

Local tennis player enters world of professional sports



By Jasen Obermeyer

After a lifetime of playing on the courts and honing her skills, local resident Erin Routliffe is taking the next step in her tennis career and has entered the professional level of the sport.

She is travelling to India this week to compete in professional tournaments in three different cities.

The 22 year-old recently graduated from the University of Alabama with a degree in public relations.

She played on the school's tennis team and twice won the NCAA title with her doubles partner.

"When you're 16 or 17 you can either go to university or turn pro," Erin said of the route players take at the higher level of the sport.

She decided that getting an education was an important part of the process and had a lot of success during her time at the University.

"Before I went to school it has always been my dream to turn pro."

Realizing that dream has taken a lot of determination, perseverance, and of course skill. She played a lot of different sports but realized her passion is on the court.

"I've been playing tennis since I was six years-old. I started at the Caledon Tennis Club. My parents put me into just about every sport just to see which one I would like. I've played a lot of different sports but tennis is my top one," she said.

Erin was coached by JoAnn Pilkey at the Headwaters Racquet Club from age six to 10, then did most of her training and practice at the Royal City Tennis Club in Guelph.

After achieving a level of skill in the sport Erin started branching out and entering different tournaments and went to Florida at age 11 to enter some well known international events.

At age 16 she won the Florida Orange Bowl international tournament. She also went to Montreal to train at the National Training Centre.

At this level of the sport Erin is on the courts almost every day of the week for practice.

Entering the professional level of the sport means more than just playing "there's a lot of planning and scheduling that goes into maintaining a pro career.

A member of the International Tennis Federation, Erin has to choose appropriate tournaments to compete in and also get to the tournament and plan scheduling which is a job in itself.

At the pro level, players must work on their ranking to move up in the standings and increase earnings.

"Only the top 200 really make any money," Erin explained. "Below that and you can barely break even. Of course the higher you go the more you make. Obviously the top 20 is where the big money is."

A professional athlete's career is pretty short so planning ahead is a big part of the lifestyle.

"Right now I'm focusing on tennis for the next few years and have to plan out a schedule," Erin said of her goal in the professional ranks.