



Jackson Grady decided to invest in himself when he was a freshman at New Hope High School.

With every serve and groundstroke in practice, Grady took a small step to becoming a better tennis player.

Grady's love for tennis and distaste for losing then motivated him to double down and find new ways to improve.

Lessons with Magnolia Tennis Club coaches Billy Gip Clark and Torean King followed as he moved through high school and continued to improve.

On Friday, Grady reaped the rewards from all of his investments as he accepted a scholarship and signed a letter of intent to play tennis at Meridian Community College (MCC).



Grady, who has played in the Mississippi High School Activities Association (MHSAA) individual state championships twice, picked MCC over scholarship offers from Hinds C.C. and Blue Mountain Christian University.

“I really felt led there by God,” Jackson said. “I met their coach, Ryan Mounce, and we instantly clicked and he showed a lot of interest. One day, he literally drove an hour and a half to come here to eat dinner with me.”

Jackson said Mounce’s commitment mattered because he has put in extra work to get to the next level and wants to surround himself with people who are going to push him to get even better. He knows the competition will be tougher, but he said his love for the sport will drive him.

“(Playing tennis) is one of my favorite things to do,” Jackson said. “I am happy I am going to college for it and can do it as a ‘job’ now.”

David Grady, who is the co-coach of the New Hope High tennis program with his wife, Monica, said the program has had five players sign to play tennis in college. He said Jackson is the second from the school to sign a scholarship offer. David said his son invested a lot of extra hours on the court and in practice with Clark and King to improve.

“He started off taking two to three lessons a week with Billy,” Grady said. “He did that year-round and competed in a lot of United States Tennis Association (USTA) tournaments in the offseason. After he reached a certain skill level, Billy introduced him to Torean to try to get him to a higher level, and he started taking lessons with Torean two or three times a week year-round.

“On the days he is not taking lessons, he is usually somewhere playing tennis, either at Lake Lowndes (State Park), Magnolia Tennis Club or somewhere else, but he is always playing tennis. He has made a commitment to it. It is almost like a full-time job for him.”

Jackson started taking lessons with Clark in the ninth grade, when he earned a starting spot for New Hope High. He started taking lessons

with King toward the end of his sophomore year. David Grady sensed his son's level of commitment change in that time and is proud of how hard he has worked to realize an opportunity to play in college.

"When he made the tennis team at New Hope High, he got really interested in getting better," Grady said. "We had another player (at New Hope), Hannah East, who won the girls singles state championship and she was taking year-round lessons with Billy, and Jackson saw what it took to get better. That's when he made the commitment to do the same thing and get himself to that level, too."

Jackson said the solitary nature of tennis clicked with him as early as the seventh grade, when he made the tennis team after not making the New Hope High baseball team. He admitted he experienced some "sadness" after not making the baseball team, but years later he believes it was a "blessing in disguise" because it opened a door for him to discover a sport he loved – and could invest in.

"It is a butterfly effect," Jackson said. "Going into the seventh-grade year, I really just wanted to play a sport. I wasn't into tennis for the long run. I really started to get serious about tennis in my ninth-grade year. It was more just wanting to play a sport. Looking back on it, it was one of the best decisions of my life."