



# 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*

## **Night Play / Court Lights**

### **Light Switch at Court 2 Gate**

The court light switch is at the bottom of the stairs at the entrance to court 2. If you arrive at the club for evening play, and the lights are not on, turn them on with the switch at the gate to court 2. The path is lighted, but it is generally quite dark when the court lights are out, so use caution. If the lights are on when you arrive to play, make sure to check the time so that they don't go out during that critical break point when you were lining up an overhead. Give yourself plenty of time for your game, as it is quite dark when they go out. You will be quite blind when the lights go off. Of course, the building, path and parking lot is lighted, but it will take your eyes time to adjust to the darkness. A flashlight in your bag is a good idea.

## **Patirc's Corner**

### **The Lifecycle of a Restring**

So, you have picked up your freshly strung racket from the Pro Shop. Now, what's next? Well, enjoy the wonderful feeling of a racket that is primed and ready for performance. Lose yourself in the experience of playing the game you love, with the racket you love, secure in the knowledge that your strings are going to allow you maximum expression on court. But, for how long?

That can vary, and is dependent on a number of factors that we will explore in future installments of **Patirc's Corner**. The one thing you can be sure of is, the strings will lose tension over time. They start to lose tension as soon as they are taken off the stringing machine. They are losing tension right now while they are nestled in your racket bag, hanging in your closet, or lying in the trunk of your car. Hopefully, not in the trunk of your car, as the extremes of temperature are not conducive to maintaining string performance.

Anyhow, the first indication that this loss of tension is affecting your game and you may need to replace your strings is when you start to sense a consistent loss of control. When those rally ball shots that used to land two feet inside the baseline, or the cross court passing shots that used to land one foot inside the sideline start to land on the wrong side of the line. As the strings loosen, the trampoline effect of the string bed increases, forcing you to alter the force or spin you hit the ball with in order to keep control of your shots.

The players on the pro tour switch to a newly strung racket every seven to nine games in order to try to maintain a consistent tension/feel. That way the only adjustment in force or spin is done for strategy or as a reaction to the opponent, and not because of changes in the performance of their equipment. But, we mere mortals are not so lucky as to have six to eight similarly strung rackets in our bag. So, when our favorite racket gets to this point, you may decide to bite the bullet and get that restring.

If you somehow survive this enhanced trampoline effect without a restring you will get to a very serious place. It is known as "The Dead Zone". No, this is not the latest HBO series, this is the point in which your racket strings have lost their elasticity, and you are effectively hitting with a glorified ping-pong paddle. This can be murder on your arm, as you have to hit harder to get the ball to go as deep or fast as you'd like it to. Also, the lost softness of the string is going to create a harshness that the internal workings of your arm, shoulder and back are not going to benefit

## **Ball Machine Club**

The ball machine club runs from March 18 to March 19. The cost is \$110 for the year. It is a great deal. Primarily we just want to cover the costs of running the machine, repairs and maintenance, and give you a great practice partner to improve and enjoy your tennis, plus get a bit of exercise.

## **Indoor Hit and Fit**

Just a reminder, but during these winter months, when Hit and Fit is rained out on the courts, we will still hold the "fit" part indoors, **Fit No Hit**, doing TRX in the Club's lobby. Come join us for a bit of exercise on those rainy days. We'll keep you in top shape for a return to the courts when the sun returns. Friday 10:30-11:30 a.m. (\$15), Saturday 7:30-9 a.m. (\$20).

## **Weekly Lessons**

### **Hit and Fit:**

*TRX workout (strength and stretching) & tennis drills using the Playmate ball machine.*

Friday 10:30-11:30 a.m. \$15  
Saturday 7:30-9 a.m. \$20

On rainy days, Hit and Fit will be held indoors in the Clubhouse, a TRX workout. It's fun, it's a killer workout!

### **Tuesday Ladies' Clinic:**

Tuesdays at 9:30 \$5

### **Thursday Men's Clinic:**

Thursdays at 9:30 \$5

The men's and women's clinics are drop-in. Register for Hit and Fit by telling Keith you are attending (e-mail).

## **Used Ball Drop**

When you are done playing with your tennis balls, please donate them by dropping them in the Used Ball Drop just to the left of the Pro Shop door. The ball machine and juniors thank you.

## **Quote of the Month:**

"I never lose. Either I win or I learn."

from. In fact, I believe most cases of soft tissue injury in the arms of tennis players is not caused by faulty technique, but by faulty equipment. And, dead strings are the number one culprit in this category.

If you want your racket to deliver consistent feel and maximum performance you need to restring it before you've travelled all the way through "Trampoline-town", and well before you enter "The Dead Zone". Certainly, \$25 to \$50 for a new restring is a small price to pay to avoid the frustration and potential injuries of playing with a tennis racket whose strings are past their prime. -- Patric



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### Tennis Tip:

## The Alley

One of the most misunderstood part of tactics in tennis is what to do with the alley. This narrow (4.5 feet wide), but long (39 feet) strip of land on each side can be an emotional issue in doubles, with partners disagreeing on how to use it, manage it, respect it, attack it, defend it, ignore it. Pretty much the whole spectrum.

**The Stats:** There are 1,404 square feet on your side of a doubles court (a lot more feet than you have). 351 of those sq. feet consist of the alley. 175.5 of them are on your half of the court. So, the two alleys comprise 25% of the court to area to be covered, but only 12.5% is on your half. This is an important consideration, because a target that is 25% of the court is much easier to hit than a target that is 12.5% of the court. Therefore, the fact that the alley is two separate areas, makes it harder to hit, even though it is 25% of the court surface area. The Alley is also right next to the side boundary of the court (more risk of hitting the ball wide), and it's long, rectangular shape means that the ball often has to fly over the other parts of the court (singles area) to land in the alley. And of course, if singles is your game, you don't need to worry about the alley at all. Other than it creates the illusion that a tennis court is much wider than it actually is (for singles). Ever play on a court that is just singles? You realize how the alleys (out in singles) skew your perspective.

So, this month, our discussion is on The Alley. Is it a dark alley, to be feared and avoided? A place to be mugged, robbed, beaten up? Or a well-lit, trendy place with interesting shops and restaurants, the place to be? What to do with it, how to cover it, when to let it be "open." Where to position at the net. Where to hit your ball to best take advantage of the whole court, and limit your opponent's ability to use the whole court. These are some of the issues we are going to look at this month in discussing the alley in doubles.

**Hour Glass.** Tennis statistician and elite coach Craig O'Shannessy calls the doubles court an hour glass (Fig. 1). At the net it is very narrow, and the back is wide. What he means by that is that most balls cross the net in the middle but can diverge to the wide court in the back (see fig. 1). Today we are talking about the few that don't. Statistically, the number of balls that go down the alley is relatively small (10%, maybe slightly more that go in), but they tend to be memorable. Significant?

**Science.** There are some very specific circumstances that must exist for a ball to have a reasonable chance to go down the alley and go in. There are three main factors: geometry, physics and physiology. These all have to be right to make an alley shot. Geometry is the easiest to understand. Can you draw a straight line from where the ball is being hit, to the alley. Physiology is probably the next easiest to understand. Our bodies tend to move in arcs, in partial circles, which means that we almost always hit balls across our body, or perhaps straight ahead. (fig 3 & 4). We have to be really set up well to control a ball inside out, or straight down the alley. Finally, there is physics. Angle of the ball, speed of the ball, spin on the ball, movement of the player hitting the ball, angular momentum, how hard the player is stroking the ball, quality of contact, etc... Pretty complicated stuff.

**Force Vectors** (Fig 2). Basically, if there are forces going in one direction (to the right in the diagram, ball, speed, and player moving), when you attempt to hit it straight (towards A), the ball will drift, or push farther to the right than you intended (towards B). The stronger the forces (harder the shot, greater the angle, faster the player is running) the greater the effect of resulting shot going to the right (towards D). Therefore, if you want the ball to go to A, you have to aim towards C. How much is tricky, because the result depends on all the variables (speed, spin, angle, how fast you are running, in which direction, etc...).

**Simplified:** What this all means in simple terms is, if the ball has pace and angle, and the opponent is running, you don't want to cover the alley (b/c they don't want to try to hit it. It's too difficult to make consistently).

"Too Complicated!" A lot of my students comment that even this is a lot to calculate. I think we all want a simple answer, "Cover your alley." And that is the way a lot of people play. They would rather be wrong (bad position), than make a wrong decision. You see, if you cover the alley when your opponent can't hit it there, you have taken yourself out of the play. Your partner is left playing singles, but at least you won't make a mistake or get beat. This is wonky thinking, because you have made a mistake, leaving your partner on their own, it just isn't as obvious as getting passed. Simple answers don't lead to optimum results. Sorry (reality butts up against desire, yet again).

**Is it a forehand or backhand?** Play for across the body (diagram 3 & 4). Back to physiology again. Unless a player is highly skilled, and well positioned, they tend to hit across their body. A ball that is played from the exact same spot, one time with a forehand, and then next time with a backhand, will usual go in opposite directions (Fig. 3 & 4).

**Small Targets.** Generally, you want them aiming for small targets, rather than big targets. This means that the more the ball is in the middle, the less you have to cover the alley, because it is just a very small target to hit. The ball is moving across the alley, not up and down it, making it much harder to hit. That doesn't mean they can't hit them, especially if your team's shot to them is pretty weak, but it is always harder than the big target.

**Where does the ball cross the net?** (Fig. 5) A ball from the middle (Y) going towards the alley will cross the net much farther towards the middle (Y at the net), than a ball played from the alley (X), or even wide of the court. So, if your opponent is playing the shot from the middle, you can be much more in the middle (Y at the net), and still be "covering your alley." If there was a ball completely in the other corner (say a lob to Z), you would come clear past the middle and still be covering the alley (corresponding Z at the net)

**First Serve / Second Serve.** Generally, first serves are more challenging to return than second serves. Most people try to just get a first serve back in play. Most good returners look to attack a second serve. So, the likely hood of an alley shot on a first serve is much less than on a second serve. In general, you should hit a first serve in a way that makes it very hard for your opponent to hit the alley, thus giving your partner the huge advantage of knowing they don't have to cover the alley. On second serves, we can't be so picky, but always consider that in serving, we are not merely trying to start the point, but start it off to our advantage, if possible. A few double faults are not as bad as a lot of weak second serves (if you are playing someone who punishes weak shots). Weak or strong is not merely about speed, but a combination of speed, spin, placement and deception. The best server (Federer, Sampras, Serena) is seldom the hardest hitter (Roddick, Raonic, Venus). Deception (can't be read) is the separator between good and great.

Fig. 1, The Hour Glass

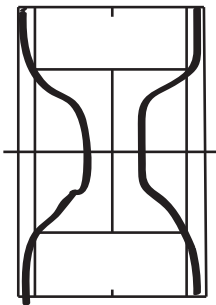


Fig. 2, Angle of deflection

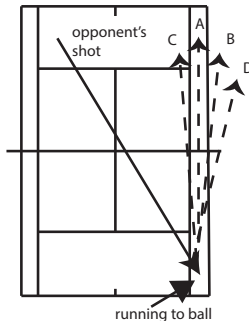


Fig. 3 BH across the body

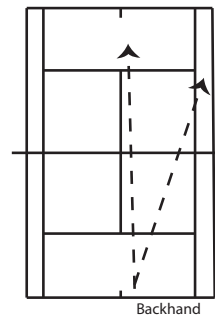


Fig. 4, FH across the body

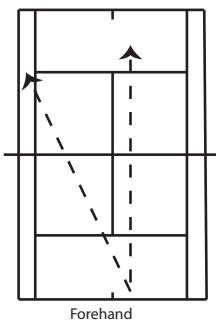


Fig. 5, Where the shot crosses the net

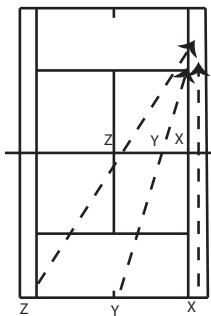
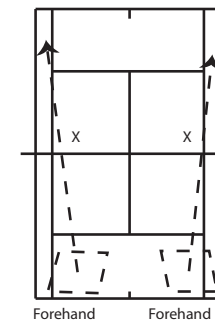


Fig. 6, The Meat Zone



**Placement** (the Meat Zone, Fig. 6) Where your team's shots land, and thus where your opponent is playing the ball from is huge in whether they can play a ball up the line. There are two places on the court, one on each side, where basically, you don't want your opponent hitting a forehand from. I call these areas the meat zone. So, job 1) is not to

hit the ball there, and 2) if it does go there, the alley is a possible target, and a reasonable target. Cover the alley (net player at X). Remember, it is very important to note whether they are hitting a forehand or a backhand. Backhands are almost always played across the body, where forehands are easier to go inside out.

What this means, is on the deuce side of the court, a backhand towards the middle (Fig. 5, Y) can end up played towards your alley (it isn't a big target though b/c the shot is crossing the alley). And a forehand in the meat zone could also go down your alley. On the add side of the court, a forehand in the meat zone is the easiest shot in tennis to hit down the alley, where a backhand in the exact same place is the hardest shot to hit down the alley (cover cross court).

**An Opportunity:** Again, a lot of people think this is too complicated, that they have to think too much, etc.... They just want to keep it simple, and just cover the alley, or never cover the alley. You can play this way, but you are handicapping yourself and losing opportunities to either be more offensive, or defend better. Here you have an opportunity to be a bit smarter about your positioning.

And remember, you don't always have to be right. You can lose some points, and win a match. Plus, just because you are in the wrong place, doesn't mean they can make the shot, or even try. So, you have a lot going for you. When someone hits the ball down the alley, and we are not there, but their shot hits the tape, and falls harmlessly back on their side, somehow we think, in some strange way, we have lost that point. But we haven't, we have won.

**Shot Selection.** Finally, what about hitting towards the alley? If they are covering the alley, you shouldn't hit it there. Obvious. If they are not covering the alley, **can you make the shot?** That's the important question, not whether the alley is open.

Now here is where shot selection gets interesting. If the alley shot is easy for you to make, your opponent should see that, and you won't hit it there. If the alley is too tough of shot to make, your opponent should see that too, and you won't try it, and the rest of the court is pretty covered too (You are in trouble). The only time to actually hit the ball in the alley is when you can make the alley shot, and your opponent doesn't think you can. Generally, that is on balls that are a bit more towards the middle (the middle side of the meat zone, Fig. 6), and perhaps not as forcing as your opponent might think they are. Remember, **only attempt shots you can make**, this is absolutely fundamental.

Sometimes you might, for strategic reasons (devious, sleight of hand, smoke and mirrors reasons), to shoot a ball down the alley even though it is covered. You are just reminding your opponent that you can hit it that way, even if you lose that point. You are hoping to keep them out of the middle, on shots that you must hit cross court. Sneaky.

**Reading between the lines**, you really don't want to play the alley shot very often. There are plenty of times you can't even make it (doesn't stop a lot of us). Then the obvious times you can, they are covering it (if they are not, by all means...). So, it is really on the border line makeable ones, that you have the best chance of success. And of course, by their very nature, are going to lead to more errors.

On the other hand, you need to send a message to keep the opponent out of the middle, so you need to hit some alley shots. The less pressure, the better the chance of success. Play alley shots in low pressure situations. First point of a game, 15/15, 40-luv. Not on game, set, match or break points.

As far as playing the net, in the big picture of winning the match, and being the best player and team you can be, it is far worse (because it happens much more often) to get beat in the middle, than down the alley. Remember the hour glass, doubles is played, and won, in the middle, with a thin neck (Fig. 1). Good luck out there!

## **Junior Clinic Schedule Winter 2018** **January 9<sup>th</sup> – March 16<sup>th</sup>**

The 2018 Winter Junior Clinics will begin the week of **January 9<sup>th</sup>** and will continue thru the week of **March 12<sup>th</sup>**. The 10-week program will be led by **Head Pro Patric Hermanson**. **Spring 2018** schedule will be similar.

The Level I and II classes will be taught using aspects of the USTA 10 and Under Development Program.

<b><u>Level</u></b>	<b><u>Class</u></b>	<b><u>Time(s)</u></b>	<b><u>One day/week</u></b>	<b><u>Two Days</u></b>
<b>I</b>	<b><u>Lil' Ones</u></b>	<b>Tues/Thurs 3:15-4pm</b> <i>The Lil' Ones class is for the always adorable 4-6 year olds</i>	<b>\$140*</b>	<b>\$220*</b>
<b>II</b>	<b><u>Future Stars Group</u></b>	<b>Tuesdays 4-5:30pm</b> <i>The Future Stars Group is for our 7 to 10 year old players.</i>	<b>\$255*</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>III</b>	<b><u>Tennis Development</u></b>	<b>Thursdays 4-5:30pm</b> <i>In the Tennis Development Group is for beginning through intermediate players ages 11 thru 14</i>	<b>\$255*</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>IV</b>	<b><u>Tournament Training</u></b>	<b>Wednesdays 4:30-6:30pm</b> <i>The Tournament Training Group is an invitation only class</i>	<b>\$325*</b>	<b>N/A</b>

\***Non-members** should add \$25 (Lil' Ones, only \$15).