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Star Profile: Stephanie Adele Johnson
by: Eric L. Smith

While Zina Garrison-Jackson and Lori McNeal may be the most prominent African American women playing professional tennis today, they are not alone. Steadily climbing the ranks are other young women who hope to one day become household names. Stephanie Adele Johnson may not be a household name yet, but she plans to be.

The 23-year-old Washington, D.C., native and Howard University graduate is currently touring on the Satellite and Challenge Circuit, picking up necessary computer points with every win and hoping to be nationally ranked in singles by the Women's Tennis Association in the near future. She's currently ranked No. 680 in doubles competition.

Although she's been playing since she was 11, Johnson didn't develop a strong interest in the game until she entered college.

"Some people think if you're 23 and you haven't been ranked yet then you're not going to make it. But it all depends on how badly you want it," she says.

If her current success is any indication, then Johnson wants to succeed badly. Last year saw her ranked No. 3 in women's singles in the Mid-Atlantic Tennis Association and No. 1 in women's singles in the Washington Tennis Association. She was also doubles champion of the MATA Women's Outdoor Closed Championship.

Johnson's mother, Adele Sadler Johnson, says she recognized her daughter's talent early, although she, along with her husband Merritt and son Merritt L. Johnson II, did have some concerns when told of Stephanie's desire to turn professional.

"We were cautious and realistic," Sadler Johnson recalls. "The feeling was that we did not want her to have unrealistic expectations. But now I'm very much convinced this dream is something she should pursue now rather than to delay and perhaps never realize it."

When she's not playing, Johnson works as a tennis coach with the Fila/Arthur Ashe Tennis Academy in Washington, D.C. There she gets to come into contact with many inner-city youths who want to learn more about the game. "A commitment has to be made to take the time to work with these children," she says. "It's important to see these kids [excel](#) in a sport that's perceived as predominantly white."

As for her own goals on the court, even if a top ten ranking eludes her, Johnson, who sees players like Garrison-Jackson as role models, says she's still fulfilling a dream just by playing professionally. "Even if I never make the top ten in the world," she explains, "I just want to play the best tennis that I can play