

# **OVERCOMING SISTER'S TRAGIC LOSS: Roxana's Sydney Owsley carves out own tennis success, headed to state**

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**ROXANA - Roxana's Sydney Owsley** has overcome many odds to make it back to the IHSA state tennis tournament since losing her sister, **Sami**, in a tragic car accident two years ago on Buchta Road in Bethalto.

Sami Owsley was 16, a Roxana junior, and just shy of her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday at the time of her death on Nov. 11, 2013. This past weekend, Sydney Owsley qualified for the IHSA state tennis tournament in singles out of the Alton Sectional, placing fourth. She came back after losing her initial match to Shelby Jones of Marquette. Sheer determination and dedication sparked Sydney to come back after the defeat, when some would have given up on the dream.

In the back of her mind, Sydney had to be thinking about her late sister as she worked to qualify. As Sydney realized she would be making it back to state, she paused and reflected about her sister and what it would mean to her that she had qualified.

Two years ago, Sami Owsley and Sydney Owsley went to state as a doubles team when Sydney was a freshman. This past weekend as a junior, Sydney qualified to return to state this year in singles. Last year, another sister pair, the Ballards, competed at state as a doubles team for Roxana.

**Roxana head tennis coach Michael Kathriner** said Sami Owsley would have been so proud of what her sister accomplished, making it to state on her own.

"I have been pulling for her all last season and this season," Kathriner said. "I know it means a lot to her and her family for her to be able to continue on and have success on her own and be able to stand on her own. Sydney is carving out her own niche and creating her own tennis identity. Something tragic happened, but it has not stopped her."

**Roxana Superintendent Debra K. Kreutzrager** couldn't be more proud of Sydney and all the girls on the Shells' team. The Shells had one of their best seasons in school history and were 11-1 in dual competition this season. On Oct. 10, five of Roxana's top six players made All Conference. They are: Anna Ballard, Georgia Ballard, Haley Milazzo, Sara Kreutzrager and Sydney Owsley.

"As a parent of one of the players, I can attest that this is a very special team," Debra Kreutzrager said. "Mr. Kathriner does an amazing job and pulled these girls together and navigated through the unimaginable loss of a friend and teammate. To see the Owsley family return to state is such a blessing!"

Kathriner said the car crash in November 2013 occurred two weeks after Sami and Sydney returned from the state tournament as a doubles tandem.

"For her to come back and make it to state in singles this year is a pretty big deal," Kathriner said. "Last year, our season was pretty dedicated to Sami."

Next year, the IHSA is switching high school post-season tennis to two classes. Now, Roxana has to compete with Edwardsville and many of the larger schools, but next year will be in a lower category.

"It gives some of my girls who might be able to make it to state a chance," Kathriner said. "It puts smaller schools all together and in the same position."

The Roxana coach describes Sydney as "a really good kid."

"She works hard and puts the time in over the summer and early fall to get prepared for the season," he said.

Milazzo and Sara Kreutzrager will return next year in doubles and coach Kathriner said they should have a chance to go deep into the sectional and conference tourney.

Kathriner has coached tennis for 18 seasons and he said this year's group is definitely a special contingency.

"It is an interesting dynamic," he said of this year's Roxana girls' tennis squad. "Our team has gotten a little bigger with numbers this year. I think for the most part the team is pretty unified and has a lot of camaraderie."

Kathriner believes camaraderie and cohesion within the team plays a factor in Roxana's overall success.

"A lot of friendships have developed from the tennis team and I think winning is almost a byproduct of their friendships and relationships," said Kathriner. "They don't let each other down and they are all in it together."