

# FEATURED ATHLETE: CLARA WHITAKER

## SENIOR STAR READY FOR NEXT CHAMPIONSHIP TITLE

by ANNA RICHARDSON, sports editor

State championships in freshman year may seem like dreams to most athletes. But senior tennis player Clara Whitaker is no ordinary athlete. In fact, she's starting her fourth year of high school with three state championships under her belt.

Part of her success has to be attributed to her years of experience on the court. Whitaker says she has been playing for as long as she can remember.

However, her competitive journey didn't start till she was in sixth grade. The early start to her career has proven beneficial.

Since freshman year, Whitaker has won three consecutive KSHSAA 5A girls tennis crowns and is hoping to obtain her fourth this season.

Last year, Whitaker was the number one singles player in the Greater Wichita Athletics League as well as the region. Whitaker was also an All-Metro, All-State and All-State Academic Team player. Along with getting these outstanding recognitions, she also ended her 2019 season with an overall record of 34 wins and 1 loss at the state competition.

As well as she does playing on her own, Whitaker has a great impact on the team as a whole. One of her teammates, junior Emma Bezdek says that Whitaker is extremely supportive.

"During tournaments, she watches my matches and gives me pointers on how to beat my opponent. She is truly one of the best teammates I have ever had," Bezdek recounts.

As seniors, athletes obtain many new responsibilities in their sport seasons. Whitaker slipped into the role rather easily being a three time state champion.

Whitaker even has a leader centered outlook on her season. When talking about her main goals, she states that she wants to support all her teammates.

"That's why I like high school tennis a lot because I get to cheer for other people... My main goal for senior year is to have fun and support my teammates," she said.

Being a state athlete does not come without its struggles. Along with the intense pressure of a fourth state title opportunity, Whitaker also has game time rough patches.

"Tennis is more of an individual sport, so sometimes it's hard when you are on the court by yourself and keeping yourself pumped up," she said.

But there is something, or rather, someone, who can pull her out of her rough days. Whitaker expressed that her older sister was one of her greatest athletic inspirations. Emma Whitaker plays golf at Oklahoma State University and is also a senior this season.

Clara Whitaker said that Emma's work ethic is what keeps her pushing harder and harder every day.

Whitaker also has plans for after her high school career comes to a close. She is currently committed to playing tennis for hometown college, Wichita State University. Her teammates and friends couldn't be happier for the Whitaker and the next chapter of her game.

Bezdek emphasized, "I cannot wait to see where she goes in life."

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junior tennis player Emma Bezdek



**SWING TIME.** Senior Clara Whitaker lines up her shot during a tennis match against Bishop Carroll Sept. 23 at Kapaun Mt. Carmel. KMC won the meet with a score of 5-4. Whitaker received not only a win in doubles with junior Reagan Boleski, but also won singles. *photo by Scarlett Resendez*