

## SECOND CHANCE - ██████ puts drug problems behind

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Jason ██████ is playing tennis with a renewed sense of purpose this spring.

After attending a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program last year, the Dixie Heights High School senior is striving to win his fourth regional doubles championship.

"My expectations are really high," ██████ said. "It's almost unrealistic to think I can do that good after not playing for nearly a year, but I'm going to try."

██████ won three straight regional doubles titles in 1993-95. Ed Wilbers was his partner the first two years and then he teamed up with Josh Dorsey.

But ██████ didn't play tennis last spring because he was more interested in hanging out and getting high.

"Alcohol, pills, marijuana, whatever we could get," he said.

"The first time I did it for fun. Then it just got worse and worse until I was using every single day.

"I quit basketball and I quit tennis. That's when you know something's wrong: When you quit everything you love just to get high and party."

██████ asked his parents for help and they enrolled him in Kids Helping Kids, a rehabilitation center in Milford, Ohio.

"You spend 24 hours a day working on your problem," he said. "I totally hated it, but once you get out you're glad you went through it, if you want a normal life."

██████ began lifting weights at the rehab center and stepped up his training when he returned home. He said he lifts every day to make him stronger in both body and mind.

"It helps my confidence, sticking to something and seeing the results," he said. "It also teaches me to care about myself and not put things in my body that it doesn't like."

██████ returned to school and played on the varsity basketball team during the winter. Then he rejoined the tennis team and picked up where he left off two years ago. ██████ has an 8-0 record in doubles this season. He played six matches with David Kuzman, who will be his partner in the regional tournament. Kuzman won last year's regional doubles title with senior Bryan Leedy as his partner.

"They go out on their own and play quite a bit," Dixie coach Tom Wischer said of ██████ and Kuzman. "They have a common goal since David won it last year and Jason won it three years before that. Now, they want to win it together."

Wischer said ██████ has a more powerful serve due to his weight training, but he's still a better player at the net than he is on the baseline.

"Jason has always been good at getting the low volley," Wischer said. "That's the key to his game."

██████ and Kuzman defeated doubles teams from Louisville Male and Louisville Collegiate on Saturday and pulled out a three-set victory against Billy Hopkins and Ashley Busald of Beechwood on Monday to maintain their perfect record.

"We went down to Louisville over the weekend and played two really tough teams," ██████ said. "That was probably the best tennis I've played since I've come back."

██████ and Kuzman still need to beat Jim Creevy and Chris Wartman of Covington Catholic in a regular-season match at 3:30 p.m. Thursday at Devou Park to have a shot at the top seed in the regional tournament.

The regional winner and runner-up both will advance to the state tournament at the University of Kentucky.

"The first three years I went to state I was just happy to be there," he said. "This year, if we make it, I want to really focus and do

something down there."

- Caption: PhotoJIM OSBORN/The Post -- Dixie Heights' Jason [REDACTED] missed last season because of alcohol and drug problems. He's unbeaten in doubles this year.
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