



Orindawoods Tennis News

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Orindawoods Tennis Club: 925-254-1065; www.orindawoodstennis.com

"I like this place, and willingly could waste my time in it" – Celia, As You Like It, Act II, Scene IV

Tennis This Fall at OW

The Hope of Tennis in Tough Times

2020 has certainly been a tough year. I think we can all agree.

Tennis is one of the joys that remains for us in a world where many things have been shut down or significantly altered. I think of three trips I had planned -- all canceled. I'm sure each of you can relate. Plans put aside, lifestyles altered. Getting together with friends and groups certainly curtailed. And tennis remains one of the safer ways to get together, at a physical distance, and see people and get exercise.

When I think of these circumstances, and these sobering facts, even in all this darkness, I feel much **gratitude** for the game we love.

In the past several weeks, the fires and the poor air quality have impacted even our ability to play tennis. What a fundamental shift in each of our lives, to not trust the air that we breath (due to disease or smoke toxins). Take a pause, relax. These are monumental times.

And as we miss these times on the courts, it once again highlights the need to get out and exercise. To see our friends, have social connection. Now we have returned to fresh air, and the beauty of California that we all come to enjoy and expect.

I suppose expecting is part of the problem, we get used to the things we love, and we expect them to always be there. This year has certainly challenged those beliefs.

In some ways, perhaps that is a good thing, a moment for growth and reflection. A moment to be thankful for the things we have, like tennis. To value each moment we have in life, and to make the most of each one. *"Expect nothing and you have all things."* – Lao Tzu

It seems that COVID is going to be with us for a while (I know, an expectation-ha ha), and the fires seem to be an annual event now. The hope of a short pandemic fades with the passing months. We adjust to a new life. In tennis, we have one of the safest activities you can do. And we play on, we live on, we do our best, and we adjust.

All skills we have learned and / or honed from playing tennis. Every match is full of adjustments, as you know. Look at the recent US Open Men's and Women's finals. Great comebacks!

So, we miss a forehand, maybe many forehands, we lose a match, or many matches, and with this perspective of gratitude, maybe we are still just happy to be out there and be able to play. It is certainly a shift, and not completely a bad one. The drive to win is important, but there are many additional things in life that are important as well.

It has been said that "death teaches life." To value life, to love the ones we love, to do the things we love to do, to not waste time, not waste life, for we don't know how long it will all be. In the sadness of loss, perhaps we can also remember the joy of living. And give thanks. See you on the courts soon! Blessings to all in this tough year of 2020.

Tennis Tip:

The Next Shot, Serve+1 & Return+1

The most important shots in tennis are the serve, and the return. Those shots happen almost every point. In fact, we have noted that the most common point in tennis, in men's or women's, college or pro, club or public park, is a serve in, and a return missed. One shot in. That's all. That's it. It happens between 25% (women's) and 33% (men's) of the time in pro tennis in singles. I would bet even more in doubles (mistakes trying to avoid the net person). One and done.

The next most common, is the return is made, and the third shot missed. About 20% of the time. Nearly half the points in tennis are two shots made or less (don't forget double faults too). That is the truth, at all levels of play.

As we spoke of last month, you should be spending a significant amount of your practice time working on your serve and your return. Ideally, you would be winning most of the points on your first serve, their second serve, and (hopefully)

2020 Lesson Rates

Keith & Patric

1/2 hour private \$45

1 hour private \$80

Jennifer (is taking time off)

1/2 hour private \$40

1 hour private \$75

Non-members add \$5

Weekly Lessons

Hit and Fit:

Canceled due to COVID-19.

Tuesday Ladies' Clinic:

Canceled due to COVID-19

Thursday Men's Clinic:

Canceled due to COVID-19

Ball Machine

Sadly, there is no ball machine use due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Court Washing

The first and last Fridays of the month, 12-3 p.m. Keeping the club clean is a high priority.

Quotes of the Month:

"Courage does not exist without fear"

"The belief was stronger than the body."

– Dominic Thiem, US Open Champ

your second serve. Only losing more points than you were winning on their first serve. This can be hard to achieve with your second serve, but you want to get as close to 50% as you can. 3.0s (~40%), elite pros (~53+%).

A large part of that success is having a good serve, and a good return, especially on the second serve. And while many points (~45-50%) are decided right here, in the first two shots, **a lot of winning most of your first serve points, their second serve points, and your second serve points comes down to what happens on the third shot (about 17%), and to a lesser degree, on the fourth shot (about 12%):** that is serve+1 and return+1.



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A Game Plan:

First question to ask yourself: are you on **offense or defense?**

Offense: If you are on the **offense, you're trying to force errors** (and get a few winners too). So, you hit a good first serve, or second serve return, and hope to put them under enough pressure to miss (point would end after one shot if you were serving, or two shots if you were returning).

If they don't miss, you hope that the shot they are able to get back in is one that you can attack (serve+1 if you are serving, return+1 if you are returning). Again, try to force an error on their next shot (or hit a few winners as well). The point ending after 3 or 4 shots in, the next shot missed.

Between 70-80% of the points in tennis are over after 4 shots made. That is amazing. As I stressed last month, don't practice "rallying", keeping the ball going. That is not how tennis is played, or won, the vast, vast, vast majority of the time. And yet, the #1 form of practice is rallying... (It's fun, that's fine, fun is good, but it depends what you are trying to achieve).

Here's a little something I have noticed this over the years, sometimes to my great frustration. When I am playing well, I'm winning most of the short points, and often losing a lot of the "good" points, the "great" rallies, the points with "amazing" shots. Because the average points are short, and unspectacular. When you are doing well, you are winning these. Longer points are much more even and thus can go either way.

Defense: On **defense**, you are trying to **keep the point going**. Maybe the attacking team will miss (about 35% of the points end in an unforced error in singles, less in doubles). Or if you can neutralize the attack, get back to even, then perhaps you can go on offense, and try to force errors. (see the second point in the upcoming example).

In addition to working on serving and returning, practice serve+1 and return+1 shots. But what shots are these?

An Example of a Typical Service Game in Doubles (all righthanders):

You serve to the deuce court, down the middle, and they try to go inside out with the backhand to avoid the net person and miss the return. 15-0.

You serve the ball out wide to the backhand in the ad court, and they return a slice crosscourt. You move over and hit your runaround forehand (serve+1) up the middle, past the net person, who is covering the alley. The returner scrambles to cover and throws up a good lob over your partner, who can't reach it. You switch sides, moving to your right, and lob the ball back. Their net person back pedals for an overhead and plays one up the middle. You block it

back, a great reflex lob. They smash again and this time, you are not able to get the next attempt at a lob very deep, and they close in and volley the ball away for a winner.

Everyone goes, "Wow! What a point." They may say, "Great get!" on your first reflex lob. They thought they had won it on the first overhead. You applaud them on their overhead or remember their first lob that neutralized your initial attack, clapping your hand and racquet strings together. That felt like "real" tennis, and you're a bit bummed you lost the point. Everyone will be talking about this point at the changeover, while drinking a cool beverage. 15-15.

Next serve down the middle, they return the backhand up the middle and your partner puts the volley (serve+1) away past the receiver's partner. 30-15.

You serve to the ad court, fault. On the second serve the returner hits the ball aggressively, a runaround forehand up the middle between you and your partner. You see their net person closing into the middle, the distraction helping to cause you miss the tough, hard, deep forehand (serve+1). Forced error. 30-30.

Back on the deuce side. You serve up the middle, and they can't handle the speed and kick on your serve, and miss the attempt at a lob return, which drifts harmlessly long. Tough to make a lob off a good serve. 40-30.

You serve wide to the backhand, and their cross-court return is short and weak. You move in, and power the serve+1 shot past the net person for a winner. Game.

Analysis: You won four points, they won two. A typical doubles hold of serve. You won 4 of the 5 first-serve points. Lost the second-serve point. You hit two winners, they hit one winner. You forced a couple of errors; they forced an error. You won all 3 deuce court points, 1 of 3 on the ad side. Server has a huge advantage on the deuce side in dubs.

If your partner had fluffed the volley on the third point, or you had missed the sitter on the last point, we would be at deuce. The odds would still be in your favor to hold serve. The serving team can usually make two errors and hold, because the receiving team rarely hits more than the one winner they got here (and taking 3 points only gets you to deuce, it takes four points to win a game). Here, the receiving team actually "won" two points (forced error). Unusual.

The serving team had the advantage because they consistently gave the receiving team tough balls, normally backhands, and first-serve returns. It was harder for the receiving team to put the serving team under pressure, only once on a first-serve point, quite brilliantly, and on the second-serve point. The receiving team really took their chances here, played well, they just didn't get enough chances.

This game could have been very different if the serving team missed more first serves. Or missed easy shots. So, the receiving team waits for their opportunities. This is percentage tennis.

Moral of the Story: If this little story doesn't have you going out to the practice court with a bucket of balls to practice your serve, you better read it again.

Also remember the importance of second-serve returns and dealing with short balls, which are very similar. On the second point, the serve+1 shot wasn't able to decide the point. Whereas the second-serve return on the fourth point, and the serve+1 on the last point decided the deal. All on short, weaker shots. We need to handle these.

Volleys and overheads were instrumental in finishing 2 of the 6 points (the second and third points above).

On the points where you are defending, primarily when they are hitting a first serve, and somewhat when you are hitting a second serve (depends how good your second serve is and how well they return), you want to keep the ball in play, and not make an [forced or unforced] error. This is when at least a short "rally" is good, because you are at a disadvantage (second point in the example, first the receiver, then the server, was just trying to stay in the point).

If we have a choice when we are on defense (which we often don't), we would also like to return the ball back in a place that makes it harder for them to force us on serve+1 (if they are playing a first serve) or return+1 (if it is a second serve return). On defense, we want them to make a mistake, or hit a winner, not us make an error (see second point).

Look at the point lengths (shots made) in the example above: 1, 10, 3, 2, 1, 3. The average length of the point 3.33 shots, but that is misleading, because only one point went past 3 shots. 5 of the 6 points were 3 shots or less. There is a good chance the only point the players remember is the least important one, the 10-shot rally. This is how our memory fools us about what is important in a match. That is not to say the 10-shot rally wasn't great, or great fun, and we all love these points, even when we lose them, but this is not the kind of point you want to base your strategy on, or train for. Four of the six points were set up, basically "won", by the serve. The returner also did a good job, getting 4 of the 6 returns back in play, and attacking on the one second-serve point. If there had been more second serves, or the serving team had made more unforced errors, there could have been a different outcome.

That's the story of serving and breaking.

The Key here was a high percentage of first serves and the serving team didn't miss any of the easy shots. Those would be very good goals or objectives. Even the returning team playing well can't stop that. For returners, get the ball in, give the server an opportunity to miss (more likely as the match gets tighter). And attack second serves.

Key Strategies on Defense: In doubles, we would like to return a first serve towards the middle. And it's nice if it is away from the net person, but not essential. Don't start missing a lot because you're trying to keep it away from the net person. In other words, we want to limit their opportunities to hit angles and at our double's partner. For example, playing a ball to the net person in the middle is much better than to the net person on the sides (where they can angle).

It only really pays to play an alley shot if you get it by them or make them miss. Once they make the volley, you are at a huge disadvantage because of the angles involved. Therefore, the alley target can be a good option on sitters.

In singles, when on the defensive, we want to get the ball cross court, so that it much easier for them to hit it back to us cross court, then into the open court (which is often down the line). "I win because I hit crosscourt," – Bjorn Borg.

When serving a second serve, we try to play a ball that is more difficult for them to attack and put us under pressure on our next shot (serve+1), so a ball to the backhand is nice, often with a kick, or high bounce. Something relatively safe, but not a sitter. We don't want to put the ball in a place where the returner has a lot of options (short and on their forehand side, just sitting there), and we are exposed.

In the deuce side, we tend to serve to a right hander's backhand in the middle to reduce the angles, and on the ad side out wide to the right hander's backhand, to force a predictable cross court return that we can poach or run around and attack. Flip flop this when serving to a left-hander (go wide on the deuce side, middle on the ad side).

Many, many players are not able to serve with this control consistently, and so when they are serving a second serve, they are at a real disadvantage. This would be an important thing to try to rectify with practice. And is totally doable, if you put in the work and time. Give yourself a chance on the second serve points. At least force a rally.

Serving Strategies: You want to serve with serve+1 in mind. In other words, you are trying to force an error with your serve, but if they were to get it back, you want to be ready for the most likely returns, so that you can attack again on serve+1. Even with a great serve, you are only winning 33% of the points on average on just one shot (serve in, return missed), so that puts you in the driver's seat to winning a majority of your first serve points, but you need to follow that up with an effective serve+1 shot in order to dominate your serve points.

Remember, once you get into a rally, serve+2, return+2, serve+3, return+3, serve+4, return+4, etc...) the serving advantage is gone, and you have to struggle to just win half of the points.

Points that last one shot (serve in, return missed) or three shots (serve in, return in, serve+1 in, next shot missed) make up about 43-50% of the points (lower in the range in most women's matches, higher end in most men's matches). These are the server's points won.

While points that last zero shots (double fault), two shots (serve in, return in, next shot missed) and four shots (serve in, return in, serve+1 in, return+1 in, next shot missed) are about 32+% of the time. These are the return's points won.

Serving Advantage: The server wins 62-70% of the points that last 4 shots or less, but only ~50% after that.

In doubles, you are trying to play a first serve that forces the returner to play the ball to your net person. That is the ideal serve+1. Then the net person can angle, take time away, and that's how you can force errors / hit winners. If they return past the net person, it is usually an angle and somewhat short (in order to get it by the net person, the ball has to be an angle and that makes it short — deep angles land wide). Or they can lob. It is very tough to lob a good serve, so if you work on your serve, that's the best way to defend the lob.

After a first serve, move in a step or two, and out a bit wide, and look for the angled return. (of course, in order to do this, it is **absolutely essential that the net person covers the middle** — probably the most important determining factor on holding serve in doubles). Where you serve largely determines if your partner can cover the middle.

Look at the points in the example. You can see what shots you need. Serve, return, volleys at the net, groundstrokes on short balls. Overheads. These are the points you are winning. Be good at these shots. Practice, practice, practice.

In singles, on a first serve, you either want to open up the court (serve wide) so that you can play the next ball into the open court, or go hard down the middle to reduce their angles, and force a short, weak return, that you can come in and finish.

Second Serve Return Points: You want to return with return+1 in mind. If you hammer the middle, look for the ball to come back in the middle, short and weak (hopefully your net person fills this space in doubles. In singles you prepare to move in for a weak return). If you go out wide (either side), prepare for an angle, which again, is usually short and often weak. After your return, don't just stand there, move to where you are most likely to be playing return+1. The less you have to move on the return+1, the higher the success rate (same for serve+1). Position!

The most important thing on dealing with weaker shots (shots where you have forced them, but they have gotten them back, often short) is getting up next to the ball. If you have to run a long way to chase down their weak shots, you are just not going to be able to do much, and either miss or not be able to press your advantage (force an error).

Second serve-return points are the one time the returner really has the advantage, and you want to really press the server or serving team on these points. Stand in close, get next to the ball. Put the pressure on, force errors. Don't let them get away with weak shots. Even a moderate increase in pressure can end up causing a lot of double faults.

Take Your Chances: The games where the server misses a bunch of first serves is your chance to get a break. But this is only your advantage if you attack. Don't just get the return back and start a rally. Remember, rallies end up 50/50, and 50% is a good success rate on second serves for the server, so as a returner, you don't want that. To have any chance to break serve, you really need to win most of the second serve points.

Rallying: You only want to rally when you are losing (playing defense). For returners, that is primarily when you are returning good first serves. If you have a weak second serve, you are hoping for a rally as well. Good luck out there!

COVID-19 Club Rules:

The Five Key Things:

- Physical distancing at all times
- Masks, wear masks when you are on the property. You can take masks off in only 3 instances (only when on the court: singles, members of the same household, practicing by yourself).
- Don't touch shared surfaces (especially tennis balls, but fences, doors, benches, etc...)
- No guests
- Play and Go (no socializing on the property).

And finally, **please don't come to the club if you are sick** (the obvious sixth thing, Duh!). The full rules are available at the club (posted in the glass case and the sign in board) and on orindawoodstennis.com under "information" and "club rules." **We're still doing great! Well played OW! Keep it up! Stay healthy!**
