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Photo by Tracy Dreslinski

Farmington High No. 1 singles player, junior captain Katie Blumberg, returns a forehand during a match earlier in the season. The team will be in action in the Division 2 state finals at Kalamazoo College May 29. Squads from Farmington Hills North Farmington and Farmington Hills Mercy will also be in action in the finals.

The big payoff

Farmington girls tennis team's continued improvement earns squad bid to D-2 state finals

By Sue Teggart
C & G Sports Writer

The journey the Farmington Hills girls tennis team took back to the Division 2 state finals was unique, to say the least.

After losing seven starters from last year's team, which finished eighth in the state last season, and losing more dual matches than they were winning, it didn't look like the girls would make a repeat trip to the final tournament, which gets under way May 29 at Kalamazoo College.

"We were playing with a lot of ninth- and 10th-graders, and a lot of girls up from JV," Farmington coach Gary Nicholls said about the makeup of this season's squad.

Though the Falcons had stability at No. 1, 2 and 3 singles — junior captain Katie Blumberg, sophomore Victoria Amponsah and junior Michelle Mac, respectively — and at No. 1 doubles with the team of junior Chrissy Healy and senior Shannon Costello, beyond that, there were plenty of question marks.

"When we started out losing pretty much all of our dual matches, we thought it was a rebuilding year. We didn't think we'd be going to states and didn't have high expectations for regionals," Nicholls said.

But then the Falcons turned the corner.

"We beat Rochester, who was the OAA Division champions, which was bizarre," Nicholls said. "Then we won a tournament up at Goodrich, which was a great tournament. Then we finished fourth in the tournament at (Bloomfield Hills) Marian, which had a spectacular field.

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"Things were looking up."

When Farmington arrived at its Division 2 regional at Bloomfield Hills Lahser May 14, Nicholls said his girls were playing what he considered their best tennis of the season.

"When we got to the regional, our girls just really stepped up," Nicholls said. "From No. 1 singles all the way to No. 4 doubles, everyone won a match, and some won more than one. The next thing we knew, we had 19 points and we were going to states again. It was a pretty exciting day."

Farmington earned flight championships from sophomore Victoria Amponsah (No. 2 singles) and junior Michelle Mac (No. 3 singles); both players were also undefeated during the season.

Nicholls said no matter what happens at Kalamazoo College, the run back to the finals is a testament to the squad's work ethic.

"It's a sign of how hard the girls worked," he said. "It shows how receptive they were to learning more about playing doubles, how mature our younger players were."

"This is the payoff for them."

Farmington joins Farmington Hills Mercy and Farmington Hills North Farmington at the state finals.

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