

# DAVE SMITH

## a walk-on winner

In the Oregon men's tennis press guide he is called "one of the smartest court players on the team."

Dave Smith has developed in more than that for the 1985 edition of the Oregon men's tennis team.

Smith, a redshirt freshman walk-on from Bellevue, Wash., has become one of the most important discoveries for coach Emory "Buzz" Summers.

Smith is now a sophomore in school and went out for the tennis team almost as an afterthought.

"I just decided to go out for the team when my roommates convinced me that I would be good enough," he says.

Smith was more than good enough to make the team.

He was good enough to help the team to a 13-11 record after 1984's disappointing 6-11 season.

Oregon concluded their season this weekend with a disappointing fourth place finish in the Pac-10 Northern Division tournament as they lost 5-4 to the Eastern Washington State, 5-2 to the Washington State University Cougars and were shutout 6-0 by the University of Washington.

Despite this weekend's showing, Summers has reason to smile about the outlook for 1986 and beyond because the Ducks lose only seniors Wade Judy and Wiley Smith.

Having the likes of (Dave) Smith around for another three years also should brighten the coach's outlook.

"David was probably our most improved player over the year," Summers says.

Despite his coach's faith, Smith found the early going rough. However, he provided himself plenty of room to improve.

Smith started the season as the Ducks No. 1 player, quite a lofty position for a walk-on freshman.

But things did not start out well for Smith at the top spot for the Ducks as he struggled through a series of tough three set matches and lost eight of his first 10 single contests as a collegiate competitor.

"In the first couple of matches I was pretty nervous," Smith says. "I didn't really expect to start the season at No. 1."

He became the Ducks top player when senior Scott Peery had to quit the team because of nagging elbow problems.

Despite Smith's troubled start, the Ducks still managed to be competitive, and that helped him as a player.

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—Dave Smith

"I knew that if I just kept at it, things would turn around for me," Smith says. "The rest of the team really supported me."

A move to No. 3 in the line-up helped find a new confidence for Smith as he went on a tear and won 10 of his next 12 matches, and seven in a row at one point, to finish the season at a respectable 10-14 in singles matches.

Summers thinks that Smith gained some valuable experience this season and perhaps matured a little.

"David didn't have the mental toughness at the start of the season, and it showed in his results," Summers says. "He definitely turned things around pretty well and finished the season with a terrific finish."

Smith can point vividly to the turning point of his season.

"We were playing Court Side Country Club," Smith says. "I was in a slump and was down 3-0 in the third set.

I sat down and told myself it was time to get serious," he continues. "I knew I had it in me."

Smith won six of the next seven games to take the match 6-4, 4-6, and 6-4, and the season was on the upswing.

His initial roller-coaster season as a Duck is not the first time he's had to pull himself out of a slump, which is why he is happy to be where he is.

After competing for Bellevue High School's team as a freshman and sophomore, Smith was ready for big things heading into his junior year. He was the No. 3 player on the top-ranked team in Washington.

Then the clock struck midnight as Smith turned an ankle in his doubles match at the regional qualifier for the state meet, and he failed to qualify for the state championships.

Smith's disappointment was also felt by his team as they finished second in the tournament in his absence.

"We would have won state for sure if we (his doubles team) could have qualified," Smith says.

The disappointment kept Smith out of competitive action for the rest of his high school career and his first year of college.

"I was a little burned out on the game," Smith says. "I really didn't want to play anymore until this year."

Smith says that he went out for the team this year to put more discipline into his life.

"I really missed the structure and competitiveness of the game," he adds. "I wanted to see what I could do on the court again."

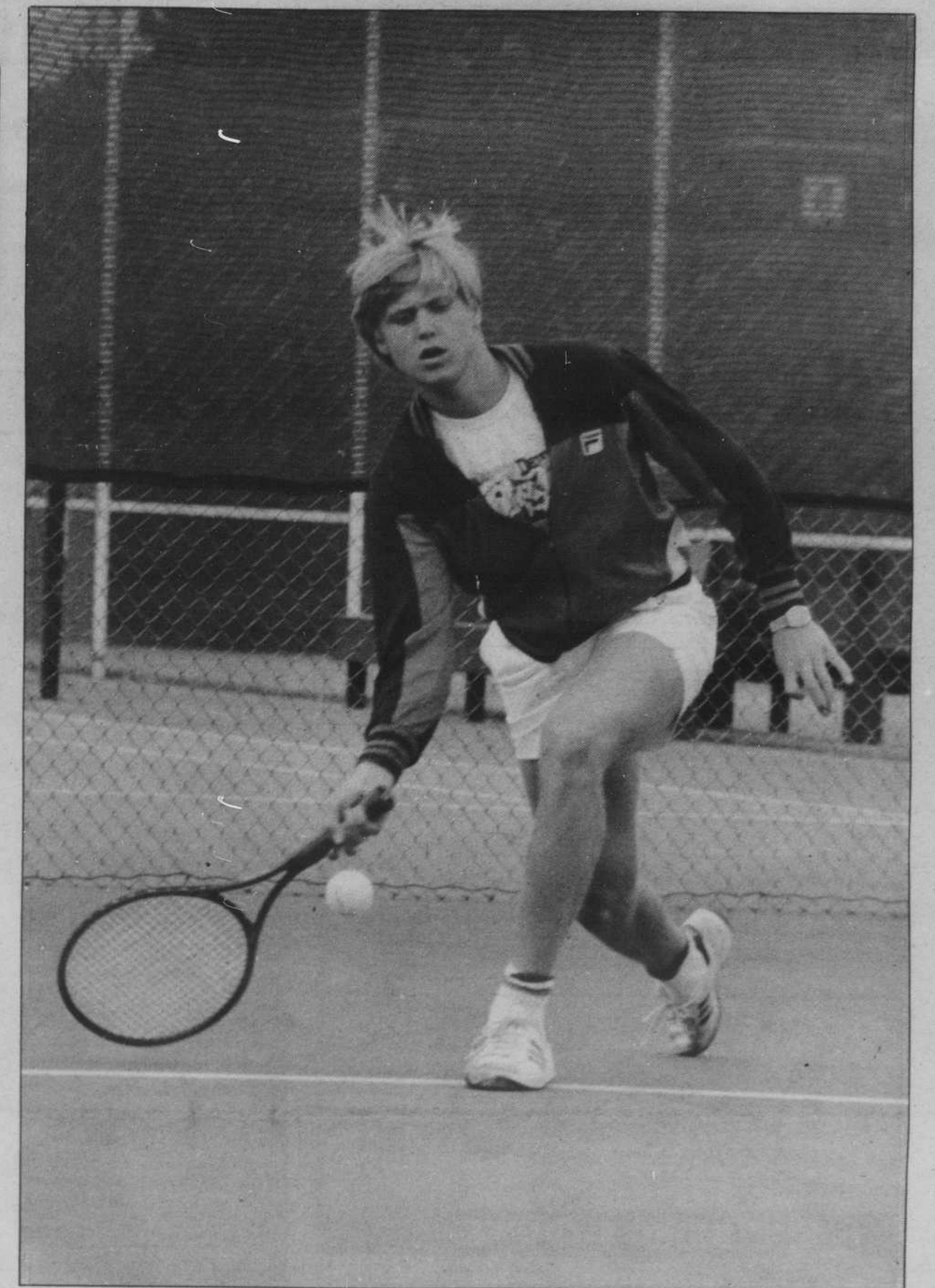
Summers says he's happy Smith made the decision to return to the game.

"We have some strong people returning, and Dave is one of our top three players," he adds.

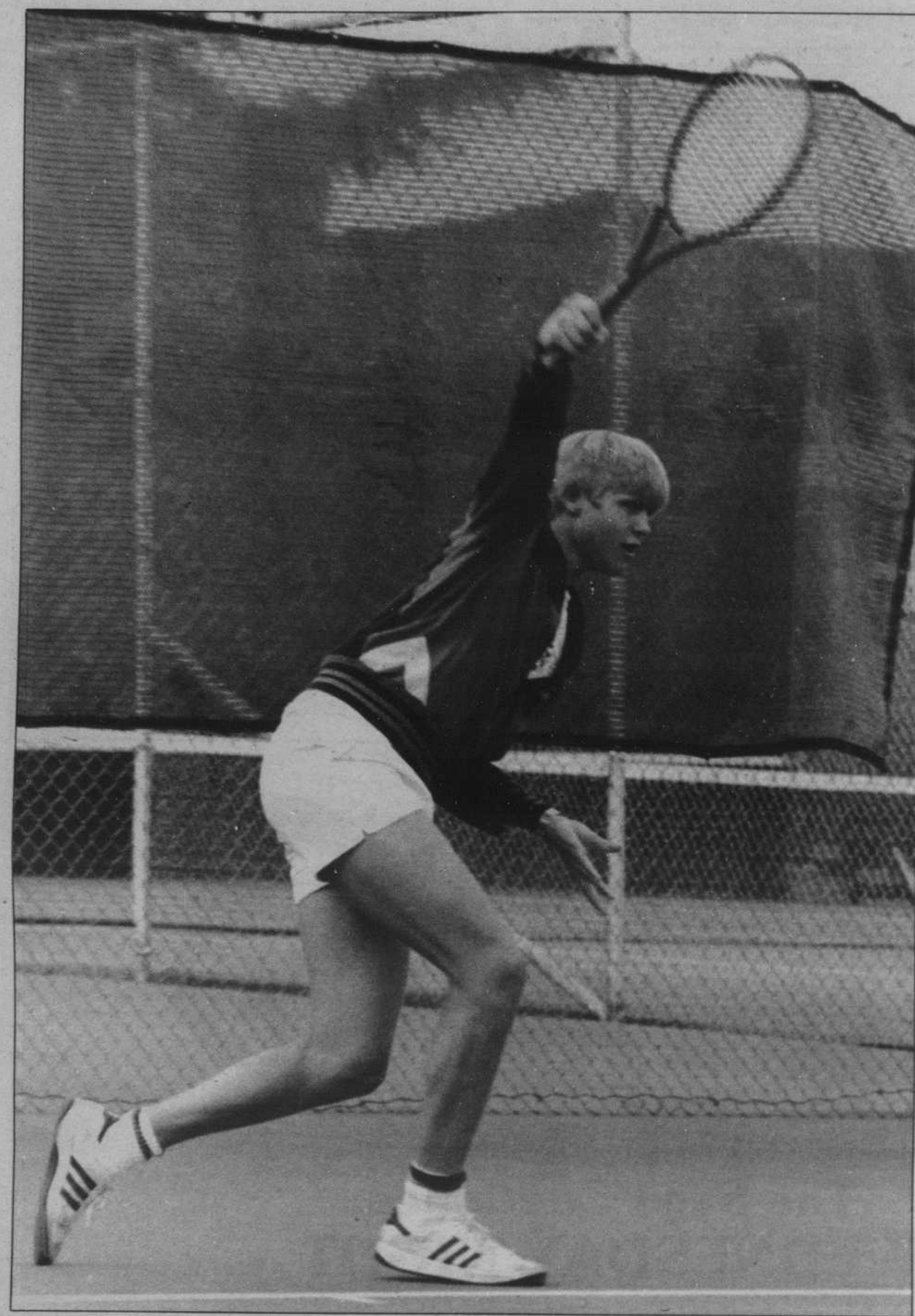
According to Smith, we can expect to see better things in the future.

"I'm ready to work all summer on my game," he says. "I'm raring to go for next year already."

Story by Robert Collias  
Photos by James Marks



Smith was one of the tennis team's bright spots during this season's return to winning ways.



University tennis player Dave Smith works on his follow-through during a recent workout.

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