

February 4, 2010

Witsken will enter tennis hall of fame

By Mark Ambroggi
mark.ambroggi@indystar.com

The start of the decade has been special for Rick Witsken.

His alma mater, the University of Alabama, captured the national football championship. His beloved Indianapolis Colts are in the Super Bowl.

To top it off, he will be inducted into the Indiana High School Tennis Hall of Fame .

"It's always fun to join (brother) Todd Witsken in a hall of fame capacity," said Rick, Zionsville.

Joining Rick as 2010 inductees are Jennifer Stephens Berger, a former Carmel doubles player and current Carmel assistant coach, and Brown County High School girls coach Steve Makurat. The ceremony will be at 6:30 p.m. Friday at the Barbara S. Wynne Tennis Center, 1805 E. 86th St., Indianapolis.

Rick, 39, will join his brother Todd, who was inducted posthumously in 2002. Todd, a former touring pro, died of brain cancer at age 34 in 2002.

Rick, a 1989 Carmel High School graduate, won singles state championships in 1987 and 1988.

"I had a pretty good high school career," Rick said, "but the most special part of my career was winning the state team championship (in 1987). There were a lot of neat guys on the team."

After played college tennis at Alabama, Rick joined Todd as a teaching pro at the Indianapolis Tennis Center.

Rick now runs Team Witsken, based in Zionsville. He also is coach of the Zionsville Middle School girls team and helps with the boys team.

His former high school coach, Lee Lonzo, said he is proud of what Rick has done as a coach.

"The fact that he went into coaching makes me proud," Lonzo said. "I've watched how he has given back. He's far more deserving as a coach than I am, and I'm in that hall of fame. He is truly a gifted coach."

Lonzo also remembers Rick as a great player.

"I coached an awful lot of great players, but I coached three that were exceptional: Rick, his brother Todd and Steve Pittman," Lonzo said. "They were a cut above everyone else I coached."

"Without Rick we would not have won that state championship in '87. He did not have the same

athleticism that a lot of state champions did. He worked hard at it. He had great technique."

Longtime Carmel High School girls tennis coach Sharon Rosenburgh had similar praise for Berger.

Rosenburgh said Berger had only one loss in her high school career and played for the Greyhounds' first girls state championship tennis team in 1989.

Rosenburgh described Berger as an aggressive doubles player.

"Jenny led the way for the importance of quality doubles on Carmel's team as well as our state," Rosenburgh said in an e-mail. "During her high school tenure there was no doubles championships. I am certain (that) in 1989 she and her partner, Shannon Armstrong, would have been state doubles champions. She carried this strength over into college, as she played for Indiana University."

Berger said she feels honored.

"I am particularly pleased with the recognition that this award is providing doubles play," she said in an e-mail. "I was very fortunate to have coaches who placed a high value on teaching and playing doubles. That support was the primary reason for my high school success."