

Westwood player hopes to reach pros

WESTWOOD TENNIS STAR PREPARES FOR BUSY SEASON

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Westwood tennis player Shane Nicholls regularly practises at Deer Lodge Tennis Club.

Westwood athlete Shane Nicholls is hoping to do what few Manitobans have done—play professional tennis.

The 22-year-old recently graduated from the University of Winnipeg with a bachelor of science degree and feels that now is the time to put 100 per cent of his focus on tennis to see how far he can take it.

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"There hasn't been many players from Manitoba who have given it a real try," Nicholls said. "This has been a dream of mine since I picked up the racquet."

Nicholls said a few key tournaments made him realize that he had the potential to compete at a higher level. An ATP (Association of Tennis Professionals) Challenger tournament was held in Winnipeg last July and Nicholls won a wild card spot to compete in the qualifying draw.

"That was a good taste of the pro level," he said. "We aren't really exposed to that here in Winnipeg... it was just a good indicator of how much we need to improve and what we need to do to play at that level."

The past few summers, Nicholls has travelled throughout Canada to play in as many tournaments as possible. He ultimately has his sights set on medical school but says now is the time to pursue tennis full time.

After a busy summer season in Canada, Nicholls, whose home court is the Deer Lodge Tennis Club, plans to travel to Europe and compete in tournaments throughout the fall and winter.

"The competition in Winnipeg isn't that great, which is tough to improve," he said. "Currently I'm doing a lot of training on my own, having a few coaches help out here and there. Day to day, I'm probably on the court four or five hours with one or two in the gym.

"Tennis is very expensive, so even coaching-wise, I've reached a point where at this time it's hard to afford any coaches so I'm doing as much as I can before reaching out to extra resources."

Nicholls is currently ranked 60th in Canada in the open category but because rankings are based on regular tournament play, he hopes that competing in tournaments will improve his game, his ranking and that he'll get a chance to meet and work with coaches from around the world.

He says the last few years have been transformative for him — he's faster, stronger and more positive mentally.

"I feel like I've had a more positive feel on the court since I used to be very negative, and that's big in tennis," he said.

"It's a small step, but I feel like, from the mental side of the game, I've had a more positive look.

"If I make a mistake it's more of a reinforcing action than kind of a negative look and even that has helped a fast recovery, instead of lagging."

Read more by Alana Trachenko.