

Man, this kid's got game in Robinson

Tennis

13-year-old wins first match in men's open

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TIMES HERALD

In the Francis J. Robinson's men's open — the tournament's premier division — most players arrive the same way.

They drive themselves over, some getting off full time jobs and others preparing for an upcoming college season.

Then there's St. Clair native Gabe Brown, who caught a ride with his dad and coach, Dave. It's not like Gabe had much of a choice though — he's only 13 years old.

"Not only did he whoop my butt, but he was a good sport about it," said Matt Wise, a 30-year-old former Kalamazoo College player that lost to Gabe in the first match.

Wise couldn't help to notice how solid Gabe's ground game was all match, working the ball side-to-side to keep him scrambling around the court. And while Gabe looked like a natural out there, it's his first time playing against grown adults in tournament play.

"You definitely got to expect a huge serve — they're like a foot taller than me," Gabe said with a laugh. "But it's fun playing against different people. I'm usually playing against people my age and it's definitely a new challenge."

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St. Clair native Gabe Brown, 13, is playing in the premier division of the Francis J. Robinson Memorial International Tennis Tournament at Sanborn Park in Port Huron. He captured the 18-and-under division title the past two years.

PHOTOS BY JEFFREY M. SMITH/TIMES HERALD



“He hits it different than the rest of the kids,” says Gabe’s father, Dave Brown, who is also his coach.

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Gabe has been to the Robinson a few times before, becoming a player with plenty of buzz after back-to-back titles in the 18-and-under division as an 11 and 12 year old the previous two years. Seeking more competition before heading to the United States Tennis Association 14U National Tournament in San Antonio this weekend, he wanted to dip his toes in the men’s singles and doubles opens at Sanborn Park.

“He won the (18-and-under tournament) twice so we let him play in the open,” Dave Brown said. “He wanted to do this.”

Gabe will be playing in the men’s doubles open on Thursday at 6:15 p.m. with 14-year-old Ann Arbor native

Owen Kelly — his partner for nationals in San Antonio as well. After that he'll head into eighth grade followed with a move down to Florida to train full time at the USTA academy.

“He hits it different than the rest of the kids,” said Dave Brown, who’s coached more than 40 players to the Division 1 college level. “I never had anybody that hits the ball like he does at his age. He likes to play and likes to compete, and this is his sport.”

If you watch Gabe, see his powerful forehand or any of his 85 mph serves, it’s evident the game comes naturally to him. Dave Brown said ever since Gabe picked up a toy Mickey Mouse racket at the age of three, it’s been second nature to him.

“I love (that) I’m the only one out there,” Gabe said. “I don’t have to rely on other people. I mean, I like being on a team, but I just love being alone and I love the mental game.”

In the future, Gabe wants to take his career to a high Division 1 college and to the professional level — who at his age and with his caliber would think otherwise? As he continues to grow his game along with his stature, Gabe Brown could be a name those at the Robinson want to remember.

“When he grows into his body and those skills are still there, he’s going to be a sharp player,” Wise said. “He’s got a lot of good things to look forward to.”



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