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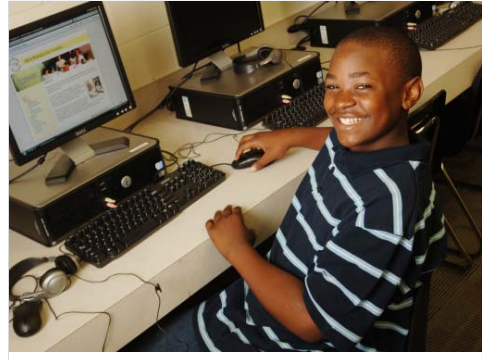
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Today's cheer: MaliVai wins another

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By The Times-Union

The youths who participate in the tennis and academic programs at the MaliVai Washington Kids Foundation in Northwest Jacksonville recently learned yet another valuable lesson as to why hitting the books is just as important as hitting tennis balls.



The foundation was named Chapter of the Year in the 2008 First Serve National Student Athlete Competition. First Serve, a Fort Lauderdale-based nonprofit, promotes tennis as a conduit for empowering underprivileged youths.

The foundation's students competed with more than 1,000 students from 17 chapters nationwide. They won the honor because more of them ranked in the top 25 academically. Points earned for participating in junior tennis tournaments were added, but the tennis points weren't weighed as heavily as academic grades.

The honor also came with a \$25,000 check.

Of course, the First Serve honor carries much more than a monetary value. It shows that the foundation, started in 1994 by former tennis professional and Wimbledon finalist MaliVai Washington, which now enrolls nearly 150 students, is making a difference in the lives of struggling youths.

It is doing that by teaching them how to connect the dots between athletics and academics - so that they can ultimately use that connection to build a bridge to a better life.



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