



Marlins *tennis*

Introducing our newsletter.

Keep up to date with the Marlins as we swing into action. Meet players like Francis, (above), check out alumni profiles, and get event updates.





“These men’s and women’s teams can really play. Look out for the Marlins!”

- Head Basketball Coach and tennis aficionado, Dave Macedo

The Mens’ team is coming off of a strong showing at Fall ITA’s and is looking to make some noise in the Old Dominion Athletic Conference (ODAC). The roster includes 4 juniors ([Felix Bevc](#), [Hubert Parawa](#), [Dheeraj Koritala](#), and [Bryce Jones](#)), 4 sophomores, and 2 first years. [Andreas Combos](#) returns this spring as a 5th year senior. See the last page of the newsletter for an exciting schedule with some cool exhibitions.

The Women’s team is led by four seniors: [Alexa Brewster](#), [Maya Brown](#), [Anna Rogers](#), and [Christine Zalameda](#). Brewster earned VaSID Academic All-State Team honors last spring, and along with her senior counterparts, looks to leave behind a legacy of winning and academic achievement as they depart with degrees in Business; Biology; Business Marketing and French; and Mathematics with a double minor in Computer and Data Science, respectively.



Marlin tennis couldn't be in better hands than Toni Bickford's, and the players are excited: "When we're at a tournament like ITA's you can tell that all the other coaches respect her. And we're proud that she's our coach," explained first year Alen Curovic. "At practices, she's tough, but fair – and we're all getting better for it. Off the court, she's an awesome resource to us all," added Shannon Lewes.

Toni comes to us from Bulgaria via an accomplished [DI collegiate playing career](#) followed by coaching stops at William & Mary (where she was head of women's tennis) and Old Dominion University. The town where she is from [Plovdiv, Bulgaria](#) is an ancient city with Roman ruins, and home to the [tradition-rich tennis club](#) where it all began. It's known for [Banitsa](#) – a Bulgarian breakfast staple. The flaky pastry parcels are filled with sirene cheese (similar to Greek feta). But Toni says she'd "rather order the team Chick-Fil A breakfast sandwiches than try to replicate that stuff here."



“Why not take it to the next level and follow the path of the softball team and one day compete for a national title? But all this does not happen within a year, it takes time to build.”

- Toni Bickford (in the [Marlin Chronicle](#))

Meet Sai Challagundla.



Article by Shannon Lewes



“Sai” - as he is known to his teammates - is a sophomore Chemistry major who started playing tennis his freshman year at James W. Mitchell High School in New Port Richey, Florida.

“My favorite part of the team is that we’re a family of sorts.”

Sai is a member of the fifth class students in the [Batten Honors College](#) which has quickly emerged as a national niche program of the University. The Batten Honors College of Virginia Wesleyan recruits

high-achieving students and equips them to be problem solvers who are environmentally-conscious, strategic-thinking global citizens, ethically-bound to bettering their community and the world. After graduation, Sai intends to go to medical school.

If you ask Sai about his tennis, he’ll tell you that his best shot is his inside-out forehand. And it is very good! But his coaches report that Sai’s best weapon is variety. “When he slices his backhand, it can be very disarming. And he’s a really solid volleyer,” explained Coach James. “He’s one of our better doubles players,” added Coach Brinkman.

Sai’s goal is to simply to “keep getting better.” And if the past trajectory is any indication, the Marlins should really benefit in 2023. He chose VWU for the small campus, the ability to play tennis, and the Batten Honors College. And the tennis family is really glad he’s found a home here.

Meet Alexa Brewster.



Photo by Cameron Evans

Brew, as she is known on the courts, came to VWU after winning the 5A regional singles championships her junior and senior seasons at Massaponax High School in Fredericksburg, VA.

As a Marlin, her success on the court is only surpassed by her achievements in the classroom. Alexa is a business major who hopes to graduate summa cum laude and continue working in an expanded role as a business analyst for a defense contracting firm while she gets her CPA.

This season Brew is working with Coach Toni and Coach James on taking more advantage of her “leftiness”. Moskowitz explained, “Brewster is crazy good

already. And now she’s starting to see how her strengths can affect the other player.” Brew is expected to anchor the first doubles team and continue in her role as the number one singles player.

“Toni and Coach Brinkman have become major influences in my life...”

“It doesn’t do enough justice for me to say that both Toni and Coach Brinkman have become major influences in my life, not only as coaches but as role models... They’ve taught me many life lessons that I will carry with me throughout my career. And they’ve saved my #@# from some pretty deep holes I dug myself into, and have given me a newly inspired love for fitness, competition, and building cohesion amongst the team,” explained Brew.



Drew Tomajczyk: Class of 2016 -- Finished fourth in school history in career singles victories (49) and third in career doubles (57).

“I love working with Young Life. It’s an honor to serve kids of all different kinds of backgrounds and to share truth, love and hope in a hurting world.”

Drew reports that he is happily married to Rachel Johnson. The couple wed in June 2021 and soon afterward headed out West, where Rachel pursues her running career and Drew serves as the Area Director for [Young Life](#) of Williams County (near Flagstaff).

“I haven’t played much, if any tennis lately, but I’ve been running a lot,” explained Drew - see pict below.

Getting to play tennis at Wesleyan was a life changing experience for me. It taught me a lot about hard work, leadership, and consistency... all things that apply to my job and life to this day.

Uniform circa 2016

Play Clothes - today

Work Clothes - today



Men's and Women's Tennis

Schedule *early 2023*



Sat.	2/04	@ CNU	2:30	m
Wed.	2/15	vs Norfolk State*	12:00	mw
Sat.	2/18	@ Salisbury	11:00	w
Sun.	2/19	vs W&L (at VBTCC)	TBD	mw
Sat.	2/25	@ Salisbury	11:00	m
Sat.	2/25	vs Goucher (@Sal)	3:00	m
Sun.	2/26	vs Hampton*	TBD	mw
Sat.	3/04	@ Univ. of Richmond	TBD	m
Sun.	3/05	@ Marymount	11:00	mw
Sun.	3/12	vs Hollins	10:30	w
Tue.	3/14+	@ Hilton Head vs. various		mw
Sat.	3/18	@ Methodist	2:00	m
Sat.	3/18	@ Sweet Briar	TBD	w
Sun.	3/19	vs. Birm. Sth. (@SB)	TBD	w
Fri.	3/24	vs. Rhodes	TBD	mw
Sat.	3/25	@ Roanoke	1:00	m
Sat.	3/25	@ CNU	3:00	w
Sun.	3/26	vs. Lynchburg	1:00	mw

Something to look forward to: An **Alumni Tennis Match at Homecoming and Family Weekend -- October 6-8, 2023**. Look out for details, limber up a little, contact your classmates, and join us for some fun.

The plan is to mix alumni with current players in some match play, and perhaps even experiment with a little pickleball.

m = mens
w = womens
* = scrimmage

visit <https://vwuathletics.com> for the most up to date information