

# Trailblazers Win Region Championship and Trip to Nationals

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The Trailblazers women's tennis team won the NJCAA Region 24 Championship against Rend Lake 6-3. From left: Abby Mundel, Nikki Steiner, Merle Bitter, Claire Morrissey, Taylor Stevenson, Alex Dennis and Merle Schlaeger. Photo by Coach Jim Hunstein

The Lewis and Clark Community College women's tennis team earned its fourth consecutive National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Region 24 Championship and a trip to the National Championship tournament by defeating Rend Lake College 6-3 on Saturday, April 11.

"The overall match was very close even though some of the (individual) matches weren't," said head coach Jim Hunstein. "The match at three doubles was decided by a couple of games and the match at four singles was decided by a couple of points in the third set tiebreaker. But we won the games and points we needed to for the team win."

The Trailblazers and Warriors played the same line-ups and match-ups as their match on April 1, and the overall score was similar, with Lewis and Clark winning the previous meeting 7-2.

The No. 1 doubles team of sophomore Claire Morrissey, of Alton, and freshman Mel Schlaeger, of Hanau, Germany, won 8-3, and the No. 2 doubles team of sophomore Taylor Stevenson and freshman Nikki Steiner, both from Troy, lost 2-8. No. 3 doubles Alex Dennis, of Godfrey, and Merle Bitter, of Hamburg, Germany, won 8-6.

In singles, No. 1 Schlaeger won her match 6-1, 6-2, No. 2 Morrissey lost 4-6, 3-6, and No. 3 Stevenson lost 4-6, 3-6. No. 4 Steiner won a tense, back-and-forth third set tiebreaker to win her match 6-2, 3-6, 10-8. No. 5 Abby Mundel, of Wood River, won 6-2, 6-1, and No. 6 Dennis won 6-4, 6-2.

The Trailblazers women's tennis team won the NJCAA Region 24 Championship against Rend Lake 6-3. From left: Abby Mundel, Nikki Steiner, Merle Bitter, Claire Morrissey, Taylor Stevenson, Alex Dennis and Merle Schlaeger. Photo by Coach Jim Hunstein

"The women are now practicing intently and preparing for the competition at nationals," Hunstein said. "We played a tough schedule all season long, and I want them to be ready for the level of competition in the post season."

This is the women's 10th trip to nationals in the last 12 years. The NJCAA D-I National Championship is May 2-8 in Tucson, Arizona. Last year, The Trailblazers finished tied for No. 20 in the country, which was up from 23rd place the year before.

This week, the women continued their winning streak as they defeated visiting McKendree University, a National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) D-II team, by the narrowest of margins in a hard-fought 5-4 decision on Tuesday, April 14.

On Wednesday, The Trailblazers earned a 9-0 win against visiting Fontbonne University, a NCAA D-III team. This last win puts them at 9-7 on their season and 4-0 in the region.

Following are the match results from the Region 24 Championships against Rend Lake:  
1D: Mel Schlaeger/Claire Morrissey (LC) def. Paige Hutchcraft/Evelyn Mendez (RL); 8-3

2D: Taylor Stevenson/Nikki Steiner (LC) lost to Marisa Uhls/Katie Wall (RL); 2-8

3D: Alex Dennis/Merle Bitter (LC) def. Emily Culbreth/Sydney Crews (RL); 8-6

1S: M. Schlaeger (LC) def. P. Hutchcraft (RL); 6-1, 6-2

2S: C. Morrissey (LC) lost to M. Uhls (RL); 4-6, 3-6

3S: T. Stevenson (LC) lost to E. Mendez (RL); 4-6, 3-6

4S: N. Steiner (LC) def. K. Wall (RL); 6-2, 3-6, 10-8

5S: Abby Mundel (LC) def. E. Culbreth (RL); 6-2, 6-1

6S: A. Dennis (LC) def. S. Crews (RL); 6-4, 6-2

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