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High school boys tennis individual state finals

Reunited Zionsville duo repeats

Hammond and Laconi, separated at season's start, give Brebeuf pair 1st loss

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At the start of the year, it appeared Zionsville High School seniors Joe Hammond and Nick Laconi would be one-state-championship-and-done as a doubles tandem.

Hammond was playing No. 1 singles for the Eagles and sustained an ankle injury in the first match of the year. Laconi was back at No. 1 doubles but with a different partner. Then, near midseason, with Hammond healthy again, coach Dan Layton made the change: Indiana's top duo from 2008 would be together again, ready to go for title No. 2 in 2009.

Good move. On Saturday, a week after Zionsville was bounced from the team quarterfinals, Hammond and Laconi collaborated for another state trophy, this time by beating Brebeuf Jesuit's previously undefeated Charlie Hurst and Chris Plump 7-5, 6-4 at Park Tudor.

"It was kind of a letdown to know in the beginning of the season that we weren't together," Hammond said. "But overall, in the end, we end up winning state. That's great."

Said Layton: "It makes it legitimate. You win one year, and you can say a lot of things. But when you win two years in a row, it's a legitimate, really big powerhouse team."

Hammond and Laconi (21-2) credited their individual coach, Rick Witsken, for helping them get as far as they did this season. On Saturday, the pair got to the final by beating Lake Central's Brad Spicer and Adam Wroughton (25-2). Hurst and Plump (26-1) ran their in-season winning streak to 26 by dropping Homestead's Jordan Mauk and Brad White (23-5) earlier in the day.

Brebeuf didn't leave without an individual trophy, as junior Dougie Barnard (26-1) battled back from a first-set loss to defeat Bloomington North's Ray Leonard (27-1) for the singles title 4-6, 6-2, 6-3. That makes consecutive state championships for the Barnard family; sister Annabeth Barnard teamed with Gabrielle Rubenstein last spring to win the girls doubles championship.

"I always had the goal to win state, but I never really thought about it until I got here," Barnard said, "and it never really hit me until I won that last point."

Barnard's win also offered some consolation to the Braves' program, which entered the postseason ranked No. 4 in the state but was bounced from sectionals by eventual state champion Park Tudor.

"We're so close on that team (title); we're going to get it someday," coach Rick Scotten said. "But this makes up for it a little bit."

Mauk and White won the doubles consolation round. Homestead's Connor Andrews (22-6) -- whom Barnard beat in the semifinals -- dropped Merrillville's Leonard Mathews II (25-3) for third in singles.