

ADVANTAGE ALL INVOLVED IN NJTL TRENTON'S TENNIS PROGRAM

By L.A. Parker, The Trentonian ~ August 29, 2015

Readers of this article will need an understanding of this tennis term.

Advantage: the player who wins the point after deuce has "advantage" and will win the game if she wins the following point. The name of the player with advantage is called to indicate who has the decisive point.

Advantage Kallah Masudi, a Trenton resident in full enjoyment of life, opportunity, passion and the advantages available for any child who joins the National Junior Tennis & Learning of Trenton program.

Advantage Masudi and NJTL Trenton tomorrow night as the 17-year-old and city share the spotlight when she serves as keynote speaker at the 15th annual USTA Foundation Opening Night Gala at the US Open being held at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Flushing, N.Y.

Masudi celebrates her birthday that same night. Can you say party dress?

"I spoke at the (NJTL of Trenton) gala during the Spring. There were some people there and they liked what I had to say," noted Masudi, a Foundation Academy (Trenton) graduate headed off to Rutgers-Newark.

Masudi signed on as an eight year old and stayed throughout her high school years. She laughed about how NJTL of Trenton had offered transformation.

Masudi arrived to NJTL of Trenton as a young girl who had attempted gymnastics, soccer and sang with her older sister, Kira, in the Trenton Children's Chorus.

"I rarely spoke to anyone during those early days at NJTL. There were other kids there who had been friends and part of the program. I felt like an outsider and rarely spoke to anyone during those early days," Masudi recalled.

Advantage Masudi whose introversion made her a perfect understudy for a NJTL of Trenton program that manifests strengthening the character and enhancing the lives of youth by providing opportunities and instruction in nutrition, education and tennis.

"First, I was this shy eight-year-old kid standing by myself on a tennis court and now I'm getting ready to give the keynote speech at the U.S. Open gala," Masudi noted.

"A lot of this happened because NJTL coaches and the program helped me grow out of my shell. Playing tennis gave me confidence. I went from not talking to not being able to shut me up," Masudi joked.

Of course, Masudi had accomplices, with two parents, mother Najah, and father, Aziz, who made the Masudi siblings attempt a variety of activities.

Najah Masudi discovered myriad activities available for Trenton children.

"My parents double-teamed us. My mother always encouraged us to try new things. My father was the guy who kept us involved even when we were not in the mood to dance, sing, or play soccer and tennis," Masudi said.

Two parents involved in a child's life offers a distinct advantage but NJTL of Trenton celebrates a history of grooming success for children who exist in a variety of life circumstances.

Some arrive as members of single parent homes or being raised by other family members. Many reside in neighborhoods wrecked by violence, drugs and other urban challenges.

Rob Howland, executive director for the NJTL of Trenton, noted the Cadwalader-based tennis program has impacted thousands.



The Cadwalader tennis complex ranks as one of the top U.S. junior tennis facilities including a nationally recognized short-court program.

"In reality, our program could help so many more children. We just need parents to get their kids here," Howland said.

Masudi, who received an \$8,000 scholarship from the USTA Foundation and a scholarship stipend from NJTL of Trenton, shares advantages with other students.

Jim and Connie Clovis offered scholarships to Karina Almanza (Stockton University, Jr.), Adeline Beaza (Penn State, Fr.) and Gabriella Snead (George Washington, Sr.).

The Geisel family awarded scholarships to Jeannella Williams, Shenandoah Univ., So.) and Kahmiya Htoo (Mercer County Community College-Fr.),

Charles Evans Foundation provided scholarships to Axe Owens (Chestnut Hill College, Sr.), Chinwe Oriji (Univ. of Texas- 2nd year PHD program), Kristi Chanda (The College of New Jersey, Jr.), and Nu-Kemeni Kermah (Fairleigh Dickenson, So.).

NJTL former and current students, some of them current instructors received more than \$20,000 in scholarship support through the tennis organization.

Masudi plans to play tennis at Rutgers but her education dreams include a double major in mathematics and chemistry.

However, first the speech.

"It's written and being edited," Masudi said.

"I'm sticking to what's on the pages because I could easily get off topic and talk about how great my parents are, my sister (Rutgers-Newark senior) and the opportunities I gained by joining the NJTL (of Trenton)."

Contact www.njtlsoftrenton.com and find out more about a city organization that offers advantages that change lives.

Advantage you.

L.A. Parker is a Trentonian columnist. Reach him at laparker@trentonian.com. Twitter @laparker6.

