



Jeff's Years on the Junior Tennis Circuit

Jeff was a pretty decent player during the years he participated in competitive junior tennis. I never expected him to win, just to give his best effort. In trying to motivate him in that direction, I got a copy of *Mental Toughness*, a tennis-specific video produced by a noted sports psychologist. Buying the video was the easy part; getting Jeff to watch it was another thing entirely. One year I took him to a junior tournament at the Rome Country Club. His first match was against a burly kid named Will Fricks. Will's dad was a member of the club, and Will's hometown pals did everything they could to help him win. Jeff took the first set, but Will stormed back in the second, largely because Jeff got rattled from being verbally ganged-up on. When I went with him to the locker room during the break between the second and third sets, he broke down crying, telling me how unfair it was and that he had no chance of winning. Doing my best imitation of Knute Rockne, I asked him if he wanted to just quit and go home. He decided to play the third set, which he won in a rout. Maybe he'd paid more heed to that video than I thought.

Mental Toughness is what inspired me to compose the motivational cartoon below, which I gave to Jeff just before his first match at Georgia's premier junior tennis tournament, held during the first week of June each year in Macon. The cartoon had little effect. Jeff got walloped in his first match, 6-2, 6-0.

