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SUN COUNTRY Sports

Prep boys tennis

He's winning the battle upstairs, too

SM Northwest's Binkley adds sports psychology to arsenal

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As if his singles opponents aren't doing enough suffering at the hands of Shawnee Mission Northwest sophomore Brett Binkley this season, here's an additional nugget that will do little to perk them up: the guy is thinking out there.

Binkley has recently added regular visits to noted area sports psychologist Dr. Andrew Jacobs to his arsenal.

Dr. Jacobs, a graduate of Shawnee Mission North, hosts a local radio show on the subject and has worked with athletes who run the gamut, ranging from Olympians to Kansas City Chiefs and Kansas City Royals players to recreational athletes.

ON THE RECORD

"It helps me when I feel like I'm losing concentration."

— Brett Binkley, on sports psychology

"I used to (go to Dr. Jacobs) a couple of years ago, and then I picked it up (again) a couple of months ago," Binkley said not long after downing Blue Valley Northwest freshman Yo Mitsuhashi 7-5, 6-3

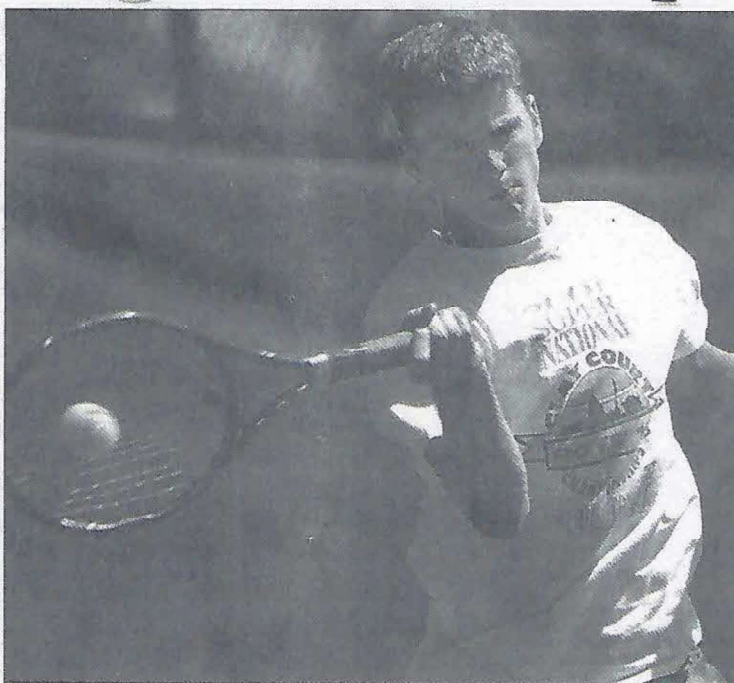
in the Class 6A regional singles championship match at Harmon Park Monday.

Mitsuhashi represented, by far, Binkley's biggest test of the day. Otherwise, he dropped just four games spread over six sets in three matches along the path to the final.

Binkley will carries a winning 17-3 match record into the 6A state tournament, which begins today and continues tomorrow at Topeka Washburn Rural. He'll also take along a winning mindset.

"It just helps my concentration and focus," Binkley said of his sports psychology sessions. "It helps me when I feel like I'm losing concentration. I say some words to myself. It's a key to get back focused."

The lift he's getting from his bolstered



MARK PETERMAN/THE SUN

With a winning mindset intact, Shawnee Mission Northwest sophomore Brett Binkley looked impressive Monday in winning the Class 6A regional singles title at Harmon Park.

mental approach represents a frightening prospect for Binkley's net opponents, one made more frightening by the fact Binkley was already the very picture of tennis commitment.

For much of the calendar year, he works out six days a week as part of the prestigious Mike Wolf Tennis Academy at the Overland Park Racquet Club.

He'll tuck those psychology sessions into his racket bag as he seeks to improve the fifth-place finish he posted in the state

singles race as a freshman.

"It's good to have an edge like that," Binkley said. "You know all of these other guys aren't doing that, and tennis is so mental."

It seems those Helgeson boys are catching ...

So much for growing pains. In BV West's very first year of existence,

the Jaguars, guided by Coach Frank Brown, are sending a whopping six netters (four entries) to the Class 6A state tournament, which begins at Oak Dale Park in Salina today and continues tomorrow.

The mere presence of two singles players and two doubles teams at the event will give the Jaguars a tremendous head start in their quest for a state team title in their rookie year.

Brown will tell you that while his two state doubles teams — senior Brinton Walstrom and junior John Park (15-7), along with sophomore Matt McClanahari and freshman Adam Squitieri (5-4) — have been solid, there is no denying the fact the presence of the Helgeson brothers, Travis and Brett at No. 1 and 2 singles, respectively, has made everyone in this program better.

Sophomore Travis Helgeson, the defending Class 6A runner-up who played for Blue Valley a year ago, heads for state with a spotless 19-0 match record.

Freshman Brett, meanwhile, has entered the high school tennis realm with a bang — and a 14-5 record to date.

While both Helgesons carry national tennis rankings, far more importantly at this point in time for Brown, they rank highly in the eyes of their teammates.

"Just because the other kids on the team aren't nationally ranked, they (Helgesons) don't alienate them from any warmups or practices," Brown said. "They help them as much as they help each other. When they (teammates) get in trouble on the court, (the Helgesons) pump them up."

As confidence brews and enthusiasm threatens to burn out of control in this upstart program, Brown continues to be pleased by the results he's getting teamwide.

"I told the guys, 'If we come together as a team, we'll be successful,'" the coach said. "And we have."

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