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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*

## **Lessons From The USPTA World Conference**

Last month, Keith attended the United States Professional Tennis Association's World Conference at La Quinta Resort. The weather was hot (108 degrees one day), but the information was sizzling. Here are a few highlights we thought you might find interesting:

1) Rick Macci (coached Capriati, both Williams and Roddick) commented on the difference between men's and women's tennis, other than the [men/women] are better looking, depending on your preference. He said that the men are larger, stronger and most importantly, move much quicker as a group. We probably all knew that, but the kicker, is in how it affects strategy and tactics. The women's game is more of a power game. Yes, that is right, more power. They hit flatter shots, much less spin, and they go for winners much earlier in the points. Because, it works. If you look at the top players, Serena Williams, Iwonovic, Safina, Dementieva, Kuznetsova, Zvonareva, Sharapova, Venus Williams, they are almost all tall, not that mobile, and go for their shots. Only Jankovic is a mover (and Henin before she retired). The men's game is different, more spin, more setting up the point. The men are faster, and if you hit flat, they can get to that ball and put you in jeopardy before you have time to recover. That same shot in the women's game is a winner, or forces a weak return. In the men's game, it comes back faster. So men use more spin and try to work the point a bit more. The top of the men's game is dominated by players that move very well, Nadal, Federer, Djokovic. Murray, Ferrer, Davydenko, Nalbandian, and often spin the ball quite a bit.

A great example of this is the Spanish players. In men's tennis, it seems like there are 150 Spanish players in the top 100 in the world (actually 16 at this moment, a huge number for a small country). Of course Nadal is #1 and Ferrer is #5 to lead the crowd. Spanish players, brought up primarily on the clay, are taught to hit with a lot of spin. The women from Spain are taught the same way, hitting heavy topspin. There are only five Spanish women in the top 100, and the highest is Anabel Medina Garrigues at #30 (who? – Macci's point exactly). The next is Carla Suarez Navarro at #47. The heavy spin game doesn't work against the aggressive power of the women mentioned above because the women are not as fast. The only really successful Spanish woman was Sanchez-Vicario, who was, like Henin &

## **Teddy Roosevelt**

I simply call the following, "Teddy Roosevelt." Of course this great man was much more than this, but this one quote, has inspired me for years. I attempt to live it every day, and teach it in all my lessons, and use it in the way I run the Club. I have shared it before, but want to share it again.

It is not the critic who counts; not the one who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. Credit belongs to the one who is actually in the arena; whose fate is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself on a worthy cause; who at the best knows, in the end, the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

--Theodore Roosevelt

## **Pool Closing**

It is that time of year again, and we are having to shut down the Orindawoods pool for the season. It has been a great year out at the pool, with much cooling off from those hot summer days. As many of you have noticed, we lost a couple of trees in the past year out by the pool, and we are planning to replant and restore some of the privacy cover and shading.

## **Orindawoods Junior Championships**

The OW Junior Championships will be held the weekend of November 7-9 at the Club. All the courts will be used this weekend for this great event for Contra Costa County's junior tennis players. If you are a junior player and would like to play, contact Keith or Patric and we will get you signed up. Deadline is October 31.

Jankovic, incredibly fast and quick on the court. Virginia Ruano Pascual another fleet footed Spanish woman made the top 20, but she was primarily successful in doubles (with the Argentinean Paulo Saurez).

2) Bill Tym spoke directly to the basis of Macci's point when he answered the question, how hard should I hit the ball? He said a) you have to maintain consistency, b) maintain accuracy and c) provide yourself time to return to the optimum tactical position. He said the biggest thing he heard from players going out on the tour for the first time was, "the winners I used to hit [in the juniors, college] now come back." So you hit it as hard as you don't hurt yourself. Because of the mobility issues, the women can go for more earlier in the point, because their opponent can't hurt them back. This might also explain why the few very fast women in the game (Henin, Jankovic, Sanchez Vicario the younger Hingis) might have been able to make it to the top.

3) Sports psychologist and best selling author James Loehr astutely noted why John McEnroe could get so angry and not have it interfere that much with the level of his tennis. It also says a lot about why he was a jerk on the court. McEnroe only got mad at external things: the linesmen, the fan clicking photos with a noisy camera, the chair umpire, the planes flying overhead, the condition of the court, these were often his targets. But, as Loehr pointed out, he never turned on himself. The anger was never pointed back at him. Most players, on the other hand, have little patience with themselves but are quite civil to others. Now I'm not suggesting you start becoming a jerk, just that you don't take your frustrations out on yourself, your ego, your focus, your concentration and your game. Loehr made this point to emphasize that it is our private voice, the voice that we use to talk to ourselves, that runs the show, and determines much of our fate and future. He suggested that we script our response to certain situations like getting a bad line call or losing our serve, in advance, and not try to make it up (or have our emotions make it up) at the time. That is the best way to stay on track and not get lost in our emotions.

4) Wayne Bryan and Mark Bey, who both work with the Brian Brothers, talked about how important it is to get your returns in. They said that Mike and Bob average between 87-93% of their return of serves back in play. Tom Gullikson emphasized the point too by saying, "no more R-O-S-E-S (Return of Service Errors)." Gullikson also referred to a great quote from Jimmy Connors that I thought you would all enjoy, "By the time I got all this experience, I was too old to use it." Let's hope not.

4) Bill Tym talked a lot about the art of the volley. One thing that really stuck with me was the following statement, "Frequently the good things in life are the mortal enemies of the best things in life. A good one-step volley is the mortal enemy of the best volleys." i.e. keep your feet moving and closing on the net!

5) John Yandell gave a great video presentation on the volley using high-speed video of top pros volleying. While showing you video in a newsletter is impossible, I can say that he did find three things in common that all good net players do: a) they make a unit turn with their whole body, b) they keep a "U" shape with their arm and racquet (upper arm hangs down, forearm forms the base, and the racquet points up to form the other side of the "U"), and c) all movement is from the shoulder joint, no movement in the elbow, forearm, wrist or fingers. Most players use a continental grip, or a slight Eastern when they volley.

6) Tracy Austin gave a great talk about being a former #1 player, and now just being a mom and raising kids (3 boys). She warned tennis parents to raise well-balanced kids, and not worry so much about the playing, the rankings and the winning. Three highlights: "Sampras never won a national junior event and he did OK." "At 16 I won the US Open on Sunday and was back in high school history class on Tuesday morning." "The chances of your kid making it as a professional are extremely slim, focus on them being good kids and having a great childhood." These are just a few of the ideas from the conference. Enjoy!

### ***The Waiting Game***

*"The waiting is the hardest part"* – Tom Petty

I don't think ol' Tom was talking about tennis, but he sure could have been. Making contact with the ball,

timing that contact, and having the contact happen in such a way that the ball goes back where you want it to, are the three fundamental problems that we have in the game of tennis.

Everyone realizes that the racquet has to meet the ball. Some of the things players do to make that happen are funny, or crazy, or just don't work, but at

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

*"The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The next best time is now."*

--unknown

least people are aware of the problem. They also know that the ball has to go in the court. Again, some of the things they do to try to make this happen end up looking pretty strange, and ineffective, but the basic concept is there.

If you are lucky enough to have played a while, and developed your eye hand coordination, and can aim the racquet, then it really is the timing of the movements that is what holds the whole process together, and makes the tennis stroke happen successfully.

Now over the twenty-five years that I have taught tennis, I have asked many players, of all abilities, when they miss-time a shot, whether they were early or late. Most of the time, they say they are late. Most of the time, an amazing 80-90% of the time, they are actually early on the contact. What is going on here?

It is true that these players feel that they are late. They are not lying. Perhaps the ball came very fast, or they felt like they should get ready earlier. But what happens, is this perception, combined with the fear of being late (and missing – the huge fear in tennis), causes them to panic, and they actually can move so fast that they are early on the contact, all the while, still convinced that they were late.

Surprisingly, there is no difference between a top athlete in their teenage years, or a person playing recreationally in their eighties. When players are afraid they are going to be late on contact, they panic and move their arm and racquet much faster than the ball is moving. And they end up early on the contact, still convinced they are late.

Of course there can be truth in the fact that they were late in preparing, or moving, or getting started. But the problem we all face over and over again is that we damage our contact with the ball by over reacting to this perception of being late, and end up completely on the other side of the problem: early.

How we work with and mitigate this phenomenon is the key to most players' success in the game of tennis. A lot of the problem centers around the whole problem with waiting. Let's face it most people hate to wait. They don't like waiting in traffic and they don't like waiting in a restaurant for a habitually late friend or business partner. Most people hate lines. Waiting sucks.

This has led to one of the more famous descriptions of enlightenment: "an enlightened person is someone who can enjoy the view on a detour."

I care not to think of the number of times I have failed that test. On the other hand, some days are good, or at least better. The proper frame of mind going into the situation is key. That frame of mind is up to us. Bad stuff (a detour), can happen on days when we handle it easily, and then on other days, we go ballistic. The detour, the bad line call, the seemingly over-powering serve that is coming at us (and we fear we are going to be late) is the same. What changes is our inner voice, our mental and emotional make up. We need to learn to have more control over this if we ever want to master dealing with what is going on in the surrounding world.

I think the problem is really that if all our mind has to do is wait, it is going to think about something else, and most of that other stuff is bad.

We need to train our mind to go through the steps required and not wander off to some rather damaging conclusions or interpretations. In a sense, this is like the training you get in the military, where the soldier knows there are bullets flying, and bombs exploding, but he is trained to keep doing his job (discipline), because that is the best chance for both his survival, and the survival of the other people in his squad, his platoon, his regiment, his division, his army, his country.

What I would like to suggest here, is that there needs to be a physical nature to our waiting. Waiting cannot just be a mental or emotional activity, or I think, too often, we are lost. If we look at the pro game, we can see this physical component to the waiting game. Especially with the advent of high speed video, we can now see what is happening in these last few moments before contact, and what we see is going to help all of us become much better at waiting for the ball.

As I have mentioned in this space over the years, perhaps the worst piece of tennis advice or teaching ever was the phrase "get your racquet back [and wait]." This stiff, static position is just asking for timing problems. Again, as I stated above, humans hate to wait. And starting a resting object involves jerking, the last thing we want to do right before contact. The solution pros have developed, through trial and error, is to keep doing something (much like the soldier who has tracers flying over his head but keeps



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loading his gun). Players have to stay focused on the moment, while having some awareness of the danger. Focusing on the danger to the exclusion of the job at hand does no good, and often leads to the very thing that you are trying to avoid.

So this takes us to active waiting. There is something that players need to do as the ball approaches (sometimes going very fast). What the pros do is continue to fold the racquet back, down and in, even while starting to move the arm forward and up for contact. Everything is telling them to lash out at the oncoming ball, and yet, they are able to fold the racquet back, and let the ball come to them to catch the ball on the strings (not slap out at it).

What exactly are they doing? For the forehand, think of it this way. If your arms are naturally hanging by your sides (not holding a racquet), the point of your elbow is pointing somewhat behind you. If you rotate your entire arm in the shoulder joint so that the point of your elbow moves in close to your body and forward (your arm is now twisted in and in front of you), that would turn the racquet back so that the tip would point backwards and the face would be down.

This is the move the pros make while the ball is almost on them and their arm is starting to lift forward for the contact. In other words, at the last moment, the tip of the racquet is being turned backwards. To make contact, from this wound position, all the pro does is lift his shoulder and the racquet head comes into alignment. No need to swing.

In other words, when club players are panicking and wanting to swing forward for fear we will be late (and thus end up early), the pro is winding his racquet back, down and in. Pretty much the exact opposite.

Now this winding move is more important than just the waiting. It is also making the pro's arm into a spring, and thus here is a lot of the power as this spring unwinds on the ball. This is how they can hit the ball so hard with even better control than the terrified club player who is just flailing at the ball, hoping he/she isn't late.

It is an interesting phenomenon of the mind, that when we are really focused, everything seems to slow down. Time slows down, and so does your opponent's blistering shot. Like the soldier, as we do our job, and keep winding our arm, as the ball comes in, we are active, not fearful, and we are present to our ongoing movement. Fear does not occupy our attention, and so we have more attention to watch the ball with, as we feel our winding, preparation movements. Maybe this isn't exactly what Einstein meant, but time is relative, as is speed. It is our perception of the incoming ball that largely determines our fate, not the actual ground speed (or the radar gun speed). If we are actively waiting, by continuing to wind our arm, and adjust our feet, focusing on our job, the ball does slow down, in our perception, and becomes easier to hit.

While this all can sound a bit like hocus pocus, I have had this happen many times in my life. I am in the zone, as they say. And I have had the opposite happen too, where everything seems like it is going so fast there is no way to play. Each is related to the level of our focus, and I think active waiting is a way to find that zone. Good luck out there!

### ***Fall and Winter Junior Tennis Program***

Head Pro Patric Hermanson's great junior program continues through the Fall up to December 19. We have had a great turn out this fall, and look to be continuing the clinics in the New Year. If your child has just finished some other fall programs in other sports, and wants to catch the end of this tennis session, we can pro rate the fee. Remember, there is no class the week of Thanksgiving. As for the Winter session, we will start the second week of January. Don't forget the tournament (see p. 1)