

Caledon tennis star reaches first WTA finals in Washington



Written By JAKE COURTEPATTE

A run to her first World Tennis Association final may have ended in defeat, but Erin Routliffe is just getting started at the age of twenty-three.

The Caledon native paired up with longtime partner Alexa Guarachi for last weekend's Citi Open championship in Washington, D.C., a hardcourt tournament representing some of the top tennis talent from around the world.

The tandem made it to Sunday's finals thanks to a 7-3 and 6-5 straight sets win over Americans Kristie Haraem Ahn and Lauren Davis in the semifinal. A walkover, the tennis term for a forfeit, sent Routliffe and Guarachi through the second round, having swiftly disposed of Britain's Harriet Dart and India's Prarthana Thambare in straight sets in round one.

Ranked fourth heading into the tournament, the final match against China's Han Xinyun and Croatia's Duriya Jurak was their first against another ranked opponent, heading in as underdogs against the third-ranked pair.

Losses of 6-3, and 6-2 in the opening sets sent Routliffe home from her first trip to a WTA championship, a finals appearance with a prize value of just over six-thousand dollars.

"Thanks for having us," Routliffe said in a tweet after the tournament. "I had a blast."

Though she may have fell just short of her first title, the championship run pulled in another career milestone for the 23-year old: she became just the second University of Alabama alumnus to crack the top one-hundred in the WTA world doubles rankings, jumping nineteen spots from 114th to 95th overall.

Guarachi was the first, jumping sixteen spots into the 74th position.

Switching allegiances to the New Zealand national team last season, her debut in the Fed Cup in February helped her rocket more than two hundred places in the world rankings since the start of the year.

The New Zealand-born Routliffe, born on an around-the-world sailing adventure to her parents Robert and Catherine, joined the Caledon Tennis Club at the age of six, falling in love with the sport after trying her hand as a multi-sport athlete.

The pair, who has played together since their freshman year with the Crimson Tide, are fresh off their first appearance at the prestigious Wimbledon Championships in July, where they fell in the opening round to the eventual champion Czechs Barbora Krejčíková and Katerina Siniaková.

Both earned multiple All-American and All-SEC honours during their time at Alabama, where Routliffe earned her degree in public relations.

One of the most successful doubles players in Alabama history, Routliffe won back-to-back NCAA Doubles Championships in 2014 and 2015, and finished as the runner-up in last year's doubles championship match.

She was also a part of the Crimson Tide's first SEC Championship squad in 2014.