

Special Women's Issue

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**Folk Beliefs on
Pregnancy**

Pro Volleyball Star

*LIZ
Masakayan*



COVER STORY

Volleyball Star

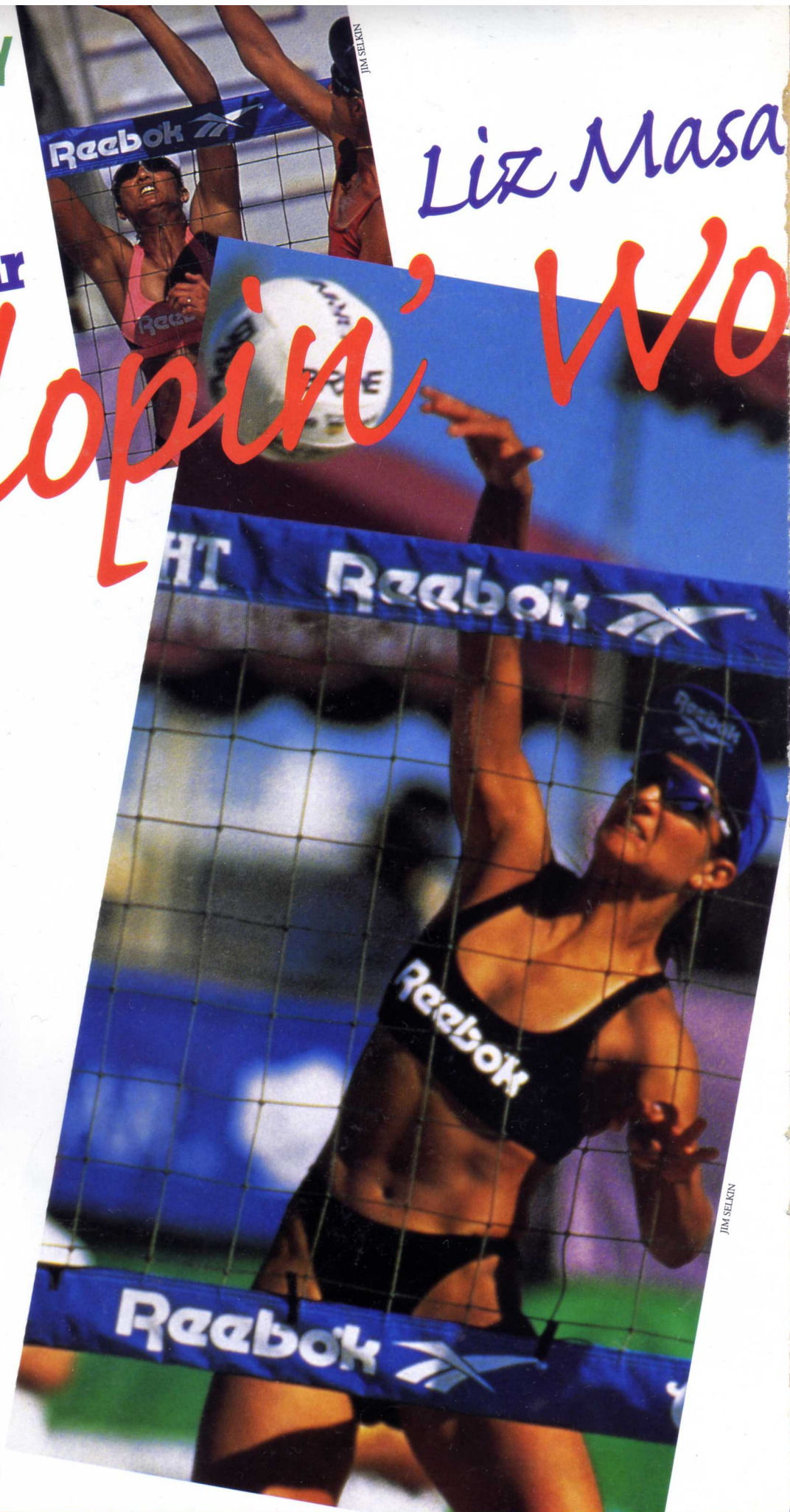
Wallopin' Wo

For a couple seconds, it was one of those moments even Michael Jordan would have marveled at. But it wasn't B-ball. Try women's V-ball.

At the 1994 Sacramento Open in California, Liz Masakayan and Karolyn Kirby, the powerhouse beach volleyball tandem, were on cruise control. Then something went wrong in a set that kept the ball bobbing in the air for a series of exchanges.

The ball finally sailed out of the pair's court, forcing the team into a damage-control situation. Kirby chased it down like a panther after its prey and smacked it in-bounds hoping Masakayan would somehow be in the ball's vicinity.

Flyin' Masakayan: Liz in action; the Quezon City-born star athlete is a big draw at tourneys.



kayan man

BY RACHELLE Q. AYUYANG

But Masakayan was racing toward the net. Masakayan stopped in her tracks, realizing the ball would irretrievably drop a good two or three yards away. The crowd of spectators, mostly female high school amateur players, craned their necks and gasped.

Masakayan readjusted, and with a few quick steps dove into her "Flyin' Masakayan" mode. Stretching her 5'8" frame with her right fist cocked before making contact, she lunged backward and slammed the ball back to their opponents. She scrambled back on her feet and planted herself on the sand for the next attack. A couple more volleys and punishing serves, and the top team in women's volleyball had point, match and pretty much the tournament all wrapped up.

For them, it was all in a day's work.

Top Gun

Liz Masakayan is one of professional volleyball's best-kept secrets, possessing rare physical agility and strength that the sport demands of its players. That a Filipina sits at its pinnacle is a surprise — a

most welcome one.

"Volleyball is the fastest-growing sport, especially beach volleyball, since it's televised on cable and the networks," Masakayan says. "The exposure is great, and enthusiasm is growing. People love the sport and they appreciate the athleticism."

Since the age of five, Southern California has been her home, where she has always been busy with some kind of physical activity just like her older siblings, Michelle, Joe and Michael. She rollerskated and skateboarded in Venice Beach, played softball, tried soccer for six years and ran track before discovering volleyball in high school.

"Like any other kid, I just started fooling around with a

ball," she says. "I grew up near a beach so I had easy access."

Masakayan was born in Quezon City, Philippines on December 31, 1964. When her parents separated, her mother Liz Lazur moved with the children to Southern California while father Joe stayed in Manila. Five years later, he died.

Masakayan, now 30, has no memory of her father who was a Harvard University graduate and a corporate lawyer. Only a framed black-and-white photo of her parents sits at her bedside. When looking at photos in the Philippines, however, she remembers lots of families and helpers.

"It's strange because I grew up not ever having a father," she says. "So I don't know what I'm missing because I'm not used to having one."

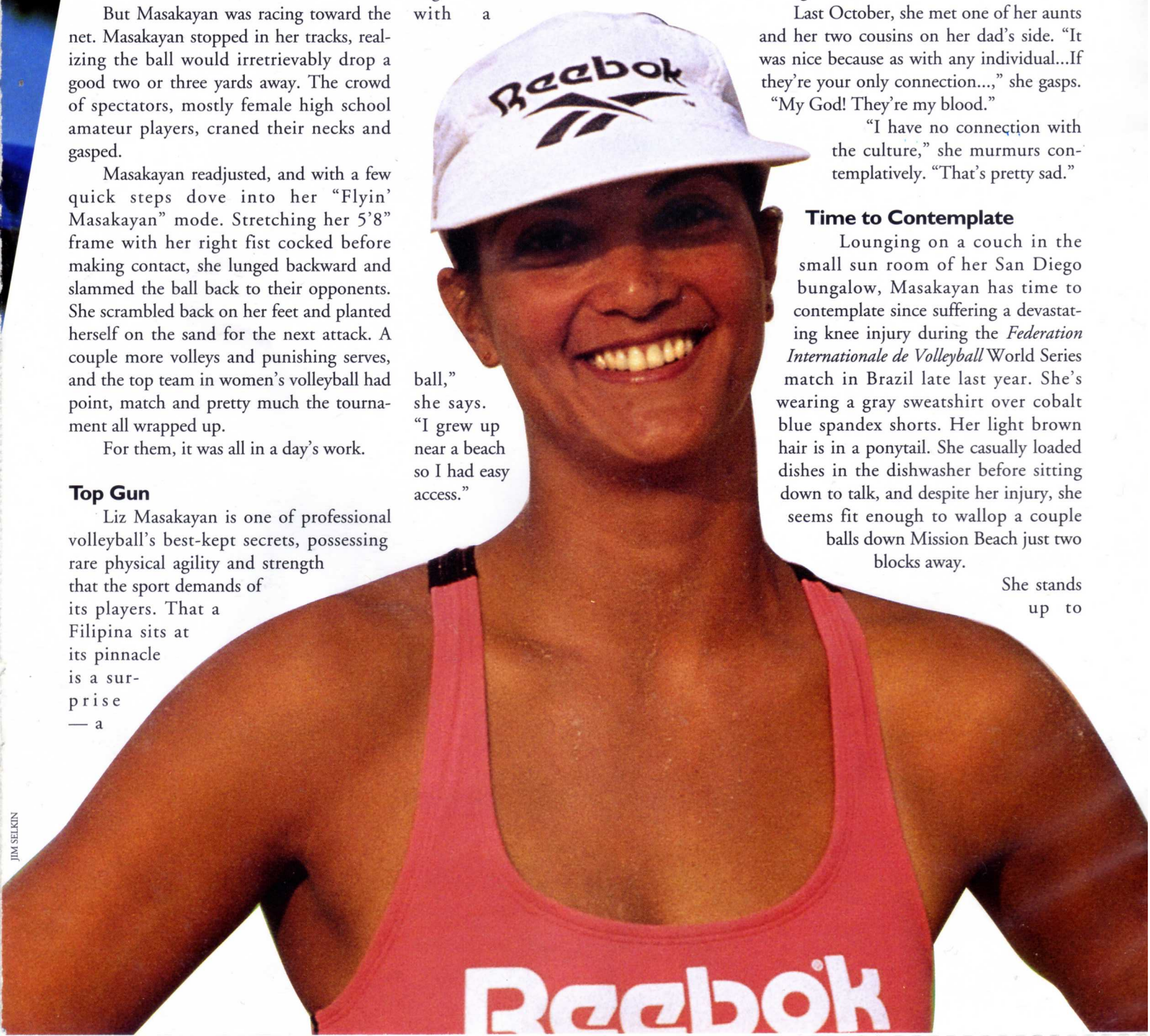
Last October, she met one of her aunts and her two cousins on her dad's side. "It was nice because as with any individual...If they're your only connection...", she gasps. "My God! They're my blood."

"I have no connection with the culture," she murmurs contemplatively. "That's pretty sad."

Time to Contemplate

Lounging on a couch in the small sun room of her San Diego bungalow, Masakayan has time to contemplate since suffering a devastating knee injury during the *Federation Internationale de Volleyball* World Series match in Brazil late last year. She's wearing a gray sweatshirt over cobalt blue spandex shorts. Her light brown hair is in a ponytail. She casually loaded dishes in the dishwasher before sitting down to talk, and despite her injury, she seems fit enough to wallop a couple balls down Mission Beach just two blocks away.

She stands up to



show the scar on her right knee and pokes her bronze thigh which wobbles like jello. "Most people don't understand what a torn ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) is," she says. "I've got one screw and two staples to hold the ligament together."

Determined to return to world-class form in four to five months for the start of a new tour season and for the 1996 Summer Olympics, Masakayan won't give herself an inch.

Within three days of her fourth surgery, she no longer needed her crutches. She has attacked her rehabilitation with the ferocity of her jump-serves. Her physical therapy takes three or four hours, six days a week, and she's recovering faster than doctors thought.

But she isn't Wonder Woman. "It's painful physical therapy," she says, laughing bitterly. "It made me cry a lot."

After the surgery, she was put on a machine to break the scar tissue in her knee. The machine induces knee-bending motion that she had to endure for 24 hours.

"I couldn't stand the pain. I was a zombie for a week on drugs, just watching TV and crying."

"I'm learning a lot from this," she says. "I'm learning to be patient which I was never good at. I've learned to be in touch with my body and feelings and appreciate being healthy and competing. Just a bunch of lessons."

"It just makes you stronger mentally," Masakayan insists. "It's just another challenge for me."

Winning Combination

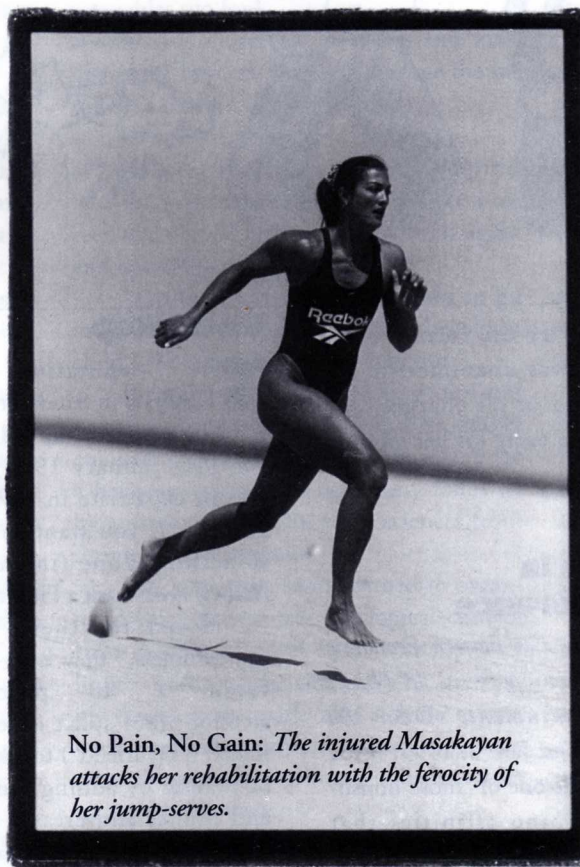
Before the hard spill, Kirby and Masakayan were a winning combination with 23 events under their belt and a record-tying 12 titles in 1993. They won 23 of the 26 Coors Light Tour events with a match record of 147-8. The team also owns a 55-match winning streak and 13-straight titles. In 1994, the pair had a 72-3 record.

Now both players and their coach must train Kirby's new partner until Masakayan gets better. This brings out her competitive spirit.

"We have to give Carolyn's new partner our secrets," she says. "It's like training our opponent to beat us. But Carolyn

needs to be successful when I'm not with her. She will not lie down and die."

At this point, Masakayan lurches from her ivory-cloth seat and nimbly walks around a row of bicycles into her kitchen, toward the refrigerator. She returns with a pint of Ben and Jerry's Mint Chocolate Chip ice cream.



No Pain, No Gain: *The injured Masakayan attacks her rehabilitation with the ferocity of her jump-serves.*

AARON CHANG

"I would be miserable if I always watched what I ate," she explains while spooning a glob from the half-full carton. "Everything should be taken in moderation."

Masakayan has squeezed every ounce of energy into her career. She's a player representative for the Women's Professional Volleyball Association (WPVA), a player-run governing body that aspires to be the counterpart of the Women's Tennis Association or the Ladies Professional Golf Association. From the start, the WPVA was plagued with financial troubles that motivated an exodus of some of its top players to the Association of Volleyball Professionals, a predominantly men's tour. But the WPVA has survived the storm, and some of its prodigal daughters are clamoring to return.

Getting the WPVA off the ground requires more time than the instant it takes

for her and Kirby to make mincemeat of their opponents. Masakayan does her share, driving to Los Angeles for meetings and endless negotiations over contracts and sponsorships.

Walking Billboard

Masakayan is a walking billboard for Reebok and Oakley eyewear, being a spokesperson for these products. In her small office and spare bedroom filled with unpacked boxes, a neat stack of Reebok bikini tops and bottoms in an array of colors lie in one corner. On a tall white shelf, her Coors Light trophies, beer cans enclosed in glass coverings, occupy a couple of levels. A champions' cup, its gold coating slowly wearing away, sits at the top. It represents her first tournament victory in 1991 in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Masakayan's hectic schedule prevents her from putting the room in order — and finishing up a college degree. (She chuckles that the latter is part of a 20-year plan.) After high school, she received a scholarship from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). But a shot at the 1986 U.S. volleyball team put her studies on hold. She trained for five years, getting a monthly stipend of \$600. In the '88 Olympics, however, the team failed to win a medal.

"It was a very inexperienced team that was getting beat by those that had been playing for eight years."

Masakayan didn't try out for the '92 Summer Games and returned to UCLA at the age of 27 on a part-time basis. And she quit volleyball. Well, not entirely — she took an assistant coaching job and sometimes did pick-up games at the beach. Then she joined the WPVA and sporadically went to school.

"My priority was screwed up. I found myself overwhelmed. One thing had to go. I had too much on my plate."

So she quit her coaching job, and then school, with seven classes remaining. Deciding to pursue volleyball professionally, she moved to San Diego rather than continue the commute from Los Angeles to train with Kirby. "I've been a full-time athlete with no school and no job," she says.

Continued on page 52

"It's wonderful."

'Kinda Selfish'

"It's kinda selfish." Masakayan confesses. "It's hard to keep life balanced. Boyfriend, friends, family. Your lifestyle becomes selfish."

She often leaves on Friday for an event and returns home on Sunday or Monday. The next three days are spent unpacking, doing her laundry, returning a long list of phone calls on her answering machine, checking her mail and religiously going through four-to-six-hour workouts for her next meet.

She's always on the phone with WPVA officials negotiating contracts or with her agent regarding photo shoots and public appearances. Her day starts at seven or eight in the morning, and she isn't done with business, usually on the phone, until ten in the evening.

"You don't live a normal life," she says. "I look back on the last two or three months and I haven't had one day off. To keep commitments is difficult. That's why I feel lucky with Ralph."

Masakayan met her current boyfriend Ralph on a blind date. He hadn't known anything about her, and what confounded him most, according to Masakayan, was how she could base her life on winning and losing.

Masakayan gives her career another three or five years. She would also like to start a family after that. Upgrading the status of women's volleyball, however, would still be a priority even when her competitive days are over.

Since her seven-year affiliation with the WPVA, Masakayan has earned a career total of over \$224,000 in prize money and gets a good income from her product endorsements. Women players only make a fifth of what the men's tour offers. Masakayan wants to close that gap and improve the earnings, opportunities and overall conditions for aspiring female players.

There's no question she's good for the sport. After the match at the 1994 Sacramento Open, a long line of fans quickly approached Kirby and Masakayan to catch a glimpse of the heroines, get their autographs and pat them on the shoulder. When the two retired to their tent, Masakayan was still at it — giving audience to young girls who had followed her after the match. ■

CONTRACEPTION, *continued from page 19*

a devout Catholic and a "pro-life" advocate. To most family practitioners, attaching the POPCOM to the DSWD was like having the fox guard the henhouse.

Much to the chagrin of Church officials, however, the POPCOM was transferred to the Department of Health (DOH) in 1989. Furthermore, Aquino's endorsement of the "cafeteria approach" to family planning in her state-of-the-nation address that July ruffled religious feathers. The bishops planned to issue a strong pastoral letter condemning this. In a placatory move, Aquino called for a dialogue between the DOH and the CBCP.

President Fidel Ramos' much-vaunted birth-control policies have aroused intensified Church resistance. Ramos' colorful and popular health secretary, Dr. Juan Flavio, has been under attack since he assumed office, for aggressively promoting family planning.

Senator Francisco Tatad called for Flavio's resignation in 1992 when the latter allegedly distributed condoms among some Cabinet members and news reporters before they left for Thailand. In the middle of the Cairo controversy, Cardinal Jaime Sin vehemently condemned the government's family planning program, while an archbishop called Flavio a devil and the Cairo document, Satan's work.

Weeks before Cairo, the Church hierarchy and its lay groups rallied an estimated 200,000 of the faithful to the Luneta where the demonstrators burned the Cairo document with pornographic materials and vilified Secretary Flavio some more. A day after the rally, government and Church leaders agreed on a guideline for the Philippine delegation to Cairo. The agreement rejected abortion as a means of family planning and recognized marriage as the foundation of the family, composed of Pop, Mom and the kids.

But despite the Church's power and its claim to speak for the majority of Filipinos, the government has the people on its side, at least on this issue. Independent surveys carried out by ABS-CBN and Dr. Corazon Raymundo of the University of the Philippines' Population Institute show that Filipinos, although mostly Catholics, want the government to provide family planning services.

There is no question that the Catholic Church can actively participate in political

processes. It should not be discriminated against. But it should not hope to be treated differently from any other social or political organization in society. Nor should it expect favoritism from the government.

To prevent the Church-state parley from becoming a case of *dialogus interruptus*, both entities should confer with such groups as the overseas contract workers, prostituted women, adolescents, women's groups, gay groups and trade unions, among others.

These dialogues will help the Church touch base with reality and grasp issues closest to most people. A choice between rubbers or abstinence will not determine one's path to salvation. For the government, such dialogues will bolster its policy of making family planning a part of the country's broader economic and social development goals.

In the meantime, while Church leaders and state officials debate ways to regulate our fertility, it would be worth their while to remember that we as citizens, women and free human beings are capable of making rational and moral choices. And that we should be supported in the choices we make. ■

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