



July 2009
Volume 15, Issue 7

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

League Tennis Update

Our four USTA Adult Ladies League teams are enjoying a summer of fun tennis competition. We have teams in the 3.0, 3.5 (two teams) and 4.0 leagues. League matches are played on Saturday and Sundays after 11 a.m.. Leagues are a great opportunity to try your skills against unknown opponents. Leagues aren't for everyone, but can be quite a bit of fun if league competition is your bag. Enjoy!

Congratulations To Philip

Associate Pro Philip Laubschere was married on June 20. Philip and Elizabeth are moving to Washington State later this summer. We are sad to be losing Philip after five years of great service here at the Club. Best wishes to Philip and Elizabeth!

Court Usage Reminder

Monday Team Tennis

Remember that Monday team tennis is every Monday night throughout the summer. MTT uses all the courts. If you didn't join us this year, please consider playing next year. It is a lot of fun.

The Art of Learning

Circling Around the Perfect Forehand

I have been on a quest to find the perfect forehand for close to forty years now. This week, for perhaps the first time since I was a beginner, I had a better forehand than backhand. OK, I have been tweaking my backhand a bit and my beloved stroke is a bit off. But the truth of the matter is that while my natural talent may lie on my backhand side, my forehand is getting a lot better. So much better that my forehand could soon pass its rival and soar to heights unknown in my tennis game. Yes, I can finally, after many years, lots of balls, and much expense, hammer the forehand.

Was it worth it? Totally. Any other questions?

"Hammer" and "forehand" were two words that never went together before in my personal tennis vocabulary. But here we are in 2009, in the middle of the forehand revolution in tennis and I can rip the shot too. As one of my coaches told me back in the day when I was starting out my tennis adventure and my backhand was not very good yet, "If you want to have a good backhand, you have to hit backhands." (Dick Peters)

I followed his advice. And so, practice helps. But practice only helps if you have a road map, or a clue, or some concept of what it is you want to accomplish. Many people believe if you just hit a lot of balls, you will get better.

Ace It!

Our Breast Cancer Awareness Day is June 27. The morning features our "Tour of the Pros" clinics put on by several local pros, including Keith and Patric. That is followed by the Ace It! Luncheon. The delicious lunch is accompanied by the presentation of the check to the Carol Ann Read Breast Center, as well as many exciting raffle prizes. The afternoon is all about the Ace It! Tournament, which features men's and women's doubles, plus mixed doubles too.

To register and support this great event, you can download an application on the Club's website, or pick up an application in the Club's lobby.

Pool Rules

We have a few simple pool rules that are all about your safety, and the safety of others.

- No running
- No diving
- No glass (broken glass is invisible in water)
- The gas BBQ is for Club functions only
- Keep the gate closed at all times to protect our younger members
- Guest fees are \$5 for a family, \$3 for an adult, and \$1 for a child.

Enjoy!

Summer Tennis Camps

Head Pro Patric Hermanson and Associate Pro Philip Laubschere are putting on eight weeks of fun and exciting summer tennis clinics. These camps are a great way to either introduce your child to tennis, or to hone their game for the future. For more info, contact Head Pro Patric Hermanson at the Club or at patrictennis@yahoo.com.

Orindawoods Summer Junior Program

Week 1	June 15-18	10s Development
Week 2	June 22-25	10s Development
Week 3	June 29-July 2	Splash & Smash
Week 4	July 6-9	10s Development
Week 5	July 13-16	10s Development
Week 6	July 20-23	Splash & Smash
Week 7	July 27-30	10s Development
Week 8	Aug 3-6	10s Development

While this may be marginally true, what you really get better at is hitting mediocre shots. One speaker at a USPTA Convention said, "Never let a student hit more than a couple of shots poorly in a row. You don't want them to reinforce bad habits." Trust me, after hitting a forehand poorly for many years, bad habits are hard to break. I wish someone had stopped me sooner, before I hacked again. To really get better, to make a significant change that is going to help you beat your nemesis Ol' Martha, and take you to the next level, you need to practice more of the proper shots. It is not how many shots you hit, but how many you hit well, that determines your future.

Now I have been to the mountaintop in search of forehand magic. As the Zen saying goes, "The only karma that you find on the mountaintop is the karma that you brought with you." But there are great teachers, and these guides can help us go in the right direction. Sometimes it is technical advice, while other times it is the more spiritual or philosophical clues that bring us home. "There is a road, no simple highway/between the dawn and the dark of night/and if you go, no one may follow/ That path is for your steps alone." (*Ripple, The Grateful Dead*)

Some wonder if they need to get on that path at all. All I can answer to that is what my mentor told me many years ago, "You're either getting better or getting worse, there is no standing still." (Rev. Cathleen Cox). I suppose I have chosen the path of not getting worse. "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -- / I took the one less travel by / and that has made all the difference." (Robert Frost)

We see the top players hit the ball, either on TV or at tournaments like Indian Wells, the Bank of the West or SAP Open. They look so smooth, and yet we were often told, only the best players can play that way. One day, a great teacher of the modern game asked the question, "Do the pros hit the ball best because they are the best athletes [and therefore, only they should hit the ball that way or play that strategy], or are they the best athletes because they are doing something right?" (Brett Hobden).

If there is a better, easier way to hit the ball, why is that being held back for just the best players? It is a point that Vic Braden made in many different occasions. "The good stuff is not just for the best players."

I think the answer lies in simplicity, or in this case, the lack of it. Forehands are difficult, complicated, and often a mystery to the conscious mind. Hitting a forehand well is not something you can get to with simple arm positions or instructions. Racquet here, follow through there. Hitting well is a question of skill, of practice, of feel, rhythm. Especially feel and rhythm. Perhaps the English language can't explain what is happening, what the pros feel, what you need to feel, so the forehand becomes a real challenge to teach. Teachers try to explain in words, yet the body doesn't move in language. You breathe in, you breathe out. "Life is rhythm. Without rhythm, there is no life." (Michael Meade).

Perhaps the language can get us close, but we have to feel the shot, and do it, to get to where we want to be. How do we feel something we have never felt before? It is a tough problem to solve. A skilled teacher with a sharp eye can let us know when we are closing in on the feel. And they can offer clues.

Of course we would all like to be given some magical cure or tip that would put the whole forehand together. Many teachers teach to that very desire. Cynically, you could say they are good salesmen. They give us what we want (words), but don't actually need (we need feel, rhythm). Or perhaps, they believe in the magic too and just pass on less-than-helpful advice asserting that a thousand different muscle movements in each forehand can somehow be captured in a couple of words and described. These instructors have the perfect stroke in mind, start here, finish there, do this, do that, keep your balance, as if the whole thing can be perfectly controlled. And of course, many are drawn to such instruction. We want ironclad answers. That's what we are paying for, right? A foolproof system to win. Guaranteed. "Yet half the people who played today lost." (Vic Braden). That has been, and always will be true.

For example, most of the past forty years every teacher told you to get ready early. Why not, we all thought we were late. We are all terrified of being late, of missing the ball. But this pat answer was actually a mistake. "The worst instruction ever given [in tennis] is get your racquet back." (Doug King)

The assumption that being late (missing) was the worst thing that could

Quote of the Month:

"For every problem, there is an answer that is clear, simple and wrong."
-- Unknown, quoted to me by Rev. Cathleen Cox

happen, when in fact, being early wasn't any better, and just produced another set of problems as bad as being late, but perhaps slightly less embarrassing. Get your racquet back plays on our fear, rather than teaching to what we could become, rather than teaching to our talent and potential. How can we excel, soar, zone, if the teaching is aimed at the lowest common denominator: terror.

I followed this path for years, trying to find some easy answer, only to find that, "For every problem, there is an answer that is clear, simple and wrong." (Origin unknown, related to me by Rev. Cathleen Cox)

The truth is, the world is ever changing, and the ball never comes to you the same. The ability to adjust, to be flexible, to be appropriate to the given circumstance, is far more valuable than the perfect stroke (under perfect conditions) or the "right" answer. "When everything is going your way, you're not good, you're lucky. When you can play well when everything is going poorly and against you, that is when you are good." (Jim Loehr). To find how good we are, we need adversity. Not everyone thinks that way.

So what does it mean to have a forehand, when every forehand is in some way different? Is there a proper stroke? We have all had matches where we hit the ball great, and we have all had matches where we hit the ball terribly. When we miss, the good news is that redemption is only one shot away. The bad news is that the opposite is also true. Sometimes it is as if our opponent is just feeding us the ball. Other times, we can never seem to connect with anything they hit over the net. What is the problem? Is it us? Is it them? Is it the way we go about trying to solve the problem itself?

Of course there is a forehand stroke, of sorts. We have felt it, perhaps on the practice court, or in an earlier match, but some days, it seems gone. Great shots happened when what we did fits in exactly with what was happening. We were completely appropriate. Effort and skill matched the task.

When we miss, how do we get or forehand back? Most people think too much, try too hard. Instead, sports psychologists Jim Loehr said, "Act 'as if' in adversity. That is, act the way you want to feel when things are going badly." Or this is to perhaps say what one of the great spiritual teachers meant when he said, "Don't forget in the darkness what you knew in the light." (Bob Munger)

If you feel calm, smooth and rhythmical when you are hitting well, and in today's match, you feel rushed, anxious, jerky, perhaps the best tactic is to simply start acting like today is a good day, and not a bad day. Be smooth, have rhythm. Your opponent can't make you panic. Only you have that power.

Yet players panic every day and play the victim of their own psychology. Don't give in to it. "No matter how strait the gate / How charged with punishments the scroll / I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul." (*Invictus*, Ernest William Henley)

I used to go to my tennis teacher looking for the answer to the forehand conundrum. And I would take away with me what I thought was the answer. Then I would work on that, and return a few weeks later, thinking I had mastered that. When I got there, I couldn't hit the forehands he was giving me that day very well, and then I would leave that day with a totally different answer. This went on for years (another of my mentors says I am the most tenacious person she has ever met). I was determined to find THE ANSWER. One day I finally realized, there was no answer. That was the answer. The forehand was different each week. Each day. Each hour. Each moment.

What in fact was happening, was that teacher and student are circling around this nebulous thing called the forehand. In truth, my instructor and I were spiraling in on this black hole, picking up bits and pieces of what it meant to hit a forehand, learning all the time what the shot wasn't. One set of skills might be used for one shot, while another set of skills might be used for the next shot. Some shots require a lot of flexibility and speed, others are more steady, even stiff and slow.

Perhaps my teacher turned out to be more tenacious than I was, because he never gave up on me, no matter how hard I tried to nail him down on the answer to the forehand. I would talk about positioning my arm, and he would speak of rhythm. I would try to be loose. He would tell me to firm the grip.

Then there would be glimpses of the forehand. Balls hit so well. Contacts that would leave me saying, "If that shot was playing tennis, I don't know what I have been doing for all these years." What went before wasn't tennis. And I have played for forty years.

The ancient Irish used to say that the difference between earth and heaven was very little. The two worlds are only separated by a thin veil that you can cross over in times of enlightenment.

So there were days when I would make great leaps towards the forehand of my dreams, while other



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](mailto:orindawoodstc@sbccglobal.net)

Head Pro:

Patric Hermanson
PatricTennis@yahoo.com

Associate Pro:

Philip Laubscher

Junior Tennis Staff:

Emily Spitz
Victoria Shepard
George Kaiser

Weekend Staff:

Courtney Krakow

Newsletter Editor:

Keith Wheeler

Associate Editor:

Patric Hermanson

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days just seemed to involve hitting a lot of balls poorly. But I know that those days, the days when nothing seems to work quite right, are often the days we are learning the most. Experimenting around, getting closer, but not yet able to put it all together. Taking the chance on getting better. Living with days when I was worse in order to get better. "It's easy to have faith in yourself and have discipline when you're a winner, when you're number one. What you've got to have is faith and discipline when you're not yet a winner." (Vince Lombardi)

Sometimes I was told to be loose, other times to be firm. I couldn't figure it out. How could the forehand be all these different things? Then it started to dawn on me. There were times, all in the same shot, where certain characteristics were required, only to have the opposite be needed a moment later, or sometimes, at the same moment in another part of the body. How could I ever figure this all out? My mind would go into a brain cramp just trying to think about all this, let alone do it. I would shank balls, want to panic.

In the end, I think I figured out that I was truly circling in on the forehand. Kind of spiraling, closing in, like a hawk circling its prey. The forehand I chased was somewhere in the middle, but I have learned that it isn't a single place, or a one-time event, but a style, attitude, a rhythm, a point of view, and that each situation, each shot, is somehow different. "To do the same thing over and over again, and to know each shot for the first time." (Zen teaching).

As much as I want to say that I had the forehand, the reality is, each shot comes, and the forehand is only how I respond to that shot, in that moment of time. It is not something to own, or hold on to. It is something to experience each time the ball comes. Then let go of, because the next one will, in some way, be different. There is no guarantee that hitting the forehand will go well this time, though with all the practice, there seems to be a better chance that it will all turn out well. Perhaps forehand means having this ability, flexibility.

Each day we play is like starting over again. We own nothing, but the opportunity to discover again what we have. I went to a meeting once completely unprepared and knowing so much less than the professionals I had to deal with. In that moment, I realized that I didn't know s---, and I wasn't prepared. That knowledge gave me the freedom to simply act, to simply live, unbound by expectation or constraints. I have seldom, if ever, performed better. The more knowledgeable professionals were no match for me. "The world gets out of the way of a man who knows where he is going." (G.K. Chesterton) The best we can do is have the tools to work with what is presented to us. "Expect nothing, and you have all things." (Zen teaching).

So now I look forward to forehands, the puzzle it presents each and every time it comes over the net. I try not to get caught in the trap of desiring it to be a certain thing, or go a certain way, but to accept what happens, and try to adjust to what is. "When you argue with reality you lose, but only 100% of the time." (Byron Katie)

I hit the ball the best I can each and every time. "I don't know about all that [mental and strategic] stuff. If you just hit the ball well, all your [tennis] problems go away." (Doug King)

Mythologist Michael Meade says that to be in the moment (the zone) is not a word to describe a brief period of time, but the moment is instead something momentous (from the Latin, greater than). We step out of the constraints of time, and enjoy the moment (life, living). When something is fun, and we do it well, we lose all track of time. We are in contact with the divine. The veil between the two worlds disappears. As players, we crave these moments, the times of immortality, when the world seems ours, and we hammer our forehands one shot at a time. Tennis is learning to count to one, over and over again. Good luck out there!