

SOUTH BAY

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Sylvano Product Playing Beyond Age

He said it back in August, and now he's now watching his prophesy fulfill itself.

"She moved here last month, and now she's living in Sunnyvale," **Sylvano Simone** told *IT* last August of **Ayaka Okuno**, formerly of Plano, Texas. "And I'm teaching her a lot—that's the scary part."

Seven months later, things haven't gotten any less frightening for the Sylvano Tennis Academy product. Okuno, 12, reached the Orange Bowl quarters and just won the USTA 14s National Open.

"I'm going to put her in 18s," said Simone. "She plays all my 18-

year-olds already. I have girls that are Nos. 5, 10, and 20 in 18s and she's there already."

The seventh grader is a five-star blue chip recruit according to tennisrecruiting.net and has moved up to No. 18 in the country. She's No. 7 in the tennisinformation.com's national junior standings and rising fast enough that a Japanese sports magazine made the trip across the Pacific to see Okuno first-hand.

"Actually, I like it," Okuno, who moved to America at age five, said of the attention. "It feels like you're really growing up."

Kepler Caps '07 with No. 1 40s Ranking

It was an action-filled Sunday that Seascape Sports Club director of tennis **Rick Kepler** will not forget any time soon.

Kepler, who each year oversees the Comerca Challenger at his Aptos club, played seven matches, including six pro sets, on December 1 at the USTA 40s National Hard Court Championships, competing in the men's singles, men's doubles, mixed doubles and father-son doubles.

"Luckily, they have a trainer on sight, because I'm not paying attention to my body," Kepler said. "It's really like I'm on the pro tour for a week."

Capping a year that included a No. 1 men's 40 doubles national finish with teammate **Brian Cory**, a No. 4 mark in the country in the year-end father-son rankings with 16-year-old **Jordan Kepler**, and a No. 12 finish in the final men's 40 singles standings nationally — Rick saved his best for last.

He won his 10th career gold ball — a mixed doubles title with partner **Erika Smith** of Oakland, while still managing to reach the quarter-finals in the 40s singles and father-son doubles and the consolation finals in the men's 40s doubles — despite the fact that his partner Cory was playing with a detached biceps tendon and tears in his labrum and rotator cuff.

"I wanted to prove to guys I could do it," Kepler said. Mission accomplished.

Baseliner's Birthday: Carmel Valley Camp Hits Double Digits

The Carmel Valley Junior Tennis Camp turns 10 this summer. Eleven and half years after **Steve Proulx** and **Susan Reeder** bought 38 acres in Monterey County, the Cachagua Road haven is now bordering on landmark status.

"There was nothing here," Reeder recalled. "At the time the tennis business was down and we put everything we owned into 38 acres."

Adopting a camp that began in '71 behind the Carmel Valley RC, Proulx and Reeder have since transformed the program — which now boasts over 350 kids every summer — on their Carmel Valley estate.

"It's incredible," Reeder said. "Phenomenal. We've got the best jobs in the world. We have gained tremendous joy, a tremendous state of accomplishment. We've never built anything. We're not developers."

But build and develop they have. What started as four courts, a dorm and a dining hall has become so much more. In '07, the Proulx and

Everything's Coming Up Aces

If there's such thing as a tennis missionary, **Gene Fortino** is it. The 42-year-old father of two, who doubles as the Monta Vista H.S. girls' and Willow Glen H.S. boys' coach, spends his free time tutoring tennis pro bono.

"A lot of people think I'm kind of crazy," said Fortino, the head coach and founder of the Blossom Hill Aces. "But we all have our passions."

The Aces, a girls' 18s USTA club team, is Fortino's.

"It's a team I've had for years.

It started off almost being my high school team," said Fortino, a long-time coach at Leigh H.S. "Then it just spread."

Most recently, it's spread unstopably toward success. The nearly decade-old Aces, who assemble when school ends in June, have won the NorCal title the last four years and Gar Glenny Cup three of the last four. Past aces include **Mia Giovanetti** (UC-Santa Barbara), **Courtney Hull** (Santa

Clara University), **Anna Guzman** (San Jose State) and **Cassandra Borjon** (San Jose State). Current high school seniors include **Haley Hemm** (UNC), **Kerri Kummer** (San Jose State), **Courtney Kilarski** (Ston Hall), **Katie Mulloy** (UC-San Diego), **Katharine Dicconson**



Gene Fortino's Blossom Hill Aces.

(Davidson) and **Cassie Bergeson** (Florida Atlantic).

"Some of the top players don't want to play on high school teams," Fortino said. "It's really important. It is an individualistic sport, and sometimes there's a lot of pressure, expectations. Playing on a team is kind of fun. I like to see the team environment."

Enough to turn down a payday. "It's just kind of a passion I have," Fortino said. "It's fun."

Reeder added their sixth court, expanded their staff to 14 and now



CVTC added its sixth court in '07, and expanded its staff to 14.

boast an interactive map of the site they call home.

"Obviously, we're very proud of

the facility," Reeder said. "We've learned a tremendous amount. Our numbers are more, but our roles haven't changed. The only things we're not doing is mowing the lawn, taking care of the pool, and we're not building fences anymore. That's where it's changed."

As for the camp, it's the same fun-loving, expert-run program it was 10 years ago. "We Love what we do, but on the same hand, we have a tremendous amount of responsibility," Reeder said.

"It's kind of like a great game of tennis, we don't just walk out on court without practicing."

Fair Oaks West Apartments

March Madness, take a number. February took over the Madness moniker this year, as Fair Oaks West Apartments' men's 9.5 team maneuvered its way through a field of 46 to win the USTA League Combo Doubles Section Championships at the Gold River RC on Feb. 1.

The three-day event was shortened to just one due to the threat of rain, and the men from Fair Oaks West adjusted just fine. Playing with a modified format of shorter pro-sets, the team — led by **Girish Satya** and **David Helleck** — followed up a '07 District title with the section crown.