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Georgia's Gullickson Keeps on Rolling, Tops No. 1 Seed

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Special to [NCAA.com](#)

ATHENS, Ga. - Georgia's dual-match season ended May 15 in the second round of the NCAA Division I Women's Tennis Championships, but Chelsey Gullickson was just getting started.

She had already qualified for the singles and doubles tournaments and went to coach Jeff Wallace with a request. She wanted to make the most of her time before she had to hit the court again May 26.

"When we lost, it hurt a lot, but I told Jeff, 'Let's just do two-a-days. Just kick my butt. Let's go for it,'" Gullickson said. "I was doing two-a-days ... every day. That definitely helped out a lot."

Gullickson won her fourth consecutive tournament match by upsetting top-seeded Irina Falconi of Georgia Tech 6-2, 6-4 on Saturday to reach the semifinals at the Dan Magill Tennis Complex.

"I know she was excited about this tournament, and she made that statement right away," Wallace said. "She was: 'Put it to me. Work me hard. I need to get ready for this.' As a coach, that's what you want your athletes to be thinking."

Gullickson will meet Stanford's Hilary Barte in the semis. Barte, who led the Cardinal to the team championship, defeated Miami's Bianca Eichkorn 6-4, 6-4.

In the other semifinal, third-seeded Maria Sanchez of Southern California will play second-seeded Jana Juricova of California.

Once Georgia fell, Gullickson, who lost in the semis last year, and her coaches put all their effort into preparing for the singles and doubles. They scrambled for practice courts at the intramural fields and Athens Country Club and went out for two two-hour sessions a day, often practicing at 9 a.m. and then going back at 1 or 2 p.m.

They went back to the basics, with Wallace making Gullickson work on her shotmaking and building points. He stressed that she couldn't use her power to win every point, and she sometimes hit with Luis Flores, a former Georgia men's player.

"She's had a great attitude and wanted to work and was very determined," Wallace said. "When you have an athlete like that, I feel like good things can happen. I was very optimistic about what she'd be able to do in this tournament, and now you look at these two days, and she's played maybe two of her best matches she's played [at Georgia]."

Gullickson, seeded 9-16, eliminated Florida's seventh-seeded Allie Will 6-1, 6-4 on Friday.

Falconi had two two-set victories over Gullickson this year, but that wasn't obvious Saturday.

Falling back on what she learned in her late-season boot camp, Gullickson broke Falconi in the first set and won four consecutive games. In the second set, Gullickson fell behind 4-2, broke Falconi's serve once again and then relied on her power and shotmaking to win the final three games.

"Losing 4-2, I just tried to stay positive," Gullickson said. "(Assistant coach) Frank (Polito) and Jeff were helping me. I tried to stick to my game plan. She stepped up her game a little bit more in the second set. I knew if I just kept on making balls, just hitting my targets and everything, I'd be OK. The crowd helped me out a lot."

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Falconi had won 23 consecutive matches dating to Feb. 13 and finished her sophomore season 40-3.

"She came out firing," Falconi said. "The ball was really big for her. She was hitting her spots and hitting big shots. I wasn't able to do much with that. That was the biggest difference."

Reaching the semifinals are especially rewarding for Gullickson, the daughter of former major league pitcher Bill Gullickson. She started the season ranked second, but three early-season losses dropped her to No. 14. She finished the regular season No. 12 and with eight losses.

"I've had a difficult season a little bit with some losses here and there, but just as this tournament started, I feel like my biggest thing is confidence," Gullickson said. "I have confidence moving, hitting through my shots, going for my winners, and I'm staying positive throughout the whole match."

Gullickson and partner Nadja Gilchrist advanced to the doubles semifinals with a 6-2, 6-1 victory over Notre Dame's Kristy Frilling and Kali Krisik. They will play Tennessee's top-seeded team of Natalie Pluskota and Caitlin Whoriskey on Sunday.

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