

Distelrath family excited for Robinson

Distelrath

Four members will play in tennis tournament

MATT SHEEHAN

TIMES HERALD

The day before the Francis J. Robinson Tournament starts is like Christmas Eve in the Distelrath house.

Those are the words straight out of Laura Distelrath's mouth, and that's no exaggeration.

The St. Clair family boasts four members in this year's tournament with dad, Todd, entering the tournament with his three sons — Troy (16), Derek (12) and Dylan (10).

"It's a really fun week," Dylan said. "It's my favorite week of the year."

While four Distelraths are gunning for

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Dylan Distelrath, 10, of St. Clair, returns the ball during the Francis J. Robinson Memorial International Tennis Tournament.

JEFFREY M. SMITH/TIMES HERALD

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titles ranging from the 10-year-old division to the men's 35-and-up division, interestingly enough, the tennis bug didn't start with Todd or the oldest brother, Troy.

It started right in the middle when Derek started playing six years ago.

"It's fun because they didn't want to play tennis," Derek said. "They had no idea what it was about until they started watching me play and then all of them started."

Up until then, the Distelrath household was primarily all about football, basketball and baseball. While those sports still thrive in the house year round, Derek's passion for tennis just caught on throughout the family.

"I liked watching the mental side of the game," Troy said. "Derek's got this poker face on and I just liked watching him dominate kids and using his athleticism, and that made me want to do it."

Not only did it mean another sport was added to the Distelrath's list, but it gave Todd — who admits he's just hoping to win a match this week — an appreciation for the challenges of the game.

"The cool thing for me is that I would be at Derek's tournaments and say 'How did he miss that shot?'" Todd said. "Then I started playing and really learned how difficult this game is."

Troy, while only playing for less than three years, has caught on quickly to the game, playing as the No. 2 singles player on St. Clair's tennis team in the fall.

"Basketball is my main sport, and a lot of the footwork is the same," Troy said.

As the four Distelrath guys are the ones playing at Sanborn this weekend, Laura is still enjoying the week as half mom, half manager. Without her stringing the rackets, preparing the bags and assuring everyone is hydrated, there's no question she'll have a big day on one of her favorite days of the year — championship Sunday. "We've been to a lot of sporting events, and nothing — nothing — is like championship Sunday at the Robinson," Laura said. "Working from the 10-year-olds to 65-and-older, it's such great tennis and camaraderie."



Troy Distelrath, 16, of St. Clair, jumps in the air to return the ball Friday.

PHOTOS BY JEFFREY M. SMITH/TIMES HERALD



Derek Distelrath, 12, of St. Clair, returns the ball Friday at Sanborn Park in Port Huron.

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