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Tennis aces off to D.C.

JUL 20, 2008 6:00 AM (1 DAY AGO) BY DAVID LEIPMAN, THE EXAMINER

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(Mike Koozmin/Special to The Examiner) Racket whizzes: Ismaeel Muhammad, above, and Myondra Lewis have been recognized for their achievements.

SAN FRANCISCO (Map, News) - Some excellent tennis and good grades are taking two San Francisco teens to the nation's capital.

Ismaeel Muhammad and Myondra Lewis, both 13, will leave Monday to attend the United States Tennis Association Junior Tennis League Leadership Camp in Washington, D.C. The all-expenses-paid camp includes touring the destinations of the capital city while receiving two to three hours of tennis instruction each day.

Tennis talent, leadership ability and financial need are among the criteria in the USTA selection process. Muhammad and Lewis were nominated by their coaches at Youth Tennis Advantage, a Bay Area organization dedicated to serving inner-city youths through a program of tennis and academic tutoring.

Muhammad was nominated for the camp scholarship by his coach, Thomas White, who began teaching the young man at YTA Hunters Point in 2004. The Marina Middle School eighth-grader is the starting point guard on the school's boys' basketball team, he stars on the baseball team and also is among the top 400-meter runners in The City.

And, of course there is tennis. Muhammad is ranked as one of the top 75 players in the Bay Area's under-14 age group. Muhammad balances his passion for his two favorite sports — basketball and tennis — but he says he has a greater appreciation for tennis, in part because of the opportunities afforded him, such as the leadership camp. He says he looks forward to the camp "to meet the coaches and players, so that I can get my game better. I like playing older guys because they make me [a better tennis player]."

His coach views Muhammad as an outstanding role model for his teammates, as well as for his two younger brothers.

"He shows leadership through his strength; if you ask him, he will give," coach White said. "He is a leader by not being a follower."

Lewis' family moved to San Francisco from New Orleans as a result of Hurricane Katrina. She lived with her parents and two younger sisters in a one-room hotel room for their first three months in The City.

Lewis enjoyed watching the tennis action at YTA Western Addition, and her ebullient personality caught the eye of coach Carl Mendoza. Despite only nine months of tennis experience, Mendoza was so impressed with Lewis' tennis and social skills that he decided to nominate Lewis for the camp scholarship.

Muhammad and Lewis have each performed well in the classroom as well as on the court. Lewis has maintained an excellent academic record at Francisco Middle School, and Muhammad has become a skilled rock 'n' roll guitarist and scores straight A's in his music classes. Both say they hope to be a part of Stanford's Class of 2017.

When asked what she most looks forward to in the coming week, Lewis responded, "To see the White House!"

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