Women's Tennis Team at Lehman Means Business this Season

Three years ago when Coach Steve Schulman began coaching the women's tennis team at Lehman College, there was barely a team to speak of. During the first and second year, he had difficulty in even getting students to volunteer to join. Today he has more than enough players, who for the first time have revealed a real competitive nature. Right now the women's tennis team is 1-2. They lost their opening match to John Jay but bounced back to beat CCNY.

The team is led by former Lightning Basketball talent Diana Olaya, who is now playing her first year of tennis with Lehman. She's put as much passion into her matches as she as she did in basketball. Right now, Olaya is 3-0 playing the #1 singles spot and was named CUNY Rookie of the Week on September 23. "Olaya doesn't look smooth when she plays, but she's got killer instincts," says Coach Schulman. "She's a hustler—a competitor who doesn't like to lose."

Third-year player Ariane Lalla is last season's most improved player. She posted an outstanding victory on September 20, defeating CCNY in both singles and doubles. The 22-year-old senior played tennis for two years at Stevenson High School. She became enamored of the sport by watching the U.S. Open on television. For her, playing for the Lightning means being a part of a greater community of Lehman athletes. "So far it's been fun," said Lalla, who's majoring in Computer Management and intends to graduate in January 2004.

It's been only a year since 19-year-old Christina Peralta saw a poster tacked onto a bulletin board calling for students to join the tennis team. Except for playing basketball in junior high school, Peralta had little involvement with sports. She always wanted to try tennis but she had never even picked up a racket. Since then she's more than learned how to hold a racket. According to Coach Schulman, Peralta is a good competitor who has made some positive contributions to the Lightning squad. "But how exactly did Peralta go from novice to amateur?""Practice," says Peralta. "Everyday I go to the wall and practice hitting the ball by myself." She is now a sophomore majoring in Theatre/Communication and expects to graduate in 2005.

Also playing good tennis are a handful of new freshmen: Micaela Tabing, the #2 singles position; Maria Javier, the #3 singles position, and Florane Vencer and Monique Dixon have all come up with victories this season.

What makes it possible for these student-athletes, many of whom have little or no experience, to play college sports is the NCAA Division III. The program offers no tuition or scholarship incentive to prospective students. Its real purpose is to enhance the student-athlete experience, essentially taking the focus off the spectator. For them playing is not about winning, but about being among a select group who wish to push themselves physically as well as academically.

For Coach Schulman, it means working with a group of dedicated young women. "Our tennis program has really improved this season," says Coach Schulman. "We believe come CUNY tournament time on October 18, we will make a strong showing. This year's CUNY Women's Tennis championships will be held October 19-20 at the U.S. Tennis Center at Flushing Meadow Park, site of the U.S. Open.

Second-year player Christina Peralta went from no game to good game in just under a year.

Senior Ariane Lalla was last season's most improved player.