Sarstrand cruises to Keowee Key singles tourney crown

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FOR THE JOURNAL

SALEM — Although it had its fair share of drama from the start, the fifth annual Keowee Key Pro Tennis Invitational Singles Tournament concluded without a doubt in anyone's mind as to who was the best player in the field: Marcus Sarstrand, who dropped just one game on his way to the title.

The tournament kicked off with the highly anticipated matchup between Andy Lake, the Keowee Key pro, and Bobby Lake, his nephew, coming in the very first round.

Just as the night before when Bobby was able to get the better of his uncle in doubles play, he came up victorious at the conclusion of the opening round, winning 6-3.

"It was the same thing as the doubles yesterday," Bobby said after the match. "He started off with a double fault, and that's not like him, so I got a quick break and held my serve."

For Andy, the feeling of an early exit was an unfamiliar one as he entered this year's tournament having left the previous two with the championship.

"I guess the streak has ended," Andy said. "We have some good players this year, a little bit better than in the past. Anytime you're playing guys at this level, you know you're going to win some and lose some."

And while Bobby was feeling confident after beating the two-time champion, he was wary of his opponent in the semi-finals, Marcus Sarstrand, who had breezed past Gera Boryachinskiy with a 6-0 win.

Also playing in the semis were Cal Hilsman, who knocked out John Boetsch in a tight match that resulted in a tiebreaker, and Christian Hand, who had the benefit of a first-round bye after Sandy Franz was unable to compete due to an injury suffered during doubles play.

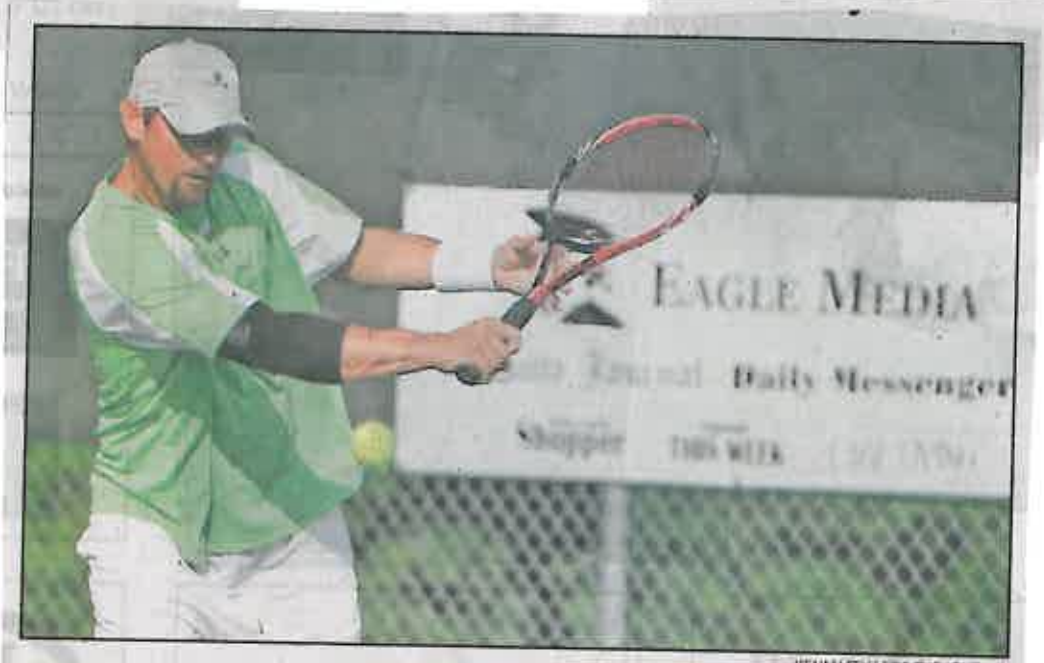
Sarstrand had a similar outcome against Bobby, winning 6-1 after taking the first four sets, while Hand advanced over Hilsman with a 6-0 victory, pairing Hand and Sarstrand against each other in the Finals the day after being teammates in doubles play.

Once again, Sarstrand seemed invincible as he beat Hand 6-0 to win the singles tournament and the $1,000 prize.

"It helped me because I knew how he was playing," Sarstrand said of playing his former doubles teammate. "I knew that I had to get him back behind the baseline so I could make him move a little bit. He has a lot of power on his shots, so I had to be aggressive and keep him back behind the baseline right away.

"I played really well today. I've played a lot of matches lately, and I got a good warm-up off the doubles yesterday, so all three matches I played great."

And while the crowd witnessed the streak of the Keowee tennis pro winning the event each year come to an end, it's fair to say that the challenging field and higher standard of play in this year's tournament was well worth it.



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Keowee Key tennis pro Andy Lake hits a backhand return during the 5th annual Keowee Key Pro Tennis Invitational this weekend in Salem.