

Cerenko, Bose star in men's tennis tournaments

By Jason Liu | October 18, 2000

Fall break turned out to be quite prosperous for the men's tennis team.

Sophomore Alex Bose defeated Ricardo Shinozaki 7-5, 6-3 to win the N.C. State Fall Invitational Monday in Raleigh, but the big story of the weekend concerned often-overlooked senior Marko Cerenko.

Cerenko, who won four matches en route to reaching the finals at the ITA All-American Championships in Stone Mountain, Ga., proved this past weekend that he belonged among the elite collegiate tennis players in the nation.

The first Blue Devil to ever reach the final round of the tournament, Cerenko made an impressive run to the top, upsetting a number of ranked opponents, before finally losing 3-6, 6-3, 6-3, to Genius Chadzikwe of Southern Methodist.

"It was just a great success story for Marko this past week," Duke coach Jay Lapidus said.

A success story that's been patiently waiting its turn.

Cerenko boasts an undefeated career record against ACC opponents and has held a strong influence over the team the past two seasons. Despite his undeniable ability, Cerenko has played at the number six spot on the team, behind many of his teammates.

But it was Cerenko who owned the spotlight this weekend at the Lincoln Center in his home state. In the first round, Cerenko upset No. 2 seed Marco Baron of Mississippi State, 6-3, 6-4. He carried his strong play into the third round, where he defeated James Shortall of Mississippi, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4. The next match it was Florida's Nathan Overholser, another three-set victim of Cerenko's.

And in the semifinals, Cerenko defeated teammate and good friend Ramsey Smith in straight sets, 6-4, 6-4.

"It's always hard playing a teammate, especially someone you've grown up with," Cerenko said. "It was unfortunate that we were both on the same side of the draw. I think I was playing really well. He might have been a little injured. We just both went out there and played our games. I was fortunate enough to come out on top."

Smith, son of former tennis great Stan Smith, has been one of Duke's top two players the past two years, often overshadowing Cerenko.

"I felt like Ramsey was a little tired and certainly emotionally spent when he played Marko, but that's not to take anything away from Marko," Lapidus said. "He played great tennis this

weekend."

However, a Smith-Cerenko match is not a new phenomenon; in fact, the two have played against each other on many occasions.

"It usually goes back and forth, but he had an awesome tournament," Smith said. "He was just better than me that day. He played great the whole tournament. That was the best I've seen him play."

Cerenko's performance in the ITA tournament should help establish his ability as a premier player.

"Just playing in the lower half of the lineup, I never got the exposure that I needed," Cerenko said. "I couldn't get a ranking playing at that position. Last fall, I finally got ranked and now I've got the exposure. I've always felt like I could play with the top players and I think this weekend showed that."

With his run into the finals, he is now expected to be ranked in the top four nationally. Regardless of the national ranking, Cerenko will definitely move up in his position on the team.

"After this tournament, I'm expecting to play somewhere near the top," he said. "I can't say for sure if I'm going to play No. 1, 2 or 3, but I'm pretty sure it will be top three or four."

The Duke men's tennis team should have its most talented team ever, boasting a core lineup of Bose, Cerenko, Smith and Andres Pedroso. Smith is expected to be ranked in the top-10 nationally, while Pedroso is a consistent top-20 player. Although Bose has yet to string together enough victories to gain a prominent ranking in his first season with the team, he is regarded as one of Duke's most talented players.

"When he is playing well, he certainly has the potential to beat anyone in the lineup," Lapidus said.

With four legitimate No. 1 players, the Blue Devils—who have not been able to advance past the quarterfinals in the NCAA tournament—believe their depth this year will carry them through the postseason to a championship.

"This is the best we've ever done at the All-American," Smith said. "We did much better than any other team. It's really exciting to see guys stepping up."

Judging by this past weekend, the Blue Devils can now confidently add Cerenko to their list of feared weapons. No longer overlooked in the Duke lineup, Cerenko can now step out and begin casting some shadows of his own.

"He certainly made a statement that he should be playing at a higher number," Lapidus said. "He worked so hard for four years and paid his dues. To see all his hard work finally come to fruition in the biggest tournament of the fall season is just great."

And with Cerenko's new-found prominence, the Blue Devils boast a deep, prolific and experienced lineup that will make them difficult to beat.

"It just shows how deep we really are," Smith said. "It's really encouraging, I can't wait."

