THE LITTLE GREEN BOOK OF TENNIS
SECOND EDITION

TOM PARHAM
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About the time I started trying golf
Harvey Penick (with Bud Shrake) wrote
Harvey Penick’s Little Red Book (Simon and
Schuster, 1992). Penick, the longtime golf
coach at the University of Texas and golf
professional in Austin, describes the book’s
origin in the first part of the book:

“An old pro told me that originality does
not consist of saying what has never been
said before; it consists of saying what you
have to say that you know to be the truth.

“More than sixty years ago, I began
writing notes and observations in what I
came to call my Little Red Book. Until
recently I had never let anyone read my Little
Red Book except my son, Tinsley.

“My intention was to pass my Little
Red Book on to Tinsley, who is the head
professional at the Austin Country Club.

“With the knowledge in this little book to use as a reference, it would be
easier for Tinsley to make a good living teaching golf no matter what happens
when I am gone.

“There is only one copy of the red Scribbletex notebook that I wrote in. I kept
it locked in my briefcase. Most of my club members and players who came
to me for help heard about my Little Red Book as it slowly grew into what
is a slender volume considering that all the important truths I have
learned about golf are written in its pages.

“What made my Little Red Book special
was not that what was written in it had never
been said before. It was that what it says about
playing golf has stood the test of time.
“I prefer to teach with images, parables and metaphors that plant in the mind these seeds of shotmaking. These, too, went into the notebook—if they proved successful.

“Maybe it was wrong to hoard the knowledge I had accumulated. Maybe I had been granted these eighty-seven years of life and this wonderful career in order that I should pass on to everyone what I had learned. This gift had not been given to me to keep secret.

“A writer, Bud Shrake, who lived in the hills near the club, came to visit me under the trees on this particular morning. “That morning under the trees we opened my Little Red Book.”

Wikipedia states the book became the number-one selling golf book of all time and calls Coach Penick perhaps the best golf coach of the mental game. Among his star pupils, Mr. Penick lists Ben Crenshaw (Masters Tournament champion) and Tom Kite (in his day the top money winner for professional golfers and a U.S. Open champion).

The book is essentially 80 golf lessons, clearly stated in one to two pages. A few are longer. What struck me immediately was the common-sense approach, yielding succinct lessons. Lessons Coach Penick describes as proven help. I doubt if anyone could make me much of a golfer. But more than golf was the realization that this man knows how to teach and coach.

And he was the same kind of professional gentleman as my mentor, Mr. Jim Leighton. Coach Leighton was Harvey-in-tennis. Perhaps not as well-known, but he had the same kind of effective teaching techniques. And, as I read Coach Penick’s book, I was stunned by the similarities with Coach Leighton and the career experiences I had gathered over 50 years of teaching and coaching.

Coach Leighton finished his career at Wake Forest University. The tennis stadium is named for him. His book, Inside Tennis: Techniques of Winning is a stellar tennis work.

My own writing is limited. I tried to compile a guide to coaching college tennis in the early ’80s but abandoned the effort until 2007. Play Is Where Life Is was about one-third tennis.

Like Coach Penick, I thought that was it. However, Coach Penick published three more books. I like all of them, especially the title of his second: If You Read This Book You Are My Pupil, And If You Play Golf You Are My Friend. My son Dan says I am “on the other side of the digital divide” and introduced me to blogging. The Little Red Book of golf may be the first golf blog. I doubt if Harvey realized what was to come.
My blog (www.tomparham.wordpress.com) was a way to continue writing—and writing about tennis especially.

I do not consider myself in a league with either Coach Penick or Coach Leighton. I do have an admiration and appreciation for both. And a realization that they both went about conveying proven valuable lessons in a language and style that is quite similar.

Bob Dylan sang, “you’ve got to get up close to the teacher if you want to learn anything.” (“Workingman’s Blues #2”). The Little Green Book of Tennis is my attempt to pay tribute to these two great teachers/coaches/gentlemen and their techniques.

Like Coach Penick I have tried diligently to select the lessons that are valuable and true in tennis. Most have a connection to my many hours spent with Coach Leighton.

MENTORS

In the mid-‘80s I began writing a coaching manual. Maybe I’ll add the next 20 years’ experience to that in a “tennis coaching book” later. If I do, one person will be responsible: Coach Jim Leighton of Wake Forest University.

North Carolina had, for years, featured the East-West High School All-Star Games. The state added more sports, then girls’ all-stars, and the games progressed. My team had just won a trip to the NAIA Nationals. We finished 15th in the nation. The first tennis clinic held in Greensboro was an after-thought. Coach Ira Norfolk was going to the basketball game, and I figured I’d pile in with him. My running buddy, Jack Hussey, was at the clinic, and we were off. We were all over Guilford County and Greensboro as well. Norfolk was in bed when I sneaked into the shared motel room very late. The tennis clinic was the next morning. I knew Norfolk was awake because he smoked 11 Viceroy before taking a morning trip.

I dragged myself out of bed just in time to make the 9:00 AM clinic at Latham Park in Greensboro. There were four coaches there including me. Coach Leighton rolled up with racquets and balls. He wore traditional white, and it matched his hair. He looked just like Colonel Sanders. After pleasantries and introductions he began speaking in a new language. Two puzzled coaches left after 10 minutes. The other coach left at noon.

Coach Leighton was a master teacher, and my first introduction to someone who was knowledgeable about the game. I was fascinated. One of his players, Paul Caldwell, was with him. When the other guy left, leaving only me, I was embarrassed, both by how much Leighton knew, and my
own misjudgment about my greatness. I offered to abandon the afternoon session. I was delighted and impressed when Coach responded, “Tom, we’ve agreed to stay until 4:00. I can tell you are interested in learning. As long as you’ll stay, we’ll stay.”

Our college offered $200 per year for “professional growth” at convention trips. I never again spent mine on anything but my new mentor, Coach Jim Leighton. He would try to refuse my money, but I’d have paid triple. I was in his home, at his club, at his varsity practices, watching tapes on everything from his current players to sequential pictures of Ellsworth Vines. He had just completed *Inside Tennis: Techniques of Winning*. This book, much of the information by Leighton himself, also included contributions by Dennis Van Der Meer, Welby Van Horn, Chet and Bill Murphy, Wayne Sabin, Pauline Betz Addie, and others. I loved Leighton and the book. I had so many questions. I’d schedule time in his Winston-Salem home. We’d talk about the book, and with explanations by Coach Leighton, I felt like Moses on the mount.

The USTA held our annual teacher’s convention just prior to the U.S. Open in Flushing Meadows. One year Jim and I made almost every session. Every coach seemed to want to use his session to further his tennis standing. At one session Leighton’s “bull” detector kicked in. A coach was trying to sell a lame idea as the end of all tennis instruction; Leighton politely questioned the man’s premise. The clinician sloughed off this old white-haired guy’s puzzlement. Again coach queried, “I want to make sure I’m understanding what you’re saying.” An abrupt, “Am I not speaking plainly enough?” was his answer. Selling the same lame premise, the clinician was startled when Leighton rose and stated, “Sir, you are addressing the tennis teachers of America and beyond. Never have I heard such a crock of baloney.” He turned to me and said “Get up Tom, we’re getting out here!” I followed him.

One day at the New York host hotel he asked, “Do you want to hear someone who knows tennis?” My immediate response was “Sure!” Coach said, “Meet me in the lobby at 6:30 for breakfast.” I joined Coach and Chet Murphy in a downtown café. Chet and Bill Murphy were Californians who knew the biomechanics of tennis. I’d heard Chet Murphy as a clinician. He seemed nervous but once the first technical question was asked, he was off and running. This morning Coach Leighton did something I’d never seen him do. He deferred to Murphy, asking questions the way I’d asked him. And while there was great mutual respect, I’ve got to say Murphy was impressive. I was all ears. This was a time when all kinds of research was being done in tennis. I was pleased with the next question asked by Coach Leighton, “Chet, how do you feel about what we’ve done?” (Meaning the
old-time proponents of "classic" tennis instruction.) Chet thought a moment and said, "We should have let them hit more western grip forehands. Other than that everything was right."

Coach Leighton was buried the day the Jimmy Powell Tennis Center was dedicated at Elon, North Carolina, in 1988. The funeral was in Wait Chapel on the campus that had named their stadium after this fine man, coach, and friend. People say you don’t have to play to be a coach. Or that you don’t have to have much other than good players ("You can’t make chicken salad, until you get the chicken"). I became a much better coach after meeting my mentor. I know it made me money. I taught everyone in Wilson and the surrounding area for years. I took Leighton's advice and sought out private sessions with Dennis Van Der Meer and Welby Van Horn. They couldn't have been nicer to me.

As my ability to see broadened, I could connect to my own experiences, while coaching college tennis for 40 years. I learned from television, professional tennis, coaching in 28 national team championships, my own players, players from other teams, other tennis coaches, and coaches of other sports. I learned particularly from Coach Jim Verdieck of Redlands University. It would be unfair to omit Coach Verdieck. The following article looks at this outstanding coach.

JIM VERDIECK

Not every athletic contest is the Super Bowl or the Final Four. Great games occur everywhere. There were some great contests, team efforts, and fine people in NAIA tennis. I’m grateful I saw 28 tournaments. Dick Gould of Stanford was the “Coach of the Era” (25 years) during the period I coached. No doubt he was the best.

But our absolute best was Jim Verdieck, a competitor, the coach at Redlands University (California). Jim was the best at winning I ran into, in any sport. And he was already a legend when my team made its 1970 trek to Rockhill Tennis Club in Kansas City, Missouri, home of the NAIA
Championships. Verdieck was a strong-willed football and tennis coach. His teams won 12 of 13 NAIA titles, starting in the mid-’60s.

I’d admired him and then befriended him. I need to write some of what I saw; one could learn a lot from Redlands and their coach. I asked him once why he didn’t write about his vast knowledge. Our kids were about to face each other. He pointed to the court and said, “See that match. If you told me we could win that match if I’d write 200 pages, I start right now.”

I asked where, over his coaching years, the non-scholarship Redlands team would rank in California, including the division I giants of USC, UCLA, Stanford, Pepperdine, and all the rest. “Sixth.”

The teams wore national championship warm-ups. Only for Kansas City. No one got to the courts before Redlands. We mimicked that too.

“But what if it dies?” I asked about his knowledge.

“If I die, it dies.”

He proved true to his word. Suffering a major heart attack, he was told he needed an emergency treatment.

“Not before Kansas City.”

Told he may die if he went, he boarded the plane.

He knew his business. Janice Metcalf, a fine California player, played number 6 on one Redlands men’s team. It was early 1970, and there were no girls’ teams in the NAIA. I was on the rules committee that denied Coach Verdieck’s appeal for a substitute for Janice, who’d injured her knee after the substitution deadline. The rule was clear and Coach Verdieck accepted the decision.

He flew Janice out for her first-round match, which she won easily, and then boarded a return plane to Redlands. Redlands University won the national title by that one point. When I asked Verdieck about that move, he explained, “I’d figured the draw pretty close. I knew Janice could probably beat this kid easily and told her to walk off if it was bad at all.”

Perhaps as impressive as Jim were his sons, Doug and Randy. Doug won
NAIA singles all four years. He won the doubles, three times—twice with Randy. When Doug was inducted into the NAIA Hall of Fame, he flew from Hawaii. As Doug tried to speak of his father, tears, not words, came. He backed out and tried again with the same results. Another attempt. The NAIA official next to him stood as if to relieve him. “No, dammit, no. I flew all the way from Hawaii to do this, and I’m gonna do it.” Angry now—his level voice stated: “My dad is the greatest” and sat down.

Coach Verdieck told me he had had lights approved for the university courts three times. Somehow the school procrastinated every time they said yes. Later he found out that when he’d tell his wife the lights were to be installed, she nixed the deal. She simply went to the administrators saying, “If you put up lights, he’ll stay there all night, and I’ll leave him.”

His roster included 24 players—a very large team. Not only that, each week every player in the top eight had a one-hour private lesson with Verdieck. Sixteen remaining players had a half hour per week with him. This, in addition to team responsibilities.

I called to congratulate him when I learned he’d retired at age 65. He was within 60 or so wins of 1,000. No one else was close.

“Did you consider staying until you break that barrier?” was one of my questions.

“No, I promised my wife if I got to 65, I’d stop. A deal’s a deal.”

**KEEP ON LEARNING**

Though he quit coaching he couldn’t give up teaching. I asked Coach Verdieck early on if he knew Dennis Van Der Meer. Not only is Van Der Meer the world’s most prolific tennis teacher, he was close to my mentor, Jim Leighton. Verdieck said, “Know Dennis? I taught him ninety percent of what he knows!” When I asked Coach Leighton if he knew Coach Verdieck, he said no. I told him of the Verdieck comment about Dennis Van Der Meer. Leighton was appalled and said he intended to ask Dennis about it! A couple of years went by, and I asked Leighton if he’d asked about Verdieck. Leighton admitted that Dennis had responded, “Yes, that’s probably about right.”

In retirement, Verdieck worked with Dennis at Sweet Briar College in the mountains of Virginia. I called Coach Verdieck and asked if I could hire him. “What for?” he asked. I told him I wanted to know more about coaching and he was the one who I most respected. I’d been coaching 25 years at this point. Still not convinced, he argued that his knees had gotten so bad he couldn’t move enough to hit many balls. I replied, “Coach, I just want to
talk with you.” He contended he didn’t talk much but to come by and we’d probably be done in 30 minutes. My wife went with me and waited patiently for three-and-a-half hours. “Tom, we have to set the babysitter free at 8:00 PM.”

You’re never too old to learn, and I learned a lot that day. When I became director of athletics the first thing I did was book an hour with five different athletic directors whom I admired. Dylan said you had to get up close to the teacher if you want to learn anything.

Coach Verdieck was impressive. In *The Little Green Book of Tennis* I draw from all my writings, and his coaching and advice show up, as well as that of my long-term mentor and friend, Jim Leighton.

Here, then, is *The Little Green Book of Tennis*. Done, I hope, in a style that does justice to the great game of tennis and to the fine men I have learned from.

P.S. Find your mentor(s)!

**IF I DIE**

Prior attempts to impart what I know included *Play Is Where Life Is*, my “bestseller” of 2007. It was such a bestseller that my garage had oodles left over. I have given many copies away. I have learned to question readers, knowing how to ascertain whether they have actually read their gift, or parts of it. The book includes my conversation with a revered coach, the late Jim Verdieck of Redlands University in California. I once asked Coach Verdieck if he had written down his voluminous knowledge of tennis. He said “No.” “What happens if you die?” I asked, respectfully. “If I die, it dies” was his answer. One of the few times I disagreed with the legendary coach.

There is an article on my blog titled “Mentors.” It describes how one with a thirst for knowledge in any arena might best learn. Maybe I am a little naive about the drive to learn that exists out there. I have had only one college coach ask for my advice since 2004. After an hour he said, “Coach, I’m supposed to meet someone at the local bar.” One hour of learning a profession?

**TEN GROUND STROKE FUNDAMENTALS**

The most significant lesson a tennis teacher can impart is to have his pupils “watch the ball” properly. Reams have been written on how to do this and what benefits will accrue. What then, are the other most important fundamental ideas in tennis ground stroke instruction and when do these ideas incorporate themselves?
Tennis teachers adopt “nutshell” approaches to express their major concerns and ideas. Some ideas suit some teachers and pupils more effectively than others. Gallway’s Inner Tennis is essentially a method book on “watching the ball” and watching yourself. Welby Van Horn’s major ideas for beginners are balance, grips, strokes, and strategy. Dennis Van Der Meer has used understanding the bounce of the ball as a core thought. Jim Leighton, author of Inside Tennis, emphasized the “gun barrel approach” and understanding the hitting zone as central ideas. All are bona fide timesavers in tennis instruction, as are many other valid thoughts.

The following is a brief list, with comments, on the major ideas a tennis instructor should convey to pupils. Certainly there are other important ideas, and the level of the player must be considered, but let’s focus on these major objectives.

- **Watch the ball.** Many great players have developed themselves with little or no instruction simply by following this suggestion. Trust your own mechanism.

- **Establish a target.** Someone defined tennis as the ability to “hit a moving target while under stress.” You must “watch the ball” but you must also have a mental target of where your shot is to go. This is concentration in tennis. “Look at the ball; where does it go” is an appropriate oversimplification for advising players. Also, which of these ideas (ball or target) comes first is a chicken or the egg argument of some relevance.

- **Tracking the ball to the “hit spot.”** This is basically movement in the game. Proper strokes are dictated by proper position. Once the ball is out of the hit zone even great players have trouble. (Lousy hit spots dictate lousy strokes!) Once the player establishes where his shot will be (forehand or backhand) his task becomes tracking that ball to the appropriate “hit spot.” The human mechanisms: use your eyes to track the ball and your brain to relay the message to your feet and legs. This makes movement, i.e., speed, quickness, and conditioning, essential.

- **Adjusting to the descending ball.** Certainly the ability to hit in the rise is important, as is learning to handle shoulder-high balls, but fundamental hit spots for beginners should be thigh-to-waist high, and the ball should be descending. Not only is this area the power zone, but also it encourages low-to-high strokes. The player must use movement to place himself so the opponent’s shot descends into his appropriate “hit spot.” Keeping the descending ball in the perfect “hit spot” makes his strokes much more simple and is
underestimated in its ability to eliminate frustration from the beginner’s game.

- **Utilize proper grips.** Proper grip is essential from the outset. There are a variety of proper grips but certainly traditional information (eastern forehand, proper backhand, etc.) should be part of the teacher’s basic craft.

- **Get your racquet back properly.** This must be one of the tennis teacher’s most often repeated phrases. Early preparation of the racquet is one of the real clues in tennis. Jack Barnaby in *Racquet Work* said these “nutshells”: prepare your racquet, prepare yourself, and watch the ball. Certainly there is an interrelationship between early racquet preparation and the speed and effectiveness of the player.

- **Firm wrists in the hit zones.** The ability to keep the wrists firm through the ground stroke hit zones can be likened to the need for a golfer keeping his lead arm straight. Without firm wrists all kinds of wrinkles can mess up fundamental shots. Often, poor position on the ball is the reason for faulty wrist movements. Perhaps Mr. Leighton’s *Inside Tennis* has the best statement on “pressed wrists” and the “gun barrel approach” to the hitting zone.

- **Proper finish, or follow through.** After the wrists have gone through the hit zone, the hips and shoulders should turn farther, and the racquet should be lifted to a firm, high ending. The teacher can emphasize this fundamental by requiring pupils to “freeze” at the end of their shots to self-diagnose their shots.

- **Return to ready.** Beginning players should understand that every ground stroke varies and to cope with the upcoming variation they must finish the current shot and regroup their concentration and head for the best defensive position they can ascertain, generally near the middle of the baseline. Here again, the player is dependent on his legs for movement, and he must understand that this is the point at which he must work hardest in tennis.

- **Recycle the process.** The player now must be ready to repeat the above outlined fundamental on either side, for as many times as needed to win the point. Each shot is similar to, but independent of, the other. The player must be aware that consistency in shot production is the major strategy in tennis. The player must also be committed to repeating the process without error for as many times as necessary to win the point.
MOVE! CONCENTRATE! WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

These are the suggestions most often repeated by parents to junior tennis players. Perhaps some players understand. However, sometimes it looks as if the juniors conceive of themselves being in a hypnotic state of deep concentration, wiggling all of themselves at once. “Is this what my parents want? Is this what they mean by move? What do they mean ‘concentrate?’"

A sympathetic mentor sees that while the parent’s sometimes caustic and impatient requests are well-founded, the junior player quite possibly might not fully understand these terms as applied to tennis. Let’s examine them more closely.

Movement in tennis is perhaps the real secret to the game. Ultimately, the game boils down to quickness and defense against poor “hit spots” or contact points. Tennis starts in your head (specifically your eyes and your brain) and moves to your feet and legs quickly. This is ample justification for conditioning and practice.

A trained player’s eyes and brain track the flight of the ball to the perfect “hit spot.” Anything less yields a lousy stroke. Move means to get your racquet back quickly and properly and to get to the ball properly. For all but advanced players, getting to the ball properly means to be set up so that when you “step hit” a descending ball will be in the absolutely perfect “hit spot,” whether forehand or backhand.

A baseliner’s task is to move to defend against poor “hit spots” much as a basketball player moves defensively with the core thought being, “don’t let the ball get out of the proper contact point.”

A player will probably deliver a good shot if the player:

• Winds up with his feet positioned properly at the completion of the shot
• Points his racquet at the target properly during contact
• Keeps his wrists firm in the hit zones
• Concentrates properly

What then, does concentrate properly mean? The most often repeated phrase in tennis is “watch the ball.” Yet it is quite possible to watch the ball intensely without either moving or concentrating in tennis terms. To concentrate properly one must not only “watch the ball” but also focus on a target. While watching the ball and tracking that ball to the perfect hit spot, the concentrating player is formulating a mind’s eye target of where the ball is to go. This is concentration in tennis: “Watch the ball; where does it go? Where does it go; watch the ball!” There is constant target selection,
BALANCE IS THE KEY TO GOOD TENNIS

Welby Van Horn would use this technique to teach ballistic swing footwork. Once you have made the ground stroke or serve or volley, hold your follow through (or ending) to a count of “3,000”). Look at your feet. Are your balance foot and adjustment foot correct as described in “The Ballistic Swing” section?

“Balance is the clue to good tennis, and footwork is the clue to good balance” –Welby Van Horn.

CHECK YOUR GRIPS IN THE “HIT SPOT”

The most irrefutable physical law in tennis is that “the ball will be directed where you point the racquet at the moment the strings meet the ball.” This sounds simple enough, but it is a fundamental that is often overlooked by a beginner who is trying to think of ten things at once.

As a tennis instructor, one can heighten the class’s attention with the mere suggestion of the proper backhand grip discussion. Almost immediately, pupils will pick up their racquets and search for this mystic grip that will cure their frustrating backhand problem. While no grip will atone for poor position or improper hit spot, an understanding that grip change reinforces wrist strength is essential.

No matter how one explains this necessity, students have a period in when the decisions concerning which way and how much the hands turn are confusing. The same is true of all grips when one progresses to the point that all strokes have been explained. To cope with this indecision, a teacher can facilitate grip change understanding by having students check their grips in the various hit spots.
Most beginners tend to check their grips in the ready, or waiting, position. By checking grips in the hit spot a beginner can immediately relate grips and their relationship to “the most irrefutable physical law in tennis.” One also can more easily ascertain the value of proper grip to wrist reinforcement.

**TENNIS PRACTICE: YOU NEED A FRIEND**

A teacher of sports skills soon realizes tasks include:

- Having a concept of what the skill looks like when correctly executed
- Seeing where others are going wrong
- Correcting execution
- Leading through a proper program to eventual proper execution on a reflex, or match, basis

Tennis is no exception. A good teacher will set up enough practice balls so errors are corrected. This is a main task, and good teachers, pros, and coaches work doggedly at it. There are some common misconceptions on the part of pupils however. Perhaps it is worthwhile to examine a few of these. First, no teacher can tell a player how to play. He can only teach the player how to practice. It’s like a person taking piano lessons and never touching the keys—the student simply cannot learn without actual practice on the piano.

Some people conceive of tennis as lessons. Tennis is play. As a city tennis director I observed people repeatedly taking beginners’ lessons from one year to the next. When I ask them how they have done since last year they often reply “oh, I haven’t played since the lessons,” or “I could never find anyone to play with.”

These people haven’t understood a basic fact regarding improving one’s tennis game: you are dependent on other people. There are some ways to overcome this fact, namely lessons, ball machines, backboard practice, racks of shag or practice balls – yet no one avoids the inevitable. You must have someone you can count on to play or practice with. Often you hear “I like to play with better people,” and perhaps to play with an equal is best. But to play with anyone is better than not playing at all.

Often the most natural practice possibilities, i.e., family member, friends, neighbors, or rivals, are somehow eliminated because of various reasons. “Oh, I can’t play with my father, he shouts at me all the time,” is one excuse. “I can’t stand to lose to her” is another. “I can’t count on them to be there on time,” or “to play hard when they come” is frequent. At this point I think the player should have a “heart-to-heart” with their potential practice
partner. The gist of which would conclude: “Look, I need you to get better, and I know you want the same. Let’s set a regular time, keep our mouths shut, and promise each other we’ll work as hard as we can while we’re on the court. Also we’ll swap practice hits on an equal basis.”

“Swap practice hits?” What does this mean? It means that if you are, and have, a dependable friend, you can set up the practice balls rather than pay a pro a fee for such service (or fail to practice because of an absent coach). This agreement has enormous potential for specific shot improvement, yet will go awry quickly unless each person is conscientious about hitting his share of the set ups. It also helps players to make note of their weak shots and their friend’s weak shots during play. A sincere effort must be made by the players to set up the practice balls realistically. (Communication helps here!) Again, it helps to “blend” shots that go together naturally. For example, player one practices serving at the backhand while player two practices his backhand return. Next the players reverse roles. Drills can be fit together in a limitless number of patterns and shots, yet some are time honored and should be emphasized.

Even coaching college men who were quite talented, one had to sell the players on the value of drilling and their dependency on each other to practice properly. Of course, more than two can practice together. A coach would never allow absenteeism, tardiness, or the “I just don’t feel like practicing hard today” excuse. For player A to improve, player B must extend himself. The entire team’s improvement is dependent on each member’s maximum effort to extend their teammate into improvement.

A sack or rack or bag of practice balls is a common sight around tennis courts today. Surely you should hit “tons” of practice services. You can bounce hit, backboard practice, and work on the ball machine. You can take lessons from the best, but to really improve, friend, you need a friend!

**OPEN AND CLOSED**

Further explanation of the terms “open” and “closed” is needed. First, open/closed/straight (“clean”) can refer to footwork or racquet face. In footwork, you can step open, closed, or straight off either forehand or backhand. The racquet could be taken back open (much more likely in a one-handed backhand), closed, or straight. Once again, level of play is a factor, as is individual player style. Yet to coach the mass of players, I would encourage a lot of “clean” backswings and “clean,” or straight, footwork. This enhances balance and hit spot for most people. Surely, I would advise against “PE” forehands, which are too closed and cramp the body with the
left (or non-hitting) side. Backhand footwork can be more closed because the non-hitting side is behind you and out of the way.

P.S. “Open” and “closed” can also apply to the racquet face. But that is another lesson.

THE DRIVING RANGE OF TENNIS

Golf has the driving range. Baseball has the batting cage. Some professional tennis teachers have ball tossing machines. For beginners our camps used The Ball Toss Drill and many variations of the fundamental drill. (See Figure 1)

Station hitters (1 or 2) at the baseline. The next two hitters (numbers 3 and 4) are on deck to hit next. On the opposite side of the court are the ball chasers. You need two plastic buckets, one on each side to collect balls.

The ball tosser or “coach” is the key. For best results we stationed this tosser on the same side as the hitter. The tosser puts the toss on each hitter’s forehand. The hitters hit down the line at a target five feet in from the sideline and five feet in from the baseline on their side. It is essential the tosser tosses underhanded, softly, and to the hitter’s forehand. Alternate tosses from player 1 to player 2.

Once 1 and 2 have hit their bucket of balls, all 6 players change jobs. Numbers 3 and 4 move from on deck to hitting. Numbers 1 and 2 replace 5 and 6 on the other side and become ball chasers. Numbers 5 and 6 move to the fence on the hitter’s side and are on deck to hit after numbers 3 and 4.

There are limitless variations that can be used:

• Backhands
• Forehands from left. Switch after half bucket and hit backhands.
• Move the tosser to the opposite side and have them hit rather than toss the set up.

This drill is great for:

• Grooving your ground strokes
• Time on task
• Teacher-pupil contact
• Maximum number of hits

The ideal number of players is six. Four and five are workable (one hitter, who now hits a forehand, then a backhand, switching at a half bucket).
figure 1
THE BACKSWING

How one takes the racquet back can vary, and there are many techniques that fit within a range of correctness. The old story of the conniving pro has some relevance: A player with a backhand problem comes in to cure his ills and the pro, on changing him from a straight back backswing to a circular one, charges his fee. The next pupil will invariably be a circular miss-hitter who the pro changes to straight back (for quicker shots). Zap! Another bill! Being a proponent of the KISS (keep it simple, stupid) method, I like to teach clean shots. There would be little variance in wrist, elbow, and shoulder alignment at the ready positions, the contact point or hit spot, and the ending of the shot. This is the basic way I would teach backswing to most players. I would not object to a simple curl mid-backswing or a number of other mild variations, as long as there were no flawed contact moments.

CHET MURPHY

Changing to a proper service grip is an example of where this technique may be used, or playing with a continental grip for all volleys or moving the ball toss to the right move for the service or any number of other changes that are sound and needed. If this all sounds like it is moving toward the classic vs. modern coaching argument, it is. And no tennis debate is more heated than debate over the current widespread use of western forehand and two-handed backhands. Coach Leighton invited me for breakfast with Chet Murphy at a USTA Teachers Conference. After listening to these two great teachers, I was particularly struck with one statement: Mr. Leighton asked Mr. Murphy what his assessment of the classic method of tennis instruction that their careers had sanctioned. Mr. Murphy pondered, then responded, “I think we did a good job, though we probably should have been more tolerant of western forehands.”

THE BALLISTIC SWING

Welby Van Horn would use this technique to teach ballistic swing footwork. Once you have made the ground stroke or serve or volley, hold your follow through (or ending) to a count of “3,000”). Look at your feet. Is your balance foot and adjustment foot correct as described below?

“Balance is the clue to good tennis, and footwork is the key to good balance” – Welby Van Horn.

I would not allow the lead foot to step backward on the backhand. The “step hit” is part of a “ballistic” swing, and footwork is comparable to a golf
shot or a baseball swing. The front foot on the forehand is set more open than the backhand. The ballistic swing gets your weight into the ball with a “one-two” or “step-hit” rhythm. The point of your hip bone (iliac crest) on a right-hander’s right side is what turns to redistribute weight from back to front. The “tacked down” back foot maintains your balance. Van Horn called the front foot the “anchor foot.”

Van Horn’s balance system is certainly one of the most sure methods of teaching beginning players, and he is meticulous in his delivery. Many varsity-level players would benefit from a better understanding of the “balance approach.”

**THE “HIT-TURN” METHOD**

“Balance is the clue to good tennis; footwork is the clue to good balance” – Welby Van Horn.

Footwork for the “hit-turn” (second) serve, and/or the “hit-turn” technique for overheads.

**THE CLINIC**

One year I took 20 juniors from Wilson to the Raleigh Racket Club. A “junior clinic” was scheduled at the stadium court. The only problem was a 15-year-old Tim Wilkison was playing the number one college player from the University of Alabama at the stadium court.

Though Tim was outsized, he patiently dismantled his opponent right in front of our youngsters. The only problem was it took a long time. At the match’s completion I told our crowd to “load up the van.” An assistant
METHODS OF TEACHING TENNIS

The following list is a personal favorite list of tennis coaching and teaching concepts I endorse. Some have been mentioned earlier. There are many other fine ideas by others, but these are the main approaches I use most often.

The Balance Approach. This is Welby Van Horn’s concise method for teaching beginners. His film, Tennis Fundamentals, is particularly good for coaches of young teams.

The Rebound Approach. Dennis Van Der Meer has become one of the all-time great teachers of groups. His work exists in every form – written to film and tape. One of his most important contributions has been to help players understand the bounce of the ball and how to move properly to cope with the movement frustrations of the game.

Graduated-Length Method. Any number of teachers have shortened the court, the racquet, or in some way modified the game itself. Be it mini-tennis or “pickle ball,” making the game easier at the beginning is a working method. We use mini-tennis annually at the collegiate level to help develop touch, “hit spot,” and movement.

The Biomechanics Approach. I don’t know what word was used prior to the popularization of “biomechanics,” but it is the closest thing to what I conceive coaching to be. It is a scientific mastery of the trade, the dissecting of the physical skills of the game. The reader can read about my admiration for these people who have lent so much to the game. Certainly, Jim Leighton and Chet Murphy are two whom I have drawn on most heavily.

The School or Academy Approach. Nick Bolletieri and Harry Hopman are the two men well known for a growing method of combining school, tennis, and competition into a sound method for developing serious young players. Quite honestly, this is similar to what college tennis has been doing for years only it happens earlier and with serious intentions toward tennis improvement.

The Checkpoint Approach. This method is the most common way of teaching tennis and can be good or bad, depending on the ability of the coach or teacher. Here, the coach stands before his pupils and shows them how to take the racquet back, grip the racquet, or whatever point he is attempting to impart. Books teach in this fashion with pictures or
diagrams. A sound understanding of biomechanics enhances the “checkpoint” approach.

**The Use of Psychology and Motivation.** One of the things good coaches do best is get their players to a “proper level of arousal.” You can pump them up too high or let the whole deal drag. How to handle players is a major part of the profession. There seems to be more written on tennis psychology than ever before, and these are excellent statements that vary “far out” to “no nonsense” approaches.

**The “Shadowing” Approach.** I once saw a college tennis coach encourage his college team to mimic patterns of shots without using a ball. Dean Smith, North Carolina basketball coach, used this method as early as 1964 to teach defensive fundamentals in basketball. This seems to be a way to teach footwork and to slow down the actions to a level that it can be better assimilated. My experience also has been that it is restricting to simply tell someone how to execute a task. Demonstration is better, but even better is to move the person through the stroke pattern yourself, a “hands-on” approach, if you will, where you blend and shape and talk and mold a player while having him pass through the stroke pattern. Once again, you have to know these patterns to move people through them correctly. The more you teach the more adept you become at this approach, and talking is needed less and less.

**The Target Approach.** “Targets for Tennis” was one of the articles I wrote that appeared in the January 1972 *Scholastic Coach*. Since that article, many teachers have written similar, more detailed, and more thorough statements. All are centered on the understanding that you have to know where to hit the ball, and a mind’s eye picture of the proper target is essential to getting the ball where it belongs.

**The Axiom Approach.** The use of time-honored statements, whether they be motivators, instructions, or “drill-sergeant” type commands, have their place in coaching. Practice sessions are filled with statements like: “The harder he hits it, the easier you swing,” or “the farther in you come, the shorter the shot, the more open the shot, and the more apt you are to hit under spin,” or “the function of the stroke determines the length of the stroke.” (These are all examples of axioms related to shot selections.) Some more familiar ones are “get the lead out of your pants,” or “move around, you’re killing the grass.” The players themselves develop the use of axioms such as “go for it;” or “this is our time;” or (heaven forbid) “awesome.” Whatever turns you on will get a lot of esprit de corps out of some people, little out of others. It does add to the fun of it all.

There are too many concepts to list them all, and some are blended in
throughout the book. Some work well one time and not so well the next. Coaches tend to think constantly about what will help. I remember once watching a number one player of mine as his reflection was cast off a clubhouse window. This right-handed player I’d watched for three years now appeared to be left-handed. Almost immediately, I said to myself, “That’s it! He doesn’t pronate his wrist on the serve.” Oddly enough, after viewing others the same way (or hitting left-handed in the mirror), I could pick out minute details that I’d never noticed before. Try it; you’ll be surprised.

There is almost no limitation to tennis knowledge and the ways you can learn about the game. Surely, you’ll develop your own favorite concepts that work for you and your players.

The real joy in coaching is the constant learning and transferring of knowledge: to see something you have gathered and given to a player, and to see the pleasure and success they derive from implementing the improvement. This is what coaching is all about.

I DIDN’T CHANGE ANYTHING

A few comments on ground strokes and women. I was a “pre-two hander” in 1961. Pancho Segura showed the world how to hit one but conventional wisdom said, “two-handed backhands are only for those who can’t hit a one hander.” No Evert, Connors, Borg, Austin, etc. I’m glad many young ones didn’t listen. Soon the tennis world realized not only can a lot of people hit it two handed, it’s often a better shot offensively. The two hander gave many average players something they’d never had: offense or topspin on the backhand side. Until the two hander, college men followed this regimen: they’d practice like heck hitting a one-handed topspin backhand. Then, when the match was on the line they’d revert to their more trusted underspin backhand ball. There were certainly exceptions, but by and large this statement is true: “Most average male college players can’t hit a reliable one-handed topspin ball.”

Once the two hander got “certified” you began to see average high school players who could “tattoo” a topspin two hander, and the game changed forever, for the better.

However, a valuable tool was neglected for many. Coach Jim Verdieck gave me one of his business cards. It had an interesting sentence on it: “I didn’t change anything, I gave you a new one.” I asked him what he meant. Essentially he said the two handers were so protective of their newfound weapon, the underspin one hander was abandoned. The underspin one hander is a tool every truly complete player would possess. Too many
awkward and/or short shots (approaches, service returns, defensive cross courts) are best hit by one-hand underspinners.

Often these balls are too difficult to handle with two-handed topspin, “full,” or lengthy shots.

Like golfers, you have to have a lot of “tools” in your bag of tricks. The “chip,” or “slice,” is truly a great tool to master. Think “wedges,” golfers.

Slices are tough for little people, young girls, especially. And it’s tough to add it once you’ve neglected it in “formative years.”

One reason it’s difficult is that people don’t understand the value of the “hit spot” regarding two different backhands. The two-handed backhand is “much like a one-handed forehand,” and therefore works best when hit off the front foot. One handers must be hit about the width of one’s shoulders in front of the front “balance” foot.

When teaching adult women a “hush” would come over the group. These “strugglers with the backhand” would grip the racquet just as I, yet neglect movement to the “hit spot.” Good backhands come from good grips and good hit spots. I’d bark: “Good hit spots make good shots. Lousy hit spots make lousy shots. Lousy hit spots make wristy shots, and wristy shots are lousy shots.”

The term “hit spot” is a direct steal from Coach Verdieck. My guess is Dennis Van Deer’s early unique contribution to tennis instruction was teaching pupils to understand the pupil’s adjustment to the bouncing ball. Van Der Meer and Verdieck were friends.

Once I became better at conveying “movement to the hit spot” my players at all levels got better quickly.

And the one-handed slice may be the one most helped by proper “hit spot.”

**COACHING EMOTION (ON PRESSURE)**

There are three main “parts” you have to coach: physical, mental, and emotional. The emotional part is the toughest to deal with. However, there are really only two villainous emotions: Fear and anger. And they are both self-directed.

Macky Carden, Elon football coach, told me, “When they get that old sinking feeling, you’ve got to change their minds.”

That “old sinking feeling” exists in a lot of places; one is on the tennis court. “Frozen elbows” cause practice to be worthless. Few people can play when angry at themselves. Maybe McEnroe was “actually nervous” when
he created those incidences. Angry, maybe, was better than scared for Mac. Only he knows.

One freshman player’s father accompanied him to my office on reporting to Elon. He brought a bag that contained thirteen broken racquets. The father wanted to know if I would appeal to Wilson Sporting Goods to replace the “faulty” $100 racquets. The fault wasn’t the racquet, it was the anger with which they were being thrown or banged. I attempted to fix the real flaw, the self-directed anger that ruled the boy’s game.

No one would practice harder, but to no avail. Within moments this young man would go into a tantrum, chastising himself in a hopelessly damaging tirade. He didn’t get angry much with others. It was self-directed and killer. It took a long time to change this attitude, but without changing, I wouldn't allow him to represent us. It took a lot of patience for him to learn to quit “beating yourself up.”

Here are several comments about the emotional part of coaching:

• Some players don’t have the “nervous system” of a tennis player. Sorry.

• The only players who do well as team players are those who can handle pressure. It’s in college tennis. Either you can handle it or lose. You can learn to handle it.

• Blood flow, more specifically “venous return,” causes “butterflies.” Proper warm-up can help get rid of the “jitters.” For many they go away once you exercise.

• There is a psychological “proper level of arousal” for athletes. Not too “torqued up” but you do need your game face. Different strokes for different folks.

• Psychologically tough people make the best college tennis players.

• What pressure does to the “one-piston” player is amazing. I saw a lot of number one seeds lose in the national tournament due to early round “nerves.”

• If you “hang in there,” it is truly amazing what can happen. Some call it “momentum” but “pressure” is a more influencing variable. Tennis is truly unique in that “one point can turn the match around.” This is a “core” belief.
PLAYING AHEAD

Perhaps one of my premier coaching attempts centered on pressure and playing “ahead.” You are either tied, ahead, or behind. Behind and tied are motivators enough. Playing while ahead is a critical emotional moment.

I don’t know how many matches I saw unfold like this:

Player A is ahead 5–3 in the third set. His opponent is serving. In the back of Player A’s head drifts this dangerous thought: “Even if I lose this game, I can serve out the match.”

All this results in a lackluster effort at another, and match-winning, service break. The opponent breaks for 5–5 and the “momentum” has reversed itself. Now the pressure, and its power, has shifted dramatically.

Teaching “killer instinct” is key. Ahead a service break? Get a second.

I think that the most vulnerable points are “ahead points,” 40–15 and 30–0. These are the points that 20 year olds lose concentration on, thus allowing that “old sinking feeling” to reenter.

When ahead, keep the pressure off yourself by staying ahead.

BORG’S SPEECH

Bjorn Borg taught a magnificent lesson one day on TV. Having just beaten McEnroe in “the greatest match ever,” I watched commentator Bud Collins interview the Wimbledon champ.

Collins asked Borg, “How did you do it?”

Borg, stoic as ever, said simply, “Legs.” Nothing more.

Collins had several minutes on his hands and rambled on in a commentary I don’t remember.

Then, Borg, having thought some, took the mike from Bud. His comments were:

1. I was very nervous inside.
2. I thought, surely I will lose.
3. I told myself, I must put these thoughts out of my mind.
4. I will not quit under any circumstances!

End of clinic. Pretty good advice for a lot of areas.

Young coaches: reread ten times.
FREE THROWS, FIELD GOAL KICKERS, AND SECOND SERVES

Pressure affects momentum in sports. One of the hardest things to learn is how to play when ahead. “Killer instinct” may sound mean, but playing well while you’re ahead prevents having to deal with momentum and pressure shifts. Nevertheless, all elite athletes get into pressure situations. Some love pressure, but my guess is that they have spent years preparing themselves for these moments. Every backyard basketball player has mentally placed himself on the free throw line, with the score tied, and the clock set to expire. All good tennis players have had to hit a second serve defending match point.

It is astounding how many pro football games end with a field goal attempt. The same is true of basketball: the lowest percentage shooter on the line with the score tied, and two seconds left on the clock. While field goal attempts vary in length and field conditions, free throws are the same distance universally. And, indoors, they are not affected by weather. They are not immune, however, to pressure.

ON LOSING

At one athletic meeting, our sports information director made repeated notice that one of our coaches was approaching 200 wins. While I had 597 in my career, what struck me at the meeting was the “other side.”

I blurted out, “I’m getting near 200 losses.” They looked at me strangely.

My point: If I lost 200 matches, that’s about 1,000 times I’ve had to deal with a singles player or doubles team who had lost. You’d better know how to handle losing and your players who’ve lost.

There are much bigger losers than in athletic contests. If you deal, as I did, with several thousand students, athletes, faculty, townspeople, coaches and their families, there are inevitable tragedies. I lost one young player. I mourn him daily.

Your players will turn to you when times are tough.

My first prayer at every season’s start is for safety in the van. No one drove but me. I prayed that prayer every trip.
ON SINGLES STRATEGY

“Levels of play” dictate strategy. Strategy is your “game plan”; tactics are the tools you use to implement your strategy or plan. I have enclosed two articles I wrote. Singles strategy draws heavily on “Wayne Sabin’s ABCs of Tennis Strategy.”

Basic Strategy Outline
(by Jim Leighton) SINGLES (From Wayne Sabin in Inside Tennis)

1. Consistency. Keep it in. Crack your opponent with concentration, hustle, and steadiness. This is by far the most important strategy in tennis.

2. Keep it deep. If it’s deep, he can’t get to the net successfully. There is great tennis “virtue” in depth.

3. Keep it at a weakness. Most often his backhand; backhand passing shots are the most common tennis weakness.

4. Position. Move them from side to side. Some can’t hit when running. Also, this tires your opponent, and tired players lose concentration and make errors.

If you can’t do number four, back up to number three. Can’t do number three, back up to number two. No good even then? Back up to number one!

The object is to use these four tools to force errors. Four of five points are determined by errors not by great shots.

The next best thing to an error is a short ball. Dennis Van Der Meer defines the strategy of tennis as “to attack the short ball.”

The short ball is the green light to attack. This varies from player to player (and from opponent to opponent).

You transfer yourself from a baseline defensive player to a net offensive player on the short ball. An approach shot is a specific and different shot, best described as compact or shortened. It is often an underspin shot and should be directed deep and down the line.
Overplay to the same side you approach on. Bisect the angle of your opponent’s best two passing shots and then (as Jim Verdieck of Redlands defines strategy) volley away from the source, or passer.

A firm approach shot often results in an easy volley. A lousy approach is usually “pass city.” Work on your approach shot.

Here are some quotes on singles strategy from people I respect. These rang true for my many players in many matches.
• “Find out what your opponent can’t do, or doesn’t like to do, and make them do that” – Jack Kramer. (Think Nadal over Federer in the 2007 French Open. Target? Federer’s backhand.)

• Don’t change the “line of the ball” unless you are sure you can make the shot. Otherwise cross courts “ad nauseam.” Two-handed backhands down the line shots will “slide wide” too often, believe me – T. Parham.

• When asked what he would do differently, Ken Rosewall replied, “I would hit a lot more balls cross court.”

• Cross courts get you out of trouble. (Jim Verdieck demanded the cross court ball from his team.)

• Get yourself in a position to “volley away from the source” – Jim Verdieck.

• Any ball hit extremely deep in either corner allows a good attacking possibility – Jim Verdieck. (“2 and in”)

• The simple strategy of tennis singles: “Attack the short ball” – Dennis Van Der Meer.

• Good approach shots make easy volleys – Jim Leighton.

• No shots in “no man’s land” is a myth – T. Parham.

• Rule 1: Find a good doubles partner. Rule 2: Get along with your doubles partner.

**DOUBLES STRATEGY**

I based my doubles strategy on the assumption that all four players have the basic tools of doubles. You may want to start with “two back” at a beginning level. Club women often play “one up, one back.” My best girls’ team (even at a good college level) contended: “We just get them up at the net and then lob it. We win!”

In doubles my main emphasis was on the service return. I encouraged our players at every practice to hone their return by being aggressive. To sharpen or hone that return by repeatedly attacking and moving in whenever possible. We gambled, took chances, often over hit, and did reckless things on practice returns. In matches, when a big break point would win the doubles point for our team the pressure wasn’t nearly as damaging.

Doubles is a “one-two” game.

Being a member of a high school team is a valuable experience. Team tennis has broadened many people. Larger squads, more fall play, schools
with more than one team, and more matches than the traditional “six singles and three doubles” (or nine point matches) are ways to allow more people to play that may not be too far away.

For now a youngster must set high goals to make his or her team. The first goal is to “get a suit,” or make the team. Goal two is to get to play in the match. Goal three is to win a match. Goal four is to win more than you lose. Goal five (the ultimate) is to win a team championship.

Back to the starting blocks. How do you make the team? While singles make up two-thirds of the points in the traditional team match, I have coached too many contests that were won by the doubles point. Every team member has realized that it is tougher to watch than to play on those cold March afternoons when this high drama develops. As a coach, I have also noted that good kids (or team-oriented players) have an advantage in these pressure-packed matches. My inclination then, is to select these people for my team. Advice well taken for the marginal player could then be to develop your doubles ability to make the team. Some organizations are even beginning to dictate that doubles team personnel be different from the singles starters.

My answer to this first step question, “How can I best insure doubles success?” is always, “Get yourself a good partner!” More often than not a coach will make this decision for you (though most will want team opinions). Once partners are determined, Doubles rule number two is paramount: “Get along with your partner until the match is over.” This doesn’t mean you have to kiss each other or that you can’t make suggestions, but to pit yourselves against each other makes it a three-against-one contest. My experience has been that the cardinal sin in doubles is to blow up at your partner for the same error you have just made or are moments away from making. (“Double faults are double trouble in doubles!”) Doubles is a different game than singles.

Ask tennis people what makes good doubles players and they will probably suggest that you get your first serve in, or develop a great chip-backhand service return or to never miss that first volley or to hit a lot of lobs and low-angled shots. While any number of skills are involved, I have found a quick summary of each of the four players’ duties is a good way to teach strategy. These suggestions assume each of the four players can execute the skills of doubles (If not, you must practice fundamentals until they are mastered). Each player will function in each role many times during the match. Each player should memorize the basic duties of each position, master the skills involved, and improvise as they improve. The concept that both coach and player should bear in mind is that doubles is
a “one-two” game. The core strategy is to set your partner up so he can hit the ball down.

**DOUBLES PLAYERS’ DUTIES SUMMARY**

**Player A (The Server).** The server’s main jobs are to hit the first serve in and at the opponent’s backhand. Then to one-two-three, check with your feet, and punch the first volley away from player D. Most any ball that is a put away should be handled by player B, becoming the “two” of your one-two play. The server should follow the first, or transitional, volley to the net in tandem with player B. The next shot could be the put away.

**Player B (The Server’s Partner).** The theory of doubles holds that the serve is stronger than the rest of the game and will cause an error or a floater to the middle of the court. It is B’s job to think middle and to cash in on the 6–1 ratio: Points won in the middle, compared to those lost down the alley, set up by the serve. Many times this player will become a
“shrinking violet” after a few misses and simply freeze in his spot. This is a
cardinal error and B must learn to keep coming in spite of even bad
ersrors. I encourage my B players to watch A until mid-serve then turn and
go to the middle as soon as they hear the ball hit by their serving partner.
A more conservative thing to do would be, when they turn and see the
serve actually hit in the backhand corner, where it is most apt to create
the desired “floater.” An even safer time to move is when they see the
receiver tilt the racquet to the backhand side, thus committing himself to
his weaker shot. B may make the play much more aggressive by the use of
signals that commit him to the 100 percent poach. Doubles teams must
pre-ordain whether they will operate on signals or instinct, with equal
arguments for both schools of thought. It is wise policy for doubles teams
to understand that an instinct mover may back off an extremely good or
low return and allow the server to handle this ball from a deeper, more
solid position. Most often, however, the serving team is geared toward
the “boom-boom” or one-two set up by the serve.

**Player C (The Receiver).** The serving team has the odds in their favor in
terms of the one-two play. Yet many receiving teams fail to understand
that a good return can turn defense into offense, or a “boom-boom” for the
receivers. If 90 percent of serves in doubles are directed at the backhand,
it is incumbent on doubles aspirants to develop great backhand returns.
Perhaps this is the skill that most determines doubles success. While
topspin is the order of the day in singles, the underspin backhand return in
doubles is the fundamental shot. It should be aimed at the “short corner”
(or where the side service lines interact), and its function is to cause the
server to hit his first volley up. Well hit, this shot will create a one-two play
in which D of the receiving team moves in to volley in between A and B
(just as he does for the serving team). One of the secondary possibilities
C has is to lob great services. A deftly placed lob, aimed over B’s head, can
take the one-two away from the server. This shot is a fundamental shot in
doubles and can take the sting out of big serves and fickle momentum in
favor of the receivers. Of course, if there is a service weakness (particularly
on second serves) the receiver may effectively knock the blazes out of
this weak shot for a one-shot winner. These three options: Underspin
backhand, lob over B, or hammer the weak serve give player C his
assignment. Also, C must freeze B with some shots down the alley. While
the odds are against this risky shot, it must be employed to keep B honest.
A good rule for C is the more the net player (B) bothers you, the more you
hit at that player.

**Player D (The Receiver’s Partner).** Just as B is looking for a one-two
approach to end the point, D’s intentions are to use his partner’s return to
set up his own “two” performance. He must, however, respect the power of the service and establish himself at mid-court in contrast to B, who is already at the net. From here, he must execute several unique techniques. First, he becomes an on-court linesman who aids a receiver faced with a tough return. Second, he assays the quality of his partner’s return. If the underspin return is on target, he quickly moves in to create the desired one-two off the server’s “up volley.” If, however, the serve causes the predictable weak return from his partner, he must make another quick decision. Perhaps he can avoid eating a yellow ball. Quite often he may elect to stand his ground and anticipate B’s in-the-slot slam by placing his racquet in front of that predictable shot. In any event he makes a quick up, back, or stand-your-ground decision based on the quality of the service return. The ability of the receiving team to combine the low cross-court return with D’s movement possesses the combination needed to provide the all-important service break in doubles.

The competent coach will continuously devise drills for players B and D in an attempt to perfect the “closing in” action essential to one-two success. Players must constantly be encouraged to move their feet to set up the “boom-boom” effect when a tennis ball hangs momentarily just a bit too high. That’s what you are trying to create; that’s what you are waiting for—don’t have your finger in your ear and your mind in neutral and miss the one-two of doubles.
CARDINAL SINS IN DOUBLES

• Failing to recognize the weaker player and attacking that person. This may change within the match.

• Failing to identify the weaker service return of each player. This, too, can change within the match.

• Failing to put pressure on second serves by moving in and hitting an attacking return.

• Failure to attempt a “quality” return. This could be a lob or a chip, but it has to have a plan. Don’t hit “wimpy” returns. Our team will accept errors of ability but not fear. Go for it.

• Our server with the best win percentage serves first in every set. This is not necessarily the player with the best serve.

• Not closing in on “floaters” at the net; if you fail at this, you sit in the stands during the next match.

• Assuming one service break wins the pro set (8 games). I saw many pro sets lost with the winners being down 7–3.

A TEAM DOUBLES DRILL

Good doubles players are aggressive with their returns. They know their target, and they are immune to pressure. Big points are made under pressure.

The following drill is good for teams. It is especially good for developing that “pressure-packed” bomb return that earns the “hallowed” serve break. We ran this drill daily. I demanded the returner attack the ball. “Go ahead and bust it. I’m the coach, you have my permission to go all out.” By daily reinforcing aggressive returns, we were ready in that dramatic moment of service break returns to “go for it.”

Here is the drill:

Each receiver gets to hit a determined number of returns (7–10). Play a full point. After each point the serving side’s players rotate. The server comes to the net. The server’s partner goes from the net to the back of the serving line. The number 2 server steps up and plays the next point.

After 10 returns the add court player becomes the receiver. After both receivers finish their 10 returns, they go to the server’s side. And the servers become the receivers.

Receivers: “Green light—go get it!”
DOUBLES RETURN TARGET

All players have been told to serve at their opponent’s weakness. It’s at their backhand most of the time. Nine out of ten players are right-handed, so the target remains the same for most serves.

Let’s make this clear: They are going to serve at your backhand. Often.

Again there are options. For me as a coach, option one is to develop a dependable underspin, one-handed service return. Hit it low and at the server and volleyer’s feet. Make him volley up to your partner: “Doubles is a one-two game.” Defining the “short corner” as the intersection of the service court back and side lines (see figure 6), we now have a “visual” for where the return goes. One problem: if you hit for the short corner and miss a little long you may hit into an error. (See figure, shot #2.) You have more inbounds “green” to hit, even if you’re a little long. Try it!

**figure 6**
DOUBLES TALK

One clinic I attended was on doubles. An astute observation centered on doubles partners and the 25 seconds allowed before the next point:

- Beginners. They simply turned and went back to their next designated spot.
- Club players. They would turn, acknowledge a good shot, high five, and comment briefly.
- Pros (with no advanced “coaching”). It was noted that pros between points would almost always turn to the center and talk strategy with their partner, up the center line, back to the server or receiver’s location.

Communication!

ON CRITICS

“Bullfight critics row on row,
Pack the vast arena full.
But there’s only one there who knows,
And he’s the one who fights the bull.”
From Michener’s “Mexico”

COACH OF THE YEAR

When they presented me with the 1990 National Coach of the Year for NAIA Tennis, I tried to give it to Coach Fred Kniffen of the University of Texas at Tyler. Fred had a firm rule in 1990 that no one rode in the van without their seat belts on. No exceptions.

En route from Tyler to Kansas City, one of the two team vans ran off a 35-foot embankment.

All belted, there was one minor injury.

THE OLD COACH

In 1983 I had a “Swedish revolt” on my hands. I had learned about “morning acclimatizations” from the NAIA Nationals. The Swedes want to sleep longer. Chief spokesman, Thomas Linne, was 6’5” and looked like Alice Cooper.

“Why we got to get up so early?”
I explained what I knew to be true. This tournament was often won by those who handled the early rises best. Besides, what difference does it make if you get up at 5:15 rather than 6:00?

Both hurt like crazy.

Thomas and I went back and forth. My point was I knew this tournament better than he and his newcomer countrymen. I finally told Thomas about 10 unlikely things that would happen in the tournament. “You crazy,” said Thomas. “I know these guys, they not going to lose to those guys.” He’s better than him! “No way he loses,” etc.

My teams had played Kansas City 20 times. Lo and behold about 8 of those 10 unlikely predictions came true. We won the NAIA in 1984. Flying home I asked Thomas what he learned from the experience. He wrote the backhanded compliment on a notebook I held: “I learned to listen to an old man who’d been there. Even if I thought he didn’t know very much.” I used this sentence to preface my coaching handbook.

**COACHING TEAM TENNIS**

If my knowledge about coaching college tennis was judged on what two topics I was most often asked to speak on, it would be how to get on a college team and doubles.

The United States Tennis Association produces a document for prospective student athletes. I’d like to emphasize a few points:

- If you really want to play, go where you can play.
- Any athletes gravitate to one level beyond their ability. There’s never been a “happy substitute.”
- In college tennis if you don’t get to play your first year, you probably won’t get to play. This is not always true but do you want to gamble?
- When tryouts were allowed, I’d have my number four player play a set with the prospect. If the prospect played closely with number
four, he had a chance at our school. It was amazing to me how many times a prospect, having just lost 6–1, would tell a parent, “I’m better than that guy.”

- Transferring, if you make a mistake, is not always easy to do.
- The single most important issue in college tennis is the international issue.

Players who want to play college tennis should play high school tennis. Many talented players (and their parents) think this is a waste of time. I disagree. “Prima donnas” sometimes haven’t learned the team concept and don’t function well in college tennis. College tennis requires personal sacrifice. You can learn a lot about that on even a limited high school team. Plus you are playing for your school.

Having coached 50-plus international tennis players, I have this strong comparison to make with American junior tennis: The American player can fire the American teaching pro! If the pro makes the player work too hard the junior will tell the parent, “I don’t like him/her.” New Pro! Internationals beat these kids like a “borrowed mule.”

Nowhere is this more evident than in junior girls. The pro hits easy balls left to right and collects the check from a happy client. That girl, confronted with an awkward miss-hit or a good drop shot, has no clue. Most act as if some tennis etiquette has been broached. The girls’ national 14s was held in neighboring Greensboro, North Carolina, for several years. The winner almost always had the best drop shot and had done a lot of work defending against the drop shot.

A strong piece of advice I have for freshmen, once they have selected a school, is to be match ready on day one of September. Many players take the summer after graduation off, having fought the junior tennis and high school wars for years. They assume they’ll go to college, get in shape again, and work their way in the lineup. Wrong.

College tennis today is essentially year round—it often features individual tournaments in the fall, team matches in the spring, and personal competition in the summer. Some schools play in tournaments as early as the second week of September. Often challenge matches for positions on the team happen almost immediately on arrival.

Challenge matches are perhaps the most important college matches you will play. Early fall and cold February matches can determine your college career. Challenge match policies are also extremely important. My essential guidelines were:
• Challenge matches earn you a spot in the lineup, match play preserves the spot. These are perhaps the grimmest matches in college tennis.

• The two most important challenge matches were between: number six and number seven, because this determines if a player starts; and number eight and number nine, because this determines if a player travels with the team. The coach should always witness these matches. I always thought eight players was the ideal number for a team. This does vary. Two seasons in my 35-year career, I played the same lineup every match with no subs on the team. One of these years we were undefeated—pure luck. Girls’ teams need more players. But too many gets testy. I never cut any team I had until NCAA rules on squad size and gender equality forced me to. Many kids will come out just to hit with a good player. Those kids don’t get much help with a win-oriented coach who’s working with the top kids. Regardless, many subs go on to teach tennis. They love the game. I tried to keep them around, for the game’s sake.

THE NATURE OF A COACH

A couple of years back I was visiting with two of my former players, one a fellow coach, one a successful businessman. The businessman was an avid and good golfer. Quite frankly I thought he was dismissive and a little rude when he commented about the worth of an article written earlier. “There is no way this is going to help my putting.” He stated laughingly.

My initial reaction was twofold. He has a right to his opinion, and keep your thoughts to yourself. Plus, he missed the point. The purpose of this suggestion was for other coaches, especially basketball coaches, who are teaching how to shoot free throws.

Recently I had dinner with the coach who had heard that comment. For the first time I asked him if I had been too sensitive about our friend? Our mutual friend said, “Coach, he doesn’t see it the way you and I do. You are attempting to give help to other players and coaches. His motivation is self-oriented. He just thinks differently.”

Okay, maybe coaches by nature, or by coaching, develop a more helping mentality. Maybe that reaction is in itself a little selfish. After all our success depends on our player’s performance. I feel better now.

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HELPFUL HINTS FROM THE COACH

• The most important thing to remember in tennis is to “look at the ball”: point of contact concentration. (There comes a time when in order to win you must forget about how you’re hitting and concentrate on where you’re hitting. Don’t work on strokes when playing an important match. Concentrate on point of contact and where to hit. You have to assume your strokes are right. “You can’t hit well when thinking about how to hit.”

• Correct one error at a time. Don’t ball up your mind trying to do too many things at once.

• Move in as far as you can on volleys. If you can get on top of the net, be there. Don’t hit it up if you can take one quick step in and hit it down.

• Volley low balls deep. Angle high volleys.

• When playing at the net and on the right-hand side use a continental grip. Many good players volley on both sides with a continental grip.

• Use your left hand to adjust your grip from forehand to backhand. It is good insurance.

• Don’t cut your shots too fine. Or, don’t try to hit within six inches of the line when a ball inside three feet will do. Don’t make it any harder than you have to. Many players do all the work to get the set-up shot and then blow the shot by trying to hit a great shot. Finish the point. Put the cap on it. “Good players don’t miss easy shots.” Short overheads are the most common spot for this error.

• You can work on your weaknesses by forcing yourself to execute them in play or practice situations. For example, if your second serve is weak, play your practice matches with one serve only. Or, if your patience and consistency is hurting, force yourself to practice without coming to the net. For backhand problems, avoid running around it in practice. Force yourself to execute your weakness.

• If a player is a weak volleyer yet strong baseliner, you can often draw him in by hitting short balls. His backhand approach probably will be weak. Hit a short ball to his backhand. His weak backhand approach might give you an easy pass.

• Decide to play offensively or defensively. Many college players can be beaten simply by keeping it back in, or “skyballing” them to death. Develop a game suited to your ability. Don’t try to do things you can’t do percentage-wise. Then add new wrinkles when you’ve mastered your play.
• You can open the way to a weakness by hitting to a strength. For example, a player with a weak backhand will often run around it. If he overplays the forehand hit it sharply to his forehand for a placement, or perhaps to move him wide to the forehand, thus forcing him to hit a backhand on the second return.

• Often a player’s apparent strength is actually a weakness. For example, many players have a weak looking but steady, deep backhand; and, while their forehand is well paced and looks good, it is actually a poor percentage shot because the player tries to do too much with it.

• One strategy that works well, particularly against slow, lazy opponents, is the “drop-shot and lob” strategy. Drop-shot them and when they lope up to the net simply lob over their heads. Do over and over again.

• “Never change a winning play—always change a losing plan.”

• Pressure pays off. Some players can’t stand it. It takes a lot of ability to apply constant pressure, but it pays big dividends. Take the ball on the rise to apply pressure. Move in and take the court away from him.

• Some players employ the “center theory” against certain players. If you approach down the center you eliminate the passing angle. This often works against weak but accurate angle hitters. Some slow court players hit well on the run but can’t get anything on a ball hit straight at them. Players with a great return of serve should often be served at “down the center.”

• One of the most difficult shots to get any pace on is a high- or medium-lofted backhand that is deep. Matches have been won in this one strategy. The best place to return a high backhand is to a high backhand. Some big hitters are completely frustrated by this simple shot.

• Low chips with angle often frustrate net rushers. If you can chip it low, they often have to volley up, and it opens them for an easy pass.

• High spin serves at the backhand are often effective (Roswell vs. Roche, U.S. Open 1970).

• Welby Van Horn: “Balance is the clue to tennis.”

• It might be good to approach on your short forehands only. If your backhand approach is weak, cross court it to eliminate angled shots as you back up.

• Cross courts get you out of trouble.
• Approach down the line, approach cross court at obviously weak passing shot.
• You have to know how to hit it, but first you have to get to it so you can hit it that way.

THESE RANG TRUE

Here are some quotes on strategy from people I respect. These “rang true” for my many players in many matches.

Find out what your opponent can’t do, or doesn’t like to do, and make them do that.” –Jack Kramer (Think Nadal over Federer in 2007 French Open. Target? Federer’s backhand.)

Don’t change the “line of the ball” unless you are sure you can make the shot. Otherwise, cross courts “ad nausea.” Two-handed backhand down the line shots will “slide wide” too often, believe me –T. Parham.

When asked what he would do differently, Ken Rosewall replied, “I would hit a lot more balls cross court.”

Cross courts get you out of trouble. Jim Verdieck demanded the cross court ball from his team.

Get yourself in a position to “volley away from the source” –Jim Verdieck.

Any ball hit extremely deep in either corner allows a good attacking possibility –Jim Verdieck (“two and in”).

The simple strategy of tennis singles: “Attack the short ball” –Dennis Van Der Meer.

Good approach shots make easy volleys –Jim Leighton.

No shots in “no man’s land” is a myth –T. Parham.

Rule 1: Find a good doubles partner. Rule 2: Get along with your doubles partner.

TENNIS CAMPS

Overnight tennis camps were quite an experience. There are tons of them, and they vary greatly in quality. I did this for over 30 years and survived financially because of “summer money.” I also survived the camps thanks to “Camp Mom Margaret” and a great staff. Resident camps are the way to make money (the parents wanted to get rid of ‘em) but there is a lot of tension. There’s no telling what 10-11-12-year-olds will do the first time away from home.

Camp week begins with real concerns. Kids feel it too. One first
morning in the cafeteria line I asked a disheveled 10-year-old his name. “Huh?” “What’s your name? Again. “Huh?” I finally said, tell me your name, son. The reply (slight speech impediment, plus 6:30) “my name is Hunt. How many times do I have to tell you?”

Toughest kid at our camp? No question, Jessica Covington, nine years old, from Rockingham, North Carolina. Though cut off age was 10, Jessica had an older sister coming and her mom was confident Jessica would be okay. Okay? In one hour everyone in the camp was afraid of Jessica. Me included.

A young faculty child named Lucy, approached me in the Pavilion tower. It was hot, the Pavilion was cooler, and in all honestly I was “hiding” up there.

Lucy figured this out at age 10. “What are you doing up there”? Her tiny head poking from the stairwell. “Well Lucy, I’m preparing our next session’s lesson.” (I’m 60 years old at the time.)

Lucy: “Haven’t you been doing this long enough not to have to write it down?”

Stunned at her perception, I felt my shorts had dropped. I couldn’t rebuke her. As she turned in disgust she finalized, “We need some help down here.”

We had to can one camp T-shirt. Our shirt featured a blazing racquet with a ball on mid-strings. “Keep it in the hit spot” came out “Keep it in the hot spot.” Back to the screen printers!

One of Jessica’s cousins, Marty Covington, aged 11, gunned down a Canadian goose, roof shingle to neck. That was my only visit from the SPCA.

We had a sign-up sheet for a night tournament. As I read out starting matches, only as it came out audibly did I get the joke: “Court #3, Bobby Johnson vs. Hugh Jass.”

Lee Gliarmis, he of Dick’s Hot Dog Stand in Wilson, sent Grandson Nicklas to camp at age 11. Nicklas’s first-ever match was the last one on the courts, 9:00 PM, after a full, full day. And then the proverbial last match tiebreaker. Nick called for help. I figured the tiebreaker had stumped them, and I hurried to help my friend’s grandson.

“Yes Nick, can I help you guys?” “Will that arcade still be open when we finish this stuff?” was his concern.

**WHY TEACH AND COACH?**

When I became director of athletics the first thing I did was book an hour
with five different athletic directors I admired.

Dylan said you had to get up close to the teacher if you want to learn anything.

You never know who you’re influencing when you coach. The same was true for teaching in college. Formal classroom or just talking to kids.

A basketball player named Damien Carter appeared in my doorway one day at Elon. He said he rode up and down I-85 often and had planned to stop by many times.

He was in his 40s, had been a pretty solid player at Atlantic Christian College, having transferred from UNC-Wilmington. At Wilmington he hadn’t played as much as he wanted. The same was true at ACC later on, and he found his chances of pro ball weren’t going to materialize. He was about to quit college though his grades were good.

I don’t remember the specific conversation with Damien, but it was one of fifty I’d had with basketball players.

It went like this:

Are you the first from your family to go to college? Often the answer was yes. You’re not going to make $100,000 playing pro ball, you understand? You can get your degree and get a good job. People are looking for athletic people with degrees.

Your job is to elevate your family and its expectations one generation. Put your money in compound interest, and expect your children to go to college.

I agreed with Damien that was the gist of what I advised the “first kids.” Damien smiled and added, “Coach, my two daughters have college degrees, and I’ve got a million bucks in the bank!” Compound interest.

TWO COACHING ERRORS

My advice to young coaches is to recruit good kids who are good players who can function academically and be happy in your school. Perhaps the two biggest errors I see the young coaches make are first, they insist on recruiting some borderline jerk who is talented. Eventually that kid throws the team and the coach “under the bus.” Don’t bet on that person, Coach! Get some good people. You’ll win your share and have a fair chance of staying sane in the crazy world of athletics. Second, I see the young coaches work the kids too much. Your players are not employees, or machines, and you can run them into the ground. Perhaps the biggest criticism I heard of my teams was that we didn’t work hard enough. But at
tournament time we were fresh, eager, and goal oriented. Often we waxed the “hard workers” whose coach had worn them beyond caring much. I never had a team that wasn’t ready to put away the racquet for a while at the end of the season. It’s call “periodization.”

**TEN THINGS MOST FRESHMEN CAN BENEFIT FROM**

1. Hit the serve up enough.
2. Learn a good backhand underspin one hander.
3. The service grip is the most functional grip in tennis.
4. “No man’s land” is a myth. You have to learn many shots from mid-court. These are “shortened” shots (service returns, approach shots, etc.). They are most often hit with underspin. Particularly in doubles.
5. Basic tennis strategy (singles) says: Down the line, come in. Cross court to stay back.
6. Hitting on the rise takes court and time away from your opponent. It’s harder, but essential. We played “21,” restricting all rallies to be made from within the court, i.e., you step behind the baseline or outside the side line, and you lose the point. You can go to the net any time after the first rally.
7. Add one shot each fall. You don’t have time in the spring. In the spring you play. Examples:
   - A one-handed backhand chip
   - Backhand service return
   - Forehand service return (underspin, too)
   - Backhand approach (often a weakness)
8. The game is the best teacher. If you play enough tough matches (practice-challenge-varsity) you will get better. It’s not high school and every match is tough. You have to rebound from yesterday’s 7–6 in the third loss to play again today. Tough-minded players survive and learn from these matches.
9. Learn to acclimatize to early morning play. Lots of important matches occur early. College kids have different “clocks,” and they will resist this suggestion.
10. Beer and idle dorm conversations cause the most “casualities.”
COLLEGE PLAYERS DON’T LIKE

• To warm up properly
• To drill on their weaknesses
• To get up early enough to be ready
• To warm up for doubles properly on match day
• To complete and turn in academic work ahead of time when missing class

WAIT AN HOUR

One policy I had was to never say anything to a player who had just lost for one hour. Then I let them initiate the conversation. My most frequent question was “If you had it to do over, what would you do differently?”

One kid I coached against wrote an analysis of his match immediately after playing. “I may have to play him again. Or, my teammate may.” Pretty smart.

CHALLENGE MATCHES

Challenge match policies are also extremely important. My essential guidelines:

• Challenge matches earn you a spot in the lineup, match play preserves the spot. These are perhaps the grimmest matches in college tennis. (One of my players always lost.)

• The two most important challenge matches were between number six and number seven (determines if you start) and number eight and number nine (determines if you travel with the team). The coach should always witness these matches.

ON-COURT ADVICE

I had several rules about my on-court conversations, or advice, during a match:

1. I’m not going to tell you anything unless I feel pretty darned sure about it. You can take it or leave it, but I think it’s true.

2. I didn’t “just talk” except to advise, “shake your head yes, like I might know something.” At least the opponent may wonder.

3. Don’t walk away from me in contempt or show me up. If I order you off the court for behavior, don’t react in any way but by getting your gear and exiting the court.
THOUGHTS FOR YOUNG COACHES

An Elon graduate, Kyle Smialek, and his family donated tennis scoreboards at the Jimmy Powell Tennis Center on the campus of Elon University. Graciously, they named the scoreboards in honor of my assistant, Bob Owens, and me.

Kyle’s mom, Jill Smialek, wrote me this nice email:

I am hoping you will be there! Kyle is going as well as Kaylyn.

If it wasn’t for you my children wouldn’t be going and there might not be a scoreboard!

But, God bless you, you had given him a chance—and to his credit he followed through for four years. Because of your dedication, which you have passed on to my son. He never gave up. He was Elon inside and out.

Tom, you have given my son the determination to try his best. He may never had been given that chance if it weren’t for you. He may not ever made it “big” in college tennis but his loyalty and his determination are admirable. And that loyalty drove Kaylyn to try her best at Elon. And again she struggled with tennis but never gave up!

I attribute that determination to you. They have both grown through
Elon tennis and have now become successful adults. Two children that make me very proud of their accomplishments.

So when you are there–look at those scoreboards and know you made a difference on not one but two people’s lives. You deserve that scoreboard. Enjoy it!

Hope you get to catch Kyle and Kaylyn while there.

My very best to Margaret.

Cheers,

Jill

I responded with the following email and the thought, “One parent is worth more than 100 teachers.”

Jill,

What a kind note and thanks. Here is an alternate explanation for the kid’s success. In James Michener’s “Mexico,” Michener uses bull fighting as a metaphor for death. He asks the reader “what is the worst thing that can happen from a promoter’s point of view?” Answer: The bull must have courage or he won’t fight! Picture Ferdinand the Bull.

Next question: what is the surest way to determine if a bull has the necessary courage? Practice fight? Can’t do that, because one practice and the bull figures out the deal about the cape. Kills the matador. Promoter’s best guess at determining the potential courage of a young bull? Fight the mothers. If the mother has heart, the offspring will have courage. You did good with the kids, Mom. Jill, I loved Kyle as a person and you all as a family. I’m glad, but not surprised about their success. Margaret and I are quite thrilled about the scoreboards and look forward to seeing them in action. (Hopefully with some Phoenix wins on the boards). I must tell you and your family that as much as we appreciate our names up there with Elon, our most intense thanks are for the remembrance of our beloved friend, Bob Owens. I truly believe Bob is an angel. Can’t wait till next weekend.

Stay in touch, and thanks once again.

Tom and Margaret Parham

The Smialeks think I did Kyle a favor by keeping him on the team. It was a no-brainer. First of all, he was a good player. More importantly, he was a heck of a fine student and person.

But I started to think about unsung contributors who often don’t get to
play much. Football coach Henry Trevathan is a dear friend and legendary coach. I once asked Coach Trevathan what he liked most about coaching. As was his way, he pondered the question a while and finally said, “There was almost always a kid trying out for the football team who had no business trying out: Too small, lack of talent, slow—whatever. But he had one quality. He wouldn’t quit. I somehow could keep him around and turn it into a positive for him, the team, and myself. Took some time, some patience, some faith.”

I had several of those kids who played for me, Kyle was one; his friend George Memory was another. George’s family, the Don Memorys, are part of the “Memorys of Wake Forest College.” Bull and Jasper Memory are iconic at “Old Wake Forest.” They were also tennis players who took my father, E. T. Parham, under their wing when he was an aspiring young theology student and ministerial hopeful. They taught him tennis, and he played number four for Wake Forest in 1928. I met Don Memory socially when George was a senior in high school. We uncovered our connection, and I learned that George was interested in Elon. We got him to Elon, and he was a “marginal” player who I kept on the squad. The summer of George’s second year I checked my returning player data with Elon and George was not enrolled. I called his dad, and I don’t believe Don would object to me saying there were “tears in his voice” when he told me that George “had worsened” (he suffered from severe kidney problems) and would not be able to play anymore. And he was not going back to Elon. I encouraged both to have him come back. I would keep him as manager and “in” tennis—a game he loved.

Fast forward two years, George’s health had thankfully improved and he was able to return to the team. We were playing Davidson; they were good and it would take all of our efforts to win. George and Kyle Smialek were up to play doubles together in a “scratch match.” We may have already won but you’d never know watching Kyle and George. I don’t remember much else about that day, just that our team won. It was beautiful out and watching Kyle and George play together made a lot of sense. It was a tremendous jolt of joy, for me and the team.

I did my share of winning. It is worthwhile to do your best. I remember a lot of these “Smialek” moments and what great kids some of these non-starter, marginal players were. Many of my era’s kids would have played on a lot of fine college teams but were bumped by the influx of foreign and international players. My first team had great guys who would not have played later. However, given the chance and some time, they blossomed with experience. Joe Roediger was number 13 on my first Elon team. He worked his way up to number 5, graduated when no one thought he could, and has taught tennis for 20 years. No one loves teaching tennis
more than Joe. Many of these marginal players ended up as teachers and coaches. The players who are cut, end up bitter at tennis and probably quit playing, let alone teaching. The marginals though, will possibly be your next great tennis teacher, pro or coach.

One of the few things that I did not like about Title IX was that it dictated squad size for men be equal to women, or vice versa. You had to cut at a certain equal number. Until then, I could let them hang around as long as they would. Coach Jim Verdieck of Redlands University and our NAIA days, kept 32 on his squad. He gave the top 16 a private hour lesson weekly, the bottom 16 a half hour. Many of these “subs” are teaching today. Plus, Verdieck won more national tennis titles than anyone, ever, in college tennis.

I did, of course, kick a few off. None who didn’t deserve it. And I kept a few I should have run off. Maybe I was idealistic, but I thought they could all be salvaged. Often, a challenge match cost a kid a starting slot, or a chance to stay on the team. One kid lost a challenge match on the match point of a third set tiebreaker—on a double fault. That hurts. But he didn’t quit and eventually became a fine starter. Almost every kid I kept, sooner or later, came back and got me a crucial win. Peter Van Graafeiland lost and lost and lost. He was as nice a kid as ever played. He figured it out and became solid at the bottom of the lineup. Jon Hodges, Ashley Shaw, Justin Clark, and Micheal Prelec were Americans who sat out until their time came. John Morel grew four inches in his freshman year. He later became all conference.

So many more examples, Chad York teaches at one of the better tennis clubs in Charlotte. He took lump after lump, and it killed me to watch him come up short. Chad has never blinked, to this day. Tommy Stratford teaches tennis in D.C. He would bleed to play and always, always supported the team. Tommy Nielsen was the same. A guy named John Potanko was recruited out of PE classes. Andrew Hodges teaches today. I watched him play freelance every day while we practiced. I convinced him to come over to the varsity courts, hit with some of the better players. He didn’t think he was good enough. Great kid. Kevin McCabe was another. Sebbe Bredberg, a Swede, fought shoulder problems and substituted for a school year. Next go—Southern Conference Champion, Bredberg a hero! There were similar kids at Atlantic Christian College and, I’m sure I’ve forgotten several.

I wrote this thinking of, and thanking, the Smialeks. More than that, thanking my persistent kids. I loved seeing them make it. More than either, though, I write this for the young coaches. “Don’t cut ‘em; don’t give up on ‘em; coach ‘em; coach ‘em; coach ‘em!”
“You can observe a lot by watching” –Yogi Berra.

I have felt apologetic to the people I coached in my “pre-Leighton” career. We had good teams and kids early, but I really had no “body of knowledge,” or thorough concept of what to suggest. Having a background in other sports helped me make common sense decisions, and I was developing an eye for how to help. Still Leighton provided the base to expand on.

I began to see things that I hadn’t been aware of, and a great new source of learning emerged. I was seeing things my own players did or didn’t do properly. Other teams provided examples. And while I hardly know about the upper echelon of tennis, I now see things the pros were doing that helped. Television brought the great players right into my living room. And tennis fits television like a glove: Borg, Connors, McEnroe, the U.S. Open, Wimbledon, Billie Jean vs. Bobby Riggs, etc.

Malcolm Gladwell says it takes 10,000 hours to be proficient in any worthy arena. I don’t know how many, from childhood to my coaching career, were spent “watching the ball bounce.” A lot! All kinds of sports. Tennis, one of the latest found.

And, as stated, my pivotal find was Jim Leighton. Mentor to many, myself included.

He opened my eyes and I began to see things better. And I learned from all kinds of sources. Tennis on television, playing tennis, reading instruction books, watching other tennis players, DVDs, clinics (especially at the U.S. Open’s USTA clinics), coaches of tennis and other sports. Most came from watching my own players. Some positive information, some negatives that needed “coaching.” Next I have listed sources for some of these lessons. Lessons that win watches.

The first is one that is unusual but I gotta tell you, we got a lot of points from badminton. “Chai” will tell you that!

I know I gave one player above 1,000 or more career points. It, too, had a strange origin. I taught badminton in P.E. classes. Soon, thinking myself a pretty good player, I encountered one Anand Jaggi, professor of economics. Anand was ranked 13th in the badminton world, and he was “state champion” in his native India.
Rarely did I get a point. He won the singles, doubles, and mixed doubles state badminton championships held annually at Duke University.

And I soon noticed an uncanny ability he had. He never played the shuttlecock when it would land out of bounds. It was “dropped” or let alone.

While my badminton ego suffered, I took this logic to my tennis team. We need to learn the court, or like Dr. Jaggi, not hit out-of-bounds points. We adopted this policy: In practice, if you have any doubt, let it go and let’s see if you are right. In a match, with any doubt, go ahead and play it. Soon I could see our players use better and better judgment. We would occasionally let one drop in, but our percentage grew drastically.

The player who benefited most was Chai Navawongse, a Thai lefthander who came in on everything. Chai had played doubles with Paradorn Schriciphan, so he came in “with game.” Soon, however, I noticed he was playing anything close. There may be 10–20 points a match he played that would have been out. Some, way out. I explained the “Jaggi” or “learn the court” theory. A bright youngster, and fine player, you could see the light click on in his head. Before long he was close to Jaggi in judgment, rarely playing an out ball, simply pointing “out” with the left hand.

**TEAM CHEMISTRY**
ON RECRUITING

I left after a road match at Davidson for a three-hour trek to Columbia, South Carolina, trying to recruit Tom Morris. It was late when I arrived at the stately Bermuda Hills mansion. Father Jack Morris told me later that my willingness to drive there that night, putting me back in Davidson at 3:00 AM, convinced them I’d look after Tom. Tom Morris led us, willed us, played us to the school’s first-ever National Championship. He won the conference singles title all four of his years, the only person before or since to do that. And he did it his senior year with a badly damaged thumb. Congratulations to an “All American Leader.”
Watching Elon University grow was fascinating. Our team was changing fast, too. Duane Johnson was an unlikely “cornerstone” for a college tennis team, but I recognized him even before I changed jobs. I’d seen him play the year before. His mom, Eleanor, was the engine that drove Duane. Here I repeat an earlier story. It applies to a lot of mothers, including Duane’s, Eleanor. Coaches have known this about good mothers for a long time. In James Michener’s “Mexico” the author explores bull fighting. The worst scenario for a promoter is a cowardly bull; Ferdinand, if you will. No courage, no fight. Michener explains that determining the probability of a fierce bull can’t be ascertained by “trying out” the bull. Show him the cape and after one audition, he’ll know where the matador is. Solutions for fight promoters? You try out the mothers. If the mother has courage, it’s likely the offspring will.

Maybe “drive” is the word for the Johnsons. And for so many other successful people. “Just keep pecking away at it.”

Duane would park in my office chair and wait for me. He’d tell me his ideas, goals, and how to motivate others. Once he (or we) obtained one goal, on to the next. He wanted to beat neighbor Guilford College. Done in year two. Atlantic Christian? “We’ve never beaten them!” Beat them in the second conference and district tournaments. Go to a national tournament? Elon’s first qualification in 1987. Next goal, same chair: “I want our team in the top ten of the country.” Our finish in 1988? Tenth of 55 teams. I want to make Academic All-American! Picked that up in 89 too. First-Team All-American? 89! When he graduated in 1989, I thought I’d done about all I could do as his coach.

Our team, led by Roland Thornqvist, won Elon’s first national title in 1990. I thought Duane would be elated, but when I saw him he was angry. “Well, what is it now, Johnson?”

“I wanted to be on that team.”

Big drive.

**SOME PEOPLE AND PLACES I LEARNED FROM**

*Roland Thornqvist* (my most talented player) said, “Coach, once I serve it, I try not to go back behind the baseline.” Roland defined himself as a “power-ground stroker” and took everything “on the rise.”

*Rocky Peed.* I noticed Rocky let a lot of lobs bounce before he hit them. He’d back up an extra step, then move in to hit it with extra force. Effective!
John Sturen and Tom Morris had a one-handed backhand technique that allowed them to “pull” the ball effectively. It involved a “laid back wrist” that pulled the top edge of the racquet “around the ball.”

THE WCT FOREHAND

Tom Morris and his character showed me a lot. Once a “new” opponent in our district was certainly a challenge for perennial winner, Morris. All we heard in “pre-tournament scuttle” was about this guy’s “WCT (tour level) forehand.” Morris said nothing but at match time directed nearly every ground stroke to an area about 5-feet square located at the service line on his opponent’s backhand side. The guy hit his WCT forehand about three times: 6–1, 6–0, Morris.

“The Andy Moll drill.” I taught this to the entire team. Andy asked me to hit a solid ball to the middle of his court, then a second ball about midway on his backhand side. Andy’s forehand was very good. He drilled his legwork this way, turning three fourths of his shots into forehands. (See figure 10 on page 95)

SPOT SPECIFIC

Andres Alvarez was “spot specific” on his volley. He would serve and volley the return invariably deep to one corner or the other—almost within a foot every time. Then, the odds were in his favor. This is an area in which American players and teachers could get better. For example, we are “spot specific” on passing shots, but on volleys many of our kids just sort of “bang it over on the other side.”

PLAYING TIEBREAKERS

One baseliner I coached, Stefen Hager, became a new and improved “attacker” when he perfected this play: Attack with an improved approach shot at their backhand. Overplay a little, setting up a ball on the backhand side. The clue was Stefan developed an accurate, or “spot specific” backhand volley that he then “bumped” deep and away. Then Stefan could put away the often “weak return.”

Stefan teamed with Robert Thornqvist to win the NAIA doubles championship in 1990. Earlier he’d have trouble winning third set tiebreakers, or close matches at the end. (“Get the game point Stefan,” he’d admonish himself).
A fine player, we discussed this weakness. I began to hear him say things like:

1. I really try in tiebreakers.
2. I’m trying to keep errors down at the end of close matches.
3. I play long points in the close sets but seem to lose game point.

Stefan listened to my radical proposal. “Maybe you are too cautious.”

Why not try an abrupt change? Take same chances. Gamble a little. Give it a try. I’m on your side, go ahead. A puzzled moment crossed his face. The next match I noticed he was close to the end of a tight match. I wanted to see what happened, but I was in another nail biter on the other side of the courts. (Superstition wouldn’t let me leave.)

In the blink of an eye a teammate came to tell me, “Coach should have seen Stefan in that breaker: 7–1 in 10 minutes. He hit shots you wouldn’t believe.”

Stefan walked up sheepishly. Didn’t say much, but he’ll tell you it changed his tiebreaker results forever.

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**COACH LEONARD**

Michael Leonard coached Elon’s men’s tennis team (2007) to its first Southern Conference tournament championship for any sport. The team finished 23–2 and played in the NCAA playoffs.

Michael gives me a lot of credit for his playing success. More than I deserve. He gushes about how much I helped him, but I really only taught him two major things: Hit it up enough on your serve and learn a one-handed underspin ball. “Yeah coach,” says new coach Michael, “but you don’t know how much those two changes helped. I was strictly two-handed, but now my slice is my bread and butter.”

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**PASSING SHOTS**

Dominic Moerstedt played on my first Elon team. A fine player, Moerstedt had grown up in a German academy that had also housed Boris Becker and Steffi Graff. Extremely talented, Moerstedt liked to try “big bombs” for passing shots, hit from way back at the fence. I told him about
an earlier player, passing on the rise, moving in on service returns, etc. Still “boom—from way back.” The first match my team played without me there (25 years’ perfect attendance!) came Dominic’s senior year. My wife had to have a surgical procedure (kidney stones—ouch!), and I sent Dr. Alan White as an able substitute coach. He still brags about his tennis coaching. We both were lucky. After the first day of the tournament, my number one player jumped into an indoor pickup soccer game in our gym. Pop! Leg injury. No number one for the finals. I returned to a hobbled team plus another problem. Dominic was playing Alex Evans, an excellent Australian player from my old school Atlantic Christian. Evans “owned” Moerstedt. In several previous matches Moerstedt had never gotten more than two games a set off the talented serve and volleyer Evans. This match was for the tournament. My advice to Dominic went like this: “Dominic, we’ve tried it your way to no avail. Please at least move in aggressively on your service return and passing shots.”

We had practiced this a lot recently, in all fairness, and Dominic had the kind of talent to pull it off. It shocked everyone—Evans, Moerstedt, our team members and me: 6–2, 6–2, Moerstedt, and Elon was Conference Champs.

What really surprised me is why the strategy worked. By hitting the passing shots quicker I’d hoped that Dominic could make Evans volley from an unstable, unusual position. What actually happened is that Alex tried to get in quicker and it disrupted his ordinarily dependable serve. Confused by a different rhythm, he lost a lot of confidence.

CHIP AND RIP BY MOON PHILLIPS

“Moon” Phillips taught me a lot, about this time. They called Danny “Moon” because his big round head looked like Charlie Browns’s (Peanuts). It also sat on a frame of about 100-plus pounds. But Danny had some trump cards. Great touch, hands, and volley, and he could hit it anyway it came at him. A fine doubles player having grown up in Goldsboro, North Carolina, he taught me several things: The backhand underspin volley, return, and approach are true keys in college tennis. Danny, from the backhand court, would slice a little cross-court return that the receiver had to hit up. “Slam dunk” on our next shot. And he convinced me of another great use of this in singles. Maybe Tim Wilkison, North Carolina’s finest player, solidified the term “chip and charge” in tennis. I watched with pride at the U.S. Open when Tim won three straight five setters with that attaching off the second serve and turning it into an approach shot.

Danny showed me the “chip and rip” in Kansas City. He played an unde-
feated (number three in the country), serve and volley specialist. I’d heard a lot about this boy, but Danny’s tactic made breaking serve easy. He’d slyly move in, chip it at the “T” and as his opponent could only touch up this “super soft” return, Danny would then rip a big passing shot by the defenseless volleyer. Chip, bang, lob, angles. Set him up with number one, pass him with number two, works in singles and doubles. Chip and rip. I began to encourage my net players to take any middle ball on the backhand volley or service return. Ask John McEnroe. He could “touch that chip on a dime.”

A POINT OF PRIDE

I watched players early on in the Nationals, picking up bits and pieces from all over the country. In the years prior to the “foreign invasion” the NAIA featured almost state vs. state contests with the warm weather states having the advantage. California was ahead in talent, but Texas and Florida came to play.

I loved watching the doubles matches. Southeastern Oklahoma’s coach, Clarence Dyer, and his players were a great model. I’d watch Kim Kettleson come in behind his serve and never miss that first volley, no matter how hard or low the return was.

Up to this point our team members (save “Moon”) would just sort of “wave” at those returns as they roared past for winners.

We went back to the practice rack on this shot. We made it a point of pride to learn how to dig that return out of the hole.

DANNY AND THE FOREHAND CHIP RETURN

Danny Colangelo was Elon’s only four-time first-team All-American in any sport. He was talented, tough, and durable.

I learned from Danny how valuable the net player was in doubles. No matter who I played Danny with, he’d play so well at the net that his partner, if he didn’t double fault three or four times, would hold serve.

Danny could learn too. I convinced him at his level he needed to add an underspin forehand return. Danny was going to play people who serve so well he wouldn’t have time for a giant backswing. He mastered it immediately and used it to great advantage.

What I learned was part two of the “learning.” Danny realized that if he hadn’t had that return, others didn’t either. He began to hit his quality serves at talented opponent’s forehands.
Danny told me he saved that shot for a “back-up” point on the tour and was always surprised how many good players couldn’t hit it, mostly due to overswinging.

**JIMMY PARKER, TIM, AND CHARLIE**

Another source of information was hosting semi-pro or “money tournaments.” BB&T (Branch Banking and Trust) hosted a fine tournament with people like Freddie McNair and other great college players of the mid-70s. The most impressive, though, was an older Texan, Jimmy Parker. What a nice guy and great player. Jimmy could stand on the service line and return serve. He also ran a below 10-second 100 yards. Blink and he was at the net. We also hired Tim Wilkison and Charlie Owens for our local exhibitions. If you couldn’t learn from those guys, don’t take calculus.

I learned a shot from Tim’s brother, Andy, who played for North Carolina State. Andy, troubled with a bad knee, was a fine player himself.

Watching him return serve caused me to define his return as “Z” shaped. I never told Andy, but his quick move to the left and in, accompanied by moving his weight in toward the target, became the model for our doubles return.

Charlie Owens perfected a “just high enough” forehand lob down the line to force the net player to hit a lukewarm backhand overhead to his only logical cross-court target. Charlie would be there waiting for it with a “passer.”

**THE YENTILMEZ FLOP (FOR RICHARD DUTTON)**

Another shot from our opponents is etched in my memory. However my memory fails on his first name. A Carson Newman College player, last name of Yentilmez, had a “flop” shot that he’d perfected. No matter how you approached, he’d spin a “semi-topspin lob” cross court at a pace that left you just short of comfortable. We added the “Yentilmez flop.” Many got out of deep trouble with the “flop.” Takes some practice!

**“RECTAL GLAUCOMA”**

As athletic director, I witnessed an opposing soccer player get kicked in the mouth. He lost several teeth immediately. Several more were in need of a dentist. It was a night game at our place, and I called a local dentist, a Dr. Woody Mason of Wilson, for emergency help. He was gracious and professional as he tried to save the kid’s teeth. The coach from the opposition arrived as I watched with concern. He called me out of the
office. “When is he going to get through? We gotta get back.” What? I had some strong words for him and told him I’d drive the injured boy back rather than let him leave before finished.

This coach was eventually fired. Probably not soon enough. “Rectal Glaucoma” (I just can’t see my butt doing that.)

THE SADDEST TALE

Maybe the saddest conversation occurred late one night after a match. Driving silently the boys talked about the spring break they’d just returned from. One kid stated, “My mom drinks gin all day. She’s a drunk.” “Hmmm. I came home four nights last week and passed by my dad, drunk in a chair. He never recognized me.” Silence. Then from the back Rocky Peed spoke: “You guys don’t know anything. Last year I saved $50, all I had, and bought myself a new racquet for the high school championships. I got dressed to leave and couldn’t find my racquet. My father had sold it for $5 to buy a pint of whiskey.” That one touched me.

Rocky had been a “need” case. I first heard about him when someone said he was going to attend Atlantic Christian. I knew he was a pretty good player but he had no phone. He lived with his grandmother. She was his only family, having kicked Rocky’s father out. Not only could I not call him, but also when I went to the tournaments Rocky was in, he ducked me. Finally I cornered him in front of a small group of junior players. I introduced myself and commented that I’d heard he was interested in our school. Rocky was 6’3”, longhaired, and a very nice looking young man. He blushed and asked, “Could I speak to you over there Coach?” In private, he told me he knew who I was. Sam Modlin had told him all about our school. It sounds great. “But Coach, I can’t go to college. I don’t have any money. All the kids I play with talk about their college plans all the time. I just said I was going to Atlantic Christian to save face. I’m sorry. I hope you don’t mind.” “Rocky, you can come to AC on the B.E.O.G. (Federal aid for needy kids.) If you want to come, I’ll get you in. Don’t worry about the money. Rocky, a 1975 graduate, is now a grandfather and a successful businessman.

He also won a district singles title. I bought his racquet for him.

COACH HOLMES

Bryce Holmes is professionally a chemist. He works now for North Carolina A&T University, but his heart is on a tennis court. Many small towns have special “tennis angels” who nurture youngsters in the game. Lexington, North Carolina, had some angels, and the town was one of
the best “tennis towns” anywhere. Bryce Holmes was the first black high school player at an integrated high school in North Carolina, and a good one. I answered Bryce’s phone call one day at Elon. He wanted to get into college coaching. Shortened story finds Bryce helping us at Elon. He and I talked incessantly about all kinds of things. Bryce not only was a natural coach but was, and is, a friend.

But he had his trepidations. A fine college tennis player at Livingston College, he was to be inducted into their athletics hall of fame. Bryce had heard me speak a few times and wanted some advice. “What in the world do I talk about?” The coach was scared! I gave Bryce some suggestions and then he began to talk tennis, his favorite subject, especially his beginnings. First, how he’d worked to earn enough for a new racquet. People began to realize he was serious about going out for the “white team.” The word got out in the community. One day after school he noticed a paper bag on his front porch with about a dozen tennis balls inside of it. Oddly, though, it had a strange variety of old and new, different kinds and colors. Bryce thought “my dad found some balls!” Not my doing, the father insisted, and after searching his mind and the neighborhood, he had no answer. Jake Bradley was the neighborhood “garbage man.” Bryce said “Jake was a nice enough guy. Not well known, and some thought ‘a little off.’” Finally a neighbor saw the donor and went up to Jake after he delivered the balls to the Holmes’ porch.

Jake simply said, “I wanted to help that young man make that team.” Bryce, I said, tell that at your induction, there won’t be a dry eye! (Coaching the coach.)

**SPORTSMANSHIP**

My language gets me in trouble, but I already know I’m going to heaven because God sent me Roland Thornquist.

About 25 Swedish men played for me. Ron Smarr, longtime men’s tennis coaching friend, and NCAA National Coach of the Year in 2004, got me started. Ronnie’s “hand-me-down” letters included one from Roger Ossmin of Linkoping, Sweden. He had an interesting resume result: Bjorn Borg beat
him 6–3, 7–5. He had to be pretty good to be on the same court with Borg, who was tearing up world tennis. Many Swedes would excel in the post–Borg era. They were bright, tough, attractive, and understood team tennis. They took me for a ride, Atlantic Christian and Elon, too.

“Thumper” Thornqvist was beautiful. All smiles, 6’6” tall, and just blossoming as a player. People repeatedly ask me how I recruited him. They assumed a gigantic sales coup. Stefan did it. A “pipeline” is a coach’s dream. One kid begets the next. Stefan Hager, a senior Swede, told me about Roland.

“He might come to Elon, Coach.”

Roland didn’t like the junior tennis circuit. It was lonely and required a lot of travel. I always let the current Swede talk to their “recruits” in their own language. Two minutes of watching Stefan’s eyes told me the conversation was going well. He handed me the phone. My great recruiting job went like this: “Roland, we can give you a scholarship in the spring.”

“I’ll be there,” were the first words he spoke.

International recruiting is like buying the proverbial pig in a poke. I always checked them out with the other kids. My deal was play hard, get your degree, and we’ll replace you with a countryman. They felt a responsibility to the next Swede, whomever he may be.

I knew Roland was good, but when he lost the first three games of his first match, I gulped. Not to worry! Nerves settled down, he went on to win that match 6–3, 6–0. And the next 44 matches. He lost three sets all year, won the NAIA singles title and teamed with Stefan to win the doubles. We had four North Carolina starters in addition to the two Swedes. It was unusual for the NAIA team winner to have an American starter in the 80s and 90s. Four “plain vanilla” Tar Heels were proud as punch. With Roland, it was like having a tough big brother in a fight. He “buoyed” the rest of us. He also was selected as the “Freshman of the Year” in NAIA tennis. And he won the NAIA Sportsmanship Award. It was a dream season. We were treated to dinner at the Governor’s Mansion in Raleigh. Jim Martin served as host. We were cited in the Congressional Record sponsored by Congressman Howard Coble of our district.

Roland was a potential pro, and I knew it was in his best interest to move up. Still it was hard for us. I think we both shed tears as he transferred to
UNC-Chapel Hill to play for Coach Allen Morris, a great player, friend, and protégé of Coach Jim Leighton.

Roland was in the top two or three college players in America. And, as a junior, he was also given the NCAA Division I Sportsmanship Award. This is a one-time award, but an odd thing happened. Playing in the NCAA Division I Indoor Singles Championship in 1993, senior Roland was down a set to Georgia’s Mike Sell, a fine player. This final match was on ESPN and Sell served a second serve. Down 4–5, 30–40, it was a precious service break point for the set. The lineman called the serve out. Double fault, set to Thornqvist. One set each. The puzzled commentators watched Thornqvist as he spoke to the chair umpire. Then one commentator said, “Well, you don’t see that every day.” Thornqvist had overruled the linesman on his opponent’s behalf. Roland told me he’d seen the ball hit the line and he couldn’t have returned it. He gave Sell the point. Roland won the second set and the third. More than that, he exemplified the best in sport.

At the spring coaches convention, the question of the sportsmanship award came up for vote. It was noted Roland, though a logical candidate, was ineligible. An unattached coach rose in the meeting and suggested, “Men, we can give this award to anyone we wish, but Roland Thornqvist deserves the award. I move we waive the rule for one year.” Roland won his third National Sportsmanship Award.

Dean Smith, Carolina’s legendary basketball coach, found out about Roland and had him on his TV show. Smith had himself won a rather significant sportsmanship award that year: Sports Illustrated’s Sportsman of the Year.

Coach Smith commented, “You know, I’ve never argued with the official to call that foul on us rather them. Roland’s one up on me!”

Coach Smith helped Roland get the women’s coaching job with Roy Williams’s school, the Kansas Jayhawks. Williams came back to Carolina, and Roland did too. Carolina bolted into the top 10 women’s tennis teams. Roland then accepted the Gators job at Florida. In his second year, his girls won the NCAA Division I Women’s title.

Roland has never failed to cite Elon as a great place to start.

THE CODE AND HIDDEN VIRTUES

While the humor in sports is great, more impressive are the truly noble things that manifest themselves on the court. Line calling in tennis provides a mirror to one’s character. There was never a player I coached who I didn’t have a pretty good estimation of their “line calling”
philosophy. Being honest is quite tough sometimes, but it is tennis’s finest moment. I have already described what was my “most impressive show of sportsmanship.”

“If you are not positive it’s out, it’s good.” That’s not complicated.

It’s just as wrong to unjustifiably accuse an opponent of cheating as it is to cheat yourself.

There are, of course, all kinds of other rules, but line calling is crucial to a worthy contest.

Steve Wilkinson, long-time coach at Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota, did the best job of any coach I observed at fostering good sportsmanship among his players. His team guidelines were stellar.

One teacher would drop a ball inside the court and ask his group of students: “In or out?” “In” was the obvious response. He would then have them close their eyes. Then he’d drop a second ball: “In or out?” The puzzled ones would hear the perceptive ones reply, “In” (if you can’t see it out, it’s in).

My age and my job were beginning to conflict. Someone said it’s time to quit coaching when the pain of losing is worse that the joy of winning. I can tell you there is a place beyond that: When you don’t really care whether you win or lose. I wasn’t quite there but I knew it wasn’t far off.

I had begun to look at things differently. Dr. White had asked me to add the girls’ team to my duties. I decided I couldn’t say no to Alan, plus I would do my best after I said yes.

We’d had several good women’s team coaches but longevity was a problem. Title IX, too.

In retrospect I should have argued for two coaches. Coaching two teams is best done if you have a M.W.A. degree (“Management While Wandering Around”).

I loved the girls. They are different to coach. Anson Dorrance of North Carolina soccer fame has done the most clinical study of effective coaching of women. I recommend his book. It took me a while to communicate well particularly with other women’s team’s coaches. Those who were men were unreasonably protective of “their girls,” and there was a genre of women who coached I never did figure out. I got into more arguments coaching women for three years than I did in 40 for men.

Jessica Fisher typifies my changed attitude toward coaching later on. Jessica was sweet, a limited player, who’d never been in the lineup. My first fall practice she asked me about being a bridesmaid in a friend’s
wedding during our spring break. We had a four match spring trip scheduled. I approved the absence. Jessica was number eight on our team. We could survive, particularly when the four teams were clearly better than our best possibilities. Before our trip we had some illness and injuries. We were down to five, needing six girls to have a full team. Plus with five you forfeit two points. On a drizzling March morning we were loading the van. Across the parking lot I saw Jessica dragging her team bag and crying. I mean sobbing. She can’t talk, but she hoisted the bag in the back. “Jessica, you don’t have to go. We’ll be okay. I told you so in the fall.” Through her sobs she said, “I won’t let an Elon team be short-handed.” And she crawled in the back. Company girl.

What I began to realize and see were all the good things kids do. People who tell you that young people are not as good as they used to be are wrong.

And it didn’t have to be my kids. The coach from the College of Charleston, Angelo Anastapoulo, asked if he could sub a senior girl in our match. “She hasn’t gotten to play much.” “Sure.” Both girls played a fine match. Down to a tiebreaker. I watched this young woman with admiration. There were five or six close calls. Calls I’d spent a career watching and wondering about. The girl never batted an eye. Almost overly fair and truly a good sport. She lost. I asked Angie if I might speak to her. “Sure.”

“You are about to graduate aren’t you?”

“Yes sir, three weeks.”

“When all this tennis stuff is over, you’ll still be honest won’t you?”

“Yes sir,” she smiled.

I’ve had parents who asked me how to make their kid be more like those who cheat. Really? I always asked do you really want your good kid to actually change?

My last year a boy I’d often encouraged to watch his calls and behavior wound up in a crucial final match against our chief rival.

Fate tests you. The deciding tiebreaker featured an unbelievable number of balls in favor of the other player and team. It was truly uncanny. Our kid lost, having made every call honestly. He came to me with tears flowing, saying, “Coach, I let you down.” I told him the truth. “Mike, I’ve never been more proud of a player.”

The next week we drew the same team in the tournament and wore them out.

I saw that happen in Kansas City once. A boy named Ben Taylor had lost a
District title on a ninth point (old tiebreaker) of the deciding set. Playing an hour from his campus, his coach said he didn’t speak all the way back. His opponent’s own fans had seen the call and booed their classmate openly. His coach dropped Ben off and confirmed: “Ben, you know your shot was good.” Ben said, “I should have beaten him anyway.” With a draw of 256 men in the NAIA Nationals, fate pitted Ben against the same guy. Taylor by 6–2, 6–1.

It was beautiful to watch the shows of honesty, courage, self-sacrifice, playing injured for team, and teamwork in sports. Beautiful moments.

NORTH CAROLINA SPORTS

Being a sports fan and a lifelong North Carolinian, my induction into the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame was a true “lifetime highlight.” My photograph is next to Michael Jordan’s photograph. I keep waiting for someone to ask me, “Who is that guy next to you in the Hall of Fame?” Anyway it is cut, I am proud to be among these familiar legends, some I happen to know. One support that aided my selection was revealed later to me. Senator Sandy Sands and his wife, Jenny, became friends and “tennis parents.” Our son Dan and Andy Sands, were in the same age group and among the best players. They played often. Senator Sands, as a member of the North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame selection committee, told that group about one of their matches. Andy twisted his ankle pretty badly. I had taped a zillion ankles, so we took some time out while I taped my son’s opponent. I asked Dan recently if he remembered the match, or who won, as I had forgotten it. Dan, too, had forgotten. Thanks, Senator. Those were fun days with your family.


And some I was fortunate to know: Alan White, Jerry Steele, Dave Odom, Jack Jensen, Dean Smith, Charlie Adams, Mary Garber, Jack McKeon, Jim Mills, Big House Gaines, Walt Rabb, Dr. Leroy Walker, Lou Pucillo, Terry Holland, Herb Appenzeller, Woody Durham, Danny Talbott. Some Wilson, N.C. brothers: This year—the Godfather—Lee Gliarmis, and Carlester Crumpler, Bill Brooks, Tom and Bill Davis, Coach Harvey Reid. Marshall Happer is to be inducted in May. Great choice. Allen Morris, Bo Roddey,
Whit Cobb, and North Carolina’s tennis matriarch Mildred Southern, represent North Carolina tennis’ great history.

Not everybody, but a gym full of the best. The North Carolina Sports Hall of Fame in Raleigh is a museum of sports treasure. Visit it. And support it.

**PREPARING FOR COLLEGE TENNIS**

Dr. John Eatman, professor at UNC-Greensboro, was my first number one tennis player. Through the years, Dr. Eatman has continued playing and promoting tennis. We talked at length about how one should select the right college to play for. John summarized some major points in this handout for prospective student-tennis athletes.

The following comments were prepared with input from college coaches. They reflect a general view of the ideas of the coaches rather than the views of any particular coach. They are offered as aid to NCTA junior players and their parents in the difficult process of finding the right college for junior players to further their education and advance their tennis.

What does playing college tennis offer me?

College tennis offers the participant a number of things besides just the ability to continue to advance as a tennis player. College tennis is a team sport. Junior competition is clearly focused on individual achievement while college tennis has definite team goals. You will make a number of contacts that are useful in later life and demonstrate you can contribute to a team effort in a competitive environment. College tennis also can add a lot to your social life and help you establish yourself as a member of the college community. Many of the people you meet as a member of a college team will become lifelong friends.

What are the opportunities for playing college tennis?

Most colleges have men’s and women’s tennis teams and most of these teams will have between 8 and 12 team members. Thus, while there are many opportunities for playing college tennis, there are also many junior players who want to play. Because the United States is the only nation with well-established collegiate competition, U.S. college tennis is attractive to foreign players. Consequently, there are many persons interested in
playing college tennis and the competition for a spot on college teams is quite competitive.

What should I take into consideration when selecting a school?

Selecting a college is one of the more difficult choices that a young person has to make. There are many factors to consider. Ideally, a person should have a career goal that can help with the decision. Realistically, most students do not have a definite career goal to which they are committed. Assuming that you are interested in selecting a school that offers you the academic and tennis opportunities that you desire, the following factors (listed in order of importance) should be considered.

**Academic Environment of the School**
Your primary purpose in attending college should be to get an education. The odds of any player making a living as a tennis player are quite small. Therefore, it is important to select a school that is compatible with your academic goals and abilities. In order to do this, an honest self-assessment is essential in making a good choice.

**Social Environment of the School**
This is difficult to consider and many times is given too much weight by a young person. Using the social environment as the sole criteria often leads to making an unsatisfactory choice in terms of other criteria. One good way to assess this aspect of a school is to visit the institution while it is in session and talk with some typical students. Visits in the summer or holidays can convey a mistaken impression of the real environment. Most colleges will arrange visits if you do not know anyone attending the school. Do not be afraid to visit and find out about the school. This is also a big help in assessing the academic environment.

**Cost of Attending the School**
The cost of attending college continues to increase and is a financial burden for most families. The base cost of attending college should not discourage you from considering the college because there are many opportunities for financial aid. Basically, a college may offer scholarships (aid not requiring work or pay back) for academic merit, athletic ability, and financial need. Often a student will receive some combination of these. It is important for you to explore all three avenues because they will not be the same for all colleges. Athletic scholarships are quite limited. The NCAA, for example, allows for eight scholarships for women’s tennis. Men’s teams: four and a half. Many, probably most, colleges offer fewer than the maximum. Thus, in any one year, a college may have limited athletic scholarship monies available. This will generally translate into the awarding of partial scholarships. Typically, scholarships are awarded on an annual basis so they are not guaranteed. A lot of players attend college
based on a “promise” of future scholarship aid. Because a situation can change in a year, there is usually no real guarantee that a promise can or will be fulfilled.

**The Tennis Coach**
The tennis coach will have a major impact on your college tennis. In essence, you are “stuck” with the coach who is at the school you attend. Thus, it becomes important to find out about the coach and his or her mode of operation and ways of dealing with the team. This is difficult to assess. Visiting the school and watching a match or practice session helps. It is also useful to talk with the players on the team. In dealing with a college coach before attending the school, a player should be open and direct with the coach and expect the same from the coach. Coaches do not like to be misled by prospective players any more than a player wants to be misled by a prospective coach. A coach should be willing to give you an honest appraisal of your chances of making the team and getting to actually play. Some coaches are guilty of inaccurately representing chances of playing and some players are guilty of misrepresenting their abilities and interest in attending a particular school. The main guide here is to ask a question if you have one and answer questions asked you honestly. Related to this are the recruiting rules. The rules for collegiate recruiting limit the opportunities for a player to visit a school and talk with a coach. The NCAA has extensive regulations. For example, a coach has to be careful in talking with a potential recruit at a tournament. A formal campus visit is usually a key part of the recruiting process. Often it is better for the player or the player’s parents to call a coach if they have questions when the player is being recruited by a college than it is for the coach to call the player. Remember that a coach’s recruiting priorities are subject to change and that his/her interest in a player can increase or decrease during the year as other recruits and current players make their plans known. At any point in time, a coach probably has a priority assigned to his potential recruits. While the coach may not always want to tell you about how you are really rated, you should not be afraid to ask for a clean statement of your status on the coach’s recruiting list.

**The Players on the Team**
Obviously, you will spend a considerable amount of time with players on the team if you are a member of a college tennis team. It is also obvious that the team members will change over time as current players move on and new players arrive. Thus, it is helpful to meet the players when you visit a college to assess your general compatibility. The quality of the players on the team should be a guide as to whether you can play on a team and at what position. If playing college tennis is important to you, then you should honestly evaluate whether you have a realistic
chance of making the starting lineup. A lot of players find that they cannot play for a team after they arrive at a school.

**The Schedule**
The schedule that a team plays can tell you a lot about what is expected. Some schedules involve a great deal of travel and this can impact your academic pursuits. The schedule can also show you what the competitive aspirations for the team are because most colleges try to develop a team that will be competitive given their schedule. You should look at the team’s recent schedule and their record to see how well they are meeting their goals. It has been said that the typical college team should expect to finish with a record of 50 percent wins and 50 percent losses. A team that is consistently under this is probably overmatched and perhaps putting too few resources into its team, while the reverse might be true for a team with few losses.

**The Tennis Facilities**
The tennis facilities can be broadly defined as the courts and the training facilities. Ideally, a college should have enough quality courts to provide practice facilities for both men’s and women’s teams simultaneously. The courts should be in good shape and many will have viewing areas. While many schools do not have their own indoor courts, a number of schools will have at least some access to indoor courts. This is obviously a more important consideration in colder climates. In addition to courts, it is useful to look at the dressing rooms that the teams use and what type of other facilities (weight rooms, sports medicine facilities, etc.) they have. In some cases, the facilities may be available only on a limited basis because of their use by other teams and the general student population.

**The Operational Budget**
The operational budget for a college team is what the school allocates for travel, equipment, and other such items. The operational budget for colleges can vary widely. It is a mistake not to understand what the college is going to provide for the team and what players are required to provide for themselves. The coach should give you details of the operational budget. For example, one team might provide a player with two pairs of shoes. Another team will provide no shoes and a third team might provide four pairs of shoes. The families of most junior players have spent a substantial amount supporting the player in junior competition and now that family is facing the financial burden of college. Given this, it is best to not have any surprises by expecting an operational budget that is different from what actually exists.

**What are coaches looking for in junior players?**
This is a difficult question because coaches do have different perspectives
and their needs are not always the same. In general, a coach would like a player who would be a good student, capable of competing in singles and doubles, have good practice habits, have a good on-court attitude, and be dependable and fit.

The academic expectations of the school and the coach will need to match. A coach generally will not want to recruit a player who cannot (or will not) be able to make the grade academically. Most coaches want to recruit players who they know can graduate, stay eligible for competition, and will not require constant supervision.

While junior rankings are important, most coaches are interested in how a player will compete at the college level. Thus, a junior ranking is not a guarantee that a coach will assume that you will be a good player on the collegiate level. Some very good junior players have not competed successfully at the collegiate level and other players have done better at the collegiate level than in the juniors. In addition, junior rankings often do not measure a player’s capability in doubles because many junior players do not play doubles regularly. Doubles at the collegiate level is important because doubles decides many collegiate matches. Being able to play successful doubles (or not being very good at doubles) can be a real deciding factor in a school’s level of interest in a player.

College tennis is a tough, competitive arena. Players need to work hard each day and come to each match to play. The season can be a burden when you are balancing academics and tennis. Consequently, a coach will value highly players who will work hard in practice, stay focused in matches, and manage academic burdens themselves. Increasingly, coaches are concerned about players who do not have a lot of composure in matches. No coach wants to deal with a prima donna and many think the presence of such a player on a team is a detriment to the team.

Most junior players have a physical adjustment to make in moving to college tennis. At the college level, most of your matches (in challenges and against other teams) will be against a player who is perfectly capable of defeating you. This makes physical conditioning important. A lot of junior players are not as fit as college coaches require. Thus, getting in excellent condition and staying there is a prerequisite for college tennis success. A lot of players have lost an opportunity to make a college team by not showing up for fall or spring practice in good shape. A coach is also less likely to recruit a player whose fitness the coach has cause to question.

**Other Suggestions for Potential College Players**

**Check the website for the school’s rosters.**

These are common now and reflect the number of internationals,
the number of seniors, people you may know, and their ability levels. If possible, find out where people you know play in the lineup. Then compare your ability to theirs.

My golfing pro buddy said: “There are two kinds of people at a golf course, the workers and the players, and all the players are looking for a job.” Tim Wilkison is the only person in the entire history of North Carolina to earn a real living playing tennis. The odds are slim to nothing. Don’t put playing ahead of a degree. That said, if you really want to play college tennis don’t be talked out of it. It’s great for those who are suited to it.

**Go where you can play.**
It’s your responsibility to find the right fit. The “perfect fit” is school, scholarship, coach, teammates, and starting position. Sometimes you may have to give on one or two of these variables.

I heard a coach say “most kids gravitate to programs that are one level too high. Then they don’t play.” There has never been a happy substitute. My experience tells me if you can’t start your first year you probably never will.

**Go to a school where you will be happy if injured, etc., and can’t play.**
Most good kids are happy at most good schools of their choice. But if you make an initial mistake, nobody (kid, coach, parents) will be happy, and it can get messy.

The United States Tennis Association produces a document on the same subject. I’d like to emphasize a few points:

**I’d like to reemphasize, if you really want to play, go where you can play.**
It’s been said that many athletes gravitate to one level beyond their ability. There’s never been “happy substitute.”

In college tennis if you don’t get to play your first year, you probably won’t get to play. This is not always true but do you want to gamble?

When tryouts were allowed, I’d have my number four player play a set with the prospect. If the prospect played closely with number four, he had a chance at our school. It was amazing to me how many times a prospect, having just lost 6–1, would tell a parent, “I’m better than that guy.”

Transferring, if you make a mistake, is not always easy to do.

**MALCOLM GLADWELL, DAVID AND GOLIATH, AND WISE COLLEGE CHOICES**

Malcolm Gladwell’s book, *David and Goliath*, has an interesting
viewpoint regarding one's choice of institutions for pursuing higher education. He suggests being a big fish in a little pond yields better results than the other way around. Being in the top third of your class breeds esteem, whereas being in the lower third (albeit a third with fine students) often discourages those who are always looking up at those who outperform them.

I don’t remember a lot said at some 45 commencement speeches I attended. One statement I do remember was that the best way to become educated in America was in good small colleges. Gladwell further acknowledges that even at some of our very best schools exceptions are made. And often these exceptions are given to athletes. And while many exceptions are given thinking we are doing them a favor, he suggests maybe the results are not the outcomes we would want.

Having been involved in college athletics for some 40-plus years, Gladwell makes one ask questions, because so many exceptions go to athletes. Are we putting these youngsters into situations they cannot function or feel positive in?

The real value of athletics lies in the lessons learned therein. Doesn’t the student have to be capable of and willing to learn the lessons? Choosing the right school seems critical to marginal students and athletes.

**MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS**

- If we believe athletics are an integral part of education, and I do, we should value athletics highly. Too often in college athletics coaches recruit incorrigible people who are incapable of being educated through any venue. If we give the education of athletics to these people, this education is denied those who might truly use it to benefit. All nations have good and bad people. Surely, even the most “pro-internationals,” or diversity disciple, would agree that opportunities should be given to outstanding people from other nations. As with Americans, bad internationals bump good internationals.

- To young coaches:
  - Don’t recruit ineligible players.
  - Don’t recruit an aberrant creature who has no business in higher education to begin with, thinking that person will save your job. Sorry. Sooner or later that person will throw the coach in the river. I’ve seen it too often.
  - Don’t overwork your players. They are not employees. The name of the game is to have them eager at tournament time. A large
number of players are burned out when you really need them, and it’s the overly zealous coach’s fault.

- Further advice to prospects and parents. When prospects say no one will outwork me, or “I want a schedule with a lot of travel,” I think
  - You’ll get plenty of tennis and there are other facets that deserve your collegiate time
  - Six hours in a van isn’t much fun, and every day you’re traveling you are missing class. I’d advise a school and/or coach that understands the value of proximity: conference opponents should be close by. There’s plenty of opportunity for competition nearby.

- Parents:
  - Some coaches will crawl on your kid’s shoulders to help themselves earn their own glory. Beware.
  - We’ve all heard: my child’s a late bloomer; she/he didn’t play tournaments, but no one will outwork him/her.
  - We also know you’ll use us to get them in school, then they join the fraternity, sorority, etc.

- Two tools are essential: a good resume and a short film. The film should include the player playing points. Doesn’t have to be slick. Film from the net post showing the prospect only. Head to toe, follow the player’s movement. Please, clip all dead time. We don’t want to watch them pick up balls, change courts, etc. Film “I serve five points, I receive five points” — about six–seven minutes worth. Rewind the tape and check to see if it works. Please, no films of “my fore hand,” “my serve,” etc.

- A warning to high school athletics associations: Beware of “tennis academies” that will usurp your constituent’s opportunities, awards, etc.

- To the ITA: Don’t be afraid of a lawsuit over the international issue. If you’re right you will win, one way or the other. I’ll help you raise money from American parents. Besides, the other side is bluffing.

- I am troubled by “the inverse relationship between athletics and integrity.” Thirty years ago the schools doing things right won. Now, quite too often, it appears that those who are willing to cheat or fudge or connive or manipulate win disproportionately. “Figures don’t lie, but liars can figure.”

- Longtime Clemson coach, Chuck Kriese, wrote of his concern about the dropping of men’s tennis teams in colleges. He cited his reasons
for this. I would add that many athletic directors are conveniently poised to avoid competition with all-international powerhouses by dropping men’s tennis in the name of Title IX.

• Problem kid, problem coach. If he cheats, the coach is allowing it. If the same coach who raises money in a community, teaches for money in a community, etc., and never recruits a community kid, don’t support him.

THE FORMAT

Certainly the matches are too long and will be forced to change somehow, someday. So much has been suggested and we are nowhere.

Two common sense, brief observations:

First, play a super tiebreaker for third sets. Period. Second, count a win in singles two points and a win in doubles one point. You have the same system but not the “throwaway” or “stack” or uncounted doubles match. This system (two points, one point) isn’t foolproof or “stack proof” but it stops a 9–8 match of beauty that ends in a 13–11 tiebreaker and counts for absolutely nothing. Believe me, two points; one point will drastically seal this stacking loophole.

FOR REFEREES

1. Your job is to prevent cheating on the line calls. (Limit worry on trivia, i.e., bathroom break time, singles net stick to the quarter inch, four balls or three, etc.). The trouble comes when cheaters cheat.

2. Think the philosophy of line calling is wrong with solo chair umpires. Referees tell me they are reluctant to overrule far line calls. Why? You are the only neutral person there! In a professional match, you are overruling a colleague. In college teams, the person you defer to is biased. Don’t be afraid of confrontation with players or coaches. The third overrule is powerful. Once you’ve corrected once or twice, the cheating stops. So what if they have to play close or even slightly out balls? That’s what the code says, anyway.

3. They cheat on the far line. Get someone on that line if you suspect it.

4. A note to coaches: Don’t complain about the refs. Don’t allow your players to complain or insult them. If you do, it will be like the teacher shortage, badgered to death until the refs finally quit. Then you’ve fired Donald and hired Daffy. Again, coaches, we are an extension of the referees. Back them. I constantly hear players who admire coaches for overruling or disciplining their own players.
5. Question for the rule makers: When a court is next to a sidewalk and fence, how far back do the team members stand? Can they crowd right behind an entrance to the courts? Shouldn’t a coach stop that even before a referee?

6. Who is really in charge of crowd control? What is permissible? How should violators be handled?

7. People are saying some nasty things to people in foreign languages. It is not all that unusual to interpret these words which, spoken in English, would be deplorable. Come on, Coach!

8. Vic Braden says he can prove scientifically that players are the worst choice to call lines accurately (moving, bouncing, etc.) My contention is a referee knows pretty soon who is cheating. Should we have a rule to allow a solo chair to take over all line calls on a suspect side, or both sides? Believe me, it would be better than some that we are seeing. We can see, too!

FOR PARENTS

1. Check the college’s websites for rosters and nationality of players.

2. There is an “elephant in the room” of college tennis: They don’t want your kid. Why? An 18-year-old can’t beat a 23-year-old international (other factors being equal).

3. Don’t give money to institutions that don’t support our kids. Tell your alumni and giving buddies the same.

4. Don’t go for the “walk-on” speech. If a coach wants your kid, he will find a scholarship. Otherwise, he has nothing to lose and probably doesn’t think your kid will play. Believe me.

5. “Enron” University is out there. You have to protect your kid.

6. Let the press know your feelings.

7. Check out the “Florida Story” about internationals.

8. Let the coaches know how you feel.

James Michener, in *Sports in America*: “and we do it in the name of education.” What hypocrisy.

COACHING GIRLS AND WOMEN

After open heart surgery, two back surgeries, and a hip replacement, I was beginning to get straightened out (2001).

My good friend Athletic Director Alan White called me into his office,
“Tom, you’re looking much better, and by the way you’re adding the women’s team to your job next fall.”

Good friend, did I say? Actually I’ve taught women or girls all my career. The tennis boom (late ’60s) hit when I first started teaching and in Wilson, North Carolina, alone I taught three generations of girls, women, mammas, and grandmas. But I’d never coached the college women’s team. Thirty-seven years of men’s tennis, now they let me coach the girls. What bothered me wasn’t all I’d observed about the women. (There are some “horror” stories out there). It was coaching two teams at once. I later said you had to have a M.W.A. degree to do it (Management While Wandering Around).

**WOMEN COACHES**

I had watched our previous four women’s coaches enough to know they were good coaches; two were men, two women. Very good people and coaches, and I worked easily with all four. The job just didn’t pay much. So, I was somewhat surprised by the initial response at the returning girls team meeting. Before I said anything, one young lady offered, “we are so glad we now have a man coach.” They all shook their heads in agreement. I didn’t agree and told them so, in my first “coaching” of women. I offered, “You wouldn’t mind a good woman coach. What you don’t want is a poor coach, man or woman.” Many times I’ve heard women say, “I don’t want to work for a woman boss.” I’ve seen too many good women in leadership positions not to object to this logic. Elon University itself has several fine women leaders and two-thirds of its students are women.

**LIMITED?**

It was tough to find adequate coaches in 1960 when there were no women’s collegiate sports. You have to remember women’s collegiate sports as we now know them began, really, only in the ’70s. How could women have the experience men coaches had? They had been denied the formal opportunity of learning by playing. Another overlooked factor were the backyard games boys played in childhood. It irked me to hear “girls can’t serve because they can’t throw.” They couldn’t throw as well as teenaged boys, who’d grown up with baseball and football free play experience. If you think women are anatomically limited in throwing, watch modern women’s tennis, or better still, collegiate women’s softball. Zing!
THE BEST CHOICE

Perhaps a problem harder than experience for women coaches was society itself. Title IX may rule the gym but not the home. Women who coached early on now had three jobs: Teaching, coaching, and running the home. Unless you had a husband willing to help at home it was extremely difficult for these young, often very capable, wives and mothers to coach long. There was a period of time we lost a lot of potentially great women coaches. Many survived. Many men saw the light and began to share the load. All things being equal, women should coach women’s tennis. Until we get to “equal,” I’d rather my granddaughter play for a competent coach, male or female.

THE COURT IS BIGGER

The next “myth” about women tennis players (often posed by men) was, “they should go to the net more.” The men coaches would corner me and tell me “about girls and the net.”

Once, during practice, I brought the women over to observe the men in a drill designed for aggressive approaching and volleying. The women were very courteous.

I then asked the men, “What would you change if this court were five feet wider and five feet longer?”

Immediately one of the guys said, “We couldn’t go to the net as much.”

I ushered the women back to the “girls’ side” and explained, “If you are a little smaller, not quite as quick and maybe not quite as strong, then the court is bigger for you, or for most women. It makes sense not to want to go in as much and that’s okay.”

Later I asked the guys if they’d still go in on a larger court? “Yes, but with more caution.”

There is a situation where you can take a “percentage advantage,” by going to the net and pressuring the other player. You have to design your skills at attacking and learn to identify the proper ball to go in on.

ANSON DORRANCE

Men are from Mars; women are from Venus. How do you identify these differences as far as coaching goes? The best source for a “crash course” on the subject would be to consult Anson Dorrance’s book on the subject. Dorrance, legendary women’s soccer coach at UNC-Chapel Hill, does a clinical job sharing his discoveries. I found one of his first suggestions to
hold truth immediately. You’ve got to give the girls about 20 minutes prior to when practices start to discuss the day. Seriously. This is actually part of practice. And if you view this as a waste of time, you’ll probably witness a lousy practice. Once they “air the day” they’re ready to go. Try it.

**BE YOUR OWN CHOREOGRAPHER**

One personal idea that I tried was the theme: “Be your own choreographer.” I tried to encourage our women to design their own practices based on their needs. For some reason they have trouble with this. Once my assistant Bob Owens had just been hitting ground strokes to one girl after another, corner to corner. Imre Kwast, a Dutch player, came close to me and said, “That’s what the ‘gulls like!” And it’s true, they like to be directed. I banged my head against the wall, trying to encourage them to design their own practices, but “they are different” this way.

**THE EASTER BUNNY**

One day I asked Imre, “Do you have Easter in Holland?”

“Why certainly,” she said, surprised.

“Do you have the Easter Bunny?” I asked.

“Sure,” she giggled, “We have the bunny too.”

I asked the team, “What’s the best thing that could happen to you in an Easter egg hunt?”

Where was this going was the look on their faces.

Finally one girl answered: “If you know where the eggs were hidden it would surely help!”

“Exactly,” I replied. “I’ve watched teams for 40 years, I know where the points are, and I’ll tell you.”

From then on they called me the Easter Bunny. When I’d see them execute a point I’d advised them on, I’d whisper “bunny point.” Other men coaches contended: “They’ll practice all week on something I’ve taught them but come to match time they forget it.” I’d smile to myself every time I got to say “bunny point.”

This test was given to all team members. Richard Dutton always won.

**EASTER BUNNY TEST**

Here are some “hidden points.” Fill out and return. Best papers, men and women, will be rewarded.
The page numbers in parentheses indicate where the question is answered.

Answer in 35 words or less, based on fall practice:

1. “Hone your return” (page 29).
2. “Churn and Burn” (page 88).
3. Seven volley spots (page 87).
4. Use your legs to volley (overhead) (page 87).
5. “Recoil” (page 88).
8. “two and in” (pages 43, 46).
9. “Shank” target (page 85).
10. Going in (pages 46, 89).
11. Backing up (pages 46, 89).
12. Which knee is down on a low backhand volley (right-handers)? The left.) (page 117).
14. “Doubles is a one-two game” (pages 29).
15. “Duties of all four doubles players” (pages 31, 32, 33).
16. Where is the underspin ball best used (which shots)? (pages 29, 36, 58).
20. “Chip and Charge” (page 58).
22. They approach cross court. Your response: (Down the Line) (page 89).
23. “Spot specific” on volleys (too!) (page 56).
24. “The most important ground stroke” (Cross-court backhand if both players are right-handed) (pages 29, 41, 42).
25. Get the return out of “the hole” (page 59).
27. The values of hitting on the rise (pages 57, 58).
29. Don’t change the “line of the ball” (pages 29, 43).
30. Who serves first for us in doubles? (The server who gives our team the best chance to win. This may not be the best server.) (page 59).

* 31. Double faults are: (See answer at bottom of test.)
32. Know when to “pull the trigger.” (See answer at bottom of test.)
33. “The harder they hit it, the …” (easier you swing … pages 21, 88.)
34. “Z” shaped return (pages 90, 117).
35. Compare the “hit spot” for a backhand two-hander to a one-handed backhand slice (pages 23, 86).
36. “Pulling the top spin backhand” (page 56).
37. “Learn the court” and team policy on dropping a questionable ball (page 53).
38. Two rally suggestions: (1. Hit ground strokes off the first bounce only. Second bounce hits are not legal, plus first bounce makes you hustle to the ball and hit some awkward shots. 2. There is no need to hit balls that are out of bounds. Just knock them down, or let them go, and start a new inbounds rally.)
39. Recommended technique on backhand overheads (page 87).
40. High volleys—down and at an angle. Low volleys—straight and deep and they get to hit it one more time (pages 41, 87, 88).

* 31. Double faults are double trouble in doubles

**PULLING THE TRIGGER**

Peter Van Graafeiland was the nicest kid I coached. That’s saying a lot, but Peter is a “sweetheart.” And he did struggle. It’s tough to watch the good kids take a pounding. I finally figured out how to help Pete. He didn’t know “how hard” to hit it when bad judgment led to over hitting, taking unnecessary chances, and “pulling his trigger too quick.” Once we taught PVG how to keep it in play patiently until he got “his shot” he improved quickly. I was delighted. Pete was characteristically grateful. “Don’t pull your trigger until you have your shot” PVG.

**A “BUNNY” FOR MEN**

Once I became better at conveying “movement to the hit spot” my players at all levels got better quickly. And the one-handed slice may be the one most helped by proper “hit spots.” A lot of good college men had forehand trouble because of a subtle flaw in “hit spot.” Whereas backhands are tougher to learn, my guess is many young boys could hit forehands with any number of “hit spots.” Backhands, they internalized early on, must be hit “right there” or in the perfect backhand hit spot. Then as they advanced a ball, they tried to hit in a faulty forehand position let them down and caused a lot of frustration. Once I could convince them of this error and the principle of perfect “forehand hit spot,” they’d get better too.
SOME OBSERVATIONS, SUGGESTIONS, DILEMMAS, AND DRILLS (ON COACHING WOMEN)

First the two big problems: Dress and choosing between two.

As for girls and dress? I only coached girls three years. I’m no closer to having any clue as to how to handle their clothing preferences.

Girls will force you into lose-lose situations. This centers on making you choose between two players.

I quickly found two solutions:

Refer these questions or demands to my noble assistant, Bob Owens. Bob is real sweet and fatherly. I’m not.

Coach Tom Morris pointed his “Lieutenant” out to me.

The Lieutenant was a girl on the team who didn’t put up with “that garbage.” She understands, by nature, how to handle these situations. Find your Lieutenant. The Lieutenant should help you convince them the team is not a “social club.” Team Rule: If anyone catches two girls standing at the net idly talking during challenge matches, they should drop racquets and run for a while. If this continues to be a problem, all girls are forced to join in (running, not talking).

Girls don’t like you to single out one girl for high praise.

Girls really want to learn, and they are appreciative. They will trust you until your suggestions are bogus, or you overcoach them.

My guess is most talented boys and girls have little trouble finding someone to take them under their wing. Most boys’ high school teams find coaches pretty easily. The “limited girl” has few “allies.” That’s why if you are a good coach and try to help them, you may be the first capable person they’ve confronted. That player drinks in everything you say. I usually liked coaching that person.

A NEW DAY

Whenever I stopped the van, the boys always had to get out and buy something. We could just leave a restaurant, stop immediately after feeding the team, and they’d go in to buy a bag of junk. The first road trip I took the girls on featured leaving the lot with little gas in the van. I stopped to fill up and was amazed when they sat patiently, no one hustling out to the candy. They also discussed subjects I hadn’t ever heard the boys mention: When will you marry? How many kids do you want? Boys? Girls? What will your bridesmaids wear? I was fascinated.
THE SILENT CODE

Jack Kramer once said, “the fundamental strategy of singles is to find out what your opponent can’t do, or doesn’t like to do, and make them do that.” That’s a violation of the number one rule of the women’s secret code. Number two is never asking why they can’t wear shorts (balls in the pockets make them look wider—a no no). Number three is never saying “waddle” in reference to women’s tennis.

But the number one rule (I suspect for many women) is, “I won’t make you hit awkward balls (up and back movement) if you won’t make me. Deal, left and right only. This one puzzled me. And I tried to develop Plan B. Simply stated, Plan A, or rallying corner to corner, is okay as long as you can win this way. Once you realize she’s better at this than you, then we’d better modify.

A southern veteran, Bob Cage, showed me his favorite “play.” Bob’s theory was most people don’t have a good backhand approach shot (true of a lot of college men). This is true mainly because it is different and not practiced much at lower levels. Bob’s trick was to float up a semi-disguised weak shot on his opponent’s backhand, which “sucked him up to the net” on a weak shot. Then the “killer lob,” or passing shot. This play, a violation of the “silent code,” was the first I attempted. Moderate success. Women are loyal. The more you can make your opponent move up and back the more you’ll have a Plan B escape.

Mia Hamm and Nomar Garciapara had twin girls. Bet someone’s already recruiting them. They’ll be able to run. If I were a women’s basketball coach, I’d recruit a skinny little girl with three older brothers. That girl can run and is tough. I’ve noticed more and more point guards who can run in women’s basketball. Once again, if American junior tennis is to succeed we have to develop women who can move well and that includes movement up and back. Many already can. Just as a junior girl has to learn to cope with the infamous “moon ball” to her backhand, she needs to confront up and back. No ducking; do the work.

THE COACH’S FAULT?


If the coach teaches you something that’s valuable but you don’t “like it,” is that the coach’s fault?
If the coach teaches you something valuable but you won’t practice it, is that the coach’s fault?

If the coach lets you do something “comfortable,” is that good coaching or a waste of practice time?

If the coach shows you something that will work but you can’t do it, is that the coach’s fault?

The best girls’ teams in our league do the tough things in a match. We can learn these tough things or lose in the spring. We may lose even if we try hard, but isn’t that what it’s about?

GROUND STROKES AND WOMEN

A few comments on ground strokes and women: I was pre-two hander, in 1961. Pancho Segura showed the world how to hit this shot, but conventional wisdom said, “Two-hand backhands are only for those who can’t hit a one-hander.” No Evert, Connors, Borg, Austin…. I’m glad many young ones didn’t listen. Soon the tennis world realized not only can a lot of people hit it two-handed but also it’s often a better shot offensively. The two-hander gave many average players something they’d never had: Offense or topspin on the backhand side. Until the two-hander, college men followed this regimen: They’d practice like heck on hitting a one-handed topspin backhand. Then, when the match was on the line they’d revert to their more trusted underspin backhand ball. There were certainly exceptions, but by and large this statement is true: “Most average college men players can’t hit a reliable one-handed topspin ball.”

Once the two-hander was “certified,” you began to see average high school players who could tattoo a topspin two-hander and the game changed forever, for the better. However, a valuable tool was neglected for many. Coach Jim Verdieck of Redlands gave me one of his business cards. It had an interesting sentence on it: “I didn’t change anything, I gave you a new one.” I asked him what he meant. Essentially, he said the two-handers were so protective of their newfound weapon, the underspin one-hander was abandoned. The underspin one-hand backhand is a tool every truly complete player should possess. Too many awkward and or short shots (approaches, service returns, defensive cross courts) are best hit by one hand under spinners. Often these balls are difficult to handle with two-handed top spin “full” or lengthy shots.

Like golfers, you have to have a lot of “tools” in your bag of tricks. The “chip” or “slice” is truly a great tool to master. Think “wedges,” golfers. And slices are tough for little people, young girls, especially. It’s tough to add once you’ve neglected it in the “formative years.” One reason it’s difficult is
that people don’t understand the value of the “hit spot” regarding two different backhands. The two-handed backhand is much like a one-handed forehand, therefore, it works best when hit off the front foot. One handers must be hit about the width of one’s shoulders in front of the front “balance” foot.

When teaching adult women a hush would come over the group. These strugglers with the backhand would grip the racquet just as I, yet neglect movement to the “hit spot.” Good backhands come from good grips and good “hit spots.” I’d bark: “Good hit spots make good shots. Lousy hit spots make lousy shots. Lousy hit spots make wristy shots, and wristy shots are lousy shots.”

The term “hit spot” is a direct steal from Coach Verdieck. My guess is Dennis Van Deer’s early unique contribution to tennis instruction was teaching pupils to understand the pupil’s adjustment to the bouncing ball. Van Der Meer and Verdieck were friends. Once I became better at conveying “movement to the hit spot” my players at all levels improved quickly. And the one-handed slice may be the one most helped by proper “hit spot.” A lot of good college men had forehand trouble because of a subtle flaw in “hit spot.” Whereas backhands are tougher to learn, my guess is many young boys could hit forehands with any number of “hit spots.” Backhands, they internalized early on, must be hit “right there” or in the perfect backhand hit spot. Then, as they advanced, a ball they tried to hit in a faulty forehand position let them down and caused a lot of frustration. Once I could convince them of this error and the principle of perfect “forehand hit spot,” they’d get better too. Keeping the ball in the perfect “hit spot” is tennis magic.

THE GRADUATED-LENGTH METHOD

“Miniaturizing” the games helps young girls. Mini-tennis, or even quarter-court tennis, teaches early understanding of the importance of movement. A basic pattern I’d used for young stars was essentially:

- Explain with demonstration
- Have them “mimic” or imitate, the shot (air stroke)
- Drop them the ball
- “Mini” toss them the ball
- Back up at their pace; if you lose it, move back in

Someone called it the graduated-length method (GLM). It works with youngsters. Rallying also benefits from this method. Start up close to the net and work back, controlling the ball. If you lose control, move back in where you can control it.
TWO MAGIC TEACHING SPOTS FOR YOUNGER GIRLS

Toss the ball to the service hit spot for them. Let them cock the racquet and just hit. Once they understand and feel the proper service hit spot, then they can add the other first part of the serve (or the toss to the hit spot).

I taught a lesson called “Learn the second serve first.” Simply stated, a player is as strong as her weakest link, and the weakest link in tennis is the second serve. The clue is Welby Van Horn’s balance technique. I call it the “hit-turn” serve and it came from limited foot movement. It’s also called a ballistic swing and baseballers, golfers, and all “hitters” use this technique. Van Horn is worth studying, and I appreciated the personal help he gave me.

WHY, I WONDER?

One phenomenal contrast I noticed coaching girls centered on two entirely different shots. I could hammer a ground stroke hard and wide and was amazed at them running this tough shot down. Seriously, watch them do this. Impressive ability. Then at the net in doubles, they’d blow a sitter overhead. Why I don’t know, but we practiced a lot on easy overhands in doubles, and closing on easy volleys. I taught, “volley with your legs,” meaning to use quick movement to get the volley where you can pop it down. The girls got better here. And when they limit their foot movement on easy overheads, they keep the overhead in the perfect service hit spot and watch it a little longer than you think is necessary. (See pages 18 and 19)

VOLLEY REMINDERS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

I taught the girls there was not “a volley” but about seven (high forehand, low forehand, high backhand, low backhand, overheads on either side, and instinct volleys, or those hit fast and straight at your belly button). Once they understood that movement could turn a low volley into a much more preferred high volley, they improved. Low volleys you hit straight and deep, and your opponent gets to hit it again. High volleys can be hit down and at an angle, aggressively.

Another odd ability girls have centered on their overheads. I taught for years to run around the backhand overhead and hit a forehand. Backhand overheads are tough. Most players should just bump them back, straight and deep. Badminton players and some talented tennis players can hit aggressive backhand overhead winners. Most college men can’t. What college women can do that surprised me was to hit a shoulder-high,
two-handed semi-overhead. They’d taught themselves this. It worked and I encouraged it.

All volleyers should keep the volley in one of the seven hit spots. Only one male player I coached could stand and hit it any way it came. He had 1,000 hit spots and could hit them all.

**TOUCH AND TIGHTEN, CHURN AND BURN, RECOIL AND FLOATERS**

Volleyers are taught to punch, or block, the ball. I preferred to teach them to “touch” the ball. Get it in a volley spot and touch it. The harder they hit it, the easier you swing. I also added, tighten to the instruction (“touch and tighten”). Volleyers can direct the ball out of good hands. Most of this action comes from a good volley spot and just tightening the hand muscles (or synergistic hand muscles). Other volleying buzzwords were recoil and churn and burn. Once you’ve hit the volley, get back (recoil) to the proper ready position. Hit, recoil, hit, and recoil. The better you get the faster it comes back, and more often. Churn and burn means moving your body to adjust to an awkward volley spot. By churning and burning you can relocate a ball even slightly out of the hit spot to the perfect volley spot. This really helps, especially on easy ones. “Bend to the proper posture.” Even if it’s slightly!

I used this sentence a lot in volley instructions:

“Easy shots are the hard shots at the net. Be ready quick, and watch the ball longer than you think is necessary.”

**THE CRAZY LADY SLAP**

I taught the girls a shot in doubles called “the crazy lady slap.” The theme was, “it doesn’t have to be pretty, just slap it.” In practice we’d serve up a high ball across the net and encourage the girls to make the ugliest shot they could. Lots of laughs in practice. Lots of “bunny points” in doubles. They’d giggle.

**UNWEIGHT**

I’d never heard the term “unweight before the service return” before going to Kansas City. I watched a kid (no idea now who he was) jump about a foot off the ground before receiving serve. Exaggerated, probably a useless “vertical jump,” but it was the moment I realized, “Hey, I’m not teaching that correctly.”

To this day I watch many returners stand flat-footed before the serve.
Pros often still don’t teach the “left, right, split, and hop” technique, essential for quickness on the return. Yet all good players do it, most having learned on their own, out of necessity.

Borg “unweighted” after every ground stroke. Women do this better than men.

One of the things I learned watching Chris Evert at 15 years old in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, was that a good early backswing made one quicker. I don’t know why, but it’s true.

**DRILLS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN**

Let me repeat. There are some tough spots girls don’t like to practice. While I preferred they choreograph these tough practices on their own, trusty assistant Bob and I ran these particular drills a lot:

**Cross court and back up.** If you are hit an awkward ball or purposeful drop shot, and you don’t want to come to the net, your best response is to cross court the ball and back up. We’d set this ball up, the player digs in, cross courts the ball, then scampers back to the baseline. (Bend your back knee down to get the low ones).

**Drop shot off a drop shot.** Set up a good drop shot and have her respond with her own drop shot. (Mostly down the line.)

**Bump volleys.** There are a lot of passing shots that can be handled with a simple bump away from the passer. Teach your girls not to panic on this easy ball. Just bump or touch it away from this source.

**Backhand service returns.** The coach hits from the “T” or mid-court, directing the ball at the backhand of the player. Work on technique, quickness, and target. As they progress, pick up the pace on your serve, vary the types and direction of your practice serves. Encourage returning on the rise or aggressively moving in.

**Hitting on the rise.** The better the player, the more balls she’ll be able to take “on the rise.” Some don’t understand this tactic or technique. Some avoid it because “it’s hard to do.” Start with slower balls; adjust to their successes.

**SERVICE RETURNS**

Next to net play, the service return requires the most quickness. Good players “unweight” or bounce slightly to ready themselves.

You have to get wide, get low, and get ready. The first part of quick is ready!
In college doubles returns are the shots that get the service break. College kids “go for it,” almost a wide open hit. Don’t move back…move in. And if you move wide first, try to bring your weight back to the target. (A “Z” shaped movement.)

Often a chip shot or lob is a quality shot. Keep in mind the “tough and tighten” return. (See Wimbledon 2014) and “Danny and the Forehand Chip” (page 59).

My wife was great at helping me with the women, though she’s much tougher than I was. I must admit that not having a daughter I missed the true nature of young women. I’m convinced women are better people than men, by and large, and I am grateful for the three years with some wonderful student athletes.

There are some different issues you have to be aware of. Eating disorders are serious and much more of an issue for women. Don’t take these problems too lightly (no pun intended).

Sexuality in sports is a growing issue. Bigger, stronger, faster, tougher athletes win. Most of these are heterosexual in men’s tennis. There are a lot of great women’s athletes and people of all orientations.

THE BASIC STRATEGY OF TENNIS

I once asked a great college tennis coach, Jim Verdieck, what would happen to his tennis knowledge if he died. He responded, “If I die, it dies.” Consequently, I would like to share the knowledge I’ve compiled about tennis freely on my blog. The subjects covered will include singles and doubles strategy, coaching instruction, and insights from 40 years of coaching alongside Dennis Van der Meer, Welby Van Horn, Chet and Bill Murphy, Jim Verdieck, and my mentor, Jim Leighton.

I’d like to start with the basic strategy of tennis, based on Wayne Sabin’s singles strategy.

1. **Keep it in.** Beat your opponent with concentration, hustle, and steadiness.
2. **Find a weakness.** Most often your opponent’s backhand will be their weaker side.
3. **Keep it deep.** Your objective is to move your opponent from side to side.
4. **Attack short balls.** Learn to hit accurate approach shots from inside the baseline.
5. **Volley away from the source.**
Four of five points are determined by unforced errors not by great shots. The next best thing to an error is a short ball from your opponent. The short ball is the green light to attack. You transfer yourself from a baseline defensive player to an at-net offensive player with an approach shot. Approach shots are most often an underspin shot and should be directed down the line and/or at your opponent’s weakness. Close in on the net, and bisect the angle of your opponent’s best two passing shots. Volley away from your opponent toward the open court. A deep, aggressive approach shot often results in an easy volley. Practice your approach shots (and your passing shots).

**figure 7**

**TENNIS TACTICS: THE CIRCLE STINGER**

Here are a few observations of singles tennis strategy, some conventional and some new. Strategy can be defined simply as how you plan to win. Great teachers deliver memorable sound bites. Dennis Van Der Meer: “attack the short ball.” Jim Verdieck: “get in a position to volley away...”
from the source.” A successful high school coach once told me, “Hit it at his backhand and go to the net.” Jack Kramer boiled it down to “Find out what your opponent can’t do and make him do that.”

Tactics are the tools you use to implement your strategy. Coach Jim Leighton defined the “basic unit of play” as: the approach shot, the passing shot, and the first volley.

In Leighton’s book Inside Tennis, Techniques of Winning, Coach Leighton pointed to Wayne Sabin’s *ABC’s of Tennis Strategy*:

- Hit it in
- Hit it deep
- Hit it to your opponent’s weakness
- Move your opponent side to side

While there is truth to the old suggestion of staying out of “no-man’s land” on a tennis court, mid-court shots (approach shots, service returns, balls hit on the rise…) must be mastered. These shots establish an aggressive court position. Given two right-handed players, Leighton and Sabin suggest a firm approach down the line at the weaker backhand. This is intended to force a weak passing shot to be volleyed to the opposite corner.

One of nine players is left-handed. The two-handed backhand is often your opponent’s better passing shot. Differing opponents dictate different approaches, as do your own abilities. However, there is a common thread in all of these suggestions—tennis players are statistically vulnerable to firm attacks on their backhand.

The success of the Spanish players, most notably Rafa Nadal, is reason to examine a new version of a conventional attacking approach shot. Witness the wear of the grass at Wimbledon. No longer is there a serve-volley alley of brown on the court. There is a new pattern of wear. There is a circle of wear just inside the baseline that indicates a shift in post-service attack.
Once the server serves, he takes an extra step into the court. Not to serve and volley, but to establish an aggressive position inside “the Circle.” What is hoped for is a defensive return. A shortened whipping, topspin ball taken inside the baseline can put more pressure on the opponent than the conventional, underspun approach shot. The modern player’s ability to hit on the rise has created a new game.

A trump card, based on this idea, is the shot Nadal uses so effectively against Roger Federer. Nadal’s shortened, topspin, cross-court attack from the Circle on Federer’s backhand is an effective tactic. As great as Federer is, the relentless pressure from Nadal’s stinger from the Circle eventually yields unforced errors, a short ball, or an open court.
An on-the-rise approach from within the Circle can produce more pressure than a volley from behind a serve, or a traditional underspin approach shot. The reason, of course, is that most volleys and approach shots are underspun and lack the speed of an aggressive, stinging, topspin attack.

What about right-handers and the Circle? The answer is the inside-out forehand, turning three-fourths or more of the court into forehands. Running around your backhand is nothing new. While some frown on it, given a much better forehand than backhand many players use their footwork to turn marginal backhands into more potent forehands. The most effective of these forehands are hit from within the Circle.
One may argue that a forehand from the Circle leaves one vulnerable to the down-the-line passing shot, and that’s true. It’s much like the left hander’s hooking serve to the right hander in the “add” court. When McEnroe leftied his hooking serve there, only a few players, including Bjorn Borg, had an ability to pass him, threading the needle to a very difficult down the line spot to hit. But the percentages were in McEnroe’s favor, as the percentages favor the stinging pressure of the Circle attack. (the Circle in figure 10 is marked as lighter green, in front of number 1.)
There seems to be a battle for position in The Circle in many of today’s strategies. If a good coach teaches a player to implement the Circle tactic, they should also teach how to defend it. Deep, well-hit service returns can force the attacker back. Ground strokes are now required to be heavier and deeper. These shots run the opponent out of the Circle and now you have a chance, with better ground strokes and returns, to get yourself in the Circle, thus turning defense into offense.

So, you now have some more shots to perfect: The Circle attacking shots and the inside-out forehand from the backhand side. Remember you have to have good leg and footwork to do this, and you must hit more balls on the rise. Your goal is the Circle Stinger, which now has the advantage of being cross court and at the backhand.
A few more tactics:

Even pros should play more balls cross court. Cross-court balls are safer. Hit one more cross-court ball before you try a counterpunching, two-handed backhand down the line. It is more difficult to change the direction of the ball from a timing perspective. Those backhands are often late, sliding wide off the sideline. Watch for yourself and you’ll believe.

As Yogi Berra has said, “You can observe a lot by watching.” I spent another great week at the U.S. Open. Even against the world’s best approach shots, passing shots hit soft enough on an angle create errors or vulnerable volleys.
And while conventional wisdom says don’t drop shot on a hard court, Federer, Nadal, Verdasco, and other top professionals now use a forehand drop shot, hit with disguise from the Circle to the open court of any surface. Once you establish the dominance of the Circle Stinger, this shot becomes another weapon. It takes great touch and a lot of practice.
Women and junior girls should develop use of the short corners on your opponent’s court. If I had any advice to young girl players, it would be to make your opponent move up and back. Most girls don’t practice these shots enough. Learn how to move up and back yourself. Practice the footwork and force your opponents to prove they’ve done the same work.

The week before the U.S. Open, Mardy Fish beat Andy Roddick in a memorable match in Cincinnati. Mardy played excellent defense with a cross-court, looping, forehand flop shot. When an attacker with Roddick’s strength is hitting a forehand so well, the flop is effective, yielding fewer mistakes. You can’t out hit some players’ best shots. A deep, looping topspin cross-court ball can’t be easily attacked. Great players like Fish, or Gael Monfils, swing the racquet head at different speeds. They don’t pull the trigger until they’re in the Circle and ready to fire. Be patient.
The hardest time to play is when you are ahead. I watched a top 10 men’s player get up 30–0, 40–0, or 40–15 in several key games. But he didn’t play those points tough and eventually lost the games. Don’t play loose points when ahead. And don’t play loose games when up a service break. When you do, pressure shifts from them to you. Stay hungry when you’re ahead.

A closing thought:

The point penalty system and cyclops line-calling machines have helped control the poor sportsmanship that once damaged the reputation of tennis as a ladies’ and gentlemen’s sport. Innovation in the rules and technology have returned respect to the game. These are positive changes for a great game that is still evolving strategically and is as fun to watch as it has ever been. Let’s not move back in the other direction.
THE NEXT LEVEL OF MEN’S TENNIS

Novak Djokovic’s win over Rafa Nadal in the 2011 Men’s U.S. Open showed tennis fans a new level of play in the history of the sport. I’ve discussed Nadal’s Circle strategy to defeat Federer and the rest of the men’s tour consistently. But Djokovic has taken the baseline game to a new level. He has perfected deep, heavy shots that keep Rafa out of his Circle. Djokovic and his team have engineered their rise to the top of the men’s game much like Andre Agassi’s team did. A rigorous fitness regimen and diet have amplified his natural counter-punching style, and he is returning serves and hitting passing shots as effectively as any player ever. I can’t remember a Grand Slam final (grass, hard, or indoor) where the first service percentage carried almost no statistical advantage. Neither Nadal nor Djokovic benefited from their normally deadly first serves. It makes you wonder if Pete Sampras could have held service while serve and volleying against Djokovic.

This also makes me wonder about the upward evolution of the game and who will achieve the next level.

Djokovic has almost perfected corner-to-corner baseline strategy. Another thing that he seems to be getting better at is the drop shot. The old adage that you can’t drop shot on a hard court is being tested more at the top level. There are four corners on each side of the court. Two are up at the net. The only player I have seen who could hit an unreturnable drop shot from the baseline was Charlie Owens. Many watched Charlie dismantle quality players with a disguised, featherlike drop shot that confounded even great players. Maybe there is someone coming along with this unique touch, who combined with the other tennis skills needed will produce the next level in the never ending evolution of tennis. Women players might be well advised to note this possibility. And to be aware that not only should she be able to hit drop shots, she must be able to defend against them. My guess is that many players and teachers have realized there are four corners on each side of a tennis court.
I watched the Wimbledon men’s single semi finals. If you go to these three strategy articles in review, I think you will find I was pretty close: basic tennis strategy, The Circle Stinger, and Rafa vs. the Joker. In the latter, I predicted this season would feature a lot more drop shots (Andy Murray vs. Baghdadis, for example). To follow up, or evolve, as a teacher-coach, it then seems we must learn defense against the drop shot. In addition to the basic strokes of tennis there are auxiliary shots (returns, approaches, passing shots…) with different techniques to be mastered. Drop shots are one of these now more than ever. There are also unlimited awkward shots in tennis (for example, a backhand overhead, or running down a shanked shot). These shots, including defending against drop shots, must be identified, the proper techniques practiced, and implementation mastered. Please remember, players and parents, that this isn’t easy work. Don’t abandon the insightful pro who pushes this mastery for a guy who simply moves you left and right. And don’t worry about how you get to a good drop shot. No one has done that gracefully.

Wimbledon 2015: “How Does Anyone Beat Serena?”

Answer: It takes a player as good as Serena but who also has a great drop shot.

And how to beat that player? Serena with a drop shot and also very good defense against the drop shot.

Tennis evolves.

STILL LEARNING

In The Little Green Book of Tennis, I have tried, as Mr. Penick stated he tried, to give the best of the best information: what worked and was time honored, helpful coaching. Mr. Leighton got me started. Practical experience gathered through 40 years of coaching and observing college tennis, and in particular small college tennis, was a strong influence. Jim
Verdieck was a heck of a role model for me and many others.

I hope to keep learning and advise others to do the same.

From *Play Is Where Life Is*: Coach Verdieck told me that three times he had lights approved for the university courts. Somehow the school procrastinated every time they said yes. Later he found out that when he’d tell his wife the lights were to be installed, she nixed the deal. She simply went to the administrators said, “If you put lights up, he’ll stay there all night, and I’ll leave him.”

His roster included 24 players—a very large team. Not only that, each week every player in the top eight had an hour private lesson with Verdieck. Sixteen remaining players got a half hour per week with him. This, in addition to team responsibilities. Upon learning he’d retired at age 65, I called to congratulate him. He was within 60 or so wins of 1,000 wins. No one else is close. “Did you consider staying until you break that barrier,” was one of my questions. “No, I promised my wife if I got to 65 I’d stop. A deal’s a deal.” Though he quit coaching he couldn’t give up teaching. I asked Coach Verdieck early on if he knew Dennis Van Der Meer? Not only is Van Der Meer the world’s most prolific tennis teacher, he was close to my mentor, Jim Leighton. Verdieck said, “Know Dennis”? I taught him ninety percent of what he knows!”

When I asked Coach Leighton if he knew Coach Verdieck, he said no. I told him of the Verdieck comment about Dennis Van Der Meer. Leighton was appalled, and said he intended to ask Dennis about that! A couple of years went by and I asked Leighton if he’d asked about Verdieck. Leighton admitted that Dennis had responded, “Yes, that’s probably about right.”

In retirement Verdieck worked with Dennis at Sweet Briar College, in the mountains of Virginia. I called Coach Verdieck and asked if I could hire him. “What for?” he asked. I told him I wanted to know more about coaching, and that he was one who knew more than I did. Still not convinced, he said his knees had gotten so bad he couldn’t move enough to hit many balls. I replied, “Coach, I just want to talk with you.” He contended he didn’t talk much but to come on and we’d probably be done in 30 minutes. My wife went with me and waited patiently for three-and-a-half hours. “Tom, we have to set the babysitter free at 8:00 PM.

You’re never too old to learn, and I learned a lot that day.

When I became director of athletics the first thing I did was book an hour with five different athletic directors I admired.
This book draws on materials gathered over the past 40 years. The early writings came from pre-1984. The following are comments on changes in the game, some written in 2007, some in 2015.

2007 Observations from *Play Is Where Life Is*:

Time moves on. What has changed from the 1980s up until now in the tennis world? Certainly some “physical” improvements have affected racquets. So much power generated with such ease. There’s more night play. Lights are better, courts are better, and surfaces are improved. Television continues to “spread the game.” Instruction is better. College coaches are now better paid and better informed. Prize money, and more scholarships for Americans and internationals, has recruited athletes who now “pick tennis first.” These people are not people who “couldn’t play anything else.” And they are bigger, stronger, faster. They train, their diets are better, weights commonly are used … There has been a positive change in the governance of matches. The point penalty system cleaned up behavior problems. College refereeing is better, and they use more refs. Still two people can’t officiate six (or more contests). Pro players are less likely to drink to excess now. “Rounders” or “tennis bums” have been “weeded out.” Indoor facilities have leveled the playing field. Now many people, particularly young people, can play year round, not just in the “weather-blessed” areas. When you don’t stop all year long, your “tennis education” grows exponentially (no “re-learning” time needed, or wasted.) One contrast with football and basketball is related to size. Soon there will be a 400-pound, 6’9” football left tackle who is also quick (read *The Blind Side*) or a basketball player who can dunk himself. Tennis and golf professionals still haven’t produced a dominating 6’7” superstar. Perhaps height produces more possibility for error in “lengthy shots.” Who knows, but “average-sized” people still have a chance in championship tennis. (You do need a “big heart.”) Another factor in American tennis can’t be overlooked: the role of parents. Connors (mother), McEnroe (father), Evert (father), Agassi (father and brother), and the Williams’ sisters, are ample proof that the tremendous role of parents in the development of championship-level American players. Mr. Williams certainly gets the award for “out of the box” results. To train one child to be number one in the world is amazing but number one and number two at the same time is unprecedented. And done without normal routes of American junior play and USTA super support says a lot. I was disappointed by the way the Williams sisters were often treated by many in American tennis. They were extremely good sports, as evidenced repeatedly. America was well served by Venus and Serena. Tennis too. The effectiveness of western grip forehands, like two-handed backhands, has been truly “certified” by numerous players. I would still encourage young
players to add (“I didn’t change anything, I gave you a new one”—Jim Verdieck) a backhand underspin ball. It is a “tool” worthy of learning the grip change from western to continental, needed to hit this valuable shot. If there were one other obvious suggestion it would be to observe how many forehands are now hit with “open” stances. Many “purists” of my day would straighten up that front lead foot. I think the racquets aid young players here, but the “western gripped—open stance—sling-shot forehand” stands on its own feet (one quite “open”). All players now have access to what the great players of the later 20th century taught tennis. Here are some examples (in addition to two-handed backhands and open stance forehands): Bjorn Borg. I think long taught the world to “hit it as hard as you can.” And he hit it in! It could be done. Topspin helped! (“I may hit long, I may hit wide, but I won’t hit into the net.”) Pete Sampras: Serve and volley with the same philosophy as Borg’s ground-stroke attitude. If you hit it as hard as you can you eliminate a lot of judgment errors based on “how hard to hit when?” (“Grip it and rip it”—John Daly.) Martina Navratilova and Billie Jean King: Women can play the all-court game. All things being equal ground stroke wise, those who can attack also will win. There were at least two other contributions that are “must mentions.” Andre Agassi: Took ground strokes and the value of conditioning to a whole new level late in his career. Becoming extremely fit, Agassi had a period of time he ruled tennis by running opponents into oblivion with the simplest of strategies: Hit it hard as hell into alternate corners (with few errors) until the other guy was “spent” physically. That truly was impressive. No one had done this as well as Andre. All made contributions, but none more so than the overall ability of Roger Federer and the ease with which he executes all of it. Perhaps no other player has had more “total” ability than Federer. His talent is staggering. Would he be the same were it not for the lessons of Borg, Sampras, Laver, Agassi, Martina, and Evert? Is he the best ever? I can’t say. What I suspect is there are youngsters watching, learning, and practicing to take it all to a new, and perhaps unknown, “new level.”

Watching tennis is going to continue to be exciting. Bet on it!

**TENNIS 2015**

Someone said “a short pencil is better than a long memory!” One of the first things I noticed about Coach Verdieck was that he constantly was taking notes during his players’ matches. Most tennis coaches at that time just wandered around (we couldn’t talk to our players during the match then) and socialized. Not Verdieck.

Technology is changing everything today. We didn’t have metal racquets
to begin with. Jim didn’t have a ball hopper, but a big red bag full of balls. One year his team lost by one point, because one of his players missed a high forehand volley. As we began to exit the courts I noticed Verdieck walking with that young man to a court farthest away carrying the red bag of balls. Intrigued, I told our players to watch as Coach Verdieck dutifully set up practice shots like the volley just missed. “Every match is preparation for another match.”

Racquets have changed the game. And strings. Who knows what technology holds but I doubt if anything will be much more helpful than a good coach.

The racquets allow shorter, more compact shots, and this is helpful particularly with mid-court shots (doubles, service returns, approach shots, volleys).

One negative with racquet technology is that the added pace they yield causes the player to have to move more quickly, more often, more awkwardly; thus causing more injury. Therefore, the role of conditioning and the necessity for good trainers and rehab have exploded.

Parity, too, caused much more intense effort at the elite levels (junior champions, college players, and certainly at the professional level).

We used to stress accuracy first, power later. I’m not sure it’s bad advice now to train talented kids to hit it hard, hit for the lines, and damn the torpedoes.

If I taught a 2015 talented youngster I might suggest:

• Use a western grip for all deep forehand shots
• Use the backhand to continental grip(s) for every other shot. It is the most versatile and functional grip.
• You must change your western forehand to this universal grip to volley, hit most forehand approach shots, and short, low forehands.
• See “Danny and the Forehand Chip Return”

I would emphasize hitting on the rise for all good players and more so for the talented ones. Why?

• It takes court away from your opponent
• It puts pressure on your opponents
• It creates lousy hit spots that yield errors or weak returns
• It takes away big shots that your opponent has hit
• It gets you to the net
• It is your only good option against most high-quality shots. Particularly services.
My teams would practice inside-the-lines games (or you rally or volley only from inside the court). If you step outside (deep or wide) the boundaries, you lose the point. Play to “21.” I put five in play on a bounce hit, then you get five. Everything then—inside the lines only. (Hint—you can volley!)

I would emphasize Coach Verdieck’s “two and in” attack. He marked a square from the baseline corner. Two steps in from the baseline and two steps in from the sideline. As you rally practice, come to the net if your sound ground shot will land in this deep square. He also marked a second smaller square inside the first (one step in from each line). Come in on any shot that will land that deep.

This is another way to attack, rather than an approach shot. Note: This creates an odd angle to come in on, and you must also practice this unusual position when you decide to two and in. It works!

No question that ground strokes are becoming more open and wristy, rolling the wrist and elbow over during the hit zone work (just not too soon or loosely). Borg was the evidence for the new forehand, but he had a lot of respect for the moment of hit and the six-ball hit zone. Then let it fly!

Some teachers had a tough time watching this evolution. Maybe we learned each has their own way. Let them make choices when things are fifty-fifty.

I watched one of Coach Leighton’s varsity players use a forehand that violated much of Leighton’s fundamental thought. I asked, Are you gonna let him keep playing that way? He simply said, “Watch him hit it!” Boom, boom, boom! Then coach said, “if a flaw works don’t change it.”

Michael Jordan explained that he shot with his tongue out because that’s the way his dad worked on his car, a mannerism that doesn’t bother anything.

I classified players this way:

- “Look bad, play bad.”
- “Look good, play bad.”
- “Look bad, play good.”
- “Look good, play good.”

Brad Gilbert was talking about number three in “Winning Ugly.” They will fool you! Number two will too.

For professional men the 2007–2014 period belonged to a great group (Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, Rafa Nadal, Andy Murray.) Great role models with individual styles and strategies.

Who would have predicted the U.S. Open 2014 Men’s Final (Marin Cilic vs. Kei Nishikori)?
Much changes, much stays the same. Please keep the learning going. Be adaptable, but again, don’t neglect history and the fine teachers like Harvey Penick, Jim Leighton, and Jim Verdieck.

**SHORT AND SWEET**

Coach Eddie Robinson of Grambling University died on an April day (2007), network news revealed. Coach Robinson was quoted on national TV saying, “I didn’t want to win the game, I wanted to win the guy.” I choked up at these words, and so did Charlie Gibson who narrated the report.

Paul Bear Bryant was to lecture at East Carolina University. I went with the football staff at Fike High School. One of them asked me why. I said, “He’s a great coach.” And I remember the Bear saying, “If you want to be a coach, get in a league you can win in,” and “Coaching is only for those who can’t live without it.” Coach Bryant was asked what he liked best about coaching? He stated: “Hearing them singing in the shower after they won.”

“Sports are for fun. You use them, don’t let them use you.”

I had this major team rule: “No drunks, no illegal drugs, and no bums.” A fellow coach asked about “bums.” I told him, “You’ll know them.”

Perhaps one of the biggest errors I see young coaches make is recruiting some borderline jerk who is talented. Eventually that kid throws the team and the coach “under the bus.” Don’t bet on that guy, Coach! Get some good people. You’ll win your share and have a fair chance of staying sane in the crazy world of athletics.

“Be nice to people you beat badly.”

I told several players: “I’m not your parent. Your parent can’t fire you. I can. Once you elect to come here, you behave yourself. You can elect to leave, but while here, you behave yourself.”

There have been any number of college freshmen who get in trouble right out of the family car.

Every match is preparation for another match.

“Toss to your swing, don’t swing at your toss.”

The weakest link in tennis is the second serve.

“Ninety-five percent of the time something is wrong.”

“The harder they hit it, the easier you swing.”

“Tennis is a defensive game and underpin is defense.”

“I may hit it long, I may hit it wide, but I won’t hit it in the net”. –Borg
Of all the things that got kids in trouble, beer drinking and conversation in the dorm were the top two. There is always someone willing to shoot the breeze. Get out of the dorm and into the library at night. Many schools require study hall for freshmen. My experience is that self-discipline is more effective.

College tennis and beer drinking have a past. And it includes some coaches who drank on the road, and some who drank with their players. Parents need to be aware of who is driving the van.

Dr. Leroy Walker spoke at Elon. Two pieces of his advice: “God gave you two ends. Whether you are to be successful or not depends on which one you use.” And “Live everyday like it is your last. One day you’ll be right.”

Henry Trevathan’s pregame speech to his Fike High School team: “Gentlemen, football is the greatest game ever invented by mankind. And you get to play it tonight.”

COACH DON SKAKLE

Before Anson Dorrance there was no one close to Don Skakle, men’s tennis coach, as far as winning at Carolina. Throngs of students would crowd the bleachers, transferred from Woolen Gym to the Cobb dormitory courts for spring afternoon matches. Coach Skakle’s teams won 19 out of 22 ACC Championships. The remarkable thing is the fact that he only lost a total of four or five conference matches, so many of them being close 5–4 matches.

Once a guy questioned a line call the late Bill Bootright made, saying that ball “hit the line.” Boots said, “It hit the ba, ba, big green line, in ba ba-tween the white line and the fa fa fence.”

TWO FRIENDS YOU NEED TO HAVE

Every player and team needs two allies: Funding and publicity. Most communities have people who, for whatever reason, want to help. One help you’ll need is money, and there are people who are good at raising and donating money, services, and equipment. While there are guidelines for proper fundraising, once you know the right way to find and accept help, some extra effort on you and your team’s part will yield the aid you may be missing.

You and your players and teams will also benefit from good public relations. Often the key is the media. Schools have sports information directors (the S.I.D.). A good working relationship here often results in the public being aware of your team and its efforts. Youngsters like publicity.
Most people do. Publicity encourages and inspires the very young to select tennis as a worthy pursuit. You have to do your part. Make rosters, team, and individual information available in a timely fashion. Scores reported, win or lose, are fundamental. The two men below are personal examples of two friends who were of immense help to our teams.

THE BIKE RIDE

They got to fly on a plane. There was a great banquet with good support from the NAIA staff, college volunteers, and the people of Kansas City. Our kids were taken in by our honorary coaches, a program that used volunteer townspeople to help out. Joanie and Bob Mullet drew our team, lucky for us. Once you had hosted a team you could be reunited by choice at the next year’s tournament. My sidekick Russell made note of a big hill. Russell had been born with a hip problem. He couldn’t run on it, and it limited his ability to exercise. This was one of life’s cruelties, because Russell really loved sports. His limitation caused a weight problem. He was a big boy. Later he went from 320 pounds to 180 pounds. One of my true joys was watching him conquer obesity. He did love to eat. As we exited one all-you-can-eat buffet the Kansas City proprietor whispered to Russell, “Sir, it’s okay if you don’t come back.” I was puzzled one year at the pre-tournament picnic the Mullets hosted in their home. After the meal Russell asked Mr. Mullett if he could borrow his bicycle. “Sure,” Bob said. “And your station wagon.” Puzzled but courteous, Bob agreed again. “Come on coach,” Russell enthused. The hill was a constant decline for about three miles. Russell sent me to the bottom of the hill. He then glided all the way down the winding road to me and the wagon. We put the bike in the wagon and drove uphill to the Mulletts. It was his first long bike ride. In the near future, sans about 140 pounds he rode his bike from Wilson to Morehead City, over 100 miles.

THE WRESTLING MATCH

Need a favor—call Buddy Bedgood. Fundraising? Buddy’s your guy.

I had tried to raise money and promote tennis in the late ’70s. We put on an indoor tennis match in the college gym and brought in pro tennis
exhibitions: Tim Wilkison, Bob Lutz, Marty Reissen, Erik Van Dillen, Tom Gorman among many other players in our little gym. It was packed and great fun, but there was no profit. After paying the players, we barely scratched. People wanted to keep doing it, but it was work. Buddy didn’t know me very well. He knew little about tennis, but he called me to his office. “Want to make some money for your team?” Tired of working all Christmas holidays for a $250 or less profit? I said yes easily. How and when?

“Wrestling match, three weeks,” Buddy said.

“What do I do?”

“Nothing, call me in a week.”

In a week I began to see pastel tinted signs on telephone poles around the town: “Black Jack” Mulligan and crew were coming to Fleming Stadium in two weeks. Limited seating. I wanted to know what was involved, willing to help, and for my team to help. Buddy said to get some change and about five kids to sell drinks and other concessions. That’s all? Yep. On the spring night of the event I arrived at the ballpark ready to go. I thought I was early (two hours before the 7:00 PM start). Buddy beat me in the locked gates. The gates were locked because the rednecks were lined up everywhere. The gates opened and they filed in. In moments the stands were full. The concession stand was hopping. I’d never seen my kids move so fast. The police milled around with some anxiety. At 7:00 the eye of the storm hit. Nothing, absolute quiet. Buddy said, “You and your guys can go in now, nobody will leave while they’re ‘rasslin.” But as I entered there was a foul mood in the air. Nothing was happening and the crowd was restless.

I noticed the stereotypical bib-overalled, tobacco-chewing fan. His John Deere green hat was on sideways. I asked “why aren’t they wrestling, its 7:05?”

He spat tobacco juice in front of me and revealed a cardinal rule: “They won’t rassle air until there’s a cop at every post.” A fourth cop walked up to the empty corner, and teeth, hair, and chairs started flying.

Buddy gave me a check for $2,500, half the profit. The other $2,500 went to the football stadium fund.
APPENDIX A: ON INTERNATIONALS IN AMERICAN COLLEGE TENNIS

The appendix houses some literature I wrote from the 1970s until I retired. Those interested may want to read this personal history.

I watched John and Patrick McEnroe discuss the current dearth of talent on the Bryant Gumbel HBO Special (*Real Sports*). And in fact our top results in the 2014 U.S. Open Championships in New York were clearly unimpressive. John Isner made the second round. No other American made the third round, when you have to win seven rounds to win the singles title.

Another factor American tennis can’t overlook: The role of parents. Connors (mother), McEnroe (father), Evert (father), Agassi (father, brother), and the Williams’ sisters, are ample proof that the tremendous role of parents in the development of championship-level American players.

Mr. Williams certainly gets the award for out-of-the-box results. To train one child to be number one in the world is amazing, but number 1 and number two at the same time is unprecedented. And done without normal routes of American Junior play and USTA super support says a lot. I was disappointed by the way the Williams sisters were often treated by many in American tennis.

They were extremely good sports, as evidenced repeatedly. America was well-served by Venus and Serena. Tennis too.

MADE IN THE U.S.A.

I was a small college tennis coach most of my career. In the 1970s, international players took over college tennis and the scholarships awarded for tennis. It started with the small college men, spread to small college women, and then on to NCAA Division 1 men and women. There was a lot of discussion about this issue. Those favoring the argument for limiting foreign scholarships lost, myself included. Forty years hence, observing a progressive downward spiral of American’s professional tennis rankings, I wonder if there is a connection between the two. Did American families, parents, and players, realizing the drastic change in supply of college tennis scholarships, redirected would-be top players? The financial commitment that’s needed to produce a world-class player is staggering. Those who commit have only two possible financial paybacks: the rare professional success or a college scholarship. Eliminate scholarship likelihood, and the bet is questionable at best. Shouldn’t American tennis organizations support parents in their commitment?
College tennis scholarships (or the lack thereof) send a powerful message in the United States. If it is in the best interest of American organizations, a reservation of college scholarships for Americans seems to be a start. Note that I am not unaware, or unappreciative, of the many fine internationals who have helped colleges, universities, and their tennis programs. How about a goal of 50 percent of tennis scholarships reserved for Americans?

**THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM**

The U.S. Open and the USTA have made tons of money, and they have been generous to player development programs. I listened as “Macs” discussed this dilemma. Certainly can’t be money.

Even in 2014 the only American winners were the Bryan brothers and the Williams sisters, both products of “parent coaches.” Many will read this and say Parham will be at it from the grave. I was persistent on the following issue, if not effective.

My point is that one really has two ways to recoup the financial investment necessary to excel in American tennis. My guess is 100 American families annually spend $100,000 on their child’s tennis. Flights, instruction, motels, lessons, and the list goes on and on. John Isner is our only current moneymaker (North Carolina). Tim Wilkison, John Sadri, and you name the next, made any sizable amount of money playing professional tennis.

The only other avenue to recover this staggering investment is by earning a college scholarship. I won’t try to tell you the percentage of tennis scholarship money that goes to international players compared to Americans. It is staggering for men and women.

Tennis has its own “tennis rule” in the NCAA rulebook, created by the abuse of playing older, borderline (sometimes not that borderline) international professionals. Total lineups are international, and in many state-supported schools.

I propose that we reserve half of American tennis scholarship aid for American students. Still seems reasonable and fair to all.

It also begs the question: Is this problem tied to our abysmal performance in the last 15 years? Try this scenario: Parents take “child one” to visit colleges. Quickly they find out that no matter how much money they’ve invested, many colleges have given the money to internationals. Many, in fact, have given it all. Some in fact proclaim: “We only recruit internationals.”
What?

Now, “child two” is coming along and is very talented. The parents say “fool me once” and direct this child away from the dead end of American junior and college tennis. What if number two is McEnroe, Connors, Evert, a Bryan, a Williams? Again, college baseball or college tennis? College baseball players sign pro contracts annually, and their players are mostly American.

Lots of scenarios.

My guess is there is no telling how many potentially great American kids and families have now opted out of tennis and not just the great players. The USTA should study this issue. Is it cutting our throat?

Note: Duke University finished second in NCAA 1 Women’s Golf this spring (2015). There was not one American girl listed on their roster.

APPENDIX B: ASSORTED AIDS

ELON UNIVERSITY TENNIS TEAM RULES

1. No illegal drugs, no drunks, no bums. (See Athletic Department rules attached).
2. Academics have priority over athletics. Academics first, then athletics. Don’t abuse this priority.
3. No smoking in public. Bad habit!
4. Abide by school rules. No academic cheating.
5. Abide by any scholarship guidelines, including study hall obligations.
6. Behave yourself on the court. Leave it if I order you off. Don’t be surprised if you are penalized by bad behavior. Don’t show me up in public.
7. If injured, abide by the trainer’s guidelines.
8. Help out with setups and match cleanups.
9. Support others when your matches are concluded.
10. Don’t expect the coach or your teammates to do your jobs for you.
11. Learn to string racquets for yourself. Have your equipment in order for matches. Do not leave it lying around.
12. Don’t cheat in matches! Don’t be cheated! Do not accuse people unjustifiably.
13. When I coach, listen! Do not cold shoulder me. Weigh my advice and use what works.
14. Be on time and make an extra effort on class conflict days. Arrange to practice outside of team practice if you miss a scheduled. Turn in assigned work ahead of time if you are to miss class.

15. Limit your excuses.

16. Wear our uniforms on match day. Be clean and represent Elon University well. Take care of our warm-ups. Lose them and you pay for the replacement.

17. I will not tolerate “tanking” machines. You must learn to play with adversity. If you get “over the edge,” let me know.

18. I would rather you practice hard than long.

**COACH TO COACH**

Coach Danny Colangelo, Men’s Tennis Barton College  
P.O. Box 5000  
Wilson, NC 27893  

Dear Danny:  

You asked for some advice on coaching at Barton College. Here are some suggestions.

1. Be honest.

2. Be fair.

3. You are not a servant, but it is a service job.

4. “There are two kinds of people at a golf course: workers and players. All the players are looking for a job.” (Tennis coaching, too)  
   –Gerald Wallace

5. “You can’t make chicken salad until you get the chicken.”  
   –Buddy Bedgood

6. If you can’t get me and you don’t know the answer, call Russell Rawlings (at Barton, 399-6358). Do what he says.

7. “If you want to be a coach, there are two rules: Keep your records straight, and Don’t mess with the cheerleaders (or coeds or girl players)” –Bob Burton, Elon basketball, 1990.

8. Don’t play illegal players.

9. Learn the NCAA rulebook—not all the rules, but how to use the book. Ask Gary Hall or your compliance officer every time you have any questions.

10. People from eastern North Carolina have a built in “bull” detector. Don’t even try it.

12. No one will look after the tennis center if you don’t.
13. You work for the athletics director and the president. Be a positive to those two important people.
14. Get the players in shape.
15. Don’t panic if something goes haywire.
16. Losing hurts bad enough. Don’t abuse your players. I always wait an hour after a match to make suggestions.
17. Sportsmanship should be high on your team and coaching priorities list.
18. Be careful in the van. Don’t schedule matches that dictate driving too much in any one stretch. Did you hear that? Re-read it!
19. Don’t be a “budget buster.” Al Rehm: “I don’t want any cheese. I just want to get out of the trap.” Find Al and Jean. They are looking for you.
20. Don’t forget how much you know about tennis. Use your intelligence, toughness, and “team first” knowledge. Be patient.
21. There are other teams and coaches at Barton. Their teams are important, too.
22. There’s a fine faculty across the campus. They affect your teams.
23. Tom Morris is an outstanding human being. He will be glad to help if you need him.
24. Tell the boys at Dick’s Hot Dog Stand hello. You’ve probably already been to Parker’s.
25. Barton is a fine school. Coaching is an opportunity to do a lot of people a lot of good. Remember what tennis did for you. Pay back your debts.

Let’s start with these 25. Call me any time you need me. Your coach, Cc: Gary Hall, Director of Athletics, Russell Rawlings, Development Office, Dr. Jim Hemby, President
FAVORITE DRILLS

Rally practice. You will often arrive early and simply hit some ground strokes. We encourage this “batting practice.” All good players hit ground strokes. Hit the ball on the first bounce, even if it’s an awkward ball or one you have to run hard to. The second bounce doesn’t count. “Learn the court.” Don’t hit out-of-bounds balls, knock it down and start a new rally.

Cross-court backhands. The cross-court backhand is the fundamental ground stroke in tennis. Spend a lot of time on this stroke. Work your legs back to the middle after each shot. Don’t linger on the backhand side because you know it’s coming back there. See the “Andy Moll” variation on this drill (running around your backhand drills).

Volley to ground stroke. I volley, you ground stroke. Then change. Do this drill at 60 percent pace (both people). Develop a sure volley for when your opponent is out of position. Jim Verdieck: “Volley away from the source.” Add: Backhand lob to overheads. Perfect the “hit-turn” overhead technique.

“1-2-3” (or serve and volley). 3-4 players in line. Returner takes X number of returns on one side then switches to the serving line. This is a service return drill. Be aggressive with your return. You don’t have to come in on your serve, but this is a good drill to practice your “1-2-3-check” footwork and volley technique (especially for doubles).

“On the rise.” Like “21” (start a point with a bounce hit and alternate every 5 points) except you can’t go behind or outside the singles boundaries. Learn to “take court away from your opponent.” This puts the pressure on them, tires them, and makes them hit from uncomfortable hit spots.

Volley Drills. Verdieck drill (player on “T.” Coach or “feeder” tosses to “4 volleys” (high, low, on either side). Coach should “float” some balls, players should close fast, so they can hit down. Your knees are your elevators on low volleys. Right-handers: On your low forehand your right knee almost touches the court. Backhands, left knee.

1-2-3 off a tossed short ball. To perfect your approach shot (half court, half shot, or a “compact” shot). Jim Leighton (“almost all backhand approach shots should be with underspin”). Parham: “Not if you can blister that two-hander.”

*Most college players start their careers without a very good backhand approach shot. When you are bored, take a rack of balls and simply “bounce-hit” some approaches from mid-court.

Morris drill. Coach feeds ball from mid-court, backhand side. Volleyer volleys a variety of feeds—“away from the source” (the coach or “feeder”).

MAIN JOBS AT THE JIMMY POWELL TENNIS CENTER
(or “Your” Facility!)

1. Keep it spotless! Develop a sense of pride in the care of this great facility.

2. Open at 9:00 AM and close at 10:00 PM daily, every day the school is officially open. When school is officially closed (between semesters, winter break, spring break, etc.) lock south, west, and north gates. Keep north gate locked except for special events. Leave “closed” signs on fence. This sign directs players to east entrance, which is open and closed daily by security. Cut lights off during this time (last switch on right on light panel is turned down). We do not turn lights on for neighborhood players during the break.

3. Lock and unlock bathrooms daily.

4. Pick up trash daily. This includes ball can lids, chewing gum, cigarette butts, leaves, and any other mess. Use the blower to blow off the courts as needed. Leaves are a special problem. I have requisitioned a leaf vacuum. Keep oil and gas in the blower. If you have to pay for gas, I will reimburse you.

5. If a worker is to be absent, get a substitute. Teach them the job (how to lock the gates properly, etc.).

6. Time sheets are due on the last day of the month. If they are not signed on time, then no pay on time.

7. Periodically sweep the balcony, steps, and bottom of the gazebo. This area picks up a lot of trash. Periodically wipe off the table and chairs upstairs.

8. Occasionally monitor night play. Try to prevent unnecessary burning of lights. Educate our students. Learn to work with appropriate personnel on time changes for lighting, plus watch the lighting problems (faculty computer timings, etc.).

9. Learn to care for the fences and gates, and windscreen (plastic stays, metal stays, rope work, net work, net measuring, numbers on court, etc.).

10. Get mowing schedules to landscapers each semester (varsity schedules, P.E. classes, etc.).

12. We fight birds for ownership in the spring and summer. The mechanics center has a water spray machine we use to clean the stairwell and balcony. Learn to use it. We have a pest control employee for wasps, etc.

13. Report to the tennis director if lights aren’t changed at daylight time changes.

14. We need to keep several new nets and small green trash cans on hand. Tell tennis director of need to order.

15. We have a handheld blower and extension cords that allow you to clean out the stands (leaves, bush sheddings, etc.). Do this periodically as needed.

16. We host several tournaments, the secretary has the schedule. Many are high school playoffs, so we need to be especially clean. Make sure bathrooms are cleaned the evening after a tournament day. Trash pickup will be heavy and important on those days.

17. Report all damages to appropriate personnel. Report painting repair needs that need special attention.

18. Correct vandalism acts. Report significant incidents to security. Pick up broken glass. Clean up aftereffects of the weather. Take trash to appropriate pick up location.

1. The balls were too fluffy.
2. The balls were too heavy (light, yellow, white, old, new).
3. It was too hot.
4. It was too cold.
5. I have a cold.
6. I have a headache.
7. It’s too windy.
8. It’s too humid.
9. I can’t play indoors.
10. I can’t play outdoors.
11. I have a blister.
12. I have tennis elbow.
13. The sun was in my eyes.
14. I can’t play when the sun’s not shining.
15. I can’t play at night (under lights).
16. I can’t play early in the morning.
17. I was thirsty.
18. I can’t play on an empty stomach.
19. I’d just eaten.
20. My racquet’s dead.
21. My racquet has a broken string.
22. Slipping grip.
23. I have old shoes.
24. I have new shoes.
25. I can’t play on clay.
26. I can’t play on hard surface.
27. He’s a pusher.
28. He cheats.
29. He accused me of cheating.
30. My partner double faults.
31. My partner talks too much.
32. Partner thinks I’m cute.
33. Teammates are too intense.
34. Teammates are too loose.
35. Too many drunks on the team.
36. Not enough drunks on the team.
37. My opponent is an airhead.
38. I can beat that guy any day (but today).
39. I didn’t think we’d play today.
40. I’m tired from yesterday.
41. This tournament is run like a circus.
42. I was worried about my girlfriend.
43. I can’t play when someone’s watching.
44. I can’t play when no one is watching.
45. I was watching instead of playing.
46. Sweat got in my eyes.
47. I can’t believe he called that ball out.
48. The linesman blew it.
49. Tennis is a groggy game.
50. I think the court’s too short.
51. Snuff nerves!
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom Parham coached tennis for 40 years. He was a teacher, a coach, and an administrator of college athletics programs. His coaching accolades include: National Coach of the Year four times. Coach of three national team champions (1979, 1984, and 1990); three different decades, at two different schools, and at three different levels: NAIA, NCAA 11, and NCAA 1. Induction into eleven sports halls of fame; four national community service awards. His players boast more than 50 All-American selections.

Related tennis activities include 35 years of residential tennis camp directorship, country club professional, city director of tennis, and private coaching.

He was awarded the Elon University Medallion, the school’s highest honor.

The Little Green Book of Tennis is his third book (Play Is Where Life Is, 2007) and Alot (A Level of Thinking, 2015).

He lives at Emerald Isle, North Carolina, with wife, Margaret.