

Men's Open Preview

Remember the name Taylor Fritz. There is no telling how deep in the draw the 16-year-old will get this week in the Men's Open singles division at The Ojai, but if family pedigree has anything to do with it, the name will be one Ojai fans could be seeing for years to come.

The Fritz family from Rancho Santa Fe already has a rich history and connection to The Ojai. Father Guy made the Independent College Doubles final way back in 1972, and he later coached one of the best junior college men's teams in state history in College of the Desert. In 1996 the Coachella Valley community college had both finalists in the men's singles, as well as four others in the doubles final at Ojai.

That same year Taylor's mother Kathy May Fritz won the Women's Open division at Ojai. The former Wimbledon quarterfinalist got to as high as No. 8 in the world during her pro career. A year later in 1997, Taylor was born and has been deemed a prodigy ever since he began competing in national tournaments at the age of 10.

"Yeah, 1996 was a pretty great year for our family at Ojai," said Guy Fritz. "I just love Ojai. It's always been one of my favorite tournaments."

Last year, the family trekked to Ojai to watch the Torrey Pines High freshman Taylor get all the way to the final in the Boys' Interscholastic Division where he lost to three-time champion Gage Brymer.

Taylor began playing professional ITF events in places like Oklahoma, Texas, Florida and Costa Rica to start the year and has already earned his first ATP points.

Because of all the travel, he was forced to drop out of traditional high school, and now attends Laurel Springs Online School, which just happens to be based in Ojai.

Guy Fritz said Taylor will play the three-week junior ITF circuit in early April, including the ASICS Easter Bowl where he won the Boys' 16s singles title last year. The goal is to do well in those events and qualify for the juniors at the French Open and Wimbledon," said Guy, adding that Taylor currently stands at No. 70 with his ITF junior ranking.

But because he is no longer playing for his high school, he is only eligible for the Men's Open event this year. "The Ojai offers us good players and that's what we're looking for."

Fritz relayed a funny story from his big year at Ojai in 1972 where he was teamed with Aussie Andrew Cae playing for the University of San Diego. "We made the finals in doubles and he sat around and drank all that free orange juice and got sick," Fritz said. "True story. We ended up losing to Cripe and Jablonski from UC Irvine."

If a teenager like Fritz happens to win the Open division, it would be the second straight year as 18-year-old Mackenzie McDonald beat Lester Cook in last year's final. Both Brymer and McDonald are now freshmen at UCLA.

Ojai fans who saw McDonald play for the first time in April, saw him again on a much bigger stage during the summer as he became the first unranked teenager to qualify for an ATP Masters event, beating former Ojai Pac-12 champion Steve Johnson, no less, to earn a berth into the main draw at the Western & Southern Open in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The win followed an equally impressive straight-sets victory over 77th-ranked Nicolas Mahut the day before.