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Winning on the Court— and in the Classroom

Academics led Venditti
twins to Colby and
women's tennis

By Gerry Boyle '78





**Tennis was just a supplement for us,
something we can do for fun.”**

—Gabriela Venditti '19
on how academics drew her
and her sister, Lydia, to Colby

The idea was to talk about how twins Lydia and Gabriela Venditti '19 helped propel the women's tennis team to its best season in several years, playing first and second singles and first doubles and gritting out some long matches against tough competition.

But first the sisters from Mercer Island, Wash., talked academics.

Lydia plans to major in neuropsychology and was working as a research assistant in the neuroscience lab of Associate Professor of Psychology Melissa Glenn this summer. Gabriela Venditti is planning to major in government and psychology and has great things to say about her classes with Associate Professor of Government Walter Hatch and Goldfarb Family Distinguished Professor of Government Cal Mackenzie.

“There are a lot of great schools on the East Coast that have opportunities for Division III athletes who want to focus on academics,” she said. Added Lydia, “A small school for undergrads is really nice because there are more opportunities, not competing with graduate students.”

Their college counselor was from Maine and talked to them about Colby's strong academics, small class sizes, and engaging faculty. The Venditti sisters visited the College and found it to be as it had been billed. If they could have a great experience away from athletics, they decided, the rest would fall into place. After all, as Gabriela put it, “Tennis was just a supplement for us, something we can do for fun.”

And fun it was last season, not only for the Venditti twins but also for coach Jason Cohen and his very young team. Made up mostly of first-years and sophomores, the team posted a 12-4 record, scored victories over Amherst and Bates, finished the season ranked 16th in the Northeast, and only graduated one player, captain Holly Bogo '16.

Gabriela Venditti '19 prepares to serve as her sister, Lydia Venditti '19, plays the net. The twins have led their team's resurgence.

“Wins come from all parts of the lineup,” said coach Cohen. “The times [the Vendittis] have not been able to win, the other players have picked up the slack.”

Competing in one of the toughest conferences in Division III (the top five NESCAC women's tennis teams are among the top 10 in the country), the first-year sisters pulled out big come-from-behind wins (vs. Bates for Lydia; Amherst for Gabriela) and helped elevate the level of doubles for the team, Cohen said. “They've played so much with each other and they know each other's games. They don't hold anything back.”

It's been that way since the sisters passed on ballet at age 7 (their mother is a choreographer) and picked up racquets. Their games developed differently, with Gabriela mixing in some slice on both sides and Lydia hitting heavier topspin. Intense competitors, they won the Washington State high school doubles championship three times and then decided to let their tennis careers follow in the wake of their academics.

“I think they were definitely interested in Colby as a school first,” Cohen said, “before tennis.”

So the sisters talked about their hopes for next season and the one after that, urging future recruits to “see that Colby is a good school academically ... and they can be part of an ascendant team,” as Gabriela put it.

Meanwhile, Lydia is hoping to explore history and environmental science this year, in addition to neuroscience. Gabriela is pursuing her interest in psychology, taking abnormal psychology and a research methods class. Her sister and doubles partner gave the psychology faculty high marks. “All of the professors in the department are doing their own research,” Lydia said. “Their classes are interesting, and they're all knowledgeable.”

In the classroom, like on the court, it's game, set, match.