

Cardinals capture first MAC title since 2006

By: Brian Weiss

The Ball State men's tennis team captured their first Mid-American regular season title since 2006 on Saturday against Buffalo. Ball State finished the regular season a perfect 5-0 in the MAC and 16-7 overall.

In the 33 seasons that Ball State has been a member of the MAC, they've won 21 MAC titles. This season marked the 17th time that Ball State has finished with an undefeated regular season record.

"Were awfully happy to have it, we were accustomed to winning pretty regularly there for a long time, it feels good to get a championship back," head coach Bill Richards said.

Before conference play, the Cardinals battled through a tough non-conference schedule where they lost all seven of their matches to nationally ranked opponents.

"We did have a tough non-conference and we were competitive with pretty much every team we played so I think that gave us a little bit of confidence going in [to conference play] knowing we can play with most teams in the country," senior Dalton Albertin said.

With injuries impacting the team throughout the early part of the season, Albertin played a key role in the team's early success. He posted a 6-0 record at the No. 1 singles position.

"I've been fortunate, I've played pretty high in the lineup my sophomore year on so I was pretty ready for that [playing at No.1]," Albertin said. "but it's always good to see good competition."

Even though the Cardinals were unable to defeat any ranked teams during the non-conference, Richards preached about how important it was for them to play against quality competition.

"I think it definitely helped us, I think most coaches feel that to try and get better and improve you have to play very good competition, and we certainly feel that way," Richards said.

The Cardinals used the tough non-conference schedule to prepare for a competitive MAC conference.

"As far as the conference, we knew going into it that there were going to be five teams, that in my opinion, were all capable of winning the league," Richards said. "and we approached every match as if it was for a championship."

The attitude of one game at a time was prevalent for the Cardinals throughout the entire season. With big matches on the horizon, Richards kept the teams focus on the next match, no matter the opponent.

In MAC play the Cardinals used a huge 7-0 victory against Northern Illinois, a team that defeated them 6-1 last season, to set up the match of the year against rival Western Michigan. In front of the largest crowd of the season, the Cardinals defeated the Broncos 4-3 to keep their title chances alive.

The Cardinals took care of work against Chicago State before traveling to Buffalo looking to secure the title. Even when the Cardinals were within one win of a regular season title, Richards treated it like any other match.

“When we got to the final match it wasn’t any different than any other match we’ve played all year,” Richards said.

After a long and difficult season, the players took pride in their accomplishment.

“It was really, really exciting to win one for the first time since 2006, it’s been a really tough and challenging year for a lot of guys and it was good to finally come through and be rewarded for it,” senior Cliff Morrison said.