

# TRIPLE THREAT

## Freshman triplets leave their mark on varsity tennis team

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associate editor

“I’m the funny one,” Fauziya says. “No...” Nephthys and Balkis say, laughing. Moving in unison and perfectly staggered one behind the other, three freshman — triplets Fauziya, Balkis and Nephthys Prothro — playfully bicker over their self-proclaimed superlatives before varsity tennis practice begins.

Nephthys shakes her head in disagreement, and Balkis chimes in over Fauziya’s explanation.

“No, I don’t agree with that,” Balkis says. “I think I’m the funniest one, the prettiest one, the smartest one and, technically, the cutest one.”

The 14-year-olds have played together since they were 10, learning at the Frontenac Racquet Tennis Club. As they improved, the triplets started playing in matches for the United States Tennis Association. Now, in addition to high school tennis, they play in more competitive matches through Universal Tennis Ranking Tournaments, which is a system that ranks tennis players based on their skills and match results.

“At first I didn’t like [tennis] at all,” Balkis said. “We stopped going to our coach for a year and just went to random places and clinics. Then I started to like it more as it got more competitive again.”

In addition to playing on the Ladue team, the triplets play club soccer throughout the week and coach tennis for children ages 5-11 at the Frontenac Racquet Tennis Club on the weekends. Balancing sports with school has been a new challenge for the triplets, but they have learned time management skills.

“I usually finish my homework between the five minute passing periods,” Fauziya said. “I don’t have a lot of time to do homework, and I don’t like to stay up late, so I try to finish it when teachers aren’t teaching. It has been manageable.”

However, being a triplet comes with a lot of competition, playful or not. Everything is a race to be the best. The girls are learning to balance their competitiveness.

Varsity tennis coach Margaret Shapiro has helped the girls separate friendly challenges with real competition. She had to warn the girls that with the way tennis ranking works in practice, they will have to play one another.

“We had to build up to it and understand that no matter what the outcome is, it’s all in support of us being a team,”

Shapiro said. “It doesn’t matter if somebody is ahead or behind. It’s all to make our team better.”

Shapiro coaches tennis outside of Ladue, so she met the triplets when they were much younger and was excited to see them finally make it to Ladue’s program.

“I knew that they were in the pipeline to come,” Shapiro said. “When they walked up, I was like, ‘oh my gosh, this is the year that I can coach them.’ It was fun to see them finally grown enough to be in high school.”

Shapiro admitted that it took her and the rest of the team around two weeks to tell them apart. Despite being fraternal, the triplets share similar features and characteristics. The girls themselves came to tryouts worried about how their team would react.

“I was just hoping that they wouldn’t get us mixed up,” Nephthys said. “What if I beat someone but [Coach Shapiro] puts one of them down for winning [a match] instead of me.”

Eventually, the team figured out which triplet was which. While they’re strikingly similar, they have some differences. The girls say Nephthys is more reserved, Fauziya is more outgoing and Balkis, Nephthys claims, is the “mom.”

“They bring cohesion to the team — a sense of unity,” Shapiro said. “Everybody enjoys them so

much that it makes our team dynamic much easier. And, the fact that they’re family just makes it better for some reason.”

Teammate Megan Ouyang noticed the triplets have a relationship like no other, and their bond represents the strength of family. Ouyang, a junior, explains that although they act like normal siblings, they have something special.

“They [have] a very special kind of sibling relationship,” Ouyang said. “They tease each other like regular siblings do, but they’re really close.”

All three sisters hope to play tennis for as long as they can, aspiring to play professionally. With the same goals in mind, the three of them are able to enjoy the journey together.

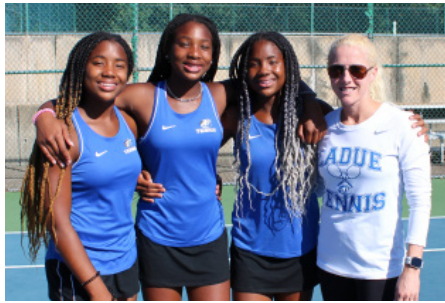
Even though being a triplet isn’t easy, the three of them know it’s a strength. At times, their competitiveness as triplets is overwhelming, but they are learning to channel the motivation from playing one another into every other match.

“Being triplets itself hasn’t really been hard, it’s the pressure of ‘who’s the best’ that isn’t great,” Fauziya said. “I need to focus on winning more in general, not just beating them. I usually play my best when I’m playing them, but I need to start playing my best every game.”



**LEFT:** Freshmen Nephthys, Fauziya and Balkis Prothro laugh together at a match Sept. 23. The triplets played against John Burroughs School. “We have good time management; we always get our work done,” Balkis said. “We balance everything out.”

**BOTTOM:** Freshmen Fauziya, Balkis and Nephthys Prothro smile with coach Margaret Shapiro. The triplets have been playing tennis for four years. “I plan on playing tennis every day and continue to get better,” Nephthys said. (Photos by Sophia Liu and Ginger Schulte)



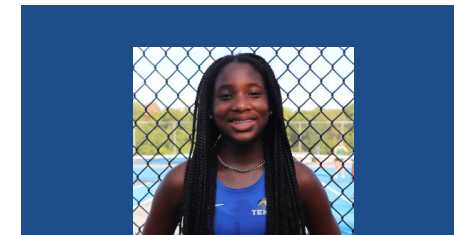
**BALKIS PROTHRO**



**FAUZIYA PROTHRO**

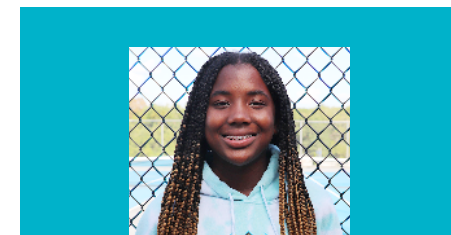


**NEPHTHYS PROTHRO**



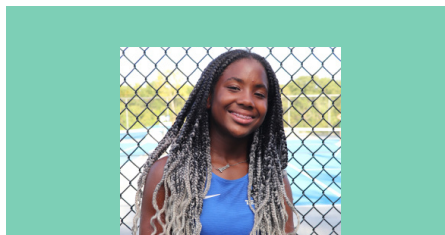
**“The Mom One”**

- The oldest
- Knows French
- Center midfield in soccer
- Favorite stroke: forehand
- Favorite food: seafood
- Favorite color: teal



**“The Outgoing One”**

- The middle
- Knows sign language
- Center defense in soccer
- Favorite stroke: slice
- Favorite food: seafood
- Favorite color: red



**“The Shy One”**

- The youngest
- Knows Italian
- Forward in soccer
- Favorite stroke: backhand
- Favorite food: scallops
- Favorite color: mint green