

WOMENS TENNIS

Brookdale duo takes doubles title

By Chris Christopher
Staff Writer

Brookdale Community College freshman Farrah Smoke, a Manasquan High School graduate, and sophomore Heidi Denn won the first-doubles title at the 2011 National Junior College Athletic Association Division III National Tennis Tournament.

The event took place at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Flushing, N.Y., from Oct. 26-28. The venue is the site of the U.S. Open Tennis Championships.

Denn is an Old Bridge graduate.

Smoke and Denn bested Mercer County College, 6-1, 0-6, 6-3 in the championship match. They won first-team All-America and first-team academic All-America honors.

Earlier this season, Smoke and Denn lost to Mercer 6-4, 6-3 in the Region 19 Tournament championship match. An opponent in both matches was sophomore Allison Noll, who won the national first-singles title for the second straight season.

"Our girls wanted it more than the other team," said Karen MacLaughlin, the Jersey Blues' seventh-year coach. "Our girls knew they could win it. Our girls really wanted to win and that kept them motivated."

MacLaughlin said the Jersey Blues were the aggressors in the national championship match.

"We came out much more energetic than the other team," she said. "Our girls were mak-

ing their shots. At one point, our girls were crushing the ball and overpowering their opponents. Another coach said our girls looked like two pit bulls."

Smoke's sister, Tahlia, also a Manasquan graduate, won the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association first-singles title a few years back. Farrah Smoke won the Region 19 second-singles title and lost in the semifinals at nationals.

"Farrah is a great doubles player," MacLaughlin said. "Her net game is great."

She is much more aggressive at the net and she is very, very intelligent. She instinctively knows where to go with the ball and she can read the ball a lot better than most players.

"She is typically a singles player. She had never played competitive doubles until this year. It took a couple of matches, but the two of them developed a chemistry you can't replace. It's hard to find chemistry as a doubles team."

MacLaughlin said Denn brings strong strokes to the court.

"She is a very powerful player," MacLaughlin said. "In my years of coaching and my two years of playing here (at singles and doubles), she probably has the strongest serve I have seen. That is why they comple-

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ment each other so well. Heidi crushes the serve and Farrah is at the net. Farrah is a good poacher."

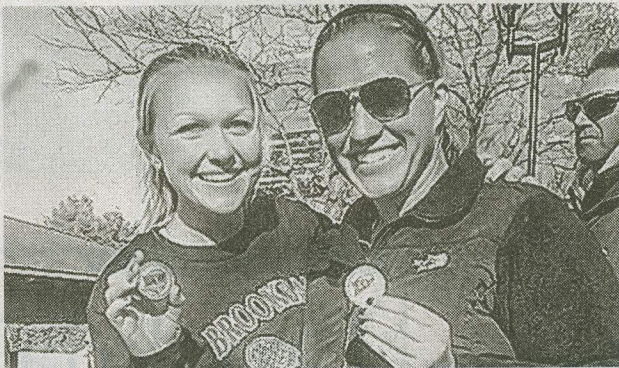
Denn carries perhaps the biggest load of any player on the team as she works a part-time job at a day care center, dealing with children.

"She carries 21 credits and is still able to compete," MacLaughlin said. "She works a couple of days per week."

The Jersey Blues finished fifth among 10 teams.

"That was OK with me as we did not do that great during the season," MacLaughlin said. "We had a strong team, but Region 19 was very competitive. It was more competitive than usual."

MacLaughlin said the Jersey Blues enjoyed



Brookdale students Farrah Smoke (left) and Heidi Denn won the first-doubles title at the 2011 National Junior College Athletic Association Division III National Tennis Tournament. PHOTO COURTESY KAREN MACLAUGHLIN

competing at the nationals.

"It was an incredible experience," she said. "The courts play a lot slower than you would think, but it's a beautiful experience and they did a great job of running the tournament. We pretty much had the whole place to ourselves.

"It's one of four Grand

Slam sites in the world and we got to play at one of them. The girls will always have that experience. You can't take that experience from the girls."

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