

I fell in love with tennis at an early age, and it didn't take long for it to become more than a sport to me—it became my passion. I started out at a local community club where I learned the fundamentals and grew to appreciate the game deeply. But as my aspirations grew, I knew I had to look beyond what was readily available to keep getting better. So, I took matters into my own hands. I watched matches on YouTube, read books, and watched professionals compete on television. I used my mom's phone to reach out to anyone on the island—again, mostly adults—who would hit with me. And then I met Coach Lee, who wasn't an official coach but recognized my commitment and helped establish an elite Sunday training group. I devoted myself to learning and getting better however I could.

That hard work paid off. I became #1 on my high school team, won the Maui Interscholastic doubles championship, and qualified for the state tournament. As a rising senior, I told my parents that I wanted to play tennis at the collegiate level while also having a good business program in finance. But the more I researched, the more challenging it seemed. I hadn't traveled for tournaments, so my UTR was only a 6 in singles and 7 in doubles—numbers that didn't reflect my work ethic or passion for the sport.

It felt like all conversations about college tennis started and finished with the same inquiry: "What's your UTR?" It was irritating. I started to believe that a different path could be a better chance. Since soccer wasn't centered around a ranking system, I focused on it with the expectation of getting in front of coaches at ID camps where they could see my value firsthand. My mom and I ended up driving over 20,000 miles from Maui this summer to participate in the camps.

But right at the start of the summer, I received an invitation to compete for Hawaii in the 2025 Impact Team Tennis Junior Nationals. That invitation framed the rest of my experience. I told my mom, "All these soccer camps are starting to feel like pressure—I'm going to enjoy the tennis tournament. It will be a release and fun." I had no clue that one event would change everything, but it did.

I found that team tennis provided all the things I enjoyed about soccer—camaraderie, energy, community—while I got to play the sport that really ignites my passion. The coed format built a tight team dynamic and introduced me to a side of tennis I had not seen. It reminded me why I began this process.

Prior to the tournament, Coach Ty Aki put me in touch with Coach Bill Riddle. I contacted him, and as fate would have it, he lived close to my grandparents on the mainland. We got together, and for the first time, a person with actual college coaching

experience said I had a chance—even at a school that had a great business program. That meeting provided me with something I hadn't experienced in a bit: hope.

At Clemson, I was in heaven. I loved every minute. I met players from all over the country—many of whom I still snap on Snapchat. The environment was competitive but supportive, and it gave me the clarity that I was looking for: tennis isn't just a passion—it's part of who I am. My mom attended the recruiting presentations with me, which helped both of us know how to proceed down this path.

I've subsequently seen a D3 coach at an AACSB-accredited business school and continue to send film and contact programs. The experience only fueled a larger flame in me to continue developing and striving towards my dream. I'm so thankful to the tournament organizers, volunteers, the city of Clemson, and all who contributed to such a valuable and life-altering event. Due to this experience, I feel confident that I will be a college student-athlete—and I look forward to seeing where that journey takes me.