

West Palm Beach's Vidov aims to capture her dreams

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DELRAY BEACH — Stephanie Vidov won't discuss her nighttime dreams with just anyone. But when they involve tennis — and star herself beating Maria Sharapova — then Vidov doesn't mind opening up.

"A couple of nights ago I dreamed I had to play Sharapova in the Australian Open and I beat her in three sets," Vidov said.

It might have been a dream to Vidov, but she's on her way to turning her dreams into reality.

"I'm weary to put an actual age on it because every individual is different," said Nick Blackwood, her coach and director of Blackwood Tennis Academy in West Palm Beach. "I've been in junior tennis for the last 14 years and I can say of all the talent that I have seen she by far has the complete package at this age. If she continues developing, then I would say in the next four to five years, possibly sooner."

Vidov would turn 17 in five years, the same age Sharapova, who turns 18 next week, was when she won Wimbledon in 2004. Until then, the busy 12-year-old will continue to compete in events such as the USTA National Spring Championships, one of four "majors" for young players.

On Tuesday, she was dressed in an all Nike wardrobe that featured a visor autographed by Argentina's Gaston Gaudio, the 2004 French Open winner. Vidov, the No. 3 seed, defeated Megan Horter of Southlake, Texas, 4-6, 6-0, 6-2 to move into the Round of 16 where she will meet Alex Tachovsky at 9 a.m. today at the Delray Swim and Tennis Club.

Vidov is ranked No. 4 in the nation in the 12s and No. 35 in Florida in the 14s division. In only her second 14s tournament, Vidov won the 2005 Cambier Park in Naples on April 4 — one of 24 tournaments she will play this year. To prepare for those tournaments, Vidov eats organic foods and practices six hours per day.

"She has big potential and I believe she will be in the top 10 in the world," said Vladimir Vidov, Stephanie's grandfather and former coach. "My oldest daughter qualified for the U.S. Open but she didn't want to become a pro and decided to go to college. Stephanie only wants to be a pro."

Upsets abound at USTA nationals: Boca Raton's Anika Novacek lost 5-7, 6-4, 6-0 to Jenny Falcone of Davidson, N.C. No. 2 seed Nicole Gibbs lost 6-1, 6-1 to Santa Rosa Beach's Erin Stephens, the No. 18 seed. No. 7 seed Robin Anderson lost 6-2, 2-6. 6-4 to unseeded Kayla Rizzolo of Wesley Chapel.