



October 2009
Volume 15, Issue 10

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

Shot Selection

Strategy vs. Stroke

One of the real challenges in playing tennis is shot selection. There are two fundamental ideas guiding us here. One is that we want to hit a shot that we can get in. Be consistent. The other is that we want to hit a shot that makes it hard for our opponent to hit. Help them make errors. These two purposes are often opposites when it comes to choosing what shot to hit.

For example, in singles, the most consistent place to hit is in the box (center of the court, see diagram A on page 3), but if you are trying to hit winners and force errors, you will do better hitting in the areas outside of the box. Shots in the box cause little problems for your opponent. Shots outside of the box mean they have to move, and more errors will be forced. For singles, the shot selection can come down to, when in trouble, hit it in the box, when in control, hit it outside of the box. It is more complicated than that, but that is a darn good place to start if you are a singles player. And enjoy winning.

In doubles, the strategy can be much more complex. Most players start with "hit the ball away from the net person" as their first strategy. This is already getting us away from optimum performance, because the first priority should always be, hit a shot you can make. How quickly we forget this. I have found that many unforced errors (missing shots you can normally make) have their roots firmly grounded in unwise choices. Of course the other main reason for unforced errors is too much attention to the outcome of the shot, before you have even hit the shot in question (taking your eye off the ball, over hitting, bad aiming, etc...). Both of these key reasons for errors are rooted in what I would like to call strategic thinking, as opposed to executing the shot.

I don't want to suggest that strategic thinking is necessarily wrong, but I think it is over-emphasized.

My students know that I like to tell a hypothetical story: if two 4.5 singles players who knew nothing of doubles strategy were to play two very solid 3.5 doubles players who knew all the strategy and had played together as a team for years, the outcome would be in favor of the 4.5's every time. They just hit the ball too well.

This story tells us that a wise person should put their time, energy and focus during a match into playing the best shot they can. Not on being tricky. Again, this doesn't mean

Welcome To James Munn

We want to welcome James Munn to Orindawoods Tennis Club as our new Associate Pro. As you know, our long-time Associate Pro Philip Laubscher left us at end of July to return to his home state of Washington. Now James has joined us to assist Patric with the Junior Program and to teach private lessons here at the Club. James has been teaching in Connecticut since his days playing junior tennis. He has a great deal of experience with both juniors and adults.

James' private lesson rate will be \$50/hr for members, \$55 for non-members. To book a lesson with James, you can write our Orindawoods e-mail address (orindawoodstc@sbcglobal.net) or call the Club (254-1065 and leave a message on mail box #3). James will teach primarily Tuesday through Saturday, mostly after 12 noon, but may be available at other times too. James currently lives in Oakland, California and enjoys outdoor activities such as biking and rock climbing.

He is looking forward to meeting all of you, and helping many of you with your tennis. Please help us in giving James a warm Orindawoods welcome.

Court Rules and Computer Errors

Occasionally our fantastic website has a few little problems (You mean computers aren't flawless?). If for some reason the computer allows you to do something that is not legal under our rules, it is the rules that apply, not what you were able to do on the program.

So, that means, that you need to follow the rules even if the computer doesn't. Too many reservations, reservations at the wrong times (certain times are designated by the rules – red squares on the court scheduler), the wrong length of reservations, etc need to follow the rules of the Club. If you break the rules, you risk having your reservation revoked on the first offense, your reservation privileges suspended on the second offense, and lost after that. Ouch!

Good Luck To Sarah Smith

Sarah Smith who has worked on our junior program much of the last several years is going off to college at UC Santa Barbara. Good luck to Sarah and thank you to her for many great hours of working with the juniors here at Orindawoods. Sarah has been great with the kids and a great help to Patric assisting him with the clinics and classes. Thanks!

that we completely abandon strategic thinking all together, but the overthinking of shots leads to reduced levels of performance.

The simplest doubles example would be that it is safe to hit the ball in the middle of the court. The net is low, the court is big, and it is harder to make mistakes aiming in the middle rather than on the sides. But it is also a good strategic shot (unlike in singles), because in most instances, when you are hitting in the middle, you are hitting between the two players. They will have to move sideways to play the ball, and that is much more likely to produce an error than if you hit it right to them.

Where to Hit: Having said that, another way to look at doubles and the choices we make is that we can easily divide the court into four squares (see Figure B). We can then number those squares in order, 1-4, as to how easy they are to hit into, given the shot you are hitting. In Figure B, lets consider that you are hitting a backhand return of serve in the deuce court off a strong serve down the middle (the best serve in the deuce court). The shot directly to the net person in box #1 is the easiest shot. The lob over the net person into box #2 is next. A cross-court return into #3 is the next toughest shot to make. A drop shot, or sharp angle into #4 is the hardest shot. Where do most people, using strategic thinking, aim? Or lets point the finger even more directly. Where are most people coached to hit the ball? If you answered #3, you have taken a lot of doubles lessons. The problem is, it is a pretty darn difficult shot to hit. Especially if the serve coming in is pretty fast or has a lot of spin. Which of course leads us to another point. If the ball coming to you is weak, hit your return shot where ever. Strategy is not the issue on such points, but the strength/weakness of the shot.

So I see the major problem in strategic thinking is that it encourages us to hit shots that are actually quite hard to make, and thus leads us to many unforced errors. In the above example, a player interested in hitting the ball well will hit the ball to squares #1 or #2, where a strategic thinker will hit to #3 or even #4.

Now I am happy to report that most players are not idiots or intentionally self destructive, and do not hit to #4 very often. But they do hit to #3 a lot, and make too many errors or hit too many weak shots that their opponents can exploit.

If we look at a couple of other scenarios (Figures C, D, E, F & G), we can see that where it is easiest to hit varies. Figure C shows the best to worst (1 to 4) returns for a serve to the forehand in the deuce court. Figure D shows the easiest returns for a wide serve to the backhand in the add court.

Figure E shows the easiest to make to hardest to make shots for a forehand return in the add court. Figure F shows the best shots if you have a forehand volley in the deuce court. Figure G shows the best shots to hit if you have a backhand volley. Figure G shows why alley shots can put your partner at risk ("Look out!"). You can figure out the add court for volleys, it is just the reverse.

Defending the Court: On the defensive side of things, if they are hitting the ball to you, there are four squares to hit into and you only have two players. Net players usually only have time to cover one square well. Baseline players have enough time to cover two squares. So obviously, you should try to cover #1 with one player (preferably the net player), and #2 & #3 with the other. It starts to become clear pretty quickly why both players at the net don't work. You can't cover enough squares against a good opponent. On the other hand, in certain circumstances, two back can be successful. We can also start to understand why Australian Formation works to the Add Court on a wide serve. Just look at the numbers.

To sum up, strategic thinking is playing a game of avoidance. You are trying to avoid the other team and their strengths. While, on the surface, this looks wise, always remember what the old sage said, "be careful what you wish for because it may come true." By avoiding their best shots, you are probably also avoiding hitting yours.

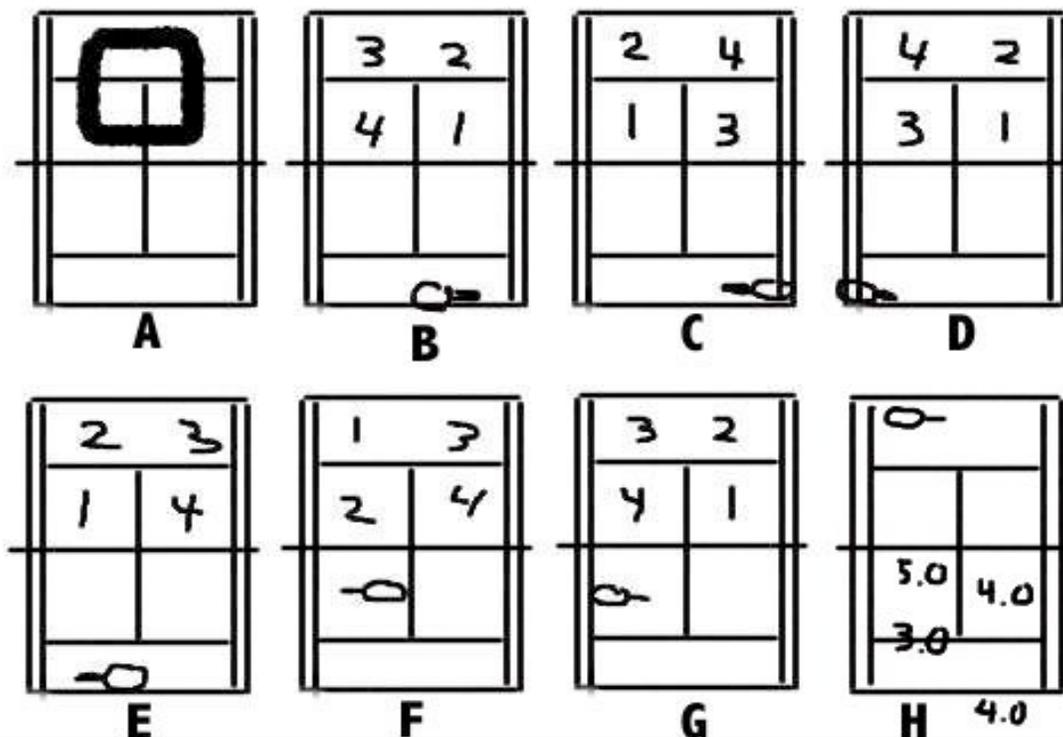
The psychological/emotional ramifications of this are huge. If you spend three sets trying to think

strategically, and avoid and trick your opponents, you will have spent three sets hitting difficult shots, shots you won't hit that well. I can pretty much guarantee that as the match goes along, your confidence will sink and fade because you are not hitting the ball very well. Even if you have been barely winning, you will begin to doubt your ability, and there is a very good chance

Quote of the Month:

"If you are going through hell,
keep going."

--Winston Churchill



that late in the third set, if not before, you will choke. If on the other hand, you are hitting most of your shots to #1 and #2, you will be hitting the ball well, feeling like you can play, feeling confident about your ability to hit the next shot, and you will be energized for the last few crucial games at the close of the third set. Your chances of choking are much less, because you have been successfully hitting the ball the entire match, even if at that point you happen to be slightly behind. Which player do you want to be? Good luck out there!

What is your NTRP Rating?

Most people who play leagues and tournaments can answer this easily. But actually, whether you realize it or not (and you should), your rating varies (not on the USTA computer, thank god). Your effective rating (how you hit the ball to your opponent) varies because of basically three factors.

1. Your rating depends (how well you will actually hit the ball back to them) on where you stand, that is, your positioning on the court.
2. Your rating depends on what shot you are trying to hit.
3. Your rating depends on how well they hit the ball to you.

Obviously, if someone hits a great shot at you, they can make you look like a total beginner. But, the other two out of three of these are very much within your control.

First, let's look at positioning. There are places on the court where you are clearly stronger than other places. Let's say you are a 4.0 player. If you are very close to the net and you hit the ball, the shot that your opponent has to hit coming from you may very well look like a 5.0 level shot. In reality, if you hit from there, you are a 5.0 player, not a 4.0. You are in a strong position, and tough to beat. If you are near the service line, and they hit the ball at your feet, no matter how skilled you are, the best your shot is going to come to them is probably about a 3.0 level shot (a lot of times you might even look 2.5). You have to hit it up, and you can't hit it very hard. However, in the exact same position if they lob you, you might look like a 4.5. If you are back on the baseline, you may be back to your 4.0 level, but if you have to chase back for a high lob, and you are way back by the fence, no matter how good you are, your resulting shot is going to look a lot like a 3.0 lob. Check out Figure H to see your actual rating around the court. As you can see, your ability to hit the ball varies greatly just by where you stand.

So, a very simple question. Why would you stand where you aren't very good? It is amazing how



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many people come towards the net, or back away from the net, and end up where they are way below their level.

Let's put it this way. You serve and come towards the net. Your partner is afraid they might lob, so they back off the net. You are both in the 3.0 position, or 6.0 as a team. The team you are playing has the net person move forward into the 5.0 position. The returner stays at the baseline where they are a 4.0. This is a 9.0 team playing your 6.0 team (even though all four players are "rated 4.0"). Whose going to win that match?

On top of this, where you hit the ball (see article above, squares 1, 2, 3 & 4) has a lot to do with how tough your shot is received by your opponent. For example, if your best shot is the cross-court forehand, and you are 4.0, that shot may look to your opponent like a 4.5 shot. It is your strength. However, you may have a 3.0 down-the-line backhand, or a 3.5 serve. You put all this together, and you may end up in a 4.0 league, and have that official rating, but if you want to do well, you will try to hit your higher, or above-level shots, more often, and your below-level shots less.

So another simple question (and the point of the article above): why would you hit a shot you don't hit very well?

I have to tell you, if you spend a lot of time on the practice court, working on those midcourt shots, they are never going to look 5.0. Never. Not even once. As I often quote, Byron Katie says, "When you argue with reality, you lose. But only 100% of the time." I know a player that came into the 3.0 position for three straight matches in a round robin tournament, and missed half volley after half volley. Finally in the last set of the last lost (she lost every match), she screamed out in frustration (I won't repeat those words here in this family publication). She still didn't get it. She was mad that she couldn't hit this shot, instead of asking, why am I trying to hit this shot? The much more appropriate question.

Tennis is a simple game. For some reason, we have worked really hard to make it a lot more difficult than it needs to be. Good luck out there!

Halloween

The Haunted Court

You probably didn't know, but we have a haunted court here at Orindawoods. Or should I say, the court has a certain karma. No matter what we do, this court has something mysterious about it.

In its current form, the net isn't high enough, and the balls all get stuck in the fence on the sides. And it has bad shadows in the morning. Yes, we are talking about wonderful, lovable court #4.

When I first came to Orindawoods fifteen years ago, court four leaked. That is, following every rain, water would seep up out of the ground, through the big cracks on court four, and run out all over the sun-dry court. If you stood on certain places on the court and jumped up and down, even more water would be pumped up out of the ground. It was our own artesian well. And of course, the court was terribly slanted (towards the drinking fountain, if you must know). I always felt it was so slanted that if you put snow on it, it wouldn't qualify as a beginner run. So when it came time to repair the courts about 8 years ago, we had the court leveled. Problem solved. No more leaks, no more downhill lie. Of course there still was that shadow, but we figured we could live with that. Except that the net post was never right after they fixed the court. Twice breaking off, and always tilting so the net doesn't get high enough. And on top of that, the balls get stuck at the back and south side of the fence. I have tried to replace/repair the net post many times, but it always stays the same, an inch low or so. Now when I think of repairs, I know more problems would arise, so instead, I love court #4 and its quirks, and haunted nature.