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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](http://www.orindawoodstennis.com)

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

## **The Story of Effort and Skill**

So you find yourself in the third set of your weekly match, bragging rights are on the line for the entire week, and the score is 4-4. Throughout school, and your successful career, you have been rewarded for your work ethic, and effort. You have applied that same drive to your tennis game, and everything in your very soul says, "Try harder here at four-all."

So you run right, you run left, you storm the net, you chase down the lobs, but your opponent, "dreaded George" is just too good, and you lose yet again, 6-4. It is infuriating, because George doesn't even look like he is trying that hard. You put your racquet down next to your tennis bag, really wanting to slam it down instead, and yank your towel out of the bag to wipe the perspiration pouring off your brow. George is saying something about how beautiful the day is, or some other worthless pleasantries. "Can't he see I hate this worthless day?"

George's smooth strokes and the way he glides to the ball, you wonder, did he even break a sweat? And there is the pleasant, seemingly condescending way he shakes your hand, and says, "Well played."

Looking down, your worthless racquet sits harmlessly by your bag. You could throw your racquet into the side fence, the frustration and humiliation of having to put up with this week after week. Is this what Federer feels in Paris?

Now George is talking about something he learned in his lesson, something about positioning the ball in relation to his body. What drivel, you think. What's so hard about tennis, you just swing and hit the ball. You want to say, "I've never had to take a lesson in my life," but you are not rude, though it would be easy right about now to be so.

Monday morning, back in the office, you are still frustrated. You had closed in to the net, so close, only to see George float that lob over your head, leaving you frozen in your steps. You struggled to turn around, your legs pushed against the ground with all their might, you slowly accelerated up to full speed, the ball floating ahead of you, so close, so far... and for what? You couldn't quite reach the ball, and in a desperate swing, launched it over the side fence. How many times will you replay match point in your head?

"Why couldn't George play like a man?" you mutter.

Your junior associate Stephanie knocks on the door, then walks in. She hands you the report she has been working on. "Here it is," she says.

"Thanks, I'll take a look."

She walks out of the room, and you flip open the cover. Trouble right away. First of all, just by picking it up, you can see it is way too long. Who is going to read something this big? Not our clients.

You lean back in your high-back leather office chair. What needs to be done with this report to fix it seems monumental.

Stephanie, she is good, went to the best school, but young, and

## **Twilights This Summer**

Hey, let's have a party. A Twilight Tennis Party. We'll play some tennis (5-7 p.m., Keith's magic mixer), and eat a little steak (Kinder's, of course). Have some wine and beer, and chat it up with our friends and neighbors. Let's do this on Friday, July 18. You don't need to play tennis to join us for dinner.

To sign up, you can register on the Club's website, or call or e-mail Keith and let him know. Be sure to say if you are playing tennis, and what you want for dinner, steak or chicken. The cost is \$18 for just dinner, \$20 if you play tennis. Thanks.

Other Twilights: 8/8, 9/12 and a weekend in Oct.

## **Monday Team Tennis**

MTT started on June 2, with our biggest turn out to date. For each Monday this summer, six teams will compete for the right to enjoy the biggest tennis party in Orinda. Four teams play each night, with dinner being served and much tennis being played and enjoyed.

## **Junior Tennis Summer Program**

Patric, with the help of Philip, are running a wonderful Junior Tennis Program this summer. Each week features either a tennis camp or wet and wild camp. See page 4 for all the details.

## **Men's Lunch Bunch**

The Thursday Men's Lunch Bunch summer BBQ will be held on July 10 at 11:45am at Woodhall.. If you would like to sign up, and join the gang for a great steak or chicken lunch, either contact Chet Ferdun, Page Thibodeaux or Keith Wheeler, and we will make sure there is a slab of meat on the BBQ for you. As always, the cost is determined by the number of guys signing up.

The Lunch Bunch's winter BBQ will be on Dec 4, so mark your calendars. I know I already have it down in mine. A lunch event not to be missed.

## **Ace It!**

Our Breast Cancer Awareness Day was held on June 21. Many thanks to all of the volunteers that help make this day such a success, and to all of you who participated, or contributed. And thanks to all the members for supporting this event by letting us use the entire Club for a day. In six years, we have been able to raise well over \$100,000 and been one of the major contributors to the Carol Ann Read Breast Center at Alta Bates. Thank you all.

lacks experience. She works hard, long hours, but you just haven't had the time to train her, and now you have to fix this report. It will take hours you don't have, but will none the less, have to make. Another long week opens up in front of you. You really need to spend more time working on her skills.

You think back about when you were young, fresh out of school, full of confidence, but really not knowing anything. Years of training, experience and trial and error have made you the successful businessperson you are now.

Your phone rings and your receptionist tells you George is on the line.

"Hey, want to play doubles on Tuesday night?" George asks.

"I can't, I have a report that needs reviewing." You answer.

"That's too bad, I've got a great game set up. They're tough, but I think we could take 'em."

George likes winning as much as you do, but he seems to actually do it.

You start to explain, "This work..."

"Yeah, it is a busy time of year," George cuts in. "We have big report due too, but my staff is handling it."

You stare at the phone keypad, wanting to slam the receiver through it, plastic shattering in every direction, but instead, you hear yourself say, "Well, this is different." You don't believe it, but you just need to save face. "Maybe I can play next week."

"Well, we'll miss you," and George says goodbye and hangs up.

How does George get to play tennis and you are still stuck at work? Why is his staff able to do the work, they are not older than Stephanie and didn't even go to as good of schools?

You think of Stephanie. Why can't she do this right? You want to yell at her, but you know better. It would have taken you half the time to do this right the first time. What do you have that she doesn't?

Skill. It hits you like a freight train. Skill.

George floating across the baseline to the ball, his racquet carving effortlessly under the ball as he takes your punishing approach shot and the under spin lob lifts into the air and rises up over your head as your on-charging feet squeak to a stumbling stop, an in vain attempt to reverse course and chase the ball down.

You need to give Stephanie the skills. You need to take the time to give her the skills. And you need to learn how to split step when you come to the net. You are faster than George, and you can't even run down an under spin lob. That @%&\$ing match point plays again in your head.

You are not even sure what a split step is, but you finally know that you need it, that you need some skills, if you are ever really going to challenge George and rub his condescension back in his face.

....

Tennis is a skill sport, not an effort sport. That is not to say that effort doesn't play a part, but it is just a part. When we learn the game, we are so excited, we can't play enough. We throw ourselves into it with more passion than Rafa, but basically, we aren't any good, no matter how hard we try.

In all our upbringing, and often in our careers, we have been rewarded for effort. Hard work, long hours, and we often think that this is the basis of our success. Effort is easy to see. Everyone can see when we are trying hard, and therefore it is easy to reward. It is rewarded in school, on the ball field, in the office and in cleaning the yard.

No matter what your faith, if you grew up in this country, you got a heavy dose of the Protestant work ethic. It is everywhere in our culture, and behind a lot of our success as a country. Basically, it says that if you work hard, you will go to heaven. And that success on earth is a sign that you are one of the chosen. It is in our blood.

The problem is that the Protestant Work Ethic can mask the fact that skill is an important component too, and without it, you are lost.

Many of us, when we take up tennis, or play that weekly match with George, rely too heavily on effort as our primary strategy. Effort is the first strategy that comes to mind. Without the split step, no matter how hard you try, George is going to get you almost every time. If George is getting in proper position, and you are just swinging away, you will miss too many shots.

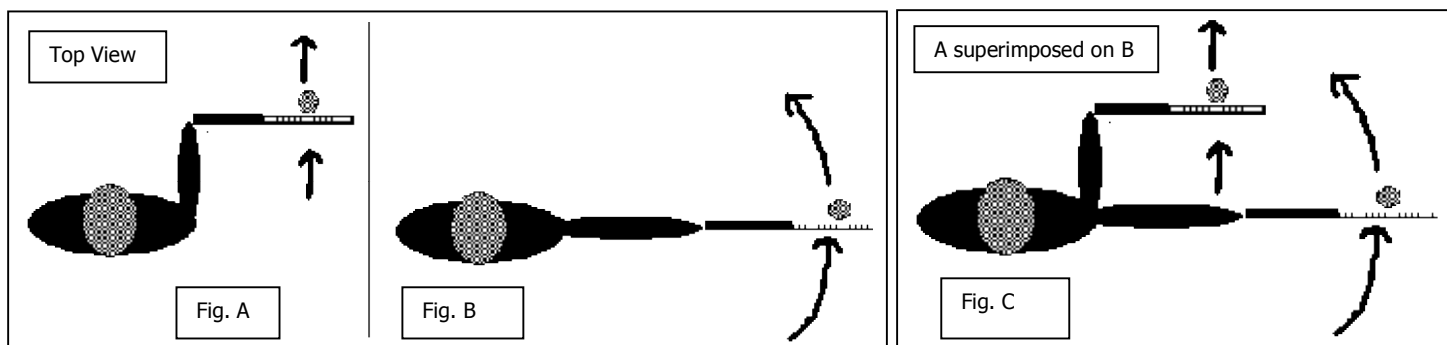
Of course when we learn, we don't have any skills, so all we have is effort. It is the best you can do. But that doesn't mean that you have to stick primarily with that strategy for your whole tennis life. Just playing, through trial and error, you will develop some skills. Getting some help with this process can help speed up the process, but what is important is that you focus on developing your skills, and not merely on effort.

### ***Position Yourself for Success***

Every tennis player probably understands that watching the ball, and moving their feet to get in position is crucial to success on the court. What players probably don't understand is that how they position themselves will largely determine what kind of stroke they will use, and that will have a direct connection to how well they are able

### **Quote of the Month:**

*"We have a purpose in life,  
and all we do serves it."  
--Gary Zukov*



to play.

### F=MA

When we look at the physics of tennis, we can end up with some pretty complicated physics equations to try to explain what is going on. But if we look at one of the most basic physics equations, and realize that we are trying to create force on the ball to make it go, we can start to understand something very fundamental about tennis, or positioning, and how we stroke the ball. Force equals mass times acceleration ( $F=MA$ ). So to create force, it is a combination of mass (weight) and speed (acceleration is velocity squared).

If we look at physiology, when we pull our arms in front of us, it is easiest to push something (think of pushing a full shopping cart). When our arms are away from us, extended to the side, arms are best for swinging. The question is, do we want to swing in tennis, or push? This question is the basis of how tennis has changed.

### The Two Balls

Of course there are as many potential contact points as places you can reach with your arm, but really only roughly two are ever used on purpose in our game. I call these two contact points, the question of the two balls. Or, which of the two balls are you going to hit, the ball in front, or the ball to the side?

One contact point, or ball, is more in front of your body, the other is more to the side (see Fig. A & B). They are probably only 10 inches apart, but that little distance will make all the difference in your game. Ball A is about 10 inches closer to the body and about 8 inches farther in front (Fig. C). To hit one ball leads to swing, hitting the other ball leads to using leverage. Lets go back to the physics,  $F=MA$ . If the ball is to the side of your body (B), you don't have much of your weight behind it, so you have little mass. But you do have a lot of freedom to swing, as your arms are free and unencumbered by your body. So if you position the ball to the side, the only way to create a lot of force is with speed through swinging.

When the ball is in front of your body (A), your arms are pulled in to hit it. You have lots of mass behind the ball, but it is tough to swing your arms. Here, hitting this ball, to create force, you will use mostly mass. You still move, but it is a slower movement, using leverage and your mass (weight).

### The Parameters

Both of these balls and their corresponding methods create force. The problem is that tennis is about much more than just force. There are parameters in the game: there are lines, the net, the shape of court and how the ball is delivered to you. This is where the force question becomes tricky. Which method, swinging (speed) or pushing (leverage) is better for tennis?

To answer this question, it is crucial to look at the direction the force is being applied using each of these methods. When we swing our arms, our racquet travels in an arc around our body. The swing follows roughly a circular path. When we push, we generally push in a roughly linear direction, like when we push a shopping cart forward.

With your arm, holding on to the racquet and swinging to the side, your strings are constantly changing which direction they are pointing, or aiming. The racquet moves in an arc, meaning that to hit the ball towards your target, you have to contact the ball precisely at the moment that the strings are pointing right at the target. When you hold the racquet in close in front of you, and push it forward, you are able to keep the strings pointing toward the target longer if you make the handle and the head of the racquet move together.

There is also the question of making contact with the ball. You don't need to tell us tennis players about that. Everyone fears swinging and missing. Now the ball comes to us on roughly a linear path (wind, spin and gravity mess with this a bit). Your best chance to make contact with the ball is to get your racquet on the line of the ball and leave it there. Swinging can't do this because it arcs; pushing or leverage can if you hold the racquet in position (handle and head even with each other, neither one in front).



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Therefore swinging compromises finding the ball, and aiming, where a mass-based, or leverage swing works better for tennis. This is why I hate the term "racquet head speed," because it makes players think that swing speed is the key to playing tennis. This makes them want to place the ball to the side, where they can swing at it the fastest. This just doesn't work very well, given the parameters of the game.

Instead, if you think about getting into a strong position behind the ball, where you have your weight behind it (mass), and you can shove the ball forward with strength, this will lead to a force that can work in tennis.

Tennis History

In the old days, swing was all we knew as tennis players. After all, it is the most obvious solution when you are holding a "stick" in your hand. With swing as your only tool, you had to swing easy (slowly) so that you could time the contact in the right place (the one instant the strings were pointing toward the target) to control the ball. The result was that there wasn't much force, because the acceleration (velocity squared) was so slow, and the mass was light, thus not much power.

When the new, more powerful racquets came along in the late 70s and early 80s, it became even harder to control the ball swinging, so someone figured out, through trial and error, a better way. Since the racquets provided power, and you could get some force from putting more mass behind the ball, using a leverage or pushing motion was better. Since it was easier to both hit the ball and aim the ball with less swinging, the actual amount of force imparted on the ball was greater, and we have seen the speed of the game go way up (while, ironically, the swings have become much less). Commentators jump to the easy conclusion that it is the racquets, but that is, as we have seen is only a small part of the reason for power in the modern game.

What This Means For You

We are back once again to, watch the ball and move your feet. But now the goal is different. There is a new alignment you are looking for with the ball (more in, and more in front), one that allows you to be strong, rather than fast with your hand (and the attached racquet).

If you position yourself where you are much more likely to use mass, and push, rather than speed and swing to get force, you will make fewer mistakes and ultimately hit the ball in harder and more accurately. In fact, simply by positioning yourself, you will determine what kind of stroke you will use. You can have the most modern stroke in tennis (leverage based, mass, strength), but if you position the ball too far to the side, you will swing. It is pretty much inevitable. Conversely, if you are an "old style" player who swings, but intentionally "jam" yourself, and contact the ball farther in front, you will start to use leverage, rather than swing. And you will improve rapidly, just by where you stand and address the ball.

Good luck out there!

### **Orindawoods Junior Summer Camps Schedule 2008**

**[patricTennis@yahoo.com](mailto:patricTennis@yahoo.com), 254-1065**

The summer program begins on June 16 and runs for 8 one-week sessions. Six of the weeks are Tennis Camps (weeks beginning 6/16, 6/23, 7/7, 7/14, 7/28 and 8/4) and two weeks are our Wet and Wild camp (6/30 and 7/21). The weekly schedule is determined by which type of camp it is:

**Tennis Camp**

Class	Days	Time	Member	Non-member
Little Ones	Tuesday and Thursday	11:15-12pm	\$30	\$35
10s Clubbers	Monday-Thursdays	12pm-1:30pm	\$90	\$100
Big Boomers	Monday-Thursday	1:30pm-3:30	\$115	\$130

**Wet and Wild**

Tennis Clubbers	Monday-Thursday	12pm-3pm	\$165	\$180
Big Boomers	Monday-Thursday	1pm-4pm	\$165	\$180