



November 2009
Volume 15, Issue 11

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

Orindawoods Junior Championships

The weekend of November 12-14 we will be hosting the Orindawoods Junior Championships here at the Club. This tournament will use all the courts from Friday afternoon through Sunday evening. This is an entry-level tournament for kids in our area to try out playing tennis at the tournament level. To play, register at topdogtennis.com. (www.topdogtennis.com/tournamentsforfun/tournaments_list.asp).

Pool Closing

We are closing the pool for the season near the end of October, depending on the weather. It was a great summer season with our new pool and we look forward to opening the pool back up in early May 2010. Thanks!

Tennis Tip

Loving The Lob

Everybody has a lob story. Everyone.

The lob is often the most dreaded shot in tennis to receive, and sometimes the most satisfying one to execute. There are few, if any, shots that are so derided. Derided to the point that people use psychological warfare to try to defeat what can't be stopped with their racquet. When players resort to name calling, that's how you know a strategy is successful. When someone tries to talk you out of it on moral grounds. "Real players don't lob." Don't buy it.

But why does the lob work so well? And how should you employ it, and defend against it. There are multiple answers to each of these questions.

First of all, the lob works well because it changes the rhythm of the point. Rhythm is one of the most important things in tennis, and yet rhythm (keeping yours and disturbing theirs) is seldom talked about or taught. The lob takes you from the hard, driving shots like the serve, forehand and backhand, to a ball that floats with the wind, sits up by the sun, and gives you little energy to hit with. When you return a lob, you have to generate much of the power yourself. When you return a groundstroke, for example, the ball already has energy and hitting it is more a question of redirecting that existing force.

When a ball comes to you, the easiest way to hit it is to hit it back basically the way it came. There are four changes you can make to the ball. You can change the speed, height, direction or spin. Physics and/or physiology can make one or more of these pretty darn difficult. Changing the height is probably the easiest change to make in most

Winter Is Coming

We have already experienced one big storm, and winter is on the way. But don't get too depressed. There is still plenty of tennis to be played.

Orindawoods has about the fastest drying courts that I have ever seen. Don't give up on tennis just because it rained last night or earlier in the day. There are a couple of ways to see the conditions of the courts. We post a daily court condition report on the home page of the website each morning (and update the posting on days where the weather is iffy). We also leave an updated court status report on the answering machine on days where the weather is less than ideal. In addition, we have two court cams on the website. These court cams are updated every five minutes or so with a live picture of the court, so you can see if the courts are dry, and what the weather looks like down here. There are also links to Weather Underground and radar from AccuWeather.com.

My experience over my over twenty-five years in this business is that about 70% of the planned tennis gets played in the winter time. 30% gets rained out. That beats upstate New York, or most of the rest of the country. Enjoy your winter tennis.

Keith To USPTA NorCal Fall Conference

Keith will be attending the Fall United States Professional Tennis Association's Conference at Napa Valley College on November 7-8. The speaker line-up looks very strong. Keith is looking forward to bringing back some new ideas to share with everyone in club. Continuing education keeps our staff at the forefront of the latest in tennis so we can continue to bring you the best tennis around. Patric and James may also be attending some of the sessions.

OW High School Members Leading Mats!

We have several members playing on the Miramonte team this fall, as well as our own Michael McCullom co-coaching the team. Number #1 player Anya Kaiser leads the team on the court, while Team Captain Anne Barber plays #6 singles most of the time. Tamar McCollom and her HUGE forehand and serve play singles (usually #3-#5), and Dani Vignos plays doubles and some singles. Tara Rodriguez is on the junior varsity and having a fun year. There are several other girls on the team that have taken lessons here over the years, giving Orindawoods a very strong presence on the first-place Mats team. Good luck with the rest of the season!

circumstances, so the lob is a good way to get you out of a pattern that you don't want to be in.

The lob also changes the point of attack. Most of the time, whether you are playing singles or doubles, you have to align yourself to defend against the fastest shots that your opponent can hit. That is because those take the least amount of time to go past you for a winner. You have more time to get to the slower shots, like the lob and the drop shot,. This means that a smart player has to defend the hard shots, and move to the slower ones. There is the problem, they have to move. Most problems with the lob break down due to the lack of movement (either as an individual or as a team). A lob might not be moving very fast, but to hit a good shot back requires very good positioning, and thus movement. When you combine this with the fact that you are nowhere near where the lobs are going to go because you have to be somewhere else to defend the hard shots, then movement is required. Most people hate to move. Even when they finally admit that movement is necessary, they have probably waited too long already and are getting a late start.

Lots of people play tennis to get exercise, or so they say. But if this were true, then everyone would love to play against the lob. It requires the most exercise. But people are not happy with lobs. Are they lying about getting exercise? Maybe they just don't like moving backwards, which admittedly, is more difficult.

Strategically, the lob is the shot that best responds to the strategy that most doubles players employ, which is to control the point from the net. Being close to the net is the most powerful position in tennis. To hit balls to a well-positioned net person is tennis suicide. So you either have to hit the ball past them, so well they can't make the volley or over them. Of those three skills (around, through and over), the lob is probably the easiest to execute for most players, requires the least amount of skill and causes the most problems for your opponent (changes the point of attack, the rhythm and forces awkward movement).

Here is something I notice about lobbers. They are often the best competitors on the court. One, they know that the lob works, and they like to win, so they use it. Competitors are pragmatic, they look for what works, not what others say looks pretty. This isn't a beauty contest, and their job is not to make you comfortable.

But there is more to it than that. Competitors want total victory. Scorched earth. Leave nothing standing. They don't just want to win the match. They want to break your will to compete. They don't want just physical victory on the score board, but mental, emotional and especially spiritual victory. They want your soul. On a pike in the Tower of London.

Of course, this mentality leads to a certain amount of guilt among those lobbers who are not lucky enough to be sociopaths, but the good lobbers learn to get over it.

True Confessions

One of my greatest victories was when I played a guy I used to play all the time. I usually would win, but the matches were close. It became clear to me that there was a style of play that this guy couldn't handle, so when I played him in a match that counted, I played that style (lobbing was involved, as well as pushing and other derided styles of play). I was up 4-1 in the first set when he walked off the court and defaulted. It took me only five games to beat him mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Total victory.

And now for a little known secret. Lobbing well is as difficult as any other shot in tennis, and often, harder. I'm not talking about hitting the ball up in the air. That is easy under almost any circumstance. But to clear the net person (one with a very good overhead) and get the ball to land in the back of the court, just inside the line, off a ball that is coming to you in a way that is difficult to lob, that is real skill.

And an ever lesser-known secret. Lobbing can be beaten. In fact, there are no lobbers, per say, in the pros. And most lobs are crushed at that level. The team that lobs usually loses the point.

So you ask, why do the pros lob at all? To keep their opponent from dominating the net and thus the point. If your opponent doesn't fear the lob, they will stand right on the net and you will lose. It is that

simple. So good players always lob some, even if they lose every one of those points. They consider it an investment in not giving up control of the net.

When to Lob

Lobbing makes sense when you are forced on the defensive. It buys time, and the lob is hard to attack unless they have a really good overhead. It also makes sense to hit a lob when both of your opponents are at the net,

Quote of the Month:

"Without deviation from the norm, progress is not possible."

– Frank Zappa

especially if one or both of them are very close to the net. Get them off the net!

Where Lobs Come From

Lobs are actually pretty predictable. The most obvious precursor to a lob is a lob itself. A slow, high bouncing ball is easiest to hit back by hitting a lob. For example, high bouncing balls to the backhand are almost always lobbed. Few people have the skill to do anything else. When players in the backcourt are backing up, they often lob. Very often. Players in trouble often lob. Often. So don't get too close to the net when you hit a great shot.

Here's one that people almost never realize. Most lobs come out of the middle of the court. Angled ground strokes or serves are seldom lobbed, and when they are, they are seldom lobbed well. Part of the reason for this is that there are more effective shots to make when you get an angle shot than the lob. For example, hitting an angle shot back with an angle works much better than lobbing that shot. On the other hand, balls in the middle of the court present little angle to get by the net person, so lobs make a lot more sense. There are many more lobs from the deuce-court player than from the ad-court player. When the deuce-court player has to play a backhand in the middle of the court, the lob is a very good choice. If you hit this ball over the net person it will end up high to the backhand of the switching backcourt player. This is such a tough shot that it is often referred to as the "bitch shot," for only a bitch would hit you such a morally reprehensible shot (see above about when someone tries to guilt you out of doing what works).

Defending Against the Lob

The trouble with coming to the net these days is that it is hard to volley coming in on a crosscourt shot. The responding ball to your shot is angling away from you. This is a hard volley whether you are already at the net, or coming in. It is much easier to volley if the ball is coming directly towards you. This means that it is best to come on in on a ball that is hit down the middle, but as we have seen, this is where the lobs come from. Therefore, I think in modern doubles, it is very difficult for both players to come into the net and be successful. If your opponents never lob, then come on in, get close. Win. If you can approach with a shot that is very difficult to lob, then again, come on in. Low slices and very hard, low, flat balls are hard to lob. Of course, they can be hard for you to hit too.

So one of the ways to defend against the lob is to play one up and one back, but that hardly solves the problem. Maybe the balls aren't going over both of your heads for winners anymore, but you still have to play a slow, high bouncing ball from the backcourt. You often end up back up against the back fence, forced to lob yourself. There is no opportunity to attack.

Recently I have been teaching players one of the answers to the lob: the swinging volley. That is, taking the ball out of the air from the backcourt before it lands. If you let the lob land, you have to back up to hit it, and you are in a very defensive position, forced to lob yourself. The swinging volley does not have to be crushed like you see on TV. In fact, seniors have been hitting swinging volleys for years. It may not look like Serena's, but the main benefit is that you don't have to run way back and get into a defensive position. In fact, you have also changed the trajectory from higher to lower and flatter, more the way you might prefer to play. This is one way to get back in a groundstroke-type rally.

If you are playing against someone who lobs a lot, you should serve and return wide. Even the best lobbers don't lob the wide shot very well. Get ready to hit an overhead or swinging volley from the middle of the court. That is where their lob will end up from the wide position if your serve or return is any good at all. Serving wide is particularly effective and fairly low risk in mitigating the lob. Returning wide can be risky, so don't make too many errors just because they like to lob.

The Lob and the Overhead Are Perfectly Matched Skills

The best way to defend the lob is with the overhead. No question about that. Players well positioned to hit overheads will defeat lobbers almost every time if they have the ability to hit overheads. The best place to stand to defend the lob is near the service line. With only a step or two back, you can hit all but the most perfect of lobs (and no one lobs perfectly very often, despite what you might think).

The trouble is, that you don't always know when they are going to lob. But there are clues. If you lob, you should know that if the ball bounces, they will more than likely lob back. If you lob and your opponent is forced back to where they have to lob and you follow your lob into the service line, you will get an overhead nine times out of ten. Your partner needs to back off the net in this scenario, so that you are both standing at the service line ready to smash.



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Consequences

Give the lobber consequences. That is, put pressure on them. If they know you are going to hit an overhead, and you have no fear (that is, you are OK with missing some), they know they have to hit a good lob or they are in trouble.

Another way to apply pressure is to smash every single lob with an overhead at the partner of the person lobbing. Just pepper them. Any chance you get. Don't even worry about getting the ball in. Their partner will not distinguish between getting hit with a ball going in or out. If you don't think this will cause disharmony on the other side of the net, you are a fool. And please, don't feel guilty. You are dealing with lobbers here. They already have no morals.

The Best Strategies for Lobbing

If you like to play the lob, have a partner who is aggressive, likes to hit overheads. Someone who is not afraid of missing. I won a bunch of trophies with a guy named Bob the Lob. The longer story went like this. Bob played me and another guy who kept coming to the net and hitting overheads. Over three sets we must have missed fifty overheads, and hit winners on another seventy-five. We beat Bob the Lob in three close sets. The next tournament, Bob asked me to play with him. Lobbers are smart, pragmatic, and they know what works (we won the next tournament, by the way).

The trick playing with opposites (just like in love) is that you have to avoid driving each other crazy. The lobber, or consistent player, can have problems with a partner who takes chances and misses. Just repeat to yourself when they miss, like Bob the Lob did, "I like winning", and you will be OK. Of course the power player has to not get frustrated with the partner who just is a steady lobber and not say, "Can't you ever put a ball away?" Again, repeat after me, "I like winning." You'll be OK.

If you hit good lobs, work on your own overhead. If you lob well, there are plenty of overhead opportunities for your team. Take advantage of them by moving in to the service line behind your good lobs and hitting overheads. Remember, you are the lobber. The other team won't lob as well as you do, so that means you get easier overheads. Back to winning, don't you think?

Mix It Up

Don't be predictable when you lob so that they can start hanging out at the service line. You might not have the best ground strokes in the history of tennis, but if they are standing at the service line, your ground stroke shot will be tough for them to hit. Remember, if they are near the service line, they are in the best place to hit the lob, and the worst place for just about everything else. Give them what they don't want. A groundstroke. Bob the Lob was a master at this. He would hit them these weak groundstrokes and have them saying, "How am I losing to this pusher." Mentally they were already toast.

Once you get them off the net, stop lobbing. You have won the first part of the battle. Now just hit the ball to them in their weak position, and they will just be lousy. If they retreat all the way to the baseline, hit the ball between them. Obviously, if you get in close, the drop shot can work well.

The lob is the most disruptive, effective shot that the average club player can make. Every other shot takes a great deal of skill. Lobbing well takes skill too, but not if your opponent is completely freaked out by your dastardly, immoral tactics. Happy lobbing, and good luck out there!

Fall Junior Program

Patric and James' Fall Junior Program runs through mid-December. It is not too late to join the fun and learning! Contact Patric if you would like to participate. The Winter Junior Program will start the second week of January.