

Marion Sentinel

ENDICOTT COLLEGE: Amy Heacox plays cat and mouse

But that game style may well change



Courtesy/David Le Photography

Amy Heacox was also part of the only Old Rochester girls tennis team to advance to the Eastern Massachusetts finals in 2011.

MARION — Call them style points, if you will.

Amy Heacox alters her style on a tennis court and she still piles up points.

Unbeaten for two straight autumns, the Endicott College sophomore from Marion is moving away from her cat-and-mouse game and becoming more aggressive.

“I feel like a lot of people put labels on the way I play, but to me I’m there to win, and whatever way helps me win, I’m going to do it,” said the former Old Rochester Regional High School star. “It may not be the prettiest tennis at some points, but still it gets the job done.

“I’m definitely working on hitting the ball harder to where my opponents aren’t. I’m not just getting the ball back in play, which is a lot different from high school. In high school, I’d just hit it back and wait for the other person to make the mistakes. Now I’m more focused on hitting the winner instead of letting it go on and on.”

The new Amy Heacox is doing just as well, if not better, than the old Amy of high school days, when she was undefeated in three of her four regular seasons there, losing only one regular-season singles match as a junior.

Possessed with great skill after honing her game from the start at age 7, Heacox often faced high school players with lesser talent and basically wound up toying with them.

At least that’s the way her Old Rochester Regional coach, Bob Hohne, saw it.

“She had all the shots,” Hohne said. “She could play power tennis if she wanted. She could play finesse tennis if she wanted.

“I always compared her to the cat and mouse. She liked to torture her opponents before she put them away. Matches would be 6-3, 6-4 when they should have been 6-0, 6-0. Amy was capable of doing that. I don’t know if she felt sorry for the opponents or what, but she did show a kinder, gentler side sometime to her opponents, I guess.”

Was she too nice to her foes?

“That could be true. I don’t know,” she said earlier this week as No. 2 seed Endicott prepared to face No. 3 Roger Williams in the semifinals of the Commonwealth Coast Conference tournament Wednesday.

Top seed Nichols was to play No. 4 Curry in Wednesday’s other semifinal. The two semifinal winners will meet for the CCC championship at 1 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 20, at the higher seed

The champion will advance to the NCAA Division 3 Tournament in May. Endicott plays an abbreviated tennis schedule in the spring.

Nichols was the conference champ in the regular season with an 8-0 record (11-4 overall), while Beverly-based Endicott finished second at 7-1 (12-2 overall).

The Gulls of Endicott were hoping that history repeats itself to some degree. Nichols won the regular-season title in 2011, but runner-up Endicott won the CCC tourney title over Nichols in the final.

However, the Gulls lost to Elizabethtown (Pa.) in Round 1 of the NCAA Tournament.

Heacox closed this season 13-0 as her team’s No. 4 singles and 12-0 at No. 3 doubles with partner Brittany Potter, a freshman from Bedford, N.H.

First-year Endicott women’s coach Jeremy Howard was hoping that his players “step up and realize that it’s tournament time and play the best they can.” Meanwhile, he’s glad that Heacox is transitioning from “cat and mouse” to something more akin to “seek and destroy.”

“We’re working with her on stopping (her old style),” Howard said. “At this level of tennis, at some point she’s not going to be able to get away with that. We’re trying to get her to put the point away as soon as she has the opportunity to. Granted, she still likes her cat and mouse game, but we’re trying to lessen that a little bit.

“She just loves to play tennis, and she likes to have fun with it. For her, part of having fun with it is to kind of expose her opponent’s weaknesses and harp on those. That’s part of her cat and mouse game.

“But we’re going to run into some opponents where the sooner she can get off the court, the better. Some opponents are tough, and the longer you let them hang around, the tougher it is.”

Heacox has the game that allows her to play just about any style.

“She is a rock,” Howard said. “She can do anything from anywhere on the court. She can put balls away with groundstrokes, and she can come to net, as well.

“We’ve got 12 women on the team, and she’s in the top couple in terms of pure, raw tennis talent. Her strokes and her shot-making ability are right up there with the top couple of people on the team, even though she’s playing No. 4. A couple of people just have a little more experience, but her raw, natural tennis ability is right there with the best of them.

“Luckily for me, she’s only a sophomore, which means I’ve got two more years to take that raw talent and turn it into something even better.” Heacox is unbeaten, so it’ll be interesting to see what “even better” looks like.

