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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

Please Help (i.e. No Bozos)

No, I'm not asking for money, or even time, or being a volunteer, or any of that. I just ask you to help out your fellow members and friends in a couple of simple but helpful ways. It is really quite easy. A snap.

1. Please put your name on the sign-in board when you go down to play. Hey, as a bonus, I'll even ask that you put an accurate time as to when you started. I know, I know, I'm shooting for the moon here. Play is for ninety minutes, singles or doubles. If nobody bumps you, play as long as you like.
2. If you have a reservation and can't play, please cancel it. You can do this by going back on the website and deleting the reservation (click on it and press delete, very simple). A bunch of players standing around waiting to see if the person who signed up for court seven is going show up is a huge waste of everyone's time, and patience. It is hard enough to be patient in tennis without having to deal with discourteous members as well.
3. If you have a reservation, please play on the court you have reserved. I know, it's two or three miles back there to court seven, and if court five is open, why not just "drop-in" there. Well, the problem is, the person coming after you doesn't know court 7 is open, in fact, when they look on line, it is reserved, so they think the club is full, when it is not. Now if your name is Bozo, and they know who you are, they can see that Bozo is on five, and not on seven, where Bozo has reserved, and then they can go to seven. But if they don't know you are a Bozo, then they don't know court seven is free. The moral of this story, don't be a Bozo. Thanks.

The Club is at full capacity. That means that we have lots of people to play with, but it also means that the club is very active. It is each of our duties to make sure that the Club runs as smoothly as possible, and everyone gets a chance to play. Please help the Club operate as smoothly as possible by helping each other out with the above behaviors.

Touring Pros Have It So Easy

Have you ever thought about how easy touring pros have it compared to club players? It is practically a cake walk.

For example, consider this: pros don't have to keep score. That's right, someone is keeping score for them. Never is there a thought in their mind, "Is it really 15-30, I can't really remember."

Not to mention, they don't even have to pick up the balls. They have these kids running around, picking up balls for them. I mean, how lazy is that? If fact I've never seen a pro pick up a ball. Do they even know how? Any club player can run circles around a pro when it comes to ball-picking-up technique and skill. We leave those pros in the dust.

And then, what is this someone-carrying-your-towel-for-you nonsense? At least when you are a pro, you don't have to do your laundry. You just toss your sweaty wrist bands, towels and shirts up into the crowd. It is rumored the recipient of these sweat-soaked souvenirs never wash these items of discarded clothing. Disgusting.

As a club player, you have to provide your own water, and no one stands

Reindeer Games

Besides a drop here and there, it hasn't really started raining yet. And yet we are already picking the one day of the year when we are sure it will rain: the date of the annual Reindeer Games. So sign up, and make alternate plans to do something just in case.

This year's Reindeer Games will be held on Sunday, December 7th at 2 p.m.. Don't miss out. The cost is free (even we don't have the nerve to charge for something that never happens). Please contact Keith or Lysbeth if you would like to plan what you are not doing on Dec. 7.

Trash Can? Garbage Dump? Guilt-Free Guilt

The Club's Refrigerator is not a trashcan. I know, you don't want to throw food away that you or your teammates brought to a match, and you don't want to take that food home because you don't want to eat it and become as big as your house, so you put the left overs in the Club's refrigerator. That way our staff can feel guilty about throwing out "perfectly good food" for you. Hmmmm.... Doesn't really work. Naturally, we want to have plenty of treats for our league matches, so we always bring too much, and have unfinished goods. It is kind of a wasteful system, but I understand. I run lots of parties here at Orindawoods, and it is always better to have to deal with left overs, than have the horror of running out. Few things are worse than being a host and feeling like you didn't sufficiently take care of your guests. Unfortunately, part of the job of hosting (the ugly, dark side of responsibility), is manning up and throwing out what doesn't get used. Please don't fill the Club refrigerator with well-intentioned garbage. Because that is what it is, garbage. Very few people are going to eat food left in a public fridge. Would you? So we refrigerate our garbage for a week or so, and then someone tosses it out. It is really just not a good way to go. Thanks.

over you, holding an umbrella on the change overs. These pros are pansies.

And a pro gets new balls every nine games. Can you imagine? They have perfect conditions all the time. No worn out, fluffed up, fuzz balls to contend with, or ones that are bald down to the rubber.

And while most of us have someone string our racquets for us, we don't have them encased in those cute little plastic bags, and only play a few games with each set of strings before they move on to a new one.

It is proper etiquette in pro tennis not to talk to your opponent. That makes life a lot easier when you don't have to hear about your partner's aunt Mildred's gallbladder on the change-overs. And you don't have to listen to someone who really doesn't care tell you about how wonderful your backhand is today, knowing that having to endure the compliment, will no doubt send your aforementioned backhand straight into the toilet for the rest of the match. That is, unless you are more mentally tough than Chris Evert, who never had to deal with such crap as an insincere compliment (or even a sincere one).

The pros get a bunch of free stuff, racquets, bags, strings, clothing, hats, etc... and you are still using your beat-up racquet with fraying strings from 1995, and your tennis shorts (washed diligently every week whether they needed it or not), from 2004 (a bit faded, but still damn lucky).

A pro breaks a racquet, his sponsor gives him a new one. You break a racquet, your mom takes your tennis privileges away for a month. Then you have to earn the money to buy a new stick at ridiculous retail prices by mowing the neighborhood lawns with a push mower.

In pro doubles, the partners meet at the service line and discuss tactics for the next point. The world's best team even discussed where to place the next serve when they were in the womb together. We can't even find time for a high-five in the rare event that our partner doesn't fluff an easy volley after my awesome serve; we're too busy picking up the balls for the next point. We have a job to do, no time for planning and celebrations.

And speaking of planning, a pro's partner can actually hit the ball where they intend to and set their net player up, and you are just happy if your partner doesn't plunk you in the back of the head with a serve.

The pros get paid, even when they suck and lose. Tank and bank, just pick up your "winnings" and make a deposit. We pay every time we want to play, whether it is for our club membership, our guest, our shoes or just the racquet and balls.

Those ATP and WTA touring pros sure have it easy.

All kidding aside, to be a successful club player, you really need to master a lot of skills, and be adept at handling a myriad of often-crazy situations. Playing well is much more than just hitting the ball. It is mastering the mental, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of the game, as well as the physical. And sometimes what we have to deal with is actually harder than the pros. They have their own difficult issues, of course, but they really don't have to face a chatty and annoying opponent, who has bad taste in clothing as well. Not to mention that knee brace that has never been washed and could walk off the court under it's own power it smells so bad. Ouch, my nose aches at the thought.

Tennis Tip:

Contact

The Crucial Moment. It is difficult to describe in useful terms what happens in the fractions of a second when the ball and the racquet interact. And yet this is the crucial moment in tennis. It is essential that we get this brief moment in time right, if we want to really succeed in the game.

The Trap of Simplicity. Simplistic instructions (from an instructor, or to yourself) to "watch the ball," "keep your head down," "move your feet," "get your racquet back," and "follow through" may be simple enough to execute (or not), but do they really improve the quality of contact that will lead to real improvement in your tennis?

I believe teachers and students in striving for simplicity in instruction may actually cheat both the student and the teacher from real success. No matter how hard one strives to succeed using these methods, they don't really work.

"Get your racquet back, hit through the ball, follow through" clearly fails in producing good strokes much beyond the beginner level, and yet it is easy to say for the instructor, and relatively easy to do for the student. Students tell themselves if they get ready sooner, or move their feet better, or keep their eye more focused on the ball, they will do better. In some cases this may be true, but how much better? And is such simple instruction really going to take them to the enjoyment of the game they desire?

Albert Einstein once said, "Keep things simple, but not too simple."

Wise advice. The instruction has to actually be useful, and not just achieve

Quote of the Month

When I first observed the art, a punch was just a punch and a kick was just a kick
When I studied the art, a punch was much more than a punch, a kick much more than a kick
When I mastered the art, a punch was just a punch, and a kick was just a kick

-- Bruce Lee



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the goal of easy to understand or execute to justify its existence. If the task at hand is complex, the methods used must be sufficiently complex to deal with the challenges the situation poses for the player.

Even touring pros, who stroke the ball better than any one, when asked, will usually say the key to tennis is to “watch the ball and move your feet.”

And yet, they are clearly doing much more than that, as they are playing far better than the average player who doesn’t get the same results when they try the same simple tips. Improving is not a question of simply practicing harder, hitting more balls over the years, or being better athletes. The pros are doing a much more complex motion, and yet, because it is well-trained and therefore largely subconscious (a habit), they focus on watching the ball and moving their feet. This simple mantra is the result of the psychological challenge to stay focused in the midst of intense competition when the ball arrives differently each time, rather than the physical challenge of good stroke mechanics (which are relatively constant and well rehearsed).

This complex stroke motion was learned through hours and years of practice. It is not an accident that they stroke the ball this way. They certainly were not born with these strokes. It may be a warped tennis pro sense of humor, but someone saying “she has a natural swing” is one of the funniest things someone can say to me, even though most people don’t get the joke. In fact, when someone looks like a natural, I know he or she has practiced and trained a great deal.

The Nature of Contact. And so we arrive at the crucial moment in a tennis player’s life: contact.

What has to happen? Research says that the ball only stays on the strings three to four thousandths of a second. Not very long, and pretty impossible to perceive, other than feeling the impact of the ball colliding with the racquet that vibrates down into your hand and arm.

At contact, the ball changes direction from coming towards us, to going back to our opponents’ court (hopefully). This happens way faster than the human eye can see. And yet, as we said, this is the crucial moment in tennis, and we have to get this right. With the advent of high-speed film and slow motion, we have been able to get a much better picture of what is happening in this crucial moment that we can’t really perceive in real time.

Perhaps this is a bit simplistic too, but basically, when the ball comes in contact with the strings, it either predominantly bounces away, or rolls away. In tennis terms, it either is hit “flat” or with “spin.” Some shots are 90% bounce and 10% roll, while others are 10% bounce and 90% roll, and of course every possible division in between.

In the spirit of keeping it simple, but not too simple: spin is better (but there always needs to be some bounce as well).

In the spirit of honesty, spinning a ball is probably harder to do, or at least learn, than hitting a ball directly (bounce). So to start, learning tennis by learning to spin the ball is probably a bit more difficult, but in the long run, it is the easier, more efficient way to play. Without the ability to spin the ball, you are severely limited in how good you can get (probably about 3.0-3.5, realistically).

The Question. When you go to play a shot in tennis, the ball is traveling towards you in most cases (except the serve). At the moment of impact, is your racquet going predominantly forward (flat hit) or approaching the ball at some angle, closer to perpendicular to the flight of the ball (high to low, low to high, inside to outside, outside to inside) which produces spin?

A Direct Hit. A direct hit with the ball (racquet and ball heading in opposite directions, i.e. head on collision) is going to produce the bounce, direct or flat hit. The resulting rebound (the racquet is a trampoline, after all, and the ball is a bouncy rubber ball) is going to leave the racquet quickly. The speed of the swing and that of the incoming ball, plus the direction the stings happen to be pointing will control the distance the ball travels. In contacting the ball this way, the only way to control the distance would be to vary the speed of the swing and the angle of the racquet. Slower swing, the ball wouldn’t go as fast or as far, faster swing, farther and faster. Point the angle up more, and the ball would go higher (this may make it go farther or shorter, depending on how

much angle).

A Spin Contact: If instead, if your stroke approaches the ball from an angle, so that instead of a direct hit, you would brush across the ball, the strings would dig into the felt of the ball, get a hold on the ball, and turn the ball as the racquet face traveled across it (low to high for topspin, high to low for under spin). The ball would stay in contact with the strings much longer than the bounce above. The predominant result of the interaction between the ball and the strings would be a ball that rolls, or spins away. There would of course still be bounce (the strings are still a trampoline, and the ball still a bouncy rubber ball), but added to this bounce would be rotation. The rotation of the ball greatly affects the flight of the ball (Under spin causing the ball to rise, topspin causing the ball to go up, and then dive down). These spins give you much more control over the ball and are essential for top-level play, and much more fun.

A Game Changer. As a side note, players have discovered over the past thirty years that if you have more spin, and thus more control, you can hit the ball harder and harder and still keep the ball in. While new racquet technologies have contributed to the speed in the modern game, essentially the difference is that with modern stroking techniques, we have more control and can therefore play a faster ball and keep it in. Remember, as much fun as power is, these players are playing for their livelihoods (just as you play to win) and are not going to hit the ball harder than they can keep it in, no matter how powerful the new racquets are.

The Key Question. So again, the key question is, at the moment of impact, is the string bed of the racquet moving predominantly towards the ball (bounce, flat), or is it predominantly moving (brushing) across the ball, thus grabbing and rotating it?

Three Dimensions. We live in a three dimensional world, so the racquet can move up and down (height), inside and outside (width), and back and forward (depth). If you want to produce spin, the emphasis at contact should be on the racquet moving in the height and width dimensions, and not so much in the depth dimension. In other words, the best swing would move mostly up and to the side of your body, and not as much forward. A forward swing would produce more bounce, and we want spin.

So “take your racquet back, hit through the ball, and follow through” are all instructions that are easy to say, easy to do, and going to produce a bounce and essentially mediocre-to-poor play. Not what the best players in the world are doing.

Any move you make with your arm or body that makes your racquet move too much forward and thus produces more bounce and less spin has to be guarded against with all the will and determination you can muster.

Two Targets. Perhaps this helps. In tennis, there are two targets: the ball, and where you want the ball to go to on the other side of the net. The ball is the primary target, and in most cases the stroke should approach the ball in a way that produces spin, and mitigates the amount of bounce (low to high / inside out on topspin shots or high to low / outside in on under spin shots). We are intentionally miss-hitting the ball, using the strings (brushing for spin), as opposed to a direct hit (bounce). But we do have a secondary target, where we want the ball to go. This target is very important, as placement is one of the key things in determining who wins the game. What we need to do as we move the racquet towards the ball (primary target, brushing motion) is to point the string bed (the face of the strings) towards the secondary target.

Stroking Patterns. When we watch the top players, their strokes (before and during contact) go up and to the side (producing a topspin / side spin combination) on a topspin stroke or from outside and downward (under spin/ side spin combination) on an under spin shot. Their strings point forward so that the ball travels towards the target with either type of spin. Not only will the ball rebound off the racquet with spin, but also it will head back perpendicular to the face of the string bed, towards the intended secondary target.

Common Confusion. Where players get confused is they think they should swing towards the secondary target (the court). That produces a bounce-type contact.

The second confusion involves power, or force. While moving forward will produce power, it costs you control (due to the bounce, and the changing direction the string bed faces as your swing arches around).

There is a better way to get power. Keep in mind that even when you brush or spin the ball, the racquet is still a very powerful trampoline, and the ball still very bouncy. This ball / racquet interchange is loaded with power, so you don't have to have much forward movement to get a lot of power with these modern racquets. Let the racquets do the work for you. In addition, the speed at which you brush the ball not only affects how much spin you get, but also how fast the ball will go. By internally rotating your arm at impact (on a topspin forehand stroke or serve), you not only brush the ball, but cause that brushing motion to be much faster. That produces more spin, and more speed.

The Great Secret of Modern Tennis: the action that produces more spin also produces more speed. In the brushing method, power and control come from the same move, while in the simple, direct, easy-to-understand bounce method, power and control come from opposite moves (swing faster or swing slower). No wonder a modern-style player crushes an old-style player. Virtually no pro plays the old way.

So simple is nice, but not too simple. There really is more to playing tennis than “see the ball, hit the ball,” at least if you want to be good and have much success. Someday, all that complexity may become subconscious and the game may seem as easy and natural as watching the ball and moving your feet, but there is no doubt some work to be done first if you ever wish to achieve that wonderful level of the game. Good luck out there!