Teenage Wild-Card Hudson Rivera Opens With First-Round Win at SoCal Pro Series

Final Round of Qualifying Completed and Main Draw Matches Begin at USTA Pro Circuit $25,000 Men's and Women's Events at Pepperdine University in Malibu

JANUARY 3, 2023 – It seemed only appropriate that longtime ATP player and current television commentator Brad Gilbert was on-site Tuesday watching a SoCal junior he's long taken an interest in – 18-year-old Hudson Rivera from Rancho Santa Fe.

Awarded a free pass into the main draw by the SoCal Pro Series Wild Card committee, Rivera outlasted former USC Trojan Connor Farren, 6-7 (7), 6-4, [10-6], to advance to the second round at the $25,000 tournament, which is part of the USTA Pro Circuit being played this week on the campus of Pepperdine University in Malibu

"It wasn't pretty," said Rivera, who is headed to play for Stanford in the fall. "Connor's been around awhile. I wasn't really looking forward to it. He lives near me and we've been practicing together all week and he's been beating me, so it was nice to turn the tables. It was up and down and I'm just glad I battled through."

To say Rivera's victory fell under the category of "winning ugly" would be a nod to his mentor Gilbert, who once authored a popular tennis book by that title that described his playing days.

One of the greatest players to come out of this week's host venue Pepperdine, Gilbert won 20 ATP titles during his career and reached as high as No. 4 in the world rankings. He lost in the NCAA singles final in 1982 before his pro days, and after his playing career went on to a successful coaching career guiding Andre Agassi to six of his eight Grand Slam titles and also coaching Andy Roddick, Andy Murray and Kei Nishikori.

Rivera made the most of several wild cards last summer playing in the SoCal Pro Series, winning six ATP points with a semifinal and quarterfinal appearance.

"I was just so fortunate to have been given that opportunity by the SoCal Pro Series," Rivera said. "It allowed me to get some points and be able to play more ITF pro events like this."

Rivera grew up next door to five-time NCAA champion Peter Smith, who took an early interest in his game. Rivera, who missed two valuable years due to a fractured back and elbow, was a one-time 10-year-old tennis prodigy working with Andre Agassi and others like Gilbert and Darren Cahill after his family moved to Las Vegas.

Most recently, Rivera has been working with former top ATP pro James Blake hitting with him once a week near their homes in Rancho Santa Fe. "He's really helped me a lot," Rivera said of Blake. "He's been more a mentor to me. I've just been really privileged to have worked with so many great coaches over the years."

In 2014, Rivera won the SoCal Junior Sectionals in the 10s, and did it again this past summer winning the prestigious Sectionals in the 18s. Winning the 10s and 18s at Sectionals is a feat only

accomplished by Michael Chang, who won the 10s in 1981, and the 18s in 1987, just two years before becoming the youngest ever player to win a Grand Slam at the French Open at the age of 17 in 1989.

Advancing with two qualifying wins on Tuesday was Pepperdine grad student Eero Vasa, the top seed from Finland. Qualifying wild card Rudy Quan, a high school junior from Thousand Oaks, also made it into the main draw where he will next face main draw wild card Aditya Gupta of Irvine in the first round on Wednesday.

In a first-round main draw women's match involving Americans (and SoCal players), Hanna Chang from Fontana, the No. 5 seed, beat unseeded Jenna DeFalco from Tustin, 6-1, 6-1.

Lisa Zaar, a Pepperdine senior from Stockholm, Sweden, who earned ITA All-American honors in singles after a run to the NCAA quarterfinals last spring, got past Indy DeVroome, 6-4, 6-3, in a matchup of unseeded players.

USC senior and No. 5 seeded Eryn Cayetano got past Carolyn Campana, a Pepperdine player who is a graduate student who played previously for Wake Forest, 6-4, 6-1, to advance to the main draw. Cayetano's Trojan teammate Snow Han also qualified, beating wild card Amanda Perez from UC Irvine, 6-2, 6-3.

Tatiana Pieri from Italy downed UCLA sophomore Kimmi Hance of Torrance, 2-6, 6-3, [10-8], to advance to the main draw. Later in the day, Hance was granted a spot into the main draw as a lucky loser after former Wimbledon junior champion Liv Hovde pulled out due to illness.