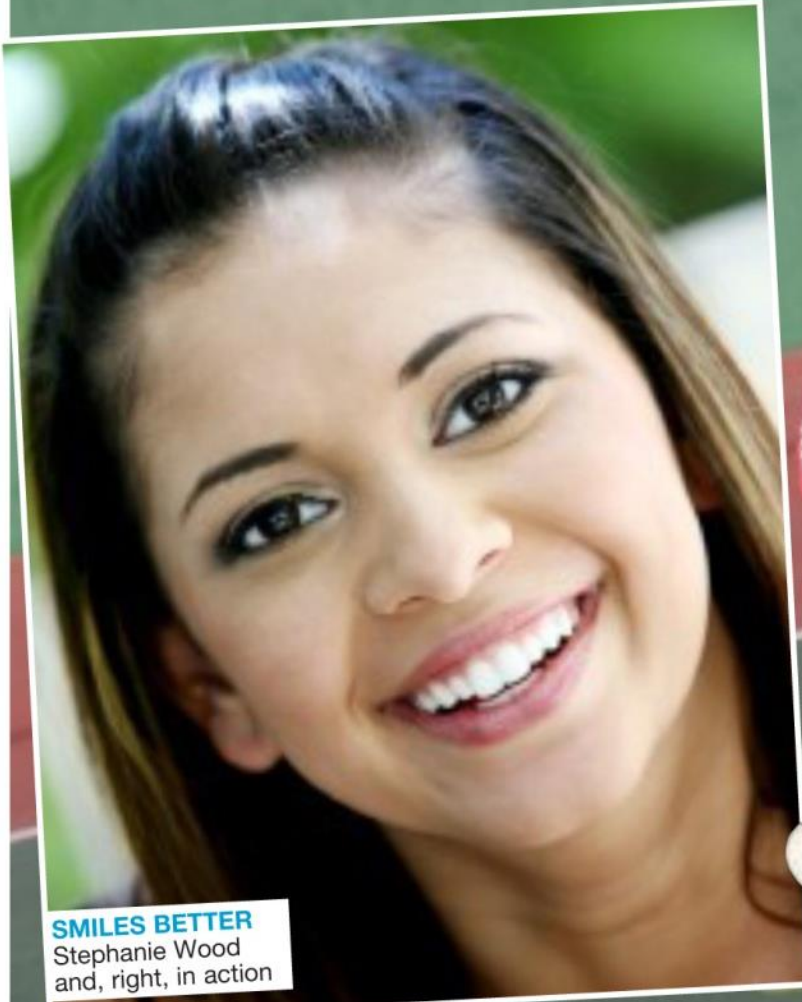


It's ACE to be back on court!



SMILES BETTER
Stephanie Wood
and, right, in action



A TEENAGE tennis player has said she overcame a spinal problem that threatened to end her playing days with the help of a physiotherapy treatment.

Stephanie Wood, 14, from Langho, was just 10-years-old when doctors discovered that she had scoliosis, a condition which causes the spine to excessively curve sideways.

Scoliosis affects three to four children out of every 1,000 in the UK. Treatment is not required in about 90 per cent of cases, because the condition corrects itself as the child grows. And most other cases can be successfully treated using a back brace.

But approximately three out of every 1,000 children will need surgical treatment, with metal rods inserted either side of the spine, before the spine is fused.

Left untreated, the curvature can get worse and cause damage to the spine, chest, pelvis, heart

■ Teenager returns to competing after physiotherapy to treat spinal problem

By **NEIL DOCKING**
Health reporter

and lungs. Stephanie, a pupil at Pleckgate High School, said: "When I was first told that I had scoliosis my whole world fell down around me. I remember thinking that I just wanted the nightmare to be over.

"I knew that I wanted to play tennis professionally and I also knew that having spinal fusion surgery meant I would lose the majority of my flexibility."

Stephanie's parents said they were told by an orthopaedic consultant that she would need surgery as soon as possible.

But after doing some research her mum Sarah sought the help of Scoliosis SOS, a clinic based in Suffolk.

Founded by scoliosis sufferer

Erika Maude, it opened five years ago, using the Katharina Schroth method of treatment, a series of exercises which work by relaxing and strengthening muscles on either side of the curved spine to help correct deformities.

A spokesman said: "There is strong scientific evidence to suggest non-invasive exercise treatment dramatically reduces the possibility of progression in scoliotic patients."

Stephanie, who is now back competing on the local tennis circuit, said: "After completing the therapy, my life completely changed. My back looks a million times better and I feel stronger."

But, our health expert, Dr Tom Smith, said: "Maybe exercise can help a little bit but there is no way exercise alone can change the shape of the spine."