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Orindawoods Tennis News

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

Pool Resurfacing

This winter we will be resurfacing the pool at the Club. It has been about ten years since the last time this work was done, and the bottom surface is getting a bit rough on the feet, so to speak.

The work should be done during our off season, and be completed in time for our normal opening around May 1. It is an involved process and requires quite a bit of demolition, as well as reconstruction, so there may be a bit of a mess around the place from time to time. Sorry for any inconvenience this work may cause.

Tennis Tip:

Some Days

We all have bad days on the court. Who knows where they come from, or why they choose to show up on this particular day. Having suffered (and this really is torture) through a rather bad day myself recently, this experience is fresh in my mind.

First of all, yes, tennis pros are human. We have bad days hitting the ball. Shocking, but true.

Now my bad day might not look that bad to you, the casual observer, but I can tell you with complete certainty, that it still sucks, is frustrating, and seems incurable at the time, just like anyone else's bad day.

Part of the problem has to be ownership. We feel like we own our game, our forehand, our backhand, and when we turn them on, like a car, we expect them to work.

Now when you have been playing for forty years, it is pretty hard not to have expectations, but it is precisely these expectations that lead to much of the suffering.

Upcoming Events

Welcome to 2009! Here is a quick list of events coming up in the first half of the year.

- Junior Program started Jan. 5, but you can still join and we will prorate the cost. A Spring session will begin in mid March and carry through to the end of the school year. Contact Patric for info.
- Indian Wells Trip: March 13-16
- Pool Opening: We will open the pool after a major resurfacing and remodeling around May 1.
- Ace It!: Our Breast Cancer Awareness Day: a Saturday in June TBA soon.
- Team Tennis: Monday Team Tennis will start early in June and play every Monday through the summer.
- Twilights Tennis BBQs: Twilights will begin in July.

Club House Beatification Committee

There is a group of women working on fixing up our modest clubhouse, giving it a new, fresh look, and making it a more inviting place to sit and have a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. They have some great ideas, from rearranging the furniture, to new pieces, painting and other changes.

I want to thank these members and our maintenance staff for doing some of the work, and tell everyone else to look forward to a spruced up Lobby in the near future. Thanks!

The Buddha said, "expect nothing, and you have all things." Not that far off.

I have commented in this space before that often players play pretty well after they have had a lay off, like the holiday season, or the winter. The reason for this is two-fold: 1) their expectations are low, and 2) their attention is high.

I remember the emotional roller coaster ride I used to take every day when I was a junior tennis player. I would play well one day, and then the next day, I would expect to play well, focus on the outcome of my efforts instead of the process, play lousy and get very frustrated. The next day, I would come out feeling like I wasn't very good (expectations low), but I would concentrate really hard to try to do better (attention high), and I would play well. The next day, back with higher expectations, I would play poorly and get frustrated again. It was a wild ride, and before I really figured out what was going on, I would go so far as to hope that I had a bad practice before a big match. Of course any consistency of play was completely out the window.

So what do you do when you are having one of those days. Is it hopeless? Not necessarily. I think it depends on how invested you are in feeling crummy, to tell the truth. Some days you need to feel lousy, or angry. Get it all out.

But if you want to work your way out of it, I think playing well goes right back to expectations. Expectations take you out of the present. So there are several exercises you can do to get back in the present. They are all good, and they can all work. The trick, and it is a big one, is to pick one and stick with it (more on that later).

My latest and greatest favorite is super fluid. I got this from one of the great books on playing and learning sports, *Quantum Golf* by Kjell Enhanger and Samantha Wallace. The technique is pretty simple, on the wind-up, you say "super,"

and on the stroke and follow through, you say "fluid." Super is an inhale, fluid is an exhale. This is all about rhythm, so is tennis. Super as the ball comes to you, fluid as it leaves.

The next thing that has worked wonders for me over the years is "bounce hit," created and made famous by Tim Galloway (*Inner Game of Tennis*). You simply say (to yourself if you are playing a match) bounce when the ball bounces and hit when you make contact. You try to make your call of the bounce or the hit as exact as you can to the time the actual event is happening. As with super fluid, this technique focuses your attention on things that are important, the flight of the ball and rhythm of your response (the stroke). And not on the outcome, or what shot you would like to hit too soon, before you even know how the ball is going to bounce to you and therefore what is possible.

Perhaps a bit less touchy feely, but a good bit of advice to help with focus is to "keep your head down." This can work because the primary loss of focus when you are actually hitting is to look up to see what the result of your hit is. This is all well and good if you have already hit the ball, but we are often so curious about the outcome, not the process, that we start to look up before we have really completed the hit. When doing this technique, I try not to look up until I think the ball has crossed the net. There is really not much I need to know from my vision before then, in the vast majority of the cases.

In conclusion, think rhythm, and not parts of the stroke. Don't get technical, because that blocks flow. For example, many players start to fixate on their toss on the serve. They may end up with a decent toss, but almost never a good serve. Too much attention is being paid to one element of an extremely complicated whole. Let it go, and let it flow.

What has often happened when we are having one of those days, is you have lost that happy mental place, and you need to get it back. Imagine, replay in your mind, when things were going really well (doesn't even have to be tennis), just find the emotions, and therefore the chemicals in your bloodstream that go with you in a good mood, a positive, high energy place. The chemical makeup of your blood is very different when you are tense, or angry, than when you are calm, and in a peak performance state. You need to replace the bad chemicals with the good ones.

This takes time. It takes about 15 minutes to flush out the chemical cocktail of your bad mood, and replace it with the good stuff, so my final advice is, be patient. Of course this is extremely difficult when you are wound up, anxious, pissed off, but it is the only way out. Peak performance requires high energy of a positive nature. When you are angry, there is plenty of energy, but the performance tends to be jerky (those chemicals make you overreact – fight or flight), highly inconsistent, and therefore frustrating (the negativity feeds on itself). One of the common mistakes is to try to calm yourself down by turning off the energy. You may end up no longer angry, but with no energy, you will not play well. If the low energy is negative, you will feel like you want to be anywhere but here, and you will be soon, because you are going down (this is tanking). If the energy is converted to positive, but is still low, the experience might be mildly enjoyable, but you won't do well, there is no fire, no passion, no gas in the tank. Observers might say that you have no drive, or don't seem to care. If your goal is not to be angry or hurt, this might just work, but if you want to win or play well, you are still in trouble here.

Of course it would be better if we never got mad, frustrated or anxious in the first place, but hey, the assumption of this article is that we are already mad, frustrated or anxious, and possibly all three.

So you ask what happened to me on that rough Saturday a couple of weeks ago out on the courts. Did I pull out of it? I can report I gave all of the above a shot, tried to be patient but, "Nah."

Some days are some days. But I did play really well the next day, 'cause my expectations were real low, believe me.

So a bit of humility is required here, perhaps. Even a well-trained professional can't always pull it off. We all have to be accepting of ourselves. We do our best, we give our all, but some days are some days. Enjoy!

Cheating For Young and Old

There has been a lot of discussion recently in tennis websites and publications about cheating, especially in junior tennis. Some of the brightest and best all-time tennis players, teaching pros and psychologists have weighed in on the topic.

Everyone maintains that the problem is getting worse since they were kids, and this very well may be true. Cheating was bad enough when I was a kid, but I think the pressures are greater now than ever. The experts propose all kinds of rule changes, and changes in officiating.

This discussion has even led me to wonder who of today's professional stars got there by hooking their way to a top

junior ranking over players who were perhaps just as gifted. It is not a pretty thought, I'm afraid. I like my heroes to be heroes, but often later, we find out perhaps they are not. With performance enhancing drugs, perhaps the cheating continues undetected, under the radar of the current ability to test. And I have no hints as to who some of those players might be. We could all venture an opinion, I'm sure.

Quote of the Month:

"It is an ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way."

-- Rollo May

Chances are if you are reading this, you are not playing junior tennis anymore, if you ever did. But cheating is about more than just junior tennis. The truth is, what I think when I read these reports on cheating is actually, how do we expect the kids to not cheat?

I see so much cheating in adult league tennis, where their parents (and grandparents) are playing. And then there is our society, with many of the top CEOs and politicians trying to get ahead by cutting corners. We have an environment of cheating right now, top to bottom, old to young, young to old.

In fact, tennis is the only junior sport where there are not officials, because, in other sports, you are expected to cheat, or was that, get away with what you can, a much nicer, but less honest way to put it. But hey, we are talking cheating here, not delusion behavior or rationalization. This lack of on-court officials has a lot to do with the history of tennis (it was created as a sport for gentile persons who were thought to be above cheating) and how difficult it actually is to officiate tennis (two people playing, 6-8 people calling lines to be effective – a very bad ratio to staff).

So in cheating, like many other things, kids just mimic what they see. They try out different behaviors and see how it works for them. If no one is there to teach them the consequences, or cause the consequences, then what is to be learned except that it is part of the game. I've heard cheaters described by others as "tough competitors," when they are not that at all. They couldn't be further from being tough, much closer to weak (see below).

Of course this culture of cheating excuses no one. We each are responsible for what we do. This is not to say all people cheat, just that cheating is easier than ever to justify, or rationalize. We can all point at one-time pillars of society that cheated, and blame them for society's cheating malaise, but it really comes down to personal responsibility. When that call is made, or you fill out your income taxes, only you are on the court or in the room.

I bought a new car recently, and reading through the manual I read that the car is programmed so that you can't accelerate past 155 mph. Nice to know. Last time I checked, the speed limit is somewhere between 55 and 70, depending on which road you are on. Of course it is not considered bad in our society to speed, only to get caught.

When I asked the salesman why my car didn't come with a moon roof, he said with a smile that the car isn't as safe in a crash if it has a moon roof, and we expect you will be going fast.

Whether I speed or not is up to me, and it is not Mazda's job to discourage me. On the other hand, is it to encourage me? Apparently so if it is to sell cars.

As for the USTA, they sell rankings, ratings, trips to national tournaments, sectionals, districts. These are the rewards for winning matches, leagues, tournaments, districts, sectionals, nationals. You get your picture in a magazine if you go far enough, and you can say you went to Nationals to your friends, proving, I guess, that you are someone special.

And it is nice to accomplish things, whether it is to win your weekly match with Boris, or be part of a team that wins it all. The rewards, in themselves, are not bad. The problem is what we do to try to get the reward, that is where the problems start.

Most violence is done to others when we stop seeing the other person as a person at all. They are the enemy, a lousy Yankee, a rebel, a red coat, a jap, a crout, a rag head, ... a cheater.

Recently I got to do an exercise in a class I take that was very useful and had a profound effect on me. The exercise asked me to talk about something that made me angry (receiving a bad line call in this case). Then it asked me what actually happened (the call was out when I clearly saw it in). It asked me what reasons I tell myself for why I am angry (they stole a point from me, it's unjust, I earned that point, I'm calling their shots fairly and I expect the same in return, I follow the rules, I'm a good sport, etc). The next question asked what needs of mine were not being met in this situation (fairness, cooperation, respect, justice). Then I was asked when I think of those needs, what other feelings come up (The world of a tennis match doesn't feel like a safe, fair place. I feel out of control, and my success is not up to me, but dependent on other, sometimes shady people). The next question asked me to imagine what feelings and needs are expressed in my opponent's actions that ended up being the stimulus for my anger (they need to feel safe, to have some control over the outcome in a sport where the outcome is unpredictable and scary). Interesting. Next, if I am still angry, I go back through the process again. I did this a couple of times. After that, I realized that their needs and predicament is very similar to mine (a situation where you don't know the outcome, but you are risking your ego and effort). Next is to ask yourself, if you are still angry, why you choose to respond with anger (I feel such disrespect, and hurt that others would only care about themselves and treat me this way. Then there was the need to feel right, and justified).

I can say that after this exercise, I was still angry about the call, but I did see my opponent in a much better light, as someone who is under stress, who probably made a bad choice in a split second. I had more respect for the person, and less for the decision or strategy that he chose. I could also see how my need to feel angry (feel justified) wasn't helping me to play the rest of the match. I was doing myself no favors there. Righteous indignation doesn't take you towards focus, concentration, and the calm, relaxed, energized state that we all play well in (see article above on Some Days). Of course, if you are particularly cynical, you might think they cheated in the first place to try



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to get you angry and out of focus. Sometimes true.

As long as we see our opponent as something in the way of what we are trying to get, the temptation to cheat is going to be strong. If we see them as someone, a person, under the same sort of pressures we are, working with us to create what we really want, to compete and play as well as we can under pressure, then perhaps we have a chance of not getting lost, and doing another human being, and most importantly in the long run, ourselves, a lot of damage.

If the prize in society continues to be of a limited supply (money, silverware, trips to Nationals), then I think the pressure of trying to achieve that prize will always lead some people to cheating. I know very strong, moral people, who have admitted to me a time in their life when they cheated because they just couldn't afford (in their eyes at that time) to lose to that bum/bitch or see their ranking drop.

Some suggest that there needs to be officiating on each court in tennis (particularly in junior tennis). After all, even when I play in the most casual adult volleyball league, for example, there are officials. And we find officials in almost every sport played, adult or junior, except tennis.

On the other hand, I have been a referee in two sports, and the presence of a referee doesn't stop the cheating, let me tell you. In some ways it encourages it because it takes the player's personal responsibility away.

I'm a huge fan of soccer, and both diving (pretending you were fouled and flopping on the ground) and beating the offsides' trap are two instances where the player tries to trick the referee into making a call in their favor. Same could be said for fouls in basketball, or football. And touches in volleyball are seldom admitted if the player thinks the ref should make the call or "it didn't happen".

Where people are lost, I think, is the emphasis on the prize, and not on the value of playing (exercise, competition, putting it on the line, giving it your all, performing under pressure, sticking to your morals when it is easy not to). These are the real values in playing, not saying you are now a 4.5, or that you earned a trip to Nationals.

What a joke, people are selling their souls for that? A weekend in Fresno, or Arizona, or some other place. We already live in Northern California, how much better can it be than that? Selling out for what people sell out for is frankly, hard to believe, but not in the environment we have created in this society.

So it is up to each of us to realize, in our own hearts, what the real benefits of playing are. Playing is the benefit. That's it. If that isn't enough, take up checkers.

So should there be prizes, when playing is the real prize? Yeah, prizes are nice, but I know with Monday Team Tennis here at the Club, everyone who plays gets a prize, and perhaps the best prize goes to the team with the worst record (a free lesson). Maybe they need prizes more, who knows? The team that won, they are thrilled because it worked out well. Winning, like playing, is the really an internal reward.

I have even talked to the USTA about having a districts, a sectionals, even a Nationals, for the worst team in each league. A Losers Tournament. Blow the whole winning thing right up. And USTA had thought about it, but lacked the volunteers to run such an event at this time. What a shame.

Or draw a team at random, out of all those that didn't make playoffs, and play a team tournament against other teams that didn't make it from other leagues and sections. These people, these players, are no less special than the ones that won. In fact, they may be more special, if the ones that won cheated to do so.

So cheating is part of the game. It separates the winners from the losers. The real winners don't cheat, they don't need to. They are enjoying playing the game and its many benefits. The losers, they are the cheaters, because they have lost sight of the real reason for playing, and they are missing the pleasure of playing to win a potential distant trip to Fresno, or to have a higher rating, which nobody really gives much of a damn about anyway. Most people think of the person you are, not your rating.

Recently I heard a definition of being an adult that most all psychologists can agree on. An adult is a person who can do two things, 1) stay connected to themselves and others at the same time (care about themselves and others), and 2) put up with short-term pain (suffering or uncertainty) to achieve long-term gain (in this case, be a morally upstanding member of the tennis community). Good luck out there!