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Orindawoods Tennis News

Orindawoods Tennis Club: 925-254-1065; Office Hours: M-F 8:30 a.m.-6 p.m., Sat./Sun.: 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m., www.orindawoodstennis.com
"I like this place, and willingly could waste my time in it – Celia, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene IV

Happy Holidays To Everyone!

I hope everyone is enjoying a wonderful holiday season! Here at the Club we kicked off festivities with our annual Thursday Men's Lunch Bunch BBQ on December 4. We had 34 guys in attendance, and it was one of the best parties yet, with old friends and good times shared by all. Derek Southern took great pictures which can be viewed on the internet by typing in this address:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/Orindan/Dec4ThursdayTennisBunchLunch#5276103776669621698>

Our Reindeer Games were unfortunately rained out this year. We had over forty reindeer signed up, but the rain gods spoke, and there was only rain, no deer ("Oh dear!"). A sad day. But a happy season. Happy holidays to all!

Pro Shop Holiday Hours

The Pro Shop will be closed Dec 24-28 for the holidays, and Jan 1 for New Years. After a long, dry year, it is time for some family time. Happy holidays to you all!

There will be no Ladies and Men's clinics on Dec 23, 25 & Jan 1

Cell Phones And Other Conversations

HI EVERYBODY! (loud voice). One of the great things about tennis is that it is a social game that we play with our friends. Perhaps it is our one time during a busy week to connect with these people, so some talking on the court is to be expected, and actually encouraged.

On the other hand, please remember there are other people playing next to you, so loud voices, especially in the direction of the neighboring court can be disruptive. I find this particularly true of cell phone conversations. Often, we can't hear the person calling very well (due to poor reception or ambient noise), and this causes us to speak even louder (like that would help us hear).

We realize in this modern age, we may need to take a call to get a report on a sick child, or a hot real estate deal, but please walk off the court to take those calls (or at least face the side fence), and we never recommend talking on the phone when you are playing a point. We also realize that perhaps you were only able to play tennis this morning because you have your phone and people can still contact you on the court. Rather than sit around your house or the office all morning, you were able to be out getting exercise and having fun here at the 'Woods, and still be available to take care of business.

In a USTA league situation, your phone ringing is grounds for your opponent claiming the point due to an intentional distraction (it is intentional because you didn't turn your phone off).

Finally, remember it is illegal in the State of California to be on your cell phone and driving (a forehand return). Fortunately, we haven't seen too much of that around here. Next: Bluetooth tennis

2009 Tennis Club Dues

Tennis Club dues will be \$95 for 2009. Costs of running the Club have continued to rise, with the cost of repairs, water and power being especially hard to keep up with. I attend every Board meeting and I can report that every possible attempt is being made to keep costs down. In addition, we are committed to keeping the Club in top shape with the resurfacing of the pool and spa this winter in time for opening day in early May. In 2008 we spent a large sum on coloring the courts, and rebuilding the retaining wall in the pool area.

We continue to focus our long-term efforts on keeping the courts, pool and our members at the top of their game. We know we are a tennis and swim club, and that is what we do best and where we apply your money. Orindawoods Tennis Club thanks you for your continued support, and we pledge to continue to be the best club we can be for you and your family.

IMPORTANT: *if you have your dues taken out electronically by your bank, make sure you adjust the scheduled payment to the new amount. It is easy to forget this, and not pay the correct amount.*

Helping Cut Costs: This is one of the funnier, or more bizarre stories of the year. It turns out that our custodial costs are up about \$1,000 this year. When we investigated this further, we discovered that there has been a huge increase in the use of paper towels. Yes, paper towels, a thousand dollar increase. That is a lot of paper towels. When we discussed this with the custodial staff, they reported that they can't put enough paper towels in the women's locker room. I asked if the towels were disappearing, and the staff reported that they all end up in the trash cans, which are overflowing. We are not talking about someone using 3 paper towels to dry their hands, we are talking about someone using 20 or 30 at a time. Hopefully who ever is doing this will stop. Any ideas who is being so wasteful?

Junior Program

The Junior Program begins its Winter Session on January 5. The classes, times and prices are listed on page 4. Our Fall Program was one of our most successful yet, with over 80 kids participating in tennis here at the Club. The Winter Session looks to be a strong one too, as so many juniors learn the game of tennis. Contact Head Pro Patric Hermanson to sign up.

New Year's Resolution***Upgrading the Midcourt Game***

At the recent NorCal USPTA Fall Conference, I saw a talk on the Modern Game that really intrigued me, and that I have incorporated into most of my lessons. The talk was given by Mark Fairchild, a USPTA National Board Member and a pro out in Modesto. Mark is one of the top doubles players in Northern California, and probably the best volleyer I have ever seen. This is why his talk began with such a shocking announcement, "The volley is dead." He exaggerated slightly for effect, but we must admit, that when we watch pro matches, and not just singles, there are fewer and fewer traditional volleys being hit. For me, an unabashed serve and volleyer my entire life, to hear "the volley is dead" from the God of Net Play was tough to hear, but he had my attention.

What follows is a summary of Mark's ideas, plus my extrapolation on where this is going. Enjoy, or like me, cringe.

In today's game, the traditional volley is basically good for two things (which are similar). It is good for taking pace off a fast shot, and it is good at angling the ball (you need to take pace off to angle). What traditional volleys are not good at, is adding pace to a shot, or forcing baseline opponents into making errors.

A Game of Errors

Tennis is a game of errors. At every level, the player or team making the fewest errors is usually the winner. Even the most powerful, attacking player, only wins about 30% of their points with winners. 70% of the points are lost. This hasn't changed much over the years.

In dealing with errors, the most basic approach is, "I'm not going to make any errors." This leads to conservative play, and a lot of lobbing in doubles, and "pushing" in singles. People play the ball high over the net, and well within the lines, daring their opponents to miss. The problem with this strategy is that if the other player takes on the same approach you can have very long points, to say the least (the record for one point in a USTA event is 51 minutes, in case you were wondering – That's right, I said one point, not one game or one set).

In other words, when you play not to make errors, you aren't putting any pressure on your opponent other than "I'm not going to miss." This is more psychological pressure than actual physical shot pressure. If they choose not to be psyched, you have nothing going for you in terms of pressure.

The other way to look at errors in tennis is "I'm going to force them to make errors." This would be a more offensive style. You are going to hit the ball where it is more difficult for them to hit it. You will hit some winners, and the difficulty of your shots will force some errors. Of course, you are hitting difficult shots, so you will make some errors.

Two Different Approaches

These two basic approaches can be summed up in two ways: "I want to win every point," vs. "I am willing to lose some points, so that I can win enough points to win the match."

Let's look at the first of these, "I want to win every point." This seems like the right approach on the surface, but actually, if you are playing someone good, this can lead to disaster. This win every point strategy means that you can't make any mistakes, so you play it so safe that you put no pressure on your opponent. If they have skill, they take your weak shots, and will put you under extreme pressure. You will end up giving up winners, and making errors because their shots are so tough, the very thing you set out not to do. Safe isn't safe.

As for the player who is willing to lose some points, to win others (and particularly the last one), it all becomes a cost/benefit analysis. The more pressure they apply, the more likely they will force errors, but also make errors. Too many errors, and one side loses. So the question becomes, how to apply the most pressure possible without the cost (too many errors) losing you too many points. After all, if you miss, that puts no pressure on your opponent at all.

The perfect example of this in modern tennis in the past ten years are the much anticipated, and highly derided matches between Venus Williams and Serena Williams. To traditionalists, these matches are usually ugly, with tons of errors from both players. But if we look closer, this is actually tennis at the highest level. They force each other to make mistakes. The same could be said for Sharapova, Ivanovic, Davenport and many other modern players. Remember, these players took over tennis from perhaps the most skilled player ever, Martina Hingis. Hingis, no matter how beautifully she hit the ball, or how fast she ran, couldn't get enough balls back to beat the big hitters. Perhaps Henin and maybe Jankovic are a nice balance between the retriever and the pounder, but it is a tough balance to find.

So how does all this relate to the death of the volley? If we look at the traditional attacking game that I learned, the

idea was that you would hit a serve or groundstroke, get a weak shot that landed in no man's land (roughly, the space between the service line and the base line), hit an approach shot and come in and finish the point off with a winning volley. Think Martina Navratilova or John McEnroe knifing that slice backhand (or can opener serve) and coming into the net to finish off the point.

The problem with this strategy, and why we almost never see it played in the

Quote of the Month:

*"Outcome is passive. But the process is active."
-- Steve Stefanki, pro tour coach*

professional ranks anymore, is that your opponent's groundstrokes are just too good. At the top levels, with the advent of the inverted, reverse or flip forehand (Nadal's over the head follow through shot), low balls are just not that difficult, even for players with extreme grips. What was once a forcing shot, just isn't forcing anymore. Notice the best flippers in the game, Nadal, Simon, Murray, Djokovic give the best attacker, Federer, fits.

I can speak to this at the club level. For years teaching pros have been telling players to come in to the net, and yet when they get there, the players have trouble with the pace of the groundstrokes coming at them, or the lob. Basically, the approach shot, as we have known it, is not strong enough to really worry the person you are attacking, and rather than forcing them into errors, their reply (lob, passing shot, ripped groundstroke through the middle) is actually causing you to make errors, the opposite of what you had in mind. Is it a disadvantage to attack?

Opportunity Awaits

Yet there are still weak shots just waiting in no man's land to attack. In fact, with the attacking groundstrokes of today's game, there actually may be even more weak shots to take advantage of, if we only knew how. Here's how:

No man's land has changed from a place to avoid to the place you want to be. Pick a new name: this area on the court has become the "opportunity zone."

In the past, the shots played in this zone all resembled the traditional net shots in some way. Back behind the baseline, players have been hitting topspin ground strokes for ages, but as soon as they entered no man's land, they would chip, slice, carve, knife the ball, strokes that closely resembled volleys. Again, the idea was to keep the ball low with underspin and get into the net to finish the point with a volley.

But keeping the ball low, and being at the net just doesn't put enough pressure on the opponent any more. McEnroe can say all he wants about players not knowing how to volley these days, but Nadal would torch him if they were the same age playing their same respective styles. Out of necessity (the mother of invention), players have taken to hitting the ball harder in an attempt to increase the pressure.

New Shot For A New Year

In modern tennis, a ground stroke type swing is now being played all the way up to the service line, if not even closer than that (through the entire area formerly know as no man's land). This has led to the development of a new kind of ground stroke, and volley, the horizontal forehand (and backhand).

The swing is very flat, or horizontal. If we try the traditional low to high groundstroke (topspin) in this area, we will often hit the ball long (and even if it is in, we don't want the ball bouncing high like a topspin shot does). And if we slice, which makes the ball rise, there is a real limit to how hard we can hit the ball. So the preparation for this horizontal stroke is much higher on the backswing than a topspin, baseline drive, and the finish is straight in front of the contact point, not up. The ball is hit flat, with little spin. And it is torched.

The idea is to hit the ball as high as you can up to about shoulder height, and take a groundstroke-like shot. If the ball bounces in front of you, the idea is to hit the ball right when it crests, at the highest point on the bounce. If you take the ball as a volley, the idea is to contact the ball about shoulder height with a swinging volley. Same horizontal swing whether the ball bounces or not.

As for swinging, it isn't really a swing of the arm, but of the body. The arm is up, with the elbow raised (to close the face and prevent you from hitting it long), and the racquet is brought forward by bringing the shoulder forward, and not by swinging the arm (the swing is in the body). So in some ways, "swinging volley" is a misnomer. There is no more swinging on this volley than the traditional volley with the arm, but the body is moving a lot more.

These contact points give you the ability to hit the ball hard and flat. Much more like ping pong than traditional tennis. However, contrary to what you might think, the actual swing speed is pretty slow. On a topspin or slice shot, much of the swing speed, or racquet head speed, goes into the spin (angular momentum). When you hit the ball flat, you don't have to swing that hard to make it go fast, because all of the energy is going into forward speed, not spin.

The resulting shot gets to your opponent much faster than a traditional approach shot, and due to the flat trajectory of the shot, still stays quite low. This shot, if not an outright winner, does force errors in a way the slower, traditional slice approach just can't do. Look at how Nadal handles Federer's backhand slice with the forehand flip.

If the ball is struck when the attacking player is in close to the service line, players often continue forward into the net position, and hit traditional volleys (not quite dead yet) to finish the point. Coming in behind this swinging shot does often produce a return from your opponent that can be put away with a volley (angled or dropped, the way volleys can still win points). If the ball is attacked closer to the baseline, then often players will stay in the area formerly known as no man's land, and perhaps hit this horizontal shot more than once. Remember, the point is not to get to the net, the point is to win the point. From where can you hit the most forceful shots.

What About Lobs?

When we are at the baseline, often opponents will hit us a lob, or a semi-lob. We have always been taught to back up, let the ball bounce near the baseline, and return this shot with a lob or semi-lob, since we will find ourselves back by the fence by the time we hit this shot. Why do this? Our opponent is not really forcing us back. Their shot



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isn't hard, fast, powerful. In fact it is slow and loopy. Instead of deciding to go on the defense and back up, why not step forward and take this ball out of the air?

This is what the pros are doing. Your opponent gets in trouble and throws up a lob, but you come forward and take it out of the air with a swinging volley. You stay on the offense, and not retreat to the back fence, hopelessly on defense from then on.

Some students ask about taking these high balls as overheads when they are in the opportunity zone. Here is what I see the pros doing. When they are coming forward, pros prefer the swinging volley. When they are moving back (already at the net) then they hit overheads. After I looked at this a bit further, this makes total sense.

Overheads are difficult when you are moving forward. It is easy for the ball to get too low, and then you hit it in the net. But even if you can make the overhead, the swinging volley is still better from this opportunity zone. The reason is that overheads bounce up higher, so they are great when you can overpower the other player, but when you are deeper in the court, it is actually harder to return a low, skidding, swinging volley. Again, think forcing errors. Which is tougher for them to hit?

The Game Changes, Evolves

So this new style works. In the professional ranks, most of the winners are being hit in this opportunity zone. Few players ever make it all the way to the net. We have seen this same shot coming up in doubles too, where many players feel that they are much more dangerous hitting overpowering ground strokes from the baseline or no man's land than coming forward to the net. I have done a very simple test with my students to prove this point. From no man's land, I hit them a shot with a traditional volley and then I hit them a swinging volley. I ask which one they would rather go up against. The traditional volleys look pretty easy by comparison. I look scary when I'm swinging.

The real question is, can we make enough swinging volleys to make the cost (missing some shots) not too expensive to achieve the benefit (winning). With a little practice, it is not that hard to be hitting a very good swinging volley. Remember, it is not like you haven't done this shot before. You have been hitting forehands and backhands your whole tennis life. A few adjustments are required (more horizontal, the timing is a bit different), but it isn't that tough and suddenly, you are a lot more dangerous player. I can see your dreaded opponents shaking in their shoes already. Good luck out there!

Orindawoods Junior Winter Clinic Schedule 2009

The 2009 Winter Junior Clinics begin the week of **January 5th**, and will finish up the week of **March 9th**. The 10 week program will be led by Head Pro **Patric Hermanson** and Assistant Pro **Philip Laubscher**

Class	Time	One Day / Week	Two Days/Week
LittleOnes (4-6 yrs)	Tu + Th 3:15-4 pm	\$115/\$130 (member/non OW)	\$190/\$205
Future Stars (7-10 yrs)	Tuesday 4-5:30 pm	\$225/\$250 (member/non OW)	n/a
Tennis Development Group (11-14 yrs)	Thursday 4-5:30	\$225/\$250 (member/non OW)	n/a
Tournament Training (by invitation only)	Friday 4:30-6 pm	\$225/\$250 (member/non OW)	n/a

We have factored into the cost of the clinics the potential of two weeks of missed classes due to rain, illness, vacations, etc. **The Future Stars Group** is for players with no tennis experience to those who have played a year or two. **The Tennis Development Group** is for our junior high schoolers and for the younger players who can somewhat consistently hit the ball back 4 to 5 times per rally and can serve the ball in from the baseline. **The Tournament Training Group** is an invitation only class. Contact Patric about setting up a try-out. Special Discount: 10% discount off the cost of second sibling. Discount taken off the lower of the two costs. Inclement Weather: In case of questionable weather (rain), please call the Pro Shop for a court condition update. For more information or to sign up, please call Keith or Patric at the Pro Shop **(925) 254-1065**, or e-mail Patric at patricTennis@yahoo.com. Tennis shoes required (no black soled shoes).

www.orindawoodstennis.com

Reservations, Club calendar, weather and court updates, lesson programs and much more!

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