



Tennis

Tradition

Pam Fischette, who finished her career holding five school records - including career singles victories (86) and career doubles wins (84) - was the national runner-up at No. 3 singles as a sophomore in 1982, earning All-America honors and helping the Irish to a trio of top-six finishes in the Division II national championship.



With 12 straight finishes in the national top 30 and 11 berths in the NCAA tournament during that time, Jay Louderback's women's tennis program at the University of Notre Dame has solidified its spot among the country's finest. Louderback enters his 15th season at Notre Dame having elevated the Irish to new levels.

His teams have captured 10 conference titles and have advanced to the NCAA round of 16 five times. Success, however, is nothing new to Notre Dame women's tennis, which began in 1976 as the first varsity women's sport at the University.

The roots of the program's recent success can be traced back to when Notre Dame first became a coeducational institution in 1972, and there were only 365 women present on the campus. This minority did not provide enough interest or depth to immediately warrant a women's tennis program above the club level. But, by 1976, female enrollment had risen to 1,550, and the tennis team gained varsity status.

Led by head coach Kathy Cordes, the Irish finished their first varsity season 7-3-1, and Jane Lammers and Mary Shukis became the first women to earn varsity monograms at Notre Dame.

Notre Dame made great progress in its initial years and became a force on the state and national level in just its fourth season. The Irish notched an impressive come-from-behind victory in the 1979 Indiana Intercollegiate Women's Championship and went on to finish 22nd in the national tournament. This showing led to the team's promotion to Division II after only four years at the Division III level.

A spring tennis season was added to the schedule for 1980-81 and the team successfully charted its first 20-win season, more than doubling its victory total from the previous year. In addition, the Irish captured the AIAW Division II State Championship title. This led to an appearance in the AIAW National Championship (20th-place finish).

In 1982, the Irish placed first once again in the AIAW state and regional tournaments, going on to tie for sixth in the national championship. Much of the squad's success was due to the play of freshman All-American Laura Lee. In individual action, Lee ran off six straight victories to capture the AIAW Division II national singles title in the No. 5 flight, becoming Notre Dame's first women's tennis national champion. Joining Lee as the first All-Americans in Irish women's tennis history was sophomore Pam Fischette, who was the national runner-up at No. 3 singles.

When the AIAW dissolved, the women's tennis program took on NCAA Division II status and immediately became a contender for the national title. The Irish notched three consecutive top-three finishes from 1983-85 before being moved up to Division I. In both 1983 and '84, Notre Dame finished third in the NCAA Division II Championship. The following year, the Irish advanced to the national title match, losing to Tennessee-Chattanooga. With the team's run-



Notre Dame fielded its first varsity women's tennis team in 1976, four years after the University admitted women as undergraduate students. First row: (from left) Mary Singer, Kathy Juba, and Monica Stupke. Second Row: Mary Jo Cushing, Jane Lammers, Anne Gardner, Ginger Siefing, Mary Shukis, and manager Roberta Kilpatrick. Third row: Head coach Kathy Cordes, Linda Sisson, Sue Flanigan, Sharon Sullivan, Diane Shillingbury, Ellen Callahan, and Paddy Mullen.

ner-up finish, head coach Sharon Petro earned Division II national coach-of-the-year honors.

After competing as an independent during its initial seven years of varsity action, the Notre Dame women's tennis team joined the North Star Conference in 1983-84, beginning a tradition of dominance in conference action that would see the Irish win 14 league titles in a row and 17 in the 21 years since giving up their independent status.

The 1985-86 season saw the women's tennis team reach another milestone in its short history – the team's debut at the NCAA Division I level. First-year head coach Michele Gelfman led Notre Dame to a 28-6 record, with four of the

losses coming by 5-4 scores. The win total still stands as the highest by an Irish team at the Division I level.

The tradition of freshman excellence continued in 1987-88 as rookie CeCe Cahill became the first Irish women's tennis player to compete in the NCAA Division I Championships. The first Notre Dame player to be listed in the national singles rankings, she qualified for the singles tournament, but dropped her first-round match 7-6 (7-3), 6-3 to Stanford's Katy Tittle.

The 1988-89 season proved to be another landmark in the program's growth, marking the Irish debut in the Midwestern Collegiate Conference, in which it would win seven straight titles (after

Academic Tradition

In addition to its success on the court, Notre Dame's track record in the classroom is virtually unparalleled in college tennis. Over the past nine years, the Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) has recognized teams posting a grade-point-average of 3.20 or higher for the year as ITA All-Academic Teams. The Irish women's tennis program has earned that distinction eight times during that span, including in each of the last five years. Only one Division I school, Western Michigan, has a better string, with the Broncos having received the award each year from 1996-2004. Southern Illinois and Evansville are also eight-time winners.

After having the highest combined GPA of any of Notre Dame's 26 varsity teams in 2002-03 (3.444), the Irish were even better in 2003-04, posting a 3.467 mark for the academic year (second-best among Notre Dame teams). During the spring semester, the Irish combined for an incredible 3.552 team GPA, which is the highest single-semester team GPA for any Notre Dame team on record (since 1992).

In 2002-03, seven Notre Dame players were honored as ITA Scholar-Athletes, a total tied for the highest by a Division I team in a single season. To earn the honor, one must be a varsity letter-winner and have a GPA of at least 3.50 for the year. Prior to the 2002-03 year, one also had to be a junior or senior. Irish players garnering the accolade were Katie Cunha, Alicia Salas, Lauren Connelly, Liz Donohue, Kelly Nelson, Jennifer Smith, and Kristina Stastny. In '03-04, Salas, Connelly, and Emily Neighbours earned the honor. Fifteen Notre Dame players have garnered the award over the past nine years.





Midwest Excellence Under Jay Louderback

Year	Regional Team Ranking	Top Singles Player (Regional Ranking)	Top Doubles Pairing (Regional Ranking)
1993	2nd	Wendy Crabtree (#4)	Wendy Crabtree-Lisa Tholen (#3)
1994	3rd	Wendy Crabtree (#1)	Wendy Crabtree-Lisa Tholen (#1)
1995	3rd	Wendy Crabtree (#1)	Wendy Crabtree-Holyn Lord (#1)
1996	1st	Jennifer Hall (#2)	Wendy Crabtree-Holyn Lord (#2)
1997	3rd	Jennifer Hall (#2)	Tiffany Gates-Jennifer Hall (#2)
1998	1st	Michelle Dasso (#1)	Tiffany Gates-Jennifer Hall (#2)
1999	1st	Michelle Dasso (#1)	Michelle Dasso-Jennifer Hall (#1)
2000	1st	Michelle Dasso (#1)	Michelle Dasso-Becky Varnum (#1)
2001	2nd	Michelle Dasso (#1)	Michelle Dasso-Becky Varnum (#1)
2002	3rd	Becky Varnum (#11)	Katie Cunha-Lindsey Green (#2)
2003	2nd	Caylan Leslie (#2)	Katie Cunha-Kristina Stastny (#8)
2004	2nd	Alicia Salas (#2)	Catrina Thompson-Christian Thompson (#3)

going unbeaten in five North Star Conference Championships).

Louderback took over the Irish program in the fall of 1989, ushering in an era of unparalleled success. After a 17-8 campaign in his first season, the '90-91 Irish became the first team in the program's history to crack the Division I national rankings, while three individuals also received national listings. Melissa Harris – who was ranked as high as seventh nationally in singles during her career – became the first Notre Dame women's tennis player to win a match in the NCAA Division I Singles Championship when she beat Northwestern's Lindsay Matthews 6-3, 4-6, 6-2.

Notre Dame entered the national stage in '92-93, earning its first invitation to the NCAA Division I Championship and knocking off #19 Alabama to advance to the round of 16. Freshman Wendy Crabtree gained entrance to the NCAA Singles Championship and teamed with Lisa Tholen in the doubles draw, the first Irish doubles team to earn a spot in the event.

Crabtree became Notre Dame's first All-American on the Division I level in '93-94, garnering honors in singles and in doubles with Tholen. In addition, the team earned its second straight trip to the round of 16 and, for the first time in the history of the program, two players – Crabtree and Holyn Lord – earned spots in the NCAA singles field.

The 1995-96 Irish squad reached the quarterfinals of the NCAA Championship – the farthest Notre Dame has ever advanced in the event. In

addition, the Irish had their highest-ever final ranking, No. 6, and came away with the BIG EAST title in their initial year in the conference. Notre Dame also registered a victory over fifth-ranked Texas, which still stands as the highest-ranked opponent to fall victim to the Irish. Jennifer Hall earned All-America honors as a freshman, and she played in the NCAA singles event, while Crabtree and Lord closed out their impressive careers playing in the NCAA doubles tournament for the second straight year.

In '97, Hall advanced to the second round of the NCAA singles tournament and to the final 16 in the doubles championship with Tiffany Gates. Notre Dame also won its second straight BIG EAST championship, and Louderback was named the league's coach of the year for the second consecutive year. Michelle Dasso, now an assistant coach for the Irish, began her illustrious career by setting the school record for singles wins in a season with a 40-8 record.

Notre Dame's Courtney Tennis Center served as the national site for the 1998 NCAA Championships (it remains the northern-most location ever selected for that distinction). Hall teamed with Tiffany Gates for the first of her two consecutive appearances in the NCAA doubles quarterfinals.

Notre Dame turned in the first of back-to-back 23-7 seasons in 1998-99, putting together a 12-match winning streak and winning its third BIG EAST title. Dasso joined Crabtree as the only players in school history to earn All-America honors in singles and doubles in the same sea-

son. She teamed up with Hall to reach the final eight of the NCAA Doubles Championship, matching the best-ever finish for an Irish team. A year later, the Irish advanced to the NCAA round of 16 for the first time since 1996 and won 14 of 15 matches in one late-season stretch.

For the fourth time in five years, the Courtney Tennis Center was selected as a host site for early-round NCAA Championship action in 2001. Notre Dame reached the final 16 for the second consecutive year and finished 25-5 after being ranked as high as a program-best fifth in the national rankings. It was the fourth consecutive 20-win season and the fewest losses for a Notre Dame team at the Division I level.

Four-time All-American Dasso became the first Irish player to be named the Intercollegiate Tennis Association National Senior Player of the Year and qualified for the NCAA singles tournament for the fourth consecutive season. She capped off the best season for an Irish women's tennis player when she reached at least the semifinals in three of the four ITA grand slam events. She became the first Notre Dame player to reach a grand slam final, at the now-defunct National Clay Court Championships, and made it to the semifinals of the NCAA Singles Championship. Dasso was ranked as high as second nationally in singles and fifth in doubles (with Becky Varnum), establishing program bests in both instances.

Notre Dame won its fifth BIG EAST Championship in '03, pulling out a thrilling 4-3 win over host and arch-rival Miami with a victory at No. 2 doubles in the last match remaining on court. Caylan Leslie and Alicia Salas both earned berths in the NCAA singles tournament, marking the fifth time since 1991 that two Notre Dame players gained entrance to the event.

Salas became one of the nation's top players during the 2003-04 season, peaking at 10th in the national singles rankings, while twins Catrina and Christian Thompson continued the tradition of freshman superlatives. The duo filled the No. 1 doubles spot all season and played Nos. 2 and 3 singles. The Thompsons became the first all-freshman doubles team (for any school) to be invited to the NCAA Doubles Championship since 1998, rallying for a three-set victory in the first round before falling in three sets in the round of 16 to finish the season ranked 26th.

The Irish earned an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament and advanced to the second round. Notre Dame's appearance in the tournament – its ninth in as many years – assured that 18 consecutive classes dating from 1990 through 2007 will have made at least one trip to the NCAA tournament – a range that includes every freshman class since five-time BIG EAST coach of the year Louderback arrived at Notre Dame.

A Family Tradition

Notre Dame women's tennis has long featured members of the same family on its teams. For the third straight season, Notre Dame will have an unprecedented two pairs of sisters on its roster in 2003-04. In fact, a total of seven sets of sisters have earned monograms in women's tennis, by far the most of any of the 13 Irish women's sports. In 2002-03, Liz Donohue and Lauren Connelly joined the Notre Dame squad as freshmen, combining with sisters Maggie Donohue and Sarah Jane Connelly to mark the first time in school history that a team (in any sport) featured two sets of sisters at the same time. Though Maggie Donohue graduated in '03, the Connelys were joined by twins Catrina and Christian Thompson to give Notre Dame women's tennis two sets of sisters again in 2003-04 (and again this season). In all, 27 sets of sisters in eight different sports have earned monograms in the same sport at Notre Dame.

The Thompsons became the fourth pair of twins to earn monograms in the same sport. The only previous sets of twin sisters were tennis players Laura and Sheila Cronin ('78-79), fencers Kelly and Rachel Haugh ('89-92), and volleyball players Jessica and Kristen Kinder ('00-03).

Another family connection is added this season, as head coach Jay Louderback's daughter, Bailey, joins the team as a freshman. He becomes the 11th Notre Dame head coach – just the second in a women's sport – to have coached his son or daughter with the Irish, joining softball's Brian Boulac; football's Ara Parseghian and Lou Holtz; men's basketball's John MacLeod; baseball's Paul Mainieri; hockey's Lefty Smith; fencing's Pedro De Landero, Mike DeCicco and Yves Auriol; and men's soccer's Mike Berticelli.



In its two years of existence (2002-03), Ace for the Cure became a new and unique Irish women's tennis tradition. Inspired and conceived by 2003 graduate and team captain Katie Cunha, whose mother passed away from the disease in August of 2002, Ace for the Cure was a benefit match to increase awareness of the deadly threat of colon cancer.

Designed as a way to honor Christine Cunha's loving and generous legacy and to educate others as to the need for preventative screening, the event featured health-care specialists distributing infor-



mation. Ace for the Cure raised over \$12,000 for cancer research and survivorship programs. The National Colon Cancer Research Alliance and the Lance Armstrong Foundation have been the sole beneficiaries of the proceeds. The benefit attracted nearly 700 fans to the Eck Tennis Pavilion and garnered considerable media coverage.

The first-ever Ace for the Cure took place on April 7, 2002, with Cunha providing the clinching wins in both singles and doubles in a 4-3 Irish victory over arch-rival Miami. The '03 event, held on March 2, also featured a big Notre Dame win, with the Irish upsetting #13 Texas 5-2. Cunha again had the clinching doubles win.



Katie and Christine Cunha



Salas Goes to China

Alicia Salas, who completed an outstanding career at Notre Dame last spring, was one of five women selected to the American Express Collegiate All-Star Tennis Team that took an eight-day trip to China in June of 2004 for a series of clinics, matches, and cultural exchanges hosted by the Chinese Tennis Association (CTA).

The team made stops in Hong Kong, Tianjin and Beijing, enjoying sightseeing excursions (including The Great Wall and the Ming Tombs), and participating in several clinics for junior/high school level players

and coaches. The U.S. squad competed in exhibition action against teams selected by the CTA, consisting of the best young players in China, ages 17-23.

Salas split a pair of singles matches in helping the women's

team to one win and one defeat. Playing No. 4, she registered a 6-2,

6-3 victory over Huan Xia, but the American Express All-Stars dropped a 4-3 decision against the Tianjin All-Stars. The former Irish standout then lost in a match tiebreaker, 6-4, 3-6, 1-0 (11-9), against Yijing Zhao, but the Americans prevailed 5-2 against the China All-Stars. The matches, as well as other tour activities, were carried on the "Beijing TV" cable channel.



Salas' participation marked the second year in a row Notre Dame was represented in foreign trips sponsored by the ITA. In 2003, an ITA All-Star Team, headed by Irish men's tennis coach Bob Bayliss, helped Waseda University celebrate its 100th anniversary of tennis by competing in two exhibition matches in Tokyo, Japan. The U.S. squad went 2-0 on that trip, the first by an American collegiate tennis team to Asia in over 20 years.



Alicia Salas (fifth from left) in China.

