers, who compiled a

AZTECS TENNIS

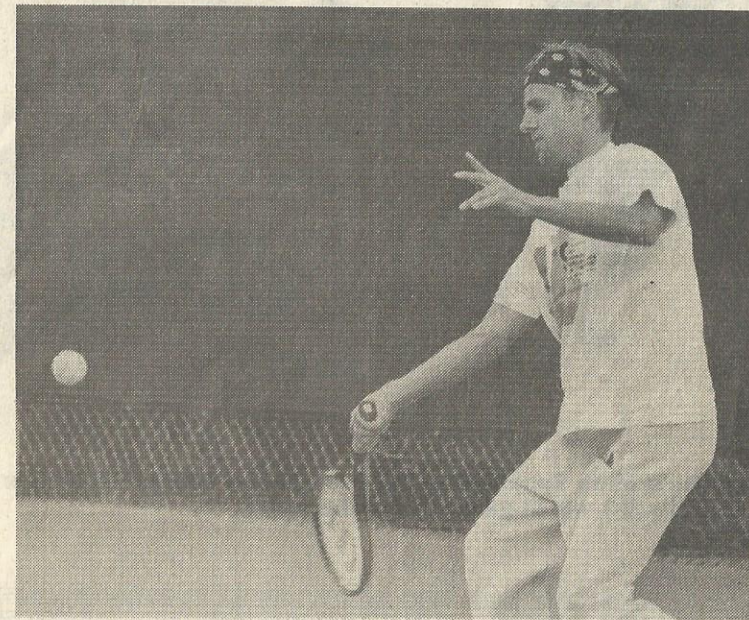
20-3 singles dual meet record this season, is currently ranked 54th in the Rolex Collegiate Rankings and is tied for first in San Diego State's region. In doubles, Numbers and Pleasanton's Ryan Johnston have jumped to 20th overall while claiming the top spot in their region.

"My goal before the season was to get 20 singles wins and reaching the NCAA's in singles and doubles and I've done that," Numbers said. "I knew my abilities and thought I'd

come back strong from my injuries, but I didn't think I'd have as good a record as I have. My ranking isn't as high as I think because of our team's record (9-15), but I've beaten a lot of top 20 guys and I feel I can beat guys in that category day in and day out."

"When I came to SDSU, Chris was already injured and we didn't know what his status would be for this year," San Diego State's second-year coach John Nelson said. "But being out of tennis put things in perspective for him and he took responsibility for getting

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Fred Greaves/The Daily Californian

Valhalla alum Chris Numbers will compete in both the singles and doubles NCAA Division I tennis finals next week for SDSU.

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back out on the court. He's got a good sense of humor, but Chris is all business when he gets out on the court."

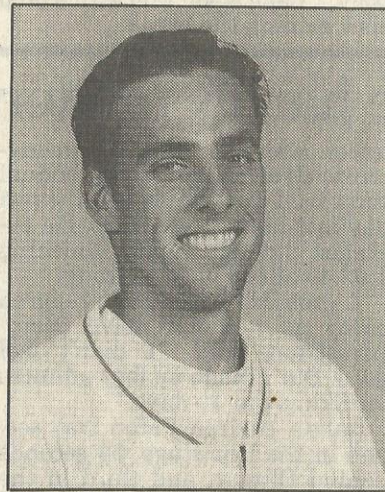
In high school, Numbers showed his quality tennis skills early on, losing to Michael Chang of San Dieguito High in the CIF finals during his freshman year. Two years later, Chang was winning the French Open and Numbers was finished with prep tennis, deciding to play on the United States junior tennis circuit instead.

San Diego State offered Numbers a full scholarship in 1990 and the Valhalla graduate immediately made an impact, earning the first of four All-Western Athletic Conference awards in his freshman season. A fractured left kneecap ended Numbers' first year prematurely, but the El Cajon native recovered in time to team with Jeff Belloli at the 1992 NCAA tourney (they earned All-America honors after reaching the semis) and train a bit with current professional standout Jim Courier the following summer.

Nonetheless, Numbers' injury days weren't over. In 1994, he sat out the season as a medical red-shirt after suffering from nagging injuries in his right knee. The experience helped Numbers gain perspective on the sport and on his life.

"I was disappointed at being injured again, but in any competitive sport you're going to get injured at some point," Numbers said. "The key is fighting back. I had doubts that I could come back, but pretty soon you get over the frustration and start missing the competition. Now, I feel I've come back stronger than before."

Looking at wins and losses, Numbers has a point. In January, he defeated Pepperdine's Charles Auffrey (now ranked seventh in the nation) 7-6, 6-4 and won 12 of



Chris Numbers

13 singles matches over a three-month span. He finished his regular season with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over then-35th-ranked Jan Anderson of the University of Arizona.

In the next month, Numbers will celebrate his 24th birthday, graduate from SDSU with a degree in Recreation Administration and begin a career on the men's satellite professional tennis tour in Mexico, a tour he has played during two different summers. He believes his experience on the satellite tour and versatile game will help him carve out a pro tennis career.

"I'm much more mature than when I entered San Diego State," Numbers said. "I've had my ups and downs in tennis here, but I've learned that even the top pros don't hit the ball well every day. And I think it'll help that I won't have to worry about classes and other aspects of college life every day."

"The combination of his attacking game and return of service makes Numbers successful," Nelson said. "And his mental game has improved too. He's always looking for a way to win and because he wants to play on the circuit he has a goal every day. He's the best I've ever coached."(cwp-rt)