

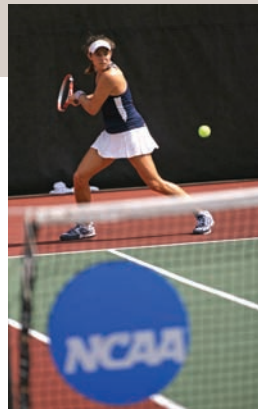
WOMEN'S TENNIS 2012. The team had a season to remember in 2012 by making school history, earning its first berth in the Sweet 16 and posting their first wins in an NCAA Championship. Natalie Beazant '15 is the first Owl and fifth player in history named C-USA Women's Tennis Player and Freshman of the Year in the same season. She teamed with Dominique Harmath '14 to earn Rice's first win in NCAA doubles competition and won the Owls' first match in the NCAA singles since 1986. Elizabeth Schmidt was named the 2012 C-USA Women's Tennis Co-coach of the Year. The team was awarded the 2012 Intercollegiate Tennis Association 2012 All-Academic Team awards, with Ana Guzman '13, Katie Gater '13, Leah Fried '14 and Stephanie Nguyen '15 earning individual honors.



WOMEN'S TENNIS 1975-2012

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

How Sweet It Is — to Make the Sweet 16 Edge-of-your-seat excitement. Upsets galore. Heart-pounding comebacks at every turn. In 2012, that was just a typical day in the life of the Rice women's tennis team.



The Owls have shown quite the flare for the dramatic in the past few years, stealing enough wins from top-ranked teams to catapult them into the top 40 midway through 2010. But 2012 was a whole different ballgame.

Gaining momentum throughout the regular season, an at-large NCAA berth extended the Owls into the postseason for the first time since 2006. The team made the trek to Oxford, Miss., where first-round opponent No. 18 Illinois waited. It just so happened that Rice had already faced Illinois at home earlier in the year and been handed a tough 5-1 loss. But that afternoon, every ounce of the brain and brawn that Rice scholar-athletes are known for was laid out on the hard courts of Ole Miss.

An upset of the Owls' top-ranked doubles team gave Illinois the doubles point and early lead. Needing four wins in six singles matches against a confident Illinois team would be an uphill battle, but the Owls climbed back to even up the score 2-2. Illinois then won another match, meaning Rice would need to win both of the remaining matches. The Owls overcame a 0-5 start on one court and clinched the win in a back-and-forth tiebreaker on the other to solidify their spot in history, with Rice's first-ever team win in the NCAA Women's Tennis Championship.

With less than 24 hours to relish their victory, recover their strength and refocus their minds, Rice then took on the host team, No. 16 Ole Miss, in front of a rowdy home crowd. But the Owls went toe-to-toe with the Rebels before storming to two convincing wins to complete the upset of the tournament. Though the 4-2 win came under the blazing lights of Ole Miss, the sup-

port and well wishes poured in from Rice fans across the country who had followed the matches online.

Despite the Owls losing to No. 1 seed UCLA in the Sweet 16, they gained a tremendous amount of self-confidence, mental strength and team solidarity that will serve them well for years to come.

In addition to the remarkable team successes of 2012, the stand-out doubles team of freshman Natalie Beazant '16 and sophomore Dominique Harmath '15 finished the season ranked No. 20 in the nation — the highest-ever finish in doubles for Rice women's tennis. Beazant also claimed a season-ending No. 27 ranking, the third-highest singles ranking by a Rice woman.

The women's tennis team led the way for Rice Athletics in 2012, but if you ask the players and coaches, they'd tell you, "That was just the beginning." With 2013 comes more competition, higher goals and the construction of a state-of-the-art tennis facility on Rice's campus — giving players a bigger stage to compete on and fans a new way to cheer on this emerging program.

