The University of South Alabama women’s tennis team won the Sun Belt Conference Championship last weekend, defeating Texas State, Louisiana-Monroe and Texas-Arlington en route to its first conference title since 2003.

**USA 4, TXSU 1**

On Friday, the No. 1 seed Lady Jags defeated No. 8 seed Texas State 4-1 on the singles courts. The teams did not finish the final singles match or play the doubles matches, as USA had already clinched the match. Texas State finished the year 9-7.

 "Coming off last weekend, we lost two heart-breaking matches," USA head coach Jaco Keyser said. "To put that behind us and take on a Texas State team that played at a pretty high level today, absorb that and come out with a win, I was very impressed."

Laura Valkova started the day for the Jaguars with a 6-3, 6-2 win on court No. 1.

"We always talk about putting some scoreboard pressure on, and today it was Laura (Valkova)," Keyser said. "Whoever can get on up on the scoreboard, win matches and build pressure on the rest of the points, that's huge for us. It's huge for any team out there."

Laura Matuskova was the next to finish, adding a 6-2, 6-2 win on court No. 6. Monica Mitta (6-4, 6-2) won in straight sets on the second court, then Michaela Meszarosova won 6-3, 0-6, 7-5 on the fourth court to seal the win for South Alabama.

"Michaela is a great competitor," Keyser said. "Sometimes she gets a little distracted along the way, but today she was able to dig in and take on a player who played a really quality match. For her to squeeze that out, that's pretty impressive."

**USA 4, ULM 3**

On Saturday, the Jaguars defeated No. 4-seeded Louisiana-Monroe 4-3 in the semifinals matchup to earn a spot in the conference finals. The two teams split the singles matches 3-3, but South Alabama swept the three doubles matches to take a 4-3 victory.

Laura Valkova was again the first Jaguar to earn a singles victory, defeating Amy Olivier 2-6, 6-1, 6-3 on the first court. Laura Matuskova then added a straight-set victory on the sixth court (6-1, 6-0), and Emily Newton took a court three win, 6-7 (6-8), 7-5, 6-4 to tie the score at 3-3.

"That was impressive," USA head coach Jaco Keyser said of Newton's performance. "Any time you can bounce back from a first set like that and, under crisis, trust and keep trying to execute your game plan takes a lot of mental toughness. That's something she's grown with in the last year or two."

"It was a good first set, it was really tight, so I knew the second set was going to be tight too if I was going to win it," Newton said. "I just tried to stay the course and play my game. I knew she had some gaps in her backhand that would eventually break down; I tried to attack that. And when Laura Matuskova came out and won her second set, it was huge that she got on and off the court; it gave me some momentum."

Mary Angela Martin and Michaela Meszarosova won the first doubles game 6-1 for the Jaguars, then Monica Mitta and Paula Sanchez added a 6-2 win to clinch the Jags’ spot in the conference finals.

**USA 4, UTA 3**

On Sunday, the Jaguars earned their first conference title in 12 years, defeating No. 2 seed Texas-Arlington 4-3 in another hard-fought game.

The Jags’ 17th conference title is the most in Sun Belt history, and earns South Alabama an automatic bid in the NCAA Tournament. UTA finished its season 16-6.

"It's been a while, so this is probably one of the most emotional conference wins I've ever had as a player or a coach just because we've come a long way," said USA head coach Jaco Keyser, who earned his second conference championship as a head coach. "I honestly believed we deserved this conference tournament; there's no one who works harder than this team in this conference, I know that for a fact. For them to be rewarded is pretty satisfying.

South Alabama again split the singles games 3-3 and took both doubles games to win the Sun Belt title.

Mary Angela Martin (7-5, 7-6 (7-1)), Monica Mitta (6-4, 2-6, 6-1) and Michaela Meszarosova (7-5, 3-6, 7-5) took singles wins for South Alabama, while the teams of Laura Valkova and Emily Newton (8-3), and Mary Angela Martin and Michaela Meszarosova (8-5) won in doubles.

"We played good doubles, that's our strength," Keyser stated. "I was surprised that we jumped on them in singles, but they're a good team and I knew they were going to come back. I thought we might squeeze them for a while, but that was wishful thinking; UT Arlington is a tough team, every time it comes down to the last match. It probably went as scripted."