

# Adventure at altitude for local tennis players

By: Avi Saper

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Shane Nicholls was starting to think playing university tennis this past year just wasn't in the cards.

But that all changed when Saul Shrom called him up and suggested Nicholls think about joining him and another Winnipegger, Alex Lesiuk, at Colorado State University-Pueblo for the winter semester.

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Shane Nicholls is playing the best tennis of his life after spending a semester at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

Nicholls, a 2012 grad of Westwood Collegiate, had enrolled at the University of Winnipeg last fall, but was still hoping to land a spot on a college tennis team.

"Saul talked me into how they needed a player, and things started rolling from there," said the St. James resident. "They were very helpful with financial aid, so I decided to go for it."

And with that, half of the six-man ThunderWolves team was from Winnipeg.

"The tennis community in Winnipeg isn't the largest," Nicholls said. "But I was never that close with Alex and Saul before and we didn't play on a regular basis. It was a pretty cool aspect that half the team was from Winnipeg and you get to be lifelong friends."

The first thing that grabbed his attention was the effect that Colorado's thin air had not only on his lungs, but on the way the ball came off the racquet.

"Saul warned me about the altitude change," Nicholls said. "I found out my conditioning wasn't my strongest suit."

The way that balls went sailing seemingly forever also caught Nicholls off guard. He had to adjust to not having as much time to prepare for a shot, and to keeping his own shots from going long.

"One I got adjusted I thought I was playing some of my best tennis," he said.

The ThunderWolves improved as the season went on, finishing in the middle of the pack in the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference.

"It was a great year," said Shrom, a Gray Academy grad who was in his third year at CSU-Pueblo. "Alex and I played some good doubles together, and Shane improved a ton this year."

Another major adjustment for any player when they first arrive on a university tennis team is the fact that they're no longer playing an individual sport. Rather than winning or losing for himself, Nicholls was suddenly part of a six-man squad representing an entire school.

"It was really nerve wracking at first," he said. "But once you got to know the team well, everyone was welcoming and treated me very well."

Nicholls isn't sure where his tennis will take him next fall, but he is looking forward to seeing how his college experience will serve him on the local scene this summer. The Taylor Tennis Club and Deer Lodge Tennis Club member said he felt like a stronger player when he returned to the local courts last week.

"I felt like I was more into the points," he said.

With the high number of matches played over the winter, and vastly improved conditioning, Nicholls thinks he could have the most successful summer of his career.

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