

## **FSU Women's Tennis Star Petra Hule Closing Out Her Decorated Career With NCAA Tournament**

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. -- To become one of the best women's tennis players in Florida State history, Petra Hule first had to be convinced on the idea of going to college.

Even after graduating high school, the Adelaide, Australia native perceived turning professional to be the better option. Hule's reasoning made sense, especially in 2017, four years prior to NIL going into effect.

As a pro, she would immediately make money. She would never have to pick up a book again. She would fulfill her dream. So why potentially waste multiple years in college while having to worry about homework and studying?

Taking an official visit to FSU late in the recruiting process helped Hule change her perspective.

"Once I saw the opportunities and the possibilities, I think that really shifted my mindset," Hule told the Democrat. "The facilities here, how could anyone not take advantage of this while getting a degree? While being able to travel and play. And having such a rigorous schedule so that during the time that I would still be in school, I would be playing elite tennis. So when I looked at it that way, I was like, 'Why wouldn't you?'"

Hule ultimately joining the Seminoles paid off. She's now one of the more renowned players in college tennis. The International Tennis Association pegs Hule as the nation's No. 3 singles player, which is the highest individual ranking ever at FSU. Hule and partner Anna Arkadianou are ITA's No. 16 doubles pairing.

With the postseason ahead, Hule has a chance to finish her five-year Seminole career as the program's all-time leader in career wins. Her 200 career wins (95 singles, 105 doubles) rank second behind Andrea Garcia's 206. Garcia and Hule were both part of the golden age in FSU women's tennis. They helped lead the Seminoles to their first two Elite Eight appearances in 2018 and 2021. Hule has been nearly perfect in singles play this season, boasting a 21-1 record in such matches.

"She's a problem solver," said FSU women's tennis coach Jennifer Hyde. "She knows what she needs to do to adapt and adjust in situations in competition. She always puts the work in Monday through Friday.

"But when she's in competition mode and she's out there on her own competing, she problem solves as good as anybody we've coached. And that's what the champions do. You've got to make adjustments. You've got to adapt on the fly.

"She is as good of a ball striker as anyone who has come through this program."

No. 35 FSU (14-10) earned its fifth straight NCAA Tournament bid and will first play No. 42 Florida International (17-4) at 11 a.m. Saturday in the Gainesville Regional. If the Seminoles come away with the victory, they will face the winner of No. 16 Florida (19-6) and South Alabama (22-4) at 1 p.m. Sunday.

Following the conclusion of the team championship, Hule will partake in the NCAA's singles and doubles championships. Those tournaments are scheduled for May 23-28 at the Khan Outdoor Tennis Complex in Champaign, Ill.

"I'm very excited for this NCAA teams weekend coming up," Hule said. "We've worked very hard. I've been through the ups and downs throughout the season. So that's special that we get to experience that as a team. And just seeing how far we can go with that. FIU first and then I'm assuming the Gators.

“First up, FIU is fun. We haven’t played them, so that’s a good match. I’m looking forward to that. And then the postseason, just getting ready for the last tournament. It’s my first time competing in one, so I’m very excited.”

### **Petra Hule started playing tennis with plastic baseball bats**

From an early age, Petra and her older sister, Chloe, knew they wanted to play tennis.

But they didn’t always have access to the proper equipment. They started playing tennis with plastic baseball bats. And sometimes, they would even practice by whacking a tetherball back and forth with those bats. Raised by their mother, Angela, in a single-parent home, the two sisters were limited financially.

“We had a really tough childhood growing up,” Chloe said. “Our finances weren’t always the best. We weren’t always in that very financially accessible situation where we could access a lot of tournaments internationally or in Europe, Asia and America. So we really had to make the most of what we had in Australia and be the best of the best really.”

Given their situation, Chloe understood the benefits of playing college tennis. Traveling for tournaments as an up-and-coming professional can be costly. College tennis programs instead offer access to an education, facilities, equipment, travel, scheduling, lodging, coaching and more.

So Chloe moved to the United States to play for the University of Colorado. She said she became the first member of the Hule family to graduate from an American college, ending her collegiate career at TCU in the 2019-2020 season.

Having such a positive experience prompted Chloe to persuade Petra to follow the same path.

“I said to her, ‘You want to go professional, right?’” Chloe said. “And she said, ‘Yes, I want to travel and want to do all these different bits and pieces.’ And I said, ‘Right. Well, at the moment, our mom has probably one more chance to go to the bank and max out on a credit card. She will be able to give you that credit card, and you will be able to do one more trip.’”

“I put it to her in perspective, ‘You’ve got one shot at making it right at such a young age. Do you think you can do it? And do you think afterwards, you can financially withstand what comes next?’”

Petra had nothing to risk when it came to visiting schools. The NCAA permits high school recruits to take five official visits that are expensed by the university. Oklahoma State and TCU were among other schools that Petra considered, but one trip to FSU proved to be enough.

“What enticed me the most was learning about not just the school, but the athletics program,” Petra said. “Especially working with the coaches. That’s what made a difference when I was choosing where I wanted to go. I saw it as a place where I could learn and grow not just as an athlete, but as a person and a student.”

### **Mentally tough**

Hyde pinpointed one aspect of Hule’s game that stands out among the rest.

“She is so mentally tough,” Hyde said. “Mentally, she is a thoroughbred. That is what the separator is in college. She’s been forced to do that and has risen. It’s been so fun to see how – we talk so much about mental fortitude in college tennis on game days. She has exhibited that time and time again.”

Maybe Hule’s toughness came from her tough childhood. Or maybe it came naturally. Regardless, it’s helped her piece together a nearly perfect spring singles season. At 21-1, Hule’s only singles loss came to top-ranked Virginia star Emma Navarro.

And Hule has since won nine consecutive singles matches. She's 4-1 against players ranked among the top 16 nationally.

"This kid has been taking everyone's best shot every single time she steps on the court," Hyde said. "And sustaining that pressure over five months is not easy. She's made for it. They say that old cliché of, 'You can't find the diamonds unless there is pressure activating.' Well, it's been activated. And the diamond is definitely there and rising to the top here."

This postseason, Hule has a chance to add to her decorated career. She will stay in Tallahassee while pursuing the professional tennis career that she delayed five years ago. Looking back on her time at FSU, Hule knows she made the right decision.

"At first, I didn't want to go to college," Hule said. "So I was like, 'OK, if I'm going to go anywhere, I'm going to go here. This is where I want to do it.' So it means a lot, because it's given me the opportunity to play and get a degree. But also learn and meet so many new people.

"That's why it means so much. It's been with me through some of my most good times, but also bad times."