

Championships ready to hold serve

Doug Barber, The Sun-Herald

Tennis team captains Betsy Taylor and Jennifer Mavar are looking forward to hitting the courts this week in the four-day USTA League Tennis Mississippi Adult Championships.

Taylor, who captains a 3.0 women's team from Bayou Bluff Tennis Club, has an experience edge over Mavar. Mavar is the captain of a 2.5 women's team from Bayou Bluff, and she and many of her teammates are experiencing their first state team championship event. Taylor's team made the state tournament in 2010 after going undefeated in the regular season.

The USTA League Tennis Mississippi Adult Championships begin Thursday at eight different venues on the Coast -- Treasure Oak CC in Ocean Springs, Bayou Bluff TC in Gulfport, the Biloxi Tennis Center, Singing River Yacht Club in Pascagoula, Halstead Tennis Center in Ocean Springs, the St. Martin Tennis Courts, I.G. Levy Tennis Center in Pascagoula, and Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College.

This is the second straight year that the Coast has played host to this statewide event.

The Taylor and Mavar teams are two of a large number of Coast teams in hunt for a state championship.

"This is our second year to go as a team and the third for some of my team members," Taylor said. "We did well last year. We were second in our flight but didn't make the finals.

"I think it is good that we don't have to travel. I also think it is a little bit of a disadvantage because you don't get to stay together as a team. I've been to Jackson before. When we stayed together at the motel, we talked about the matches at night play, too. I don't think there is a lot of pressure. Everyone has been helpful at the club. The higher levels have been good in showing me what to do. It has been a wonderful experience.

"We are definitely strategizing. When we started off the season, we asked, 'Are we in it to win it, or just have fun?' We tried to do both. But we wanted to win. We've got the fever. Now we are strategizing, looking at other teams we will play at state."

Both women play doubles on their teams. And as captains, they have to set up the lineup. Taylor has 16 players and Mavar has eight.

Taylor's team opens play at Treasure Oak on Thursday at 3:30 p.m. Mavar's team also plays at 3:30 p.m. Thursday at Bowman's Tennis Center in Biloxi.

Teams compete in their respective pools, trying to qualify for Sunday's finals.

Without a doubt, making and winning the tournament is the goal of the teams.

"These are the best of the best," Taylor said. "We were fortunate to come in second in our division and make it here. It will be really hot, really hard and there are some really good teams. We hope to do our best and hopefully come out on top."

Mavar echoed those sentiments.

"We're walking into it with eyes wide-open," She said. "We don't know what to expect. But we hope to win,"