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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

Just My Opinion or My Short Career as a Tennis Pundit

The Six Players You See On TV

Editor's note: what follows is a parody of the pundit style, and is not intended to offend anyone, or better yet, is intended to offend everyone. Enjoy.

Perhaps it is a slight exaggeration, but there are very few tennis players that you actually see on television. I don't have anything against Andy Roddick for example, but I never need to see him play again. I mean, if you watch tennis in the US, you have to feel that you have purchased a season ticket to Andy's career. Even my beloved Agassi had too much face time for me, and he actually could hit a backhand.

While in Indian Wells at the Pacific Life Open, it was interesting to see how this phenomenon of "the six players" actually played out. You see, in tennis, if you televise an event, you show the finals no matter who is playing.

As a side bar, this is one reason why we are losing ground with TV coverage, because TV wants to be guaranteed there is someone on TV "the people" want to watch. I remember when Trans America gave up sponsorship of the local men's pro event (now the SAP Open, after being Siebel, and several other alphabet soups), they said that they would rather put their sponsorship money into golf, where half the players make the cut, and there is a very good chance that the stars will be around on the final day, even if they are six over par. (would people rather watch Tiger playing badly, even though it doesn't happen very often, than some unknown playing the best of his life? Apparently so, according to TV).

On with my rant. So at some point, after all the Americans have lost (how many times do you need to see James Blake choke in the final set of a grand slam tournament your viewing lifetime?), and Federer, Nadal, and Sharapova are gone, you have to show who ever is there. At this year's Australian Open, that player was Tsonga. A few years ago, it was Baghdatis.

The point is, if you ever make it to be one of the six people they show on TV, even for a very short time, there will always be crowds in the stands at your matches, and fans following these players like rock stars. The power of television, and the 15 minutes of

Ace It!

Our Breast Cancer Awareness Day Fund Raiser is Saturday, June 21. Ace It!, now in its sixth year, was started by several women here at the Club in response to some club members and friends being diagnosed with breast cancer. Over the past five years, we have raised over \$100,000, all from small donations and entry fees from people like you, to help fight this terrible disease.

The event itself starts off with a guided warm up, followed by our Tour of the Pros (seven courts of clinics with pros from the area), a wonderful lunch on the deck and in the afternoon, the Ace It! Tournament.

You can sign up by picking up a registration form at the Club, or going on the Club's website and downloading a pdf file of the application. If you just want to make a donation, please make it to Alta Bates Summit Foundation and either drop it by the Club or send it to: Ace It! at Orindawoods, P.O. Box 2087, Orinda, CA 94563.

Monday Team Tennis

Monday Team Tennis starts June 2 and runs for twelve consecutive Mondays in the summer. MTT is our fun, social team tennis competition. We divide all the players into even teams, and then 4 of the 5 teams play each week (you will have a couple of bye weeks). Each Monday evening includes a dinner, and several rounds of tennis. This is a bring your own booze event, but everything else is provided, including the cups to put your favorite beverage in.

The cost is \$50 for members. If there is room, we will take few select non-members (\$70). Sign up on the Club's website, or send Keith an e-mail (orindawoodstc@sbcglobal.net).

Keep It Down

Please remember that people are playing on the courts near you, and not everyone wants to know about the fine dinner you had at this great new little Italian restaurant down the block, so please talk quietly, and respect everyone's lack of concentration. And, by the way, how's the food?

fame.

If, on the very next court, there is a better player, but one that has never been on TV at a big event, then most people could just walk by them and not even know who they were. At Indian Wells, I have literally walked shoulder to shoulder with Top Five ranked players who no one recognized who they were. One year, down on the practice courts, a fellow fan asked me who Agassi was practicing with. It was Juan Carlos Ferrero, who was #2 in the world at the time.

This year at Indian Wells, we watched Baghdatis, with a large Stadium Two following, play some unknown guy (never been on TV) from Switzerland named Stanislas Wawrinka. Well, Wawrinka pounded Baghdatis with some of the best shot making never seen on TV. I've never seen a better backhand, and will probably never see it again, unless he cracks the top six.

And of course, that is not the top six in rankings (see poor Juan Carlos above), at least not ATP or WTA rankings. This is the top 6 in "IT" rankings. Not sure who picks these rankings, but that is how you get on TV folks. The TV people will tell you it is the personalities "the people" want to see, but who decides that?

For some unexplainable reason, Sharapova is #1 in the "IT" rankings, even though, if you actually watch her play, it is so painful you may never watch a tennis match again. Talk about bad for the game: her routines between points are just too painful to even watch, and last way too long. Then she screeches through an overpower shot, out as often as in, and then you have to watch the shadow boxing, the hair adjustment, the ball bounce, all over again. The average is a shot or two every minute. Who wants to watch that?

As overpowering as she was in Australia this year, I have watched many a match when she hit everything out. (same can be said for the other big boppers, Serena and Venus). Maria does look damn good in a magazine ad, however, or on a TV spot for your next camera.

Agassi (another camera pitch man) always had it over Pete in the "IT" rankings, and the sponsorship dollars, even though he hardly ever beat the guy in a match played north of Melbourne, Australia.

Now I know that I am a devoted tennis lover, but why don't we see a bit more diversity of players on TV? And dare I even say, what about doubles? In Indian Wells, the doubles courts are often packed, while the star stadium featuring "the six players" often is 20% full. I realize that 20% would fill the smaller doubles stadium, but then is it a tie, and maybe we should see some of both. There's an idea.

As a solution, all I can really offer you, is an invitation to go to Indian Wells next year, and see all these great players for yourself, up close, and in all their human frailties, as well as immense talents. I admit that Sharapova is an attractive woman, but her personality crosses her off of my "IT" list. At tennis paradise, Indian Wells, I don't have to watch her, or Andy either. And that is one of the main reasons I'm going back each year. At the Pacific Life Open, I can make my own "it" list. You can too.

Tennis Instruction

The Contact Zone

When I traveled to Indian Wells for the Pacific Life Open in mid March, I have to say that one thing leaped out at me watching all these great players. It was how they did everything they could to contact the ball in the proper contact zone. They fought tooth and nail for their contact point, and would not surrender it, even under intense pressure of huge shot making by their opponent.

That is to say, these players, the best in the world, were far more concerned with the depth they contacted the ball at (in relation to their body, i.e. how far in front of them), than height, width, speed or

energy of their swing. In fact, to my eye, I saw very little swing at all (if you think of swing as a momentum-based movement of energy from behind you to in front of you). Instead, the whole stroke rotated around the contact point.

Over and over again, these players set the racquet in behind the ball and pushed with their bodies (leverage), and rotated their arms in their shoulder sockets (torque). The motion of the racquet was far greater in the vertical plane, than in the horizontal. In other words, they turned the

Quote of the Month:

"In a pitch-black night a blind man is the best guide; he knows the roads and paths better than any man who can see. When daylight comes, however it is foolish to use blind old men as guides." – Heinrich Heine

ball, rather than hit through it.

Their focus was on alignment, not on swing, on positioning, and not on energy or timing. This is not to say that there was not energy involved or transferred. Or that players don't time their shots. In fact, these players hit the ball harder than anyone else in the world, but they do more than that, they hit it in.

There in lies the bridge to understanding why the "leverage game," as one great teaching pro calls it, is key to success. The ball is only going to go to the intended target if the racquet face, in conjunction with the various forces being applied, is pointed in the direction needed when the racquet contacts the ball (on the strings, oh yeah, that).

Any force that you apply that takes away from this aiming, is not going to be very useful.

So on the forehand, power, or force, comes mostly from the moving of the hitting-arm shoulder forward (by pushing with the legs and trunk: leverage), and the turn of the arm in that shoulder joint (torque). There is some rotation of the body, but only as much as brings the rear (hitting-arm) shoulder forward toward the intended target. Over rotation is just as much a problem as no rotation.

One of the best analogies for the forehand is to think of opening a very heavy, spring-loaded door, that has a doorknob. If you are right handed, stand close to the door with your left shoulder, grab the door knob with your right hand and push and turn counter clockwise. You have to push with your legs, move your right shoulder forward (by rotating a bit) while at the same time, turn the doorknob (again, counter clockwise). Your arm is directly out in front of your shoulder, for maximum force, and you need it there. If you turn your trunk too much, your shoulder will go away from the direction you need to apply the force (the heavy door on a spring, will come back towards you and push you back).

The position of your arm, and in particular, your elbow is key in shot making to get maximum leverage. Your arm needs to be between your shoulder, and the ball. That is, your elbow must be in front of your body, not to the side (where most people have it when they hit the ball).

On the court, if you hold your arm out towards the target (straight away from your shoulder), and then let the racquet stick out to the side at a 90 degree angle, you will just about have it. Again, the trick is to not let your elbow get behind the trunk of your body.

This position of keeping your elbow in front of your trunk is why many teaching pros have said, "The single worst piece of teaching advice ever uttered was 'get your racquet back.'" The last place you want your elbow, and arm, is behind your body.

The follow through is also quite important, for if the alignment of the elbow/arm in front of the trunk defines the back of the hitting zone, the follow through defines its limit forward. Contrary to popular opinion, it is the follow through that stops the racquet going forward (in other words, stops the momentum). That is, the follow through stops the racquet from going forward too much. Too much means past the point when the racquet is pointing towards the target. Hit it out there folks, and you miss high and wide (sometimes impressively: "Wow Martha, I think that one made the freeway.").

So the hitting zone is a vertical plain, out in front of the body, in which the racquet moves, primarily by the rotation of the arm in the shoulder socket. Both topspin and under spin can be applied in this hitting zone, depending on the direction of rotation in the shoulder.

How far this hitting zone is out in front of you is dependent on which grip you are using. The more western the grip, the farther forward the zone. The more Eastern, or even Continental the grip, the farther back it would be. Grab your racquet, go to mirror (no, don't hit the mirror – lots of bad luck associated with that). Hold your racquet in front, and move it to where the strings are facing directly towards the mirror. You may have to lay your wrist back quite a bit to do this, but that puts you in a stronger position anyway (think how your hand would be if you were trying to push a refrigerator – that is a strong position). Where your arm and racquet are, that is your hitting zone. Up and down from there, in that vertical plane.

The primary image to get is the racquet turning in the zone, not moving forward through it. It is this motion in the zone, the racquet turning, that I saw over and over again from the professional players at Indian Wells. #1 or #101, they all did it.

You create this turning or torque by rotating your entire arm in the shoulder socket. This is not a wrist



Orindawoods Tennis Club

650 Orindawoods Dr
Orinda, CA 94563
USA

Phone:

925-254-1065

Fax:

925-254-1380

Website:

www.orindawoodstennis.com

Executive Tennis

Director:

Keith Wheeler
orindawoodstc@sbccglobal.net

Head Pro:

Patric Hermanson
PatricTennis@yahoo.com

Associate Pro:

Philip Laubscher

Junior Tennis Staff:

Sarah Smith
Alex Webber

Weekend Staff:

Cortney Krakow

Newsletter Editor:

Keith Wheeler

Associate Editor:

Patric Hermanson

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movement. If the point of your elbow is down toward your toes as you wait for the ball (wrist laid back and down), as you hit it, your arm rotates so that your elbow finishes pointing out toward the target, about a 90 degree turn of your arm, perhaps a bit more, if you are really flexible.

Where the racquet ends up depends a lot on how much spin you want to apply. The traditional follow through over your shoulder still works, but for more spin, we see many pros completely inverting the racquet so that the head of the racquet points somewhat down. Another finish has the racquet straight across the left arm for a flatter, more powerful hit. This mid-arm finish is more and more common.

There are virtually no players on the tour that use the swing/momentum model that we all learned as children. Chasing the ball with the racquet leads to errors and inconsistent play. Using leverage and torque on the other hand, leads to power and control.

I'm reminded of a story I once heard about Wayne Gretzky, the Great One. Gretzky was the greatest hockey player ever and he seemed to have this uncanny knack for being in the right place at the right time, and that led to scoring more goals than anyone else. When asked about this and how he pulled it off, Gretzky said that virtually all hockey players chased the puck, but he figured out where it was going, based on the angles and geometry, and simply waited for it to come to him. It often did.

This is the same idea here. Figure out where you want to hit the ball, and wait for your racquet in that zone, and let the ball come to you. I know it sounds crazy, because we have been chasing the ball for years with our racquets. We've been trying, often in vain, to time contact, but really, it is practically that simple, just wait for the ball. The hard part is you have to move your feet so that you can intercept the ball out in front, in the contact plane.

So why keep doing it the old way? And why do some still teach that method? Here I must refer to the Quote of the Month.

The only thing that makes the new leverage game difficult is that we have been doing it the other way for so long. But you can teach "old dogs" new tricks, and the new way is so much easier than the old way, that it isn't that hard to change. Trust me, if you have hit as many balls in your life as I have, and I could change, you can change too. There are many examples of Club members, between the ages of 10 and 85 that have made the switch, and are playing the better for it. You can too! Good luck out there.

Orindawoods Junior Summer Camps Schedule 2008

patricTennis@yahoo.com, 254-1065

The summer program begins on June 9 and runs for 8 one-week sessions. Six of the weeks are Tennis Camps (weeks beginning 6/9, 6/16, 6/30, 7/7, 7/21, 7/28) and two weeks are our Wet and Wild camp (6/23 and 7/14). 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