

So, what's the racket about Frank Gianni?

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NPBS junior overcomes competition, brain surgery to soar in local tennis ranks

Anissa Gardizy, Staff Writer • April 27, 2017 •





Frank Yanni gets ready to hit a tennis ball

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TOWAMENCIN – Frank Yanni, the SOL Conference Tennis Champion, didn't start playing tennis at a young age like most standout athletes. It all started when he was twelve years old, and he expressed an interest in playing tennis after constantly watching matches on television.

"I was just watching tennis on T.V, and said 'Wow, I want to play that.' My parents didn't introduce me to the sport, it was my choice," said Yanni.

Luckily, he had supportive parents who let him explore his interest in tennis while also playing basketball and baseball. However, when Yanni reached a certain age, he had to choose which sport he was going to invest most of his time in.

Yanni chose to pursue tennis, mostly because of the individual aspect of the game. Along with sports like golf, track and field, or gymnastics, tennis is a sport that is dependent mostly on an individual's performance.

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— Frank Yanni

“I like tennis because it's all me. If I'm making a mistake I have to own up to it myself. My performance is something I control,” said Yanni.

However, Yanni also enjoys the team aspect of the game, something he misses while playing outside tournaments.

“I do miss the team aspect of high school tennis when I go to tournaments alone, but overall I just love the nature of the game,” said Yanni.

All of Yanni's successes on the tennis court make it hard to believe that just 3 years ago, he had brain surgery. It was in 8th grade during a check-up from the school nurse when Yanni was told he might have scoliosis.

“It is uncommon for a boy to have scoliosis in eighth grade, so I went to the doctors at CHOP to get checked out. They had me do a two hour MRI, which was brutal, and they noticed there was liquid being blocked from going to my brain- it was going down my back,” said Yanni.

Yanni had Chiari Malformation, a condition that is prevalent at birth, but often not discovered until adolescence, according to the National Institution of Health. When Yanni was told he was going to need surgery, it came as a shock.

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“I didn't think it was that big of a deal until the moment my doctor said, 'The best option is to have brain surgery',” said Yanni.

The night before his surgery, Yanni was hitting tennis balls in his driveway, a true indicator of his passion for the sport. After surgery, Yanni came to school for half days, and he didn't return to tennis for three months. However, Yanni kept up with his tennis training the way he

began loving the game in the first place, by watching it on television.

“I couldn’t play after surgery, but I could watch it on television. It helps my game to watch the strategies of other players, analyze their decisions, and look at their footwork,” said Yanni.

Sometimes, overcoming a serious injury is tough, and some athletes might end up giving up their sport. However, as Yanni pushed through his rehab, he felt that it really tested his passion for the game.

“You have to stay patient, and it gets really tiring when you are waiting to play. However, it is good to have that break, because it proves how much you love your sport,” said Yanni.

Now that Yanni is the SOL Conference Champion, he is looking to play well in the District Tournament this weekend so that he can have a chance at going to the State Tournament. With his eyes set on playing tennis in college as well, it is safe to say that when 12 year old Yanni said, “Wow, I want to play that”, he made the right choice.