

Phillips: In a Class All by Herself

By Randy Cadiente
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Traci Phillips is a humble person.

Ask her if she thinks she's in a class by herself in the sport of women's racquetball in Hawaii and without hesitating, she'll answer no.

But the truth to the matter is, there is no one in the state that comes close to beating her.

Some may argue that Shizu Takeyesu is No. 1. Or that Lorna Nalual, if she came out of retirement, would be on top. Nine times out of 10, however, there's no one better than Phillips.

"There are a lot of girls out there who have the potential," Phillips said quite frankly. "I just don't think they're using it to their advantage. They're not playing the right people.

"I think a lot of them don't take it serious as I do," she added. "I don't know. But I do think the potential is out there."

AS GOOD AS Phillips is, the chances of her getting better are slim.

Not that she doesn't have the talent or the ability but competition among women in Hawaii is scarce—especially the good ones. And for Phillips to reach her goal of becoming the No. 1 women's player in the world, she needs the competition to get better.

"I need to get tournament tough," said Phillips, who likes surfing as much as she does racquetball. "There's a difference



Traci Phillips

when you go out and play someone for a Coke and you play someone you don't even know for all the marbles.

"You've just got to be mentally tough and I can't get that way with the amount of tournaments (for women) over here.

"I, myself, am going to be playing in all men's divisions (in Hawaii) besides the women's open because for me to get better and play the mainland woman players, I've got to play in the men's A division."

PHILLIPS DID establish herself in one Mainland tournament when she captured the women's

singles A championship last Sunday of the eighth annual Schoeber's Christmas Racquetball Classic at Pleasanton, Calif. And it was a right step in her dream of becoming No. 1.

But the 23-year-old aspiring actress is nowhere near the top of the field where Lynn Adams, the No. 1 ranked woman in the nation, resides.

Still, Phillips is slowly making her way uphill towards the pinnacle of the game.

"You've got to think high," said Phillips, who made it to the quarterfinals of the women's open in the Schoeber's Classic. "I mean, you just don't say 'I want to be in the top 10' and be happy. I want to be the best. That's what everybody's striving for. Whether they get there or not, it's another story."

ADAMS, LIKE Phillips, is the best among her peers and for Phillips to even get a chance to play her, let alone beat her, she has to get behind a long line of good players. Topping the list are Heather McKay and Shannon Wright, both of whom were ranked No. 1 at one time or another. Laura Martino is ranked No. 4 while Vicki Panzeri is fifth and Terri Gilbreath sixth.

Rounding out the top 10 are Marci Greer, Janell Marriott, Peggy Gardner and Caryn McKinney.

How does Phillips compare with Adams?

"She's way ahead of me right now," said Phillips, who won the

1983 Ektelon State women's singles title, the Oahu Athletic Club State women's open crown, as well as several men's OAC Class B championships.

"She's been playing for seven years and she's got a coach—her husband is her coach—that's always helping her," she added.

ADAMS WILL BE in town next month to participate in the Arthritis Racquetball Benefit at the Oahu Athletic Club, Jan. 12-15.

But Adams will play only one game here and that will be against the winner of the women's open of that competition.

"Hopefully, if I win, I'll get to play her," said Phillips. "Then I'll see how much I know from there."

Phillips didn't know much about racquetball three years ago. Her attention back then was focused on canoe paddling. In fact, she worked at the front desk of the OAC for six months and never knew what went on behind closed doors.

It took only one look, however, and she was hooked.

"One day after paddling was over, I decided to finally go back there and see what all the racket was about," said the 5-foot-4, 120-pound Phillips. "And I just asked Les Moon, a friend of mine, 'How do you hit the ball?' He showed me and I don't even remember from there."

A year later, Phillips was one of the best. Now, she is in a class by herself—at least in Hawaii.