Written by Peter Nocerini Tuesday, April 30, 2013 1:58 PM -



Austin Waara, shown here in a match at Nelson Field last spring, will lead West Iron's boys tennis team this seaon. Waara won the U.P. Division 2 first singles championship the last two years.

IRON RIVER—All U.P. boys tennis teams will be playing catch-up this season, as repeated rounds of wintry weather kept them out of competition and off the courts until late in April. PUBLIC

But if any team can deal with it, it should be West Iron's boys team. The Wykons won the Division 2 team title in 2010 and 2011 and fell one point short of Westwood at the 2012 U.P. Finals last spring—with just one senior on the roster.

That means Coach Joe Serbentas has nearly everyone else back again this spring, and the returning experience is going to be valuable during a brief 2013 season.

"It's been tough with the snow on the courts," Serbentas said last week. "Since I've been coaching tennis, this is the first time we've had our first match canceled due to snow on the ground."

With the Nelson Field courts under snow, the team did what it could indoors. "It's OK for a while, but you can only do so much inside."

That made last weekend's warm spell so welcome. "They're really antsy to get outside." As soon as the team is back in familiar surroundings, the coach said, things should fall into place quickly. The key is that most of his players have plenty of varsity experience and know what it takes to win. "It will be a little rough in the first couple matches, but they'll be fine as the season goes."

Nobody more so than senior Austin Waara, who has won three U.P. singles titles—once at third singles and the last two years at first singles.

"He's been a cornerstone of the program," his coach said. "Whenever you have that guy at the top, that's the key to a good tennis team. He makes everybody better below him."

Waara won the first singles U.P. title last spring, and so did Alex Ralston at fourth singles. Adam Newby nearly joined them but lost the third singles title match after his leg cramped up during the third set.

Two doubles teams also were runners-up at last year's U.P. Finals: Sean Gustafson-Tylor Capadagli at second doubles and Joe Pisoni-Max Maloney at fourth doubles. All will return this year.

Also returning are Aren Newby, Ryan Rogers, Andrew Peterson and Connor O'Donnell. "I've got a lot of experience on this team."

It's not that he is predicting another Division 2 title. "But if you're looking for a favorite, I have to think we are the favorite to win.

"We've got good, solid players, guys who care about playing, guys who get out and do things in summer to get better, and they put in the extra time."

• Cold and snow has made a shambles of the schedule, but the Wykons were to host Iron Mountain on April 30 and Escanaba on May 3, also at Nelson Field. Cross fingers.