



Sports Information Office
University of Notre Dame
112 Joyce Center
Notre Dame, IN 46556
www.und.com
574-631-7516
574-631-7941 FAX

NOTRE DAME WOMEN'S TENNIS

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Sports Information Contacts: Chris Masters/Bo Rottenborn

No. 21 IRISH SET TO OPEN NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY

- Notre Dame earns its eighth consecutive NCAA berth and 10th in the last 11 seasons.
- Irish to face No. 38 Missouri in first round Friday at 10 a.m. (CDT), followed by No. 15 Vanderbilt and Boston University at 2 p.m.; winners to meet Saturday at 3 p.m. (CDT).

2002-03 NOTRE DAME WOMEN'S TENNIS (15-8)

September

20-22	at OSU/Prince Cup (Columbus, Ohio)	NTS
27-29	at adidas® Invitational (Peachtree City, Ga.)	NTS

October

24-29	at Omni Hotels Midwest Championships (East Lansing, Mich.)	NTS
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November

8-10	Eck Tennis Classic	NTS
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January

16-19	at Collegiate Tennis Kickoff Classic (Las Vegas, Nev.)	NTS
22	Wed. (22) Western Michigan	W, 5-2
25	Sat. (22) at Wisconsin (30)	W, 5-2
30	Thurs. (21) at Northwestern (16)	L, 0-7

February

1	Sat. (21) North Carolina (5)	L, 2-5
14	Fri. (21) Virginia Tech (71)	W, 6-1
16	Sun. (21) Boston College	W, 6-1
21	Fri. (19) Duke (1)	L, 2-5
23	Sun. (19) at Tennessee (11)	L, 3-4
24	Mon. (19) at Kentucky (25)	L, 3-4

March

1	Sat. (19) Wake Forest (50)	W, 6-1
2	Sun. (19) Texas (13)	W, 6-1
8	Sat. (15) at BYU (49)	W, 4-3
14	Fri. (15) at Arizona State (7)	L, 2-5
21	Fri. (27) Iowa	W, 4-3
23	Sun. (27) William & Mary (13)	L, 3-4
25	Tue. (27) Michigan (28)	W, 5-2
26	Wed. (48) Purdue (55)	W, 6-1
29	Sat. (48) at Ohio State (35)	W, 5-2

April

2	Wed. (27) at Illinois (24)	W, 6-1
3	Thurs. (27) at Indiana	W, 6-1
12	Sat. (24) at Miami (25)	L, 1-6
27	Sun. (24) vs. Boston College*	W, 4-0
27	Sun. (24) at Miami (20)*	W, 4-3

May

9	Fri. (21) vs. Missouri (38)^	10 a.m.
10	Sat. NCAA Second Round^	3 p.m.
15-24	NCAA Championships (Gainesville, Fla.)	All day

* BIG EAST Championship (Coral Gables, Fla.)

^ NCAA First/Second Rounds (Nashville, Tenn.)

Home matches in **boldface** are held at Eck Tennis Pavilion or Courtney Tennis Center.

All times local to site // dates and times subject to change

NOTE: Number in parentheses to left of opponent is Notre Dame ITA national ranking at time of match; number to right of opponent is its ITA national ranking at time of match.

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — For the eighth consecutive season and the 10th time in the last 11 years, the 21st-ranked University of Notre Dame women's tennis team has qualified for the NCAA Championships. The Irish have reached the round of 16 in two of the last three seasons, and their best-ever finish came in 1996, when they advanced to the NCAA quarterfinals.

This season, Notre Dame will open its quest for a third trip to the round of 16 in four years when it faces off with No. 38 Missouri Friday at 10 a.m. (CDT) at the Brownlee O. Currey Tennis Center in Nashville, Tenn., on the campus of Vanderbilt University. Should the Irish defeat the Tigers, they would move on to play the winner of Friday's other first-round match between the No. 10 overall seed, Vanderbilt (ranked 15th nationally) and Boston University. That second-round contest will take place Saturday at 3 p.m. (CDT).

NOTRE DAME SPORTS HOTLINE TO FEATURE IN-MATCH UPDATES: Irish fans can keep up with the action at the 2003 NCAA Women's Tennis Championships via the Notre Dame Sports Hotline, which will be updated every 15-30 minutes during Irish matches. Semi-live reports can be accessed by dialing (574) 631-3000 and selecting option #8 for tennis. In addition, the official athletic website of the University of Notre Dame, www.und.com, will feature recaps of all the Irish action at the end of each day.

LAST TIME ON THE COURTS: In perhaps the most dramatic final in BIG EAST Conference women's tennis history, Notre Dame claimed its fifth BIG EAST title (and first since 2001) with a 4-3 win over (then) 20th-ranked Miami on April 27 at the Neil Schiff Tennis Center in Coral Gables, Fla. The Irish and Hurricanes split the six singles matches, as well as the first two doubles matches, leaving the team title in the hands of the No. 2 doubles contest, which Notre Dame won 8-6. With the victory, the Irish (15-8) earned the BIG EAST's automatic bid to the NCAA Championships.

The Irish No. 2 doubles team of sophomore **Sarah Jane Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) and freshman **Kristina Stastny** (St. Louis, Mo./St. Joseph's Academy) came through with the decisive 8-6 victory to secure the league title, although for a while, it looked as though the Irish pair would win easily. Connelly and Stastny won the first six games of the match and had a 7-1 lead before Miami's senior tandem of Igna deVilliers and Abby Smith put on their rally caps, winning five straight games to pull back on-serve at 7-6. With Smith serving to even the contest at 7-7, the Irish had their second team match point saved with an overhead by the server. On the next point, Connelly pounded an overhead of her own to give the Irish a third team match point, which they converted thanks to a double fault by Smith.

Irish junior **Caylan Leslie** (Newport Beach, Calif./Corona del Mar H.S.) and freshman **Jennifer Smith** (Charlotte, N.C./South Mecklenburg H.S.) also were instrumental in Notre Dame's final point of the day, dominating Miami's Staci Stevens and Mari Toro at No. 3 doubles for an 8-2 victory. In the first doubles match completed, the No. 22 team in the nation, Miami's Melissa Applebaum and Megan Bradley, topped the Notre Dame duo of freshman **Lauren Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) and junior **Alicia Salas** (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek H.S.), 8-2.

Several of the six singles contests had their own miniature dramas, with four of them going the full three sets. Miami struck first when No. 110 Bradley downed Leslie, the nation's 40th-ranked player, 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, at the No. 1 position. Moments later, Notre Dame got on the board, as Lauren Connelly finished off the Hurricanes' Sihem Bennacer at the No. 5 flight, 7-6 (3), 6-3. Miami then regained the team lead when Toro closed out Stastny, 6-3, 7-6 (2) at the No. 3 spot.

Trailing 2-1 in the team match, the Irish rallied back behind a pair of astonishing third-set comebacks. At No. 4 singles, Sarah Jane

IRISH vs. NCAA REGIONAL TEAMS

Notre Dame vs. Boston University

0-0 (first meeting)

Notre Dame vs. Missouri

0-0 (first meeting)

Notre Dame vs. Vanderbilt

Vanderbilt leads 3-1 (all at neutral sites)

#4 Vanderbilt 5, #13 Notre Dame 2 (most recent meeting)

February 8, 2002 -- Madison, Wis. (Indoor: Nielsen Tennis Center)
Singles

- No. 1: #27 Sarah Riske (VU) d. #58 Becky Varnum (ND) 6-0, 6-2
- No. 2: Jenny Miller (VU) d. Nina Vaughan (ND) 6-1, 6-2
- No. 3: Lindsey Green (ND) d. #97 Kate Burson (VU) 6-3, 7-5
- No. 4: *Kelly Schmandt (VU) d. Katie Cunha (ND) 7-6 (6), 6-3
- No. 5: Alicia Salas (ND) d. Annie Menees (VU) 6-3, 6-2
- No. 6: Audra Falk (VU) d. Sarah Jane Connelly (ND), 6-3, 6-1

Doubles

- No. 1: *Riske/Aleke Tsoubanos (VU) d. #29 Green/Varnum (ND) 8-3
- No. 2: Burson/Menees (VU) d. #53 Connelly/Cunha (ND) 8-6
- No. 3: Miller/Schmandt (VU) d. Salas/Vaughan (ND) 8-3

* indicates clinching victory

IRISH PLAYER PROFILES

Player	Ht.	Yr.	Singles	Doubles	Career	Notes
Lauren Connelly	5-9	Fr.	22-14	19-12	22-14(s) / 19-12(d)	Has won 11 of last 12 in singles and 10 of 13 in doubles
Sarah Jane Connelly	5-9	So.	24-11	16-11	46-26(s) / 36-29(d)	Won 11 of last 12 in singles; team leader in singles wins
Katie Cunha	5-6	Sr.	9-18	14-17	65-48(s) / 82-67(d)	12th player ever w/ 80 doubles wins; def. 4 Top 25 teams
Liz Donohue	5-8	Fr.	7-6	6-4	7-6(s) / 6-4(d)	Has won four of last five matches in singles
Maggie Donohue	5-5	Sr.	4-8	1-4	6-11(s) / 3-7(d)	Eck Classic gold flight consolation singles finalist
Caylan Leslie	5-4	Jr.	17-9	8-3	50-24(s) / 26-7(d)	Ranked 39th in nation; beat 9 ranked players in singles
Emily Neighbours	5-8	Jr.	3-4	3-2	18-9(s) / 14-8(d)	Has been sidelined with wrist injury this spring
Kelly Nelson	5-7	Fr.	13-7	6-5	13-7(s) / 6-5(d)	Eck Classic gold flight champ; led team in fall singles wins
Alicia Salas	5-8	Jr.	23-14	20-11	70-24(s) / 57-31(d)	Ranked 94th in nation; won six of last seven in singles
Jennifer Smith	5-9	Fr.	9-10	21-14	9-10(s) / 21-14(d)	Tied for team lead in doubles wins; has six clinchers
Kristina Stastny	5-6	Fr.	18-17	21-14	18-17(s) / 21-14(d)	Teamed w/ S.J. Connelly to clinch BE title at #2 doubles

OMNI HOTELS COLLEGIATE TENNIS RANKINGS

Release: April 28, 2003

TEAM	Rk.	School	Prev.	W-L
	1.	Stanford	2	20-1
	2.	Florida	1	25-2
	3.	Duke	3	26-2
	4.	California	4	19-5
	5.	USC	5	19-5
	6.	Washington	6	17-3
	7.	Georgia	7	16-4
	8.	Tennessee	8	20-6
	9.	Virginia Commonwealth	9	23-0
	10.	William & Mary	12	23-5
	11.	North Carolina	11	17-8
	12.	Kentucky	10	21-7
	13.	UCLA	15	13-10
	14.	South Alabama	14	20-4
	15.	Vanderbilt	13	18-5
	16.	Northwestern	19	19-8
	17.	Harvard	16	17-3
	18.	Arizona State	18	9-10
	19.	Clemson	17	18-5
	20.	Fresno State	22	16-7
	21.	NOTRE DAME	24	15-8
	22.	Arizona	21	9-11
	23.	Oklahoma State	34	17-6
	24.	Miami (Fla.)	20	16-6
	25.	Illinois	25	16-7

Other ranked Notre Dame opponents

33.	Texas	34	11-14
38.	Missouri	37	15-7
39.	Purdue	42	13-11
42.	Michigan	43	13-9
46.	BYU	54	12-11
49.	Ohio State	44	12-11
63.	Iowa	61	7-13
67.	Wisconsin	71	11-12
74.	Virginia Tech	65	16-13

2003 TEAM INFORMATION

Starters Returning:

Katie Cunha (Sr.) Caylan Leslie (Jr.)
Alicia Salas (Jr.) Sarah Jane Connelly (So.)

Monogram Winners Ret./Lost: 5/5

2002-03 Captain: Katie Cunha

2002 Record (Final ITA Rank): 14-14 (23rd)

2002 BIG EAST Championship: Runner-up

2002 NCAA Championship:

Wisconsin 4, Notre Dame 2 (1st round)

Connelly fell behind 1-5 in the third set of her match with Stevens, but won the next six games to pull out the contest, 6-3, 2-6, 7-5, and even the team score. Soon after, the 93rd-ranked Salas posted a critical victory for Notre Dame, rallying after being down a service break in the third set to upset No. 54 Applebaum at the No. 2 position, 7-5, 4-6, 7-5.

Now leading 3-2, the Irish had a chance to win the conference title in singles play, but Miami's Sara Robbins outlasted Jennifer Smith at the No. 6 flight and tied the match at three-all, winning 5-7, 6-4, 6-2. That set the stage for the thrilling doubles competition and Notre Dame's nailbiting triumph.

IRISH IN THE NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP: For the second time in as many years, Notre Dame will go on the road for first and second round action in the NCAA tournament. This is the fifth year in which the NCAA Championships will consist of a 64-team field, with 31 conference champions garnering automatic bids and 33 at-large entries as chosen by the NCAA Women's Tennis Committee. The first two rounds of the team championships are being contested at 16 campus sites this weekend. The 16 remaining teams will advance to the national site, the Linder Stadium at Ring Tennis Complex in Gainesville, Fla., for the final four rounds of the tournament, to be contested May 15-18.

Notre Dame has qualified for the team portion of the NCAA Championships for the eighth consecutive year and the 10th time in the last 11 seasons, all under the guidance of current head coach **Jay Louderback**. The best finish for the Irish came in 1996, when they reached the quarterfinals before losing to Stanford, 5-1, in Tallahassee, Fla. Notre Dame has advanced to the round of 16 three other times, including two of the last three seasons, when it defeated Illinois-Chicago (5-0) and South Carolina (5-1) in 2000, and Eastern Michigan (4-0) and Tulane (4-0) in 2001 -- both regionals were contested at Notre Dame's Courtney Tennis Center. In each case, the Irish saw their NCAA Championship run come to an end at the hands of Florida, which registered a 5-0 win in 2000 and a 4-1 victory last season.

Notre Dame is 11-9 all-time in NCAA Championship play and has won at least one match in nine of its previous 10 appearances in the national tournament. The Irish are 5-5 in NCAA competition when playing away from home, although they have lost their last two road matches (2001 vs. Florida, 2002 vs. Wisconsin). Last year's first-round loss to Wisconsin also represented the only time Notre Dame has failed to win at least once in the NCAA tourney.

In addition to its recent team success, Notre Dame has sent at least one player to either the NCAA singles or doubles tournament every year since 1989. For the fifth time in school history, the Irish will be sending two singles players to the national tournament, as juniors **Caylan Leslie** (Newport Beach, Calif./Corona del Mar H.S.) and **Alicia Salas** (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek H.S.) were selected to the 64-player competition, which will take place May 19-24 at the Linder Stadium at Ring Tennis Complex in Gainesville, Fla. on the University of Florida campus. It also marks the 14th time in 15 years the Irish have had at least one player qualify for the NCAA Singles Championship.

Notre Dame posted its best individual singles finish in 2001, when Michelle Dasso surged all the way to the NCAA semifinals before falling to eventual national champion Laura Granville of Stanford. Three Irish doubles teams have reached the quarterfinals of the NCAA tournament, with Dasso and Jennifer Hall the most recent tandem to do so in 1999. Hall and Tiffany Gates turned the trick in 1998, and Wendy Crabtree and Lisa Tholen were the first Irish pair to advance to the round of eight in 1994.

SCOUTING THE REGIONAL FIELD: Missouri will be the first-round opponent for Notre Dame this season. The Tigers, who are making their first-ever appearance in the NCAA Championships, come into this weekend's regional ranked 38th in the country with a record of 15-7 overall. Like the Irish, Missouri earned an at-large berth to the NCAA tournament after a regular season in which it reached the quarterfinals of the Big 12 Conference Tournament. The Tigers have won seven of their last 11, and peaked at No. 34 in the rankings on March 24. MU is led by sophomore Urska Juric, who is ranked 36th in the country and has a 30-10 singles record. Meanwhile, the Tiger doubles team of Juric and sophomore Katka Sevcikova is rated No. 15 in the nation, posting a 28-5 record.

Notre Dame and Missouri will be playing one another for the first time. They have met two common opponents in dual match competition this year (Purdue and Texas), with the Irish going 2-0 and the Tigers winding up 1-1

NOTRE DAME IN THE NCAA CHAMPIONSHIPS

Notre Dame is making its 10th appearance in the team portion of the NCAA Championships since moving to the Division I level in 1985-86. All 10 NCAA bids have come in the last 11 years under the guidance of current head coach Jay Louderback, including a berth in the quarterfinals in 1996, which remains the best-ever finish for the Irish.

1993 -- Second Round

(at Gainesville, Fla.)

Notre Dame 5, Alabama 0 (first round)
Stanford 5, Notre Dame 0 (second round)

1994 -- Second Round

(at Athens, Ga.)

Notre Dame 5, UCSB 3 (first round)
Stanford 5, Notre Dame 1 (second round)

1996 -- Quarterfinals

(at Tallahassee, Fla.)

Notre Dame 5, BYU 0 (first round)
Stanford 5, Notre Dame 1 (quarterfinals)

1997 -- Midwest Region Semifinals

(at Notre Dame, Ind.)

Notre Dame 5, Illinois 3 (first round)
Wisconsin 5, Notre Dame 2 (semifinals)

1998 -- Midwest Region Final

(at Champaign, Ill.)

Notre Dame 6, Northwestern 2 (first round)
Notre Dame 5, Wisconsin 1 (semifinals)
UCLA 5, Notre Dame 1 (final)

1999 -- Second Round

(at Notre Dame, Ind.)

Notre Dame 9, UIC 0 (first round)
Iowa 5, Notre Dame 4 (second round)

2000 -- Round of 16

(at Notre Dame, Ind.)

Notre Dame 5, UIC 0 (first round)
Notre Dame 5, So. Carolina 1 (second round)
Florida 5, Notre Dame 0 (round of 16)

2001 -- Round of 16

(at Notre Dame, Ind.)

Notre Dame 4, E. Michigan 0 (first round)
Notre Dame 4, Tulane 0 (second round)
Florida 4, Notre Dame 1 (round of 16)

2002 -- First Round

(at Evanston, Ill.)

Wisconsin 4, Notre Dame 2 (first round)

Current Irish in NCAA Championships

Sarah Jane Connelly (So.)

Singles: 0-0, 1 abandoned
Doubles: 0-1

Katie Cunha (Sr.)

Singles: 2-1, 1 abandoned
Doubles: 2-1, 3 abandoned

Caylan Leslie (Jr.)

Singles: 1-1, 1 abandoned

Alicia Salas (Jr.)

Singles: 0-1
Doubles: 0-1

against that duo. Notre Dame is 24-12 (.667) against current Big 12 members all-time, including wins in eight of its last nine matches against that conference.

Boston University comes into the tournament with a 10-11 record, having won five of its last seven matches. BU gained entrance into the NCAA Championships as the America East Conference champion for the fifth consecutive year after defeating Binghamton, 4-1 in the conference title match. Notre Dame has never faced the Terriers, nor have the Irish ever played any current America East member. Meanwhile, BU has played three BIG EAST teams this year, downing Seton Hall (7-0), while falling to Miami (6-1) and Boston College (4-3).

Vanderbilt, seeded 10th overall in the tournament, also earned an at-large berth to the NCAA Championships after reaching the quarterfinals of the Southeastern Conference Tournament. The 15th-ranked Commodores (18-5) have won nine of the last 11, including a 4-3 victory over then-No. 1 Florida on March 16 at the Currey Tennis Center. Notre Dame and Vanderbilt have met four times in their history, all at neutral sites, with the Commodores holding a 3-1 series edge. The teams faced one another last season in the quarterfinals of the National Team Indoor Championships, with VU taking a 5-2 victory at Wisconsin's Nielsen Tennis Center. The Commodores took the doubles point, then won four of six singles matches to log the win. Current Irish junior **Alicia Salas** (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek H.S.) did register one of the two team points for Notre Dame in that match, defeating Vanderbilt's Annie Menees at the No. 5 singles position, 6-3, 6-2.

IRISH HEAD COACH JAY LOUDERBACK: Now in his 14th season under the Golden Dome, Jay Louderback owns a superb 254-123 (.674) record, with a 458-301 (.603) overall mark in 24 years of collegiate coaching. Louderback's Irish have finished in the national top 30 in each of the last 10 seasons, have won 11 conference titles and registered 20 or more victories five times in the last seven seasons. After taking over a program looking for its first NCAA tournament appearance, Louderback has helped Notre Dame to the NCAAAs 10 times in the last 11 years, including five appearances in the round of 16 and a 1996 quarterfinal finish. His teams also have been ranked in every set of national rankings for an 11-year span from the beginning of the 1992-93 season to the present. Louderback reached three milestones earlier this season, gaining his 400th career victory as a women's coach (Jan. 25 vs. Wisconsin), becoming the first coach in Notre Dame women's tennis history to win 250 matches (March 29 vs. Ohio State), and becoming just the fifth active NCAA Division I women's coach to win 450 career collegiate matches (March 8 vs. BYU).

Louderback, a four-time Midwest Region Coach of the Year, has been honored as his conference's top coach on eight occasions, including five times in eight years in the BIG EAST. In his time at Notre Dame, Louderback's players have earned All-America honors 13 times, won three national ITA awards, and earned 18 invitations to the NCAA singles championship and 10 to the NCAA doubles tournament. His players also have dominated the university awards, leading all sports in both Byron V. Kanaley awards (five) and Francis Patrick O'Connor awards (five). The Arkansas City, Kan., native, and 1976 graduate of Wichita State arrived at Notre Dame prior to the 1990 season after coaching for seven years at his alma mater and three years (men and women) at Iowa State.

AMONG THE NATION'S ELITE: After winning 11 of its last 14 matches, capped off by its fifth BIG EAST Conference championship, Notre Dame rose three spots to 21st in the most recent Omni Hotels Collegiate Tennis Rankings, remaining in the Top 25 for the third time in four weeks after a month-long hiatus from that group. The Irish had dropped 33 places in a two-week stretch in late March, a fall that could be attributed to the fact that those were the first sets of rankings to be determined by the Intercollegiate Tennis Association's point-per-match computer formula, while each of the previous listings were based on coaches' votes. The computer rankings do not take into account margin of victory or defeat and, thus, three 4-3 Irish losses to top-15 teams (#9 Tennessee, #11 William & Mary, and #14 Kentucky) counted the same as 7-0 defeats.

Notre Dame's No. 48 ranking on March 26 was the worst for the Irish since the ITA began ranking more than 25 teams in 1993. Prior to that point, Notre Dame had been ranked in the Top 25 in the previous 125 sets of rankings released by the ITA, dating back to Fall 1995. Nonetheless, the Irish have been ranked continuously for all of 11 consecutive seasons, a streak dating back to the preseason listing in the fall of 1992 and spanning nearly 200 sets of rankings.

A new set of individual rankings was released this week, with junior **Caylan Leslie** (Newport Beach, Calif./Corona del Mar H.S.) checking in at No. 39 in singles. Back on March 26, she was as high as 33rd, becoming the highest-ranked Notre Dame player since **Michelle Dasso** finished her career fifth in the final 2001 rankings. Meanwhile, classmate **Alicia Salas** (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek H.S.) currently checks in at 94th in singles. In doubles, senior **Katie Cunha** (Mercer Island, Wash./Mercer Island H.S.) and freshman **Kristina Stastny** (St. Louis, Mo./St. Joseph's Academy) jumped three spots to No. 41 (after a high of 27th on March 12), despite the fact the pair have not played together in the last six weeks.

LESLIE, SALAS SELECTED FOR NCAA SINGLES CHAMPIONSHIP: For the fifth time in school history, Notre Dame will send two players to the NCAA Singles Championships. Juniors **Caylan Leslie** (Newport Beach, Calif./Corona del Mar H.S.) and **Alicia Salas** (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek H.S.) both have been tapped to compete in the national singles tournament, which begins May 19 in Gainesville, Fla., at the Linder Stadium at Ring Tennis Complex on the University of Florida campus. It also marks the 14th time in the last 15 years the Irish will have at least one player competing in the NCAA singles draw.

Leslie, the nation's 39th-ranked player, earned BIG EAST All-Tournament honors after posting a 17-9 singles record that includes nine wins over ranked opponents this year. She has been a fixture at the top of the Irish singles lineup all year long, going 15-7 in dual match play and 9-4 at the No. 1 flight. Earlier this year, she was ranked as high as No. 33 in the country, the best poll position for a Notre Dame individual since Michelle Dasso

was fifth at the end of the 2001 season. Leslie has not lost consecutive singles matches since Feb. 1 and has won 14 of her last 18 individual contests heading into the NCAA tourney.

Salas is ranked 94th in the nation and picked up conference all-tournament laurels in both singles and doubles after going 2-1 in those disciplines at the BIG EAST Championship. She is 23-14 in singles play this year, including a 12-10 mark in dual match competition. Like Leslie, Salas has been ranked throughout the spring season, topping out at No. 65 back in early March. And, like her teammate, she comes into the NCAA singles tournament on a hot streak, having won six of her last seven individual matches, including a three-set victory over No. 54 Melissa Applebaum of Miami in the BIG EAST final on April 27.

In addition to this year, the Irish also sent two players to the NCAA singles tournament in 1991, 1994, 1998 and 1999. The best NCAA finish ever by a Notre Dame individual came in 2001, when Dasso advanced to the semifinals before bowing in straight sets to eventual national champion Laura Granville of Stanford.

FIVE IRISH PLAYERS EARN BIG EAST ALL-TOURNAMENT TEAM HONORS: The University of Notre Dame was well-represented when the 2003 BIG EAST Conference All-Tournament Teams were announced. A total of eight Irish student-athletes -- five women and three men -- were awarded all-tournament honors, the most from any conference school this season.

The 21st-ranked Notre Dame women, who defeated then-No. 20 Miami in the BIG EAST Championship match, 4-3, on April 27, had two players earn all-tournament laurels in both singles and doubles. Sophomore **Sarah Jane Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) was one of those double winners, going a perfect 3-0 in the conference tournament (2-0 singles, 1-0 doubles). She also teamed with freshman **Kristina Stastny** (St. Louis, Mo./St. Joseph's Academy) to garner all-BIG EAST Tournament recognition in doubles after the Irish tandem won the clinching match in the conference final vs. Miami. Meanwhile, junior **Alicia Salas** (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek H.S.) won both of her singles matches at the BIG EAST tourney, including a three-set triumph over 54th-ranked Melissa Applebaum of Miami in the finals. Salas and freshman **Lauren Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) also received all-tournament honors in doubles.

Junior **Caylan Leslie** (Newport Beach, Calif./Corona del Mar H.S.) rounded out the Irish women's award winners, earning all-tournament status in singles play. Leslie is ranked 39th in the nation with a 17-9 singles record that includes nine wins over ranked opponents this year.

CUNHA EARNS FRANCIS PATRICK O'CONNOR AWARD: Senior **Katie Cunha** (Mercer Island, Wash./Mercer Island H.S.) received the Francis Patrick O'Connor Award at Notre Dame's second-annual O.S.C.A.R.S. (Outstanding Student-Athletes Celebrating Achievements and Recognition Showcase) April 30 at the Joyce Center. Since 1973, the University has presented this award in the name of O'Connor, a former student-athlete who died in 1973 following his freshman year at Notre Dame. Pat was the son of William "Bucky" O'Connor who played guard in football for Notre Dame in the 1940's. The award honors one female and one male senior student-athlete who best displays the total embodiment of the true spirit of Notre Dame as exemplified by their contributions and inspirations to their respective teams. To be considered, student-athletes must possess those qualities attributed to Pat O'Connor himself - caring, courage, confidence, encouragement, humility, honesty, humor, kindness and patience.

Cunha, a four-year monogram winner and captain of the '02-'03 squad, is the fifth Irish women's tennis player to win the Francis Patrick O'Connor Award. Since the inception of the award, more women's tennis players have earned the honor than any other sport at Notre Dame. She is a member of the nation's 41st-ranked doubles team and owns a career record of 82-67, including a 65-48 singles record. Last season, Cunha qualified for the '02 NCAA Doubles Championship with (then) senior **Lindsay Green**.

Cunha also founded and directed the "Ace for the Cure" benefit match in '02 to raise money for cancer research. The second annual event was played this year in honor of her late mother, who passed away from the disease. She is a member of Notre Dame's prestigious Academic Honors Program for Student-Athletes and is a four-time Dean's List selection. Cunha will graduate later this month with a bachelor's degree in marketing from the Mendoza College of Business.

ALMOST, BUT NOT QUITE: Even with a solid 15-8 record and a No. 21 ranking in hand, Notre Dame's ledger could be even better were it not for a series of near misses in upset attempts this season. The Irish have played nine times against currently ranked in the Top 25, winning twice (a 6-1 victory at No. 25 Illinois on April 2, and a 4-3 win at No. 24 Miami in the BIG EAST final on April 27). Counting the Miami match, four of those contests were decided by 4-3 scores, while another trio were 5-2 decisions. Tennessee, currently ranked eighth, won the doubles point in the last match on-court to defeat the Irish by a point. No. 12 Kentucky got a win at No. 5 singles with the match tied 3-3 to beat Notre Dame, while 10th-ranked William & Mary rallied from a 2-0 deficit and got three-set wins at Nos. 2 (rallying from down two service breaks, 4-1, in the third) and 4 (with the match tied 3-3) for the victory. The Irish also dropped 5-2 matches to No. 3 Duke, No. 11 North Carolina and No. 18 Arizona State.

TINKERING TURNS TO TRIUMPH: Irish head coach **Jay Louderback** has proven why he is one of just five active coaches in NCAA Division I women's tennis with 450 career victories by making three relatively minor lineup changes that have led to much Irish success. At the beginning of March, Louderback flipped his Nos. 1 and 2 players and his Nos. 5 and 6 competitors in the singles lineup. Since then, Notre Dame has rolled up an 11-3 record after posting a 4-5 mark up to that point in the season. Junior **Caylan Leslie** (Newport Beach, Calif./Corona del Mar H.S.) moved into the No. 1 spot for the first time in her career and is 9-4 in that spot, while classmate **Alicia Salas** (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek H.S.) dropped to No. 2 after being 4-5 at the top spot. Salas has won six of her last seven and is 8-5 overall at No. 2. At the bottom of the singles lineup, Louderback flip-flopped the Connelly sisters, acting as a catalyst for both of them to begin hot streaks. Sophomore **Sarah Jane Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) is 11-4 this year at No. 5, while freshman **Lauren Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) has won eight of 11 at No. 6. The two combined for four match-clinching victories during March, and went 4-0 in singles play at the BIG EAST Championship at the No. 4 and 5 positions after senior captain **Katie Cunha** (Mercer Island, Wash./Mercer Island H.S.) was sidelined with an injury.

In doubles, Louderback put Leslie into the No. 3 position on Feb. 24. Since then, Notre Dame has won the doubles point eight times in the 10 matches Leslie has played doubles, after doing so just four times in the initial eight matches of the season.

BIG ELEVEN (OR TWELVE)?: Though Notre Dame participates in the BIG EAST Conference in women's tennis, a glance at the Irish schedule may not bear out that fact. Notre Dame faced only a trio of BIG EAST foes (Boston College, Virginia Tech, and Miami) during the regular season, but took on a total of eight teams from the Big Ten Conference, including six in seven matches. Only Penn State, Minnesota, and Michigan State from the Big Ten did not play the Irish during the regular season. A year ago, Notre Dame played nine matches against Big Ten teams (including the NCAA tournament), posting a 5-4 mark. In '03, the Irish went 7-1 against the Big Ten, losing only to No. 19 Northwestern.

Notre Dame has had a long history of playing Big Ten teams, posting an all-time 104-60 (.634) mark, averaging over six matches per season against Big Ten teams in the 27-year history of the program. Each of the six most common opponents for Notre Dame in the history of the program are members of the Big Ten (Northwestern-24 matches, Illinois-23, Purdue-22, Michigan-21, Wisconsin-18, Indiana-17).

DYNAMIC DOUBLES: Since Notre Dame head coach **Jay Louderback** made a minor change in his doubles lineup on Feb. 24, inserting **Caylan Leslie** (Newport Beach, Calif./Corona del Mar H.S.), the Irish have won the doubles point in eight of the 10 matches Leslie has played in, including the last five in a row. Notre Dame had taken a 1-0 lead in four of the eight matches prior to that. Overall, the Irish have won the doubles point 15 times in 22 matches this season (doubles weren't contested in the BIG EAST semifinal vs. Boston College), including nine of 11 contests in the Eck Tennis Pavilion. Notre Dame is 12-3 when winning the doubles point and 2-5 when dropping it.

SECOND TO NONE: Notre Dame's No. 2 doubles team, junior **Alicia Salas** (Englewood, Colo./Cherry Creek H.S.) and freshman **Lauren Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.), has been outstanding of late, winning nine of its last 12 regular-season matches. The pair has been a major reason the Irish have won the doubles point 11 times in the last 14 matches (doubles wasn't contested vs. Boston College), including eight of the last nine. The team has been especially effective in the clutch, posting a 4-1 record as the last match remaining on-court with the doubles point still hanging in the balance. In that situation, Salas and Connelly won against Wisconsin (8-6), Kentucky (8-6), Michigan (9-8), and Ohio State (9-8), while losing to Tennessee (8-5). The Irish pair is 12-7 in dual matches and 15-9 overall, while its match vs. BYU was abandoned with Notre Dame leading 6-3.

COUNT ON THE CONNELLYS: Irish sophomore **Sarah Jane Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) and freshman **Lauren Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) have both been consistently superb in singles of late, accounting for two major reasons the Irish have won 11 of their last 14 matches. Sarah Jane Connelly has won 11 of her last 12 matches to improve to a team-high 24-11 overall this season, including 16-6 in dual matches. Since being moved into the No. 6 position on March 1, Lauren Connelly is 11-3 after holding an 11-11 mark up to that point. Both Connelly sisters went 4-0 at the BIG EAST Championship after each moving up one spot on the Notre Dame singles ladder (the result of an injury to senior captain **Katie Cunha**).

LETHAL LESLIE: Irish junior **Caylan Leslie** (Newport Beach, Calif./Corona del Mar H.S.), who missed all of last spring with a shoulder injury after going 30-12 as a freshman, has returned to action this spring with much success, establishing herself as one of the most dangerous players in college tennis. She is 17-9, including 15-7 in dual matches, and is ranked 39th nationally in singles, having defeated nine ranked players. Leslie returned after a 14-month layoff at the Collegiate Tennis Kickoff Classic, going 2-2 with wins over #60 Tina Hojnik of Georgia and #83 Jennifer Magley of Florida. After starting the dual-match season 1-3, she has won 14 of her last 17 matches, including straight-set wins over #15 Amanda Johnson of Duke, #26 Candice Fuchs of William & Mary, #48 Nathalie Roels of Kentucky, #98 Karin Coetzee of Wake Forest, and #105 Kendra Strohm of Texas. She moved into the No. 1 singles position for the first time in her career at March 1 and is 9-4 at that spot. Seven of her nine losses this season came to players currently ranked, including three in the top 15, with one decision in a match tiebreaker and another in a third set. In addition, she had to retire two points from a straight-set victory vs. Michigan's Michelle DaCosta.

COMEBACK CONNELLY: In nine matches in March, **Sarah Jane Connelly** (Oklahoma City, Okla./Bishop McGuinness H.S.) lost the first set on five occasions, but rebounded to win each time, grabbing victories vs. Wake Forest, BYU, Arizona State, Michigan, and Purdue. In all this season, she has dropped the opening frame 19 times, but holds a 9-10 record in those matches. She is 13-3 in 2002-03 in matches that extend beyond the second set (8-3 in three-setters and 5-0 in match tiebreakers). A year ago, she was 3-11 when losing the initial set and 3-7 in matches decided in more than two sets.

THOMPSON TWINS SET TO JOIN IRISH: In November, Jay Louderback announced the signing of two incoming freshmen for the 2003-04 school year. **Catrina Thompson** (Las Vegas, Nev./Bishop Gorman H.S.) and **Christian Thompson** (Las Vegas, Nev./Bishop Gorman H.S.) have signed national letters of intent to enroll at Notre Dame next year and join the Irish tennis team in the fall of 2003. The sisters were ranked No. 1 in the USTA Girls' 18-and-under national doubles rankings last year and both are among the top 16 high school seniors in the country in singles. The Thompsons, who helped Bishop Gorman High School to the Nevada state championship, have a number of notable juniors doubles titles in the 18s to their credit, including the 2001 Super National Winter Doubles Championship, the '01 National Clay Court Championships and the '02 National Grass Court Championship. Catrina Thompson is 39th in the USTA girls' 18s singles rankings and is the 16th-highest-ranked prep senior in the United States. Christian Thompson is ranked 11th nationally in singles and is fifth among players who will enter college in the fall.

GETTING YOUR TIMING DOWN: Just a reminder that South Bend never changes its clocks, remaining on Eastern Standard Time throughout the year. From now through the end of October, Notre Dame basically will be on Central time, since Eastern Standard Time is the equivalent of Central Daylight Time. When most of the rest of the country returns to Standard time the last Saturday in October, Notre Dame then will match Eastern time.