TRIPLE THREAT

Freshman triplets leave their mark on varsity tennis team

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I’m the funny one,” Fauziya says.

“No...” Nephthys and Balkis say, laughing.

Moving in unison and perfectly staggered one behind the other, three freshmen — 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 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 match-es through Universal Tennis Rating Tournaments, which is a system that ranks tennis players based on their skills and match results.

“At first I didn’t like [ten-nis] 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. As they improved, 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 fun is that they’re family just makes it better for some reasons.”

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.

However, being a triplet comes with a lot of competition, 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.”

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I like being a triplet, but I would want to see how it is by myself. I think I would be really different.

FAUZIYA PROTHRO | FRESHMAN

FAUZIYA PROTHRO

“Mom One”

• The oldest
• Knows sign language
• Center midfield in soccer
• Favorite stroke: forehand
• Favorite food: seafood
• Favorite color: teal

BALKIS PROTHRO

“The Outgoing One”

• The middle
• Knows French
• Center defense in soccer
• Favorite stroke: slice
• Favorite food: seafood
• Favorite color: red

NEPHTHYS PROTHRO

“The Shy One”

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