

Two years ago, Trevor Davis and Gavin Robles never would have imagined they would play tennis in college.

At the time, the New Hope High School students were focused on other things and didn't know much – if anything – about the sport.

A lot can change in 24 months, though.

On Wednesday, Davis and Robles celebrated how far they have come in a short period of time when they announced their decisions to play tennis at Mississippi University for Women and Hinds Community College, respectively, in a signing ceremony at New Hope High.

“The biggest challenge for them will be the pace of the game, which is the same challenge for anyone moving from high school to college,” New Hope High tennis coach David Grady said. “They are going to play older people, and they’re going to have to get very fast and very strong in a hurry, but they’re tough kids, and I think they will adjust really well to the college tennis game.”

Grady, his wife, Monica, who is an assistant tennis coach, and Karen Clay, who is university counsel at The W and a volunteer tennis coach at New Hope High, had hands in helping Davis and Robles make the next step. There also were plenty of fortuitous moments along the way that helped them extend their tennis careers.

Davis overcame multiple foot surgeries and plenty of hours in physical therapy. He said the time he spent recovering influenced his decision to study kinesiology and convinced him he wanted to help others bounce back from injuries.

Davis said his path to The W became clearer after he applied to the school's Honors College and received the Centennial Scholarship, the school's most prestigious scholarship that covers the cost of full tuition, room and board and a small book stipend.

With his academic path laid out, Davis realized he wanted to continue to play tennis, which he started playing as a junior. He reached out to Daniel Talley, the former tennis coach at New Hope High who is now the tennis coach and compliance director at The W, and Clay to explore his options.

"I never really got to play sports in high school, and when I did get to play tennis, I enjoyed it," said Davis, who primarily played boys and mixed doubles this past season. "When I realized The W had a tennis team and the coach gave me the chance, I took it. I am grateful for it. I wasn't expecting it at all."

Davis anticipates college tennis will be a lot harder and require a bigger investment of his time, but he said he is eager to take on the challenge, especially considering how much he has improved in the last two years.

"I feel my last two years of high school I really put forth much more effort," said Davis, who also thanked his mother, Jessica,

for supporting every decision he made in high school. “The last two years balancing academics and athletics has not necessarily fully prepared me for the transition to college, but it has given me an idea. I think I can do it. I am just going to have to try harder.”

Robles likely would not have realized an opportunity at Hinds C.C. if his brother, Gunner, an eighth-grader at New Hope Middle School, hadn’t “begged” him to take him to Lake Lowndes State Park to play pickleball and tennis. Gavin said he knew his brother didn’t have anyone to play with and that he always told his brother no, but one day he said yes, which opened the door to him falling in love with tennis.

“Since then, it has been my goal to play tennis in college,” Gavin said.

It helped that Gunner bought rackets for himself and Gavin, which fueled their development. Gavin said he didn’t know any of the rules or how to keep score in tennis, but he said players on the New Hope High team helped him learn about the sport when he was at Lake Lowndes with Gunner.

Since those initial steps, Robles has gone from zero to 60 in a short amount of time. He said it was “crazy” to him that he could start on the New Hope team after playing only a few months.

“I couldn’t even keep the ball in the court (when I first started playing),” said Robles, who wants to go to law school and may

study History or Criminal Justice. “I have definitely gotten better since then.”

Robles said he met the Hinds C.C. tennis coach a few months prior to a Freshman Friday event at the school. He said he then took another tour of the school, which is when he received an offer to play on the team.

“It is definitely going to be a big difference,” Robles said. “I am practicing probably four times a week, and I know it is going to be six or seven times a week at Hinds. I probably will have to fix my diet a little bit. It will be tougher playing against harder opponents, but I am definitely ready for the challenge. I think my work ethic is up there. I think I will be able to outwork anybody and be ready for anybody I play.”

Grady said both players have the right mind-set and work ethic to succeed.

“Gavin picked tennis up really fast,” Grady said. “He is at the courts somewhere almost every day. Trevor is the same way. He picked it up real fast and was a utility player for us. I think they are going to represent New Hope well at the next level.”