

McPhillips not just first class on court

Andrews Osborne senior Kyle McPhillips can pinpoint the exact moment she knew she loved tennis.

The Willoughby resident was 5 years old when her father, Tom, started taking her and her two older siblings to the court. Afterward, they would always go for ice cream at Dairy Queen. That's when she knew she'd be playing tennis for many years.



Theresa Neuhoft
Audio

On Wednesday morning in a room filled with family, friends, teachers and classmates, McPhillips announced she would be taking her talents to the Division I collegiate level.

She signed a letter of intent to continue her career at UCLA.

There are many reasons she chose to be a Bruin over her various options, which included Duke, Stanford and North Carolina. She chose it not only for academic and athletic reasons, but she will be close to the beach and an awesome ice cream place.

"Since I'll be in California, maybe I'll meet a celebrity and get a picture with them," McPhillips joked.

AOA senior Beth Schulz believes McPhillips, her close friend, will be a celebrity herself one day.

"I think she can be famous," Schulz said. "She's really talented."

McPhillips is beyond talented.

She is a phenom.

Throughout her career, the 17-year-old standout has achieved the United States Tennis Association's No. 1 ranking in the nation in the 12, 14, 16 and 18-and-under divisions. She has developed into one of the top junior players in the country and has played



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Andrews Osborne's Kyle McPhillips thanks her classmates Wednesday after signing a letter of intent to play tennis for UCLA. At right is AOA's tennis coach, Kris Najdovski.

in four professional tournaments as an amateur. In June, she won the Ladies Cleveland Open at the Chagrin Valley Athletic Center. In the spring, she won the ITF Easter Bowl in Rancho Mirage, Calif.

"If you look at her overall game, there are no weaknesses," said Kris Najdovski, McPhillips' coach who is the tennis pro at Kirtland Country Club. "She is an incredibly balanced player. Her ground strokes are incredible.

"But as good as she is, she still has a lot of room to improve. I'm

sure you'll see a lot of that at UCLA and beyond."

McPhillips began her high school career at South, where she finished third in the Division I state tournament. She chose to transfer to AOA for her sophomore year to focus on tennis and academics. Since AOA is not in the Ohio High School Athletic Association, McPhillips was unable to compete on the state level. Instead, she competed in tournaments across the country and the world including France, Greece and the Czech Republic.

That sounds like a better deal than going to Columbus to compete in the OHSAA tournament.

While she was traveling, she was also missed school. To keep her up to speed, teachers began video taping their classes for her. The individual attention helped McPhillips balance her dreams with her academics.

"Kyle was so diligent," said one of her teachers, Katharine Marsh, the chairperson of AOA's science department. "She wanted to learn so badly, and she was an easy student to teach. We had that distance prob-

More online

Kyle McPhillips talks about signing with UCLA, and ceremony highlights.



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lem to deal with. But then we started recording all of the lectures.

"I would give Kyle the notes, and when she'd come back to school, we'd do a refresher. She did an incredible job."

When McPhillips stood at the podium on Wednesday morning to speak to the crowd assembled for her, she thanked numerous people including Marsh, her parents (Tom and Stephanie) who were present, friends, Athletic Director Vance Linamen, Head of School Charles Roman and Najdovski.

At one point, McPhillips was moved to tears by the ceremony.

It was touching to see the young girl embrace the moment she had worked so hard for. What's even better is there are many great moments in McPhillips' future. She is just beginning to reach her potential.

One thing is certain, she is a success not only on the court, but off where it matters most.

"The people at UCLA are very, very lucky on a number of levels," Marsh said. "She is a great student. She is a great athlete. But she's a dynamite kid.

"That's probably the biggest compliment I could give any student. She is a wonderful, wonderful person."

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