

Capriati's success encourages teachers

With Jennifer Capriati in the tennis spotlight these days, area teaching professionals generally see her emergence into the pro ranks at such a young age as a good thing.

Two weeks ago, the 13-year-old Floridian became the youngest player since the Open era began in 1968 to reach the finals of a major tournament. The eighth grader won \$28,000 at the Virginia Slims of Florida.

The area teaching professionals share the common job of working with youngsters the same age or younger than Capriati. The consensus of the pros was they were encouraged by her playing professionally.

"Chris Evert began when she was young and made a career for herself," says Sue Simcox of the West End YMCA. "It didn't really hurt her. I think if she can

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TENNIS

be on the top of the world at 13, there's no reason why she shouldn't go for it.

"If Capriati is that talented and doing that well, it's because she loves what she's doing. I think it's a fantastic opportunity for her."

Ron Wesbrooks, the former Lamar University men's coach, saw Capriati play two years ago. He witnessed her winning a major national tournament at 12 years old and beating girls who were 18.

"At the time," he recalls, "she

had the mechanics and skills of an 18-year-old player. She had the technique, the balance. It was all there. I think it's a tough life out there, but there was nowhere else for her to play.

"She could've stayed in juniors and beat players she's already beaten. She would stagnate in that situation."

Stagnation is the least of the pros worries when it concerns Capriati or any other young player. All of them are worried about her becoming burned out at such an early age.

"It's a matter of letting her grow up at her own pace," says Jeffery Herr of the Beaumont Country Club. "From what I've heard, they let her be a kid off the court and that's important. It looks like she's got the talent and as long as they keep everything in perspective, she has a good future."

Ian Griffin of the Beaumont Municipal Tennis Center was vehemently opposed to Capriati being a pro.

"13-year-olds shouldn't be playing professional tennis with adults," he says. "A young person can be susceptible to injuries and I think that will happen to Capriati. Tracy Austin is an example. There's also the psychological stress of not being able to handle it and that's what happened to Andrea Jaeger.

"While I don't think it will happen in the case of Capriati, it also encourages parents to get involved in the wrong way. Maybe everyone wants something new, but this will rob her of her youth."

David Wong of the BPM Club might have summed it up best.

"Turning pro is not for everybody," he says. "It depends on the individual."