

# Tennis: Tournament fun, but challenging



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

**Justin Toews took first in the men's 3.0 bracket at the Monmouth-Independence Fourth of July Tennis Tournament.**

**Continued from Page 10A**

Later, I found out he has competed in USTA tournaments before.

Oh great. But, as the 1980 USA hockey team taught me, miracles can happen.

We stepped onto the court and warmed up. Then, it was game time.

He tossed the ball into the air and our epic match was off.

Ok, epic might not be the right word to use.

Domination would be a better word. Slaughter perhaps. Not by me, mind you.

Justin had me running all around the court. And while I was able to return serves decently well and extend points, let's just say I had about as good of a chance to win as a snowball has lasting for an hour in hell.

But, did I have my happy ending? Did I triumph over a seemingly unbeatable foe? Could this be the basis of an inspiring blockbuster movie?

No. I took Justin to deuce in two

games. That was as close to winning as I got and lost 6-0, 6-0. It was a thorough beat down, though he did give a word of encouragement. In all seriousness, he was a nice fellow.

No, that didn't make the beat down any more fun.

For the record, Justin did win the 3.0 bracket ... so ... at least I lost to the champ

That, in theory, should have been the end of my tennis excursion. I was tired and resting when organizer Patty Youngren asked if I would play someone in a match for fun.

I agreed and we traveled to Western Oregon to throw down.

It's a shame no one was there to watch that one because that had ESPN Classic written all over it.

Well, maybe not. But it was definitely fun and a lot closer than my first match, though that isn't saying much, all things considered.

He and I went back and forth in the first set. I dropped down 2-0, before winning my first game. I tried my best to lob, hit, slice and spike my way to a first-set victory, tying the set at five games each. I

moved the court like Rafael Nadal, hit like Roger Federer and had the poise of Pete Sampras — if Nadal was an out of shape athlete, Federer an unskilled, slightly uncoordinated tennis player and Sampras an athlete who let frustration get the best of him multiple times.

I lost the final two games and the first set 7-5.

It was at this point I realized I'd have to win two sets to take the match. And the first set had as many games as my entire first match (12). I was getting tired. The temperature was rising and I was frustrated/disappointed with losing the first set.

All that equaled a 6-1 loss in the second.

By the end of the second match, I was exhausted and beaten. But it was an enjoyable experience and one that had me excited to continue playing tennis.

Turns out Novak had fallen earlier that day as well at Wimbledon.

See, even champions fall every so often, though his match may have been slightly bigger than mine.

Only slightly, though.

# Avgi: Will play football for WOU this fall

**Continued from Page 10A**

He decided to attend WOU — a decision that paid big dividends for both parties.

But through it all, football never strayed far from his mind.

"I think I knew when I made the decision to play basketball that somewhere along the road, I was going

to come back to play football," Avgi said. "It felt like the right time (last season)."

Avgi will return to WOU to play football in the fall for one last season — he is able to because of having five calendar years to compete in up to four years in a given sport.

"I've been working on my speed," Avgi said. "I'm

spending a lot of time with Cory (Metzgar), our strength and conditioning coach. I'm working on my route running, working with our quarterback and just doing some extra work."

Avgi has also been in contact with WOU alumni — and Super Bowl champion — Kevin Boss to help guide him through the process of

turning professional.

"We're really good friends," Avgi said. "I've been talking to him probably the last two or three years. He said he will train with me after the season for whatever comes next after football."

As of now, the plan will be to continue to work on strength and conditioning once the season is over.

"I think staying in shape, working on football drills and getting ready for a pro day," Avgi said. "I'd want to possibly get in the NFL combine and get a chance to show what I can do."

Performing well at a pro day was key to a recent WOU alumni getting his NFL shot. Former Wolves player Tyrell Williams im-

pressed at Oregon State's pro day and eventually signed with the San Diego Chargers as an undrafted free agent in 2015. Avgi hopes for a similar path to success.

WOU's most decorated basketball player may be making a surprising choice, but it's a challenge he's excited to see through.

# Central: All teams taking part in program

**Continued from Page 10A8**

The event is a weekly story times followed by an activity aimed at kids 8 years and younger.

"It was good and fun," Padilla said. "I like reading aloud and talking to kids. I was trying to involve them. I think it's important for us to show kids to be who you are."

Senior Chris Polanco from the boys tennis team also read a story.

"It was fun for me out there," Polanco said.

After story time, the athletes helped kids make their own paper bag puppet.

The partnership between the library and Central's athletics came as a result of the library's summer reading theme, "Ready, Set, Read" Carrie Kasperick, youth services librarian, said.

## Thursday story time

- Monmouth Public Library will hold a special story time Thursdays at 10:15 a.m. through Aug. 11.
- Each week, athletes from different Central High School athletic teams will read stories and lead kids in a game or activity aimed at kids 8 years and younger.
- There is no cost to attend.
- For more information: Monmouth Public Library, 503-838-1932.

"This is the first year we've partnered with the high school," she said. "All the stories and activities are sports related. I contacted Central Athletics Director Shane Hedrick and he was very supportive. He helped coordinate a weekly session with the high school ambassadors."

Each Thursday through Aug. 11, different Central sports teams will send representatives to read and lead

an activity or game.

And while the focus was on the fun, Kasperick said the kids also get to have a positive influence in their life.

"It's been inspiring for the younger kids to see the older kids because they don't always get as much interaction with teenagers," Kasperick said. "It's a great for them to see examples of what a teenage role model can be and hav-

ing a positive experience with them."

Polanco hopes this sports-themed program leads not only to a love of reading, but an increased interest in sports.

"I hope kids get inspired to move around more. I see a lot of kids not being active at all," Polanco said.

Kids can still sign up for Monmouth's summer reading program and Thursday's story time is open to the public.

And with the chance to see some of Central's athletes all summer long, kids can have fun, foster a love of reading and be inspired.

"It's fun to go outside your comfort zone," Padilla said. "I hope they see if you do, you can always have fun and get them excited to start school."



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

**Central senior Chris Polanco reads a tennis-themed book to children on Thursday morning.**

# Living in the United States a fun, memorable experience

**By Thomas Gniadecki**  
For The Itemizer-Observer

*\*Editor's note: Thomas Gniadecki attended Dallas High School on a foreign exchange student program. He will return to his home in December in July.*

First of all I would like to thank the Rotary club of Dallas for sponsoring my stay abroad.

Being on exchange is a wonderful experience; experiencing new cultures, becoming a part of a family, and making new friends from the other side of the world. There is an incessant joy of being on exchange, because something new always happens. My host families have taken me places that I have always dreamt to see, such as Las Vegas, Grand Canyon, Disneyland,

Seaworld, Death Valley, and much more.

I have done three sports during my exchange: soccer, wrestling, and tennis. My favorite sport of those three is definitely tennis, which I have had a blast of fun playing here. During the season I played tennis on average six times a week, where I now only play once a week, on Wednesdays.

The Wednesday program is coordinated mainly by Petra Cole and Mary Christensen. The fun takes place at Dallas High School courts at 6 p.m.

Everyone is welcome to attend, and it is lots of fun! Our newest attendee is the one and only Lukas Eggen from the Polk County Itemizer-Observer. Eggen has great talent in the sport of tennis. He does not have a lot of ex-

perience, but has a great feeling of the ball and when to hit it. He planned on playing in the annual Fourth of July tournament in Independence, and I am sure he performed well. I am also playing in the Independence tournament on Saturday and Sunday. The tournament is coordinated by Central's head coach, Patti Youngren. It is because of people like her that makes it possible for the sport of tennis to continue.

I will continue to play when I return home, with fond memories of the friends and competitors in the U.S.

I have been impressed with the community support like Rotary and the gracious volunteers who have made my stay unforgettable.

## Returning serve



LUKAS EGGEN/Itemizer-Observer

**A player returns a serve during the Monmouth-Independence Fourth of July Tennis Tournament on Saturday. The two-day event had a large number of participants, according to organizer Patty Youngren. Results available at www.polkio.com.**

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