



Men's Pro Tennis Classic Continues With Qualifying Play

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GODFREY – Qualifying play in the 17th Annual Lewis and Clark Community College Men's Pro Tennis Classic kicked off Friday at the Andy Simpson Tennis Complex and Alton High School courts.

While many players come from all over the world to compete in the USTA Pro Circuit Futures event, the \$10K tournament also includes local hopefuls.

Former L&C tennis players Neil Berkel, of Troy, Illinois, and Quinton Argent, of Ravenshoe, Australia, were among the more than 60 players competing for a shot at the main draw.

Berkel, who plays for McKendree University, lost to American Daniel Burgess 3-6, 2-6.

Argent lost 1-6, 2-6 to Brian Page, a sophomore University of Illinois tennis player.

"I was expecting a good match and I got a good match," said Berkel. "I played well, but the level of competition is much higher than in most tournaments I've played in."

Argent said he was glad to have an opportunity to play in the tournament.

"We were out there for a solid 90 minutes. It wasn't one-sided, that's just how tennis goes sometimes," he said.

St. Louis native Blake Strobe defeated No. 2 Hunter Harrington, a standout Clemson player.

Strobe took the first set 6-4, but Harrington pushed back, winning the second set 6-3. Strobe was able to keep his composure and best Harrington in the third set 6-3, crediting a few timely passing shots as the turning point.

“I thought he was playing very well,” Strode said. “It was just a few points here and there. We were both serving very well, neither of us had many opportunities on the other’s serves.”

Incredibly, Strode is coming off a two-year hiatus from tennis. After graduating from Pattonville High School, Strode played tennis at the University of Arkansas for four years and spent nearly three years on the pro circuit before stopping to accept admittance to Harvard Law School.

One of his last professional tournaments was when he won the 2011 Edwardsville Futures. Strode will face Reese Hunter, a junior from the University of Tennessee, in his second-round match Saturday not before 10 a.m.

Returning to the tournament this year is No. 3 Ronnie Schneider, of Bloomington, Indiana. Schneider just finished his freshman year playing for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where he finished 34-9 in singles and 28-6 in doubles. He was named to the 2014 All-Atlantic Coast Conference Academic Team as well as All-ACC Team and Intercollegiate Tennis Association (ITA) Player To Watch for the Carolinas Region.

Schneider will play American Dominic Cotrone, a junior and All-ACC Second Team at Florida State University, at 9 a.m. at Lewis and Clark Saturday.

Qualifying play continues Saturday at 9 a.m. with all matches at Lewis and Clark. The event is free and open to the public.

Also on Saturday, a free children’s tennis clinic will begin at 9 a.m. in the George C. Terry River Bend Arena.

Many local families are hosting players again this year, but more are needed according to tournament housing director Nancy Simpson.

“These young men really appreciate a place to stay after being on the road so much and we are looking for more families to host players this year,” said Simpson.

To get more information on hosting a player(s) contact the tournament desk at (618) 468-6252.

For more information on the tournament, visit www.lc.edu/usta and to view and download photos from the tournament visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/lewisandclarkcc>.

Photo captions:



St. Louis native Blake Strode made it through the first round of qualifying in the Lewis and Clark Men's Pro Tennis Classic Friday afternoon at the Andy Simpson Tennis Complex at the college. Photo by S. Paige Allen, Lewis and Clark Community College photographer.



Neil Berkel, of Troy, Illinois, competes in the USTA Men's Pro Circuit Futures tournament at Lewis and Clark Community College during the first round of qualifying on Friday, July 18. Berkel, who was a standout tennis player at Triad and for Lewis and Clark Community College plays tennis for McKendree University. Berkel lost to American Daniel Burgess, Jr. of New York. Photo by S. Paige Allen, Lewis and Clark Community College photographer.

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