

St. Clair's Dave Clutts earns Tennis Coach of the Year

[Matt Sheehan](#), Times Herald 5:12 p.m. EST December 3, 2016



Dave Clutts, St. Clair boys tennis coach. (Photo: Tony Pitts / Times Herald)

At the Division 3 boys tennis state tournament, St. Clair is a staple. It just wouldn't make sense if they weren't. It would be like Thanksgiving without turkey, or an election without Facebook arguments.

So when the Saints went to their 19th straight state tournament this year, no one was surprised. However, their seventh-place finish with 10 points turned a few more heads as it was their best performance at the state level in program history.

"We've had good teams and players in our programs that have gotten better, but now we are getting into players that have been playing for quite some time," St. Clair head coach Dave Clutts said. "We are moving in the right direction, and the last two years are the first two we've been top 10 in the state. We are really fighting to be at the top."

For Clutts' leadership in his 21st season at St. Clair, he is the boys tennis Times Herald Coach of the Year.

"He's probably, out of all the sports, one of my favorites because he's very calm and he got along with everyone," senior No. 4 doubles player Ryan Marino said. "He would always joke around with us, it's never too serious."

The relaxed atmosphere helped guide the Saints through their Division 3 regional title-winning season, especially for the doubles teams. Heading into the season Clutts knew his singles corps would be one of the best he's had, but watching his doubles squads grow throughout the year was the most satisfying part of the season.

"You're always looking for your players to improve and to get better, and what I saw was our kids understand the game more mentally," Clutts said.

What wins over the players on the team is the pressure-free feeling at practice, allowing them to learn from their mistakes without being harshly criticized.

"He's not the type of coach that's in your face if you do something wrong," Marino said. "He would just give you help of what to do for the next time."

The future of St. Clair tennis also looks to be as bright as the last few seasons, graduating just one singles player from this year's squad.

"For me, it's just the expectations (that keep the program steady), and we don't take anything for granted," Clutts said. "We set goals for kids in each flight and as a team. And manageable goals, we aren't saying we aren't going to win a state title every year. But we are working with each kid to make them better throughout the season."