

Serving up a valuable lesson

Tennis festival teaches students how to achieve their best while focusing on what's important.

BY BRITNEY BARNES

NEWPORT BEACH — With tennis racket in hand and the third- through sixth-grade watching, Mariners Elementary School Principal Pamela Coughlin walked onto the tennis court in a flower-print dress and matching lavender espadrilles.

Playing alongside third-grade teacher Pat McLaughlin, the two attempted to return volleys hit to them by two sons of the head coach of the three-time national champion USC men's tennis team.

"Oh, we have the principal out. Now we're getting competitive — I like it," said USC tennis Coach Peter Smith. "Are those tennis shoes you're wearing, principal?"

On Friday, Mariners hosted the Inch & Miles Sportsmanship Tennis Festival, a collaboration between Harper for Kids and USC. The program aims to teach students how to be their personal best.

Kids are under a lot of pressure to achieve the best grades and get into the top schools, but the important thing is that they do their best work and the result will take care of itself, said Tim



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GIVING POINTERS: USC men's tennis Coach Peter Smith gives a demonstration of tennis skills to students during an exhibition at Mariners Elementary School on Friday.

Harper, co-founder of Harper for Kids with his wife, Peanut.

"We talk about what's really important," he said "It's the effort that you put into things — that's what's really important."

Though USC was well represented, the philosophy behind the event was rooted in legendary UCLA men's basketball Coach John Wooden's children's book "Inch and Miles: The

Journey to Success," that the late coach wrote with Peanut Harper and Steve Jamison.

In the book are 15 "blocks," or character traits, like hard work, enthusiasm and fitness, that when combined form a pyramid.

McLaughlin, a UCLA alumna, adapted the book into a character education program in 2003 that spread to a third of Newport-Mesa elementary

schools.

During the event, Smith's sons, Colter, 10, and Riley, 14, gave tennis demonstrations as students tried the school's never-before-used tennis courts. Smith and the Harpers also talked about character.

The idea was to teach students what it really means to be successful by having someone of Smith's stature show them, Peanut Harper said.

Smith, who collaborated with Harper for Kids for the first time Friday, said he's used the blocks in coaching for a long time and also values them in his players.

While he recruits around the nation and internationally to find the best athletes, he looks for more than skill.

"I pass by lots of really good players and I pick the ones with character," he told the students.

Third-grade student Kyle McKibbin, 9, was impressed with the event.

"It was cool that I got to meet people from USC," he said.

Third-grade student Tyler Li, 8, agreed that the event was cool and with the message that success is about trying your best.

"That's what it is," he said, "and having fun too."

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Third-grade teacher Pat McLaughlin demonstrating her tennis skills with USC men's tennis coach Peter Smith and his sons Riley and Colter for 450 third-sixth grade students on the newly painted 36' Quickstart tennis courts at Mariners School.



(left to right) Third-grade teacher Pat McLaughlin, Riley Smith, Peter Smith, Tim Harper, Colter Smith, Peanut Louie Harper and Tammie Smith (Peter's wife)



Mariners students join in the tennis exhibition with Peter's sons Riley and Colter.