

# Essential Tennis Podcast #141

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Announcer: Welcome to the Essential Tennis podcast. If you love tennis, and want to improve your game, this podcast is for you. Whether it's technique, strategy, technique, or the mental game, tennis professional Ian Westermann is here to make you a better player.

And now, here's Ian!

Ian Westermann: Hi, and welcome to the Essential Tennis podcast, your place for free expert tennis instruction that can truly help you improve your game.

Today's episode of the Essential Tennis podcast is brought to you by TennisExpress.com.

Thank you very much for joining me on today's show. As always, I appreciate it. It's going to be my goal today to give you information that can help you take your game to the next level. That's what the Essential Tennis podcast is all about, and that's what EssentialTennis.com is all about. Hopefully today's show does that for you.

Before we get to today's topics, we've got a couple of really good ones to talk about. I want to remind you guys about iTunes. It's the best way, the easiest way by far to get the podcast each and every week. You can subscribe to the Essential Tennis podcast. Every single week when I put a new show out, it will automatically download if for you. I highly recommend that you download iTunes. It's a free download from Apple. It doesn't matter whether or not you're using a Mac or a PC. So check that out, subscribe to the show, and then you'll be sure to not miss any episodes moving forwards.

Alright, let's go ahead and get down to business. Sit back, relax, and get ready for some great tennis instruction.

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Alright. Before we get to our first topic on today's show, I want to spend a couple minutes telling you guys about Essential Tennis Platinum. I'm sure many of you guys went and checked out the video that I had up last week at EssentialTennis.com slash Platinum, so you have a good idea of what I'm offering there as far as tennis instruction, and giving you guys personalized feedback. I want to work with you guys personally to help you improve your games.

I'm putting up a new video this week and it's going to feature instruction. It's going to be a video that's focused around creating more power and creating more top spin on your forehand or backhand ground stroke. It's a video on which I'm going to be breaking down the stroke technique of a recreational tennis player, comparing it to a high level tennis player, and I'm going to show you how the kinetic chain works. How you guys are supposed to use your body correctly and in the right order using different parts of your body to hit a high level shot. So go check that video out. It's free. You can watch it anytime you like this week. It will come down this coming Sun. the 31st at midnight EST. So you want to go check it out before then so that you can at least get that free

instruction.

Now as far as Platinum is concerned, basically what I'm offering here is the ability for you guys to be coached by me personally. What the Platinum show, what the Platinum membership offers, is access to a weekly hour long video show in which I analyze and break down the tennis strokes of members. So you guys can submit videos to me and live, I will break them down, compare your strokes to high level players, and archive it. Every single show is recorded and archived so you can go back and see exactly what you need to work on.

There's also a 1 hr. long weekly audio show, just like the Essential Tennis podcast where I answer your questions about mental toughness, or tactics, or anything else that you're having trouble with. I'll be there to help you. So as you make changes in your game-- and that's what you need to do get better by the way. You can't improve your game without making changes. As you make those adjustments, whether it be to your tactics or to your technique, you want to know that you're making the right choices as far as what to change. You can search around the internet and try to find good, free information. There is a lot of it out there.

But the question is always: "Which piece of information do I listen to?" Because you guys know there's a lot of stuff out there. I don't want you guys to have to sit through hours and hours of stuff, and at the end of it not even be sure if what you're hearing or seeing is even correct or the best thing for you. So Essential Tennis Platinum remedies that. By giving you access to me directly so that I can help you guys and cut right to the chase, and tell you what you need to change that's going to help you the most.

Now of course you could always go out and take personal lessons from a pro in your area. But to be honest with you, your local pros are probably not even using the technology that I am to help give you guys the information as clearly and as well. This especially pertains to the video instruction. There are some pros out there doing analysis on court. They'll show you your stroke and then compare it to another stroke. But very few tennis professionals do that. In my experience, it's the way that players can make the biggest changes in the shortest amount of time. You will see that when you go to [EssentialTennis.com/Platinum](http://EssentialTennis.com/Platinum) this week and check out that free video that I have up.

Last thing that I want to say before we get to today's questions is that everybody who signs up for Essential Tennis Platinum this week before the 31st will receive doubles domination for free. If you guys aren't familiar with doubles domination, it's a doubles tactics. Like a complete overview of doubles tactics. It's a product that I released a couple of months ago. I'm re-working the product. It's going to include a lot of video the next time I release it. But you'll get my first release, my 1.0 product of doubles domination for free by signing up for Platinum. Platinum comes with a 30 day money back guarantee. So you can try Platinum out.

If you don't like it for any reason, ask for a refund. I will completely give it to you, no questions asked. And you can keep doubles domination. It's a \$47 product. So I'm basically offering to give you guys \$47 just to try Essential Tennis Platinum. So you have really 0 risk here. In fact, you're going to come out ahead no matter what! If it turns out Platinum's just not for you, no problem. I'll give you your money back for that first month. No questions asked. Keep doubles domination. You'll leave happy either way. [laughter]

But I truly believe that Platinum is an excellent product, and when you start working

with me, you start giving me your videos to analyze, you start giving me your questions to answer that week so you don't have to wait 8-12 weeks the way it is right now on the podcast.

So check it out Remember this offer only stands until this Sunday the 31st, at midnight. EST. Go check it out. Sign up, and I look forward to working with you personally on improving your tennis game.

Alright. Let's go ahead and get to our first topic now; our first instructional topic on today's episode of the Essential Tennis podcast. It comes to us from Jacob in England. He wrote and said:

"My regular tennis partner moves exceptionally quickly around the court. He tends to hit a lot of slow, sliced shots on both forehand and backhand sides. I generally have a lot of success rushing the net; however, I often have to hit slow, awkward shots that are just below comfortable smashing height, but above a comfortable volleying height. Maybe at about head height and just a little over that. If I try to hit an overhead, I will often end up clearing the baseline or hitting the net, but I also find it difficult to properly connect with a firm volley. What shots should I try to be hitting at this awkward height?"

Jacob, good question. This is a shot that recreational players very often struggle with. It's frustrating, because it seems like it should be a gimme. You know? It seems like this should be an easy shot. It's traveling slowly. It's high. As Jacob said, not quite high enough to hit an overhead, but definitely high enough that it's not a defensive shot. He's saying right about head height or so. So it's a shot that you should be able to attack on but if you don't do the technique correctly or if you're not in the right spot on the court, it can turn into unforced errors very quickly.

That's the first thing I want to talk about, is positioning. How aggressively you can actually hit this shot totally depends on how close you are to the net, Jacob. A head high volley taken 2 steps from the net can be crushed if done correctly. We're going to talk about how to do it correctly.

So if you're close to the net and you get that shot around head height, feel free to go ahead and be really aggressive with it, and essentially smash it.

However, a head high volley taken from 2 steps behind the line really needs to be treated with respect. You can't just do whatever you want with that shot, because you're far enough away from the net that you have a much lower margin for error. You have a lot less court to work with on the other side, because the net is now blocking a large portion of it. When you're standing close to the net, it's easy to see the other side of the court and hit directly to it. And let's talk about that one first

So I've got 2 different shots we're going to talk about. Crushing that shot and the respectful high volley. As I've titled it. [laughter] You want to be respectful on the ones where you're farther away. But let's talk about the ones that you have the opportunity to crush the ball on first. I very rarely condone this shot [laughter] when it's not high enough to be an overhead, which is exactly what Jacob is talking about. So it a volley. It's a high volley. And I very rarely am OK with students and members where I teach taking a big swing at that shot and being really aggressive.

But when you're really close to the net, and it is head high, I do want you to take care of

business. I do want you to be able to put it away. So you're allowed to make an aggressive swing at the ball when you are that close. Making the shot is all about closing your racket face and having it at the correct angle. Jacob said when he tries to hit them aggressively, he will very often hit it way long or hit into the net so he makes both errors. Missing these types of shots is definitely common. The key is making contact with your racket facing towards, directly towards, your opponent's side of the court.

When you're a few feet away from the net and the ball is head high, you want to close your racket face so that it is facing your opponent's side. It should not be facing forwards, or definitely upwards, but on the other hand, you don't want to close it so much that it's angled straight down into the net either. That's why making a swing is typically something that I don't ever recommend. That's because the racket face is moving around. The string face of the racket. When you make a swing with your racket and you try to hit the ball hard at that height, the strings are facing all different directions while you make that swing. So if you don't time that swing so that it's just right so that it's facing the correct spot on your opponent's side of the court, it could go in a very wide variety of directions. Which is obviously something that we don't want.

So keep in mind that making that swing is going to make it more difficult to accurately know where the ball is going. So you better be sure you time it correctly at least a large percentage of the time. And you better be sure that you're close enough to the net to warrant that swing. That's probably the biggest thing that I want you to take away from this, Jacob. And everybody else listening.

You're only allowed to make that swing if you're close enough to justify it. If you are 2 or 3 steps inside the service line with a head high volley, you cannot swing at that shot. OK? You're not close enough.

Next time you guys are on a tennis court, or maybe you're next to a tennis court right now, walk out onto the court right now. Stand on the service line. Take 2 steps forwards, and just stand there for a moment. I want you to look across to the other side of the court, and make a mental note of how much of the other side of the court you can see while looking over the net. Obviously if you look through the net, you can see the entire side of the other side of the court. But if you look over the top of the net, I want you to make a mental note. Walk out there and do this guys. Look at how much of the court you can see over the top of the net, and that's how much of the court you have to aim for when hitting an aggressive shot.

And if you guys are of average height 2 steps inside the service line, you can probably see from around the service line back on your opponent's side side of the court. I'm estimating there a little bit. I'm guessing that's probably about what it is. It's probably right around the service back. So you have half of the court to work with when hitting an aggressive shot from 2 steps inside the service line.

Now take 3 more steps forwards, and you'll probably be a little bit past the service box. Maybe even within arm's length of the net. Maybe a little farther away. And now look over the net and see how much of the other side of the court you can see. That 3 step difference is going to make probably like a 10-12 foot difference in how much court you have to work with on your opponent's side. That is significant! That's way more court to work with.

So when you guys are playing your doubles points, you have to be very aware of where

you're standing on the court, and that's going to dictate how aggressively you're able to hit your shots. Don't try to make this big swinging volley unless you're close enough that you can see most of the court over the top of the net. If you can't, you're going to make a lot of mistakes either 1.) by trying to avoid the net and overcompensating, or into the net by trying to hit avoid hitting it long and overcompensating. So you want to be close enough that you have a large area of court to aim for so that it's a consistent shot. Alright? So that's the first part of my answer Jacob, is having to do with crushing the ball. I don't mind it if you're close enough.

Now let's about the second type of volley. This is the one that you really have to work on more. That is the respectful high volley. I title it "respectful" because you have to respect the shot! [laughter] Let's say you're on the service line or maybe even a step or so behind and you get that high volley around head height, you have to respect the shot. Even though it's high, and maybe it's slow, you can't just haul off and beat the heck out of it, because you don't have a lot of court to work with on your opponent's side. At least not when hitting the ball aggressively.

This is a shot that every doubles player needs to be competent at, is this head high or should high easy volley. It will cut out a lot of dumb, unforced errors if you can do this correctly while still pressuring your opponent. You should be able to take this shot and at least hit it firmly, and be able to pressure your opponent. But if you don't do it correctly, you're going to make a lot of mistakes.

So the key to controlling where the ball is going to go is in controlling the racket face, which we talked about earlier. The way that you physically do that while you hit a shoulder high or head high easy volley from the service line is by using your core and your shoulder to hit through the ball instead of using your hand and your forearm. Accelerating your forearm and your hand quickly and aggressively is how you make big changes in the racket face. And that's what's going to make you inconsistent as you try to hit your easy high volleys. So you want to use the big parts of your body instead. They will help you keep the racket face steady and making more consistent shots.

So how do you do that? I want you to do this with me. If you're listening in a car right now, obviously that's not going to work. [laughter] Well, I suppose with bumper to bumper traffic go ahead and follow along, but if you're at home or on a walk right now, or doing chores around the house, go ahead and do this along with me here.

I want you to picture you've got a net in front of you. Or maybe if you're on a tennis court, that would be ideal. Stand on the service line. If you're not on a tennis court, picture that you're standing on the service line facing towards the other side of the court. Alright? You've got your racket, you're in a ready position.

Now I want you to turn to the side.. Turn your shoulders. You don't have to turn your stance, but you can if you want, and turn sideways 90 deg. to the net so that your shoulders are now perpendicular to the net. You're at a 90 deg. angle. I want you to put your hand up. Put your palm right in front of you so that your palm is right about eye height and it's facing towards the net. So that imaginary net, which if you're right-handed is now to your left after having turned to the right 90 deg. Put your palm up in front of you so that it's right about eye height and about even with the front edge of your body, the left edge of your body if you're right-handed.

Now starting from this turned position with your palm flat out in front of you at eye height, I want you to rotate your chest forwards to face towards the net, and as you do

that extend your palm out towards the imaginary or realistic net at the same time. Turn back again 90 deg. and rotate forwards again. I want you to repeat that a couple of times.

So your palm remains facing the same direction, which is towards the net. As you extend your shoulder and your hand out towards the net, and as you rotate your body forwards towards the net, your palm remains steady and facing the same direction. This is how you should be hitting your high forehand volley. It's just like this when you're not super close to the net. If you're close to the service line or within 2-3 steps of the service line in either direction. This is how you hit a high volley steadily and consistently and confidently.

You can still use this technique to hit through the ball firmly and relatively aggressively, but it's not nearly as aggressive as using your forearm and your hand to whip the racket back and forth and really create a lot of racket head speed. That's going to make the racket travel faster, but when you do that, your strings are facing all different directions as I mentioned earlier. So use the technique that I'm describing here. And hopefully you actually did that along with me so that you get a feel for it. Next time you go out and practice on a tennis court, remember that and use that for your high volley technique. At least when you're farther away from the net. Using this technique, you can still hit the ball firmly. But the racket face is under control. And that's the key.

If you hit the net when using that technique that I suggested, open your racket face just a little bit more. If you miss it long, then close your racket face a little bit more. Angle your strings a little flatter, a little more towards the court if you're missing the shot long consistently. And that's pretty much it!

So that answers your question Jacob, about those head high volleys. Practice. Go out. If possible, get a ball machine, have it feed you those shots over and over again, or get a friend to toss you some of those high volleys. Practice that technique when you're a little bit farther away and you want to make that high volley.

Before I get to the next question in today's episode of the podcast, I want to remind you guys quickly about the official sponsor of today's show. That is [TennisExpress.com](https://www.tennisexpress.com), your online gear emporium. Go check them out! They've got rackets, strings, clothing, shoes, bags--whatever you guys need. Tennis balls, tennis ball machines, string machines. Whatever you guys want, they've got it. They have free shipping for orders of \$75 or more. And when you check out, please use the promotional code "essential." It will show them that you're a listener and you appreciate their support of the show. So go check them out! Not [EssentialTennis.com](https://www.essentialtennis.com). It is [TennisExpress.com](https://www.tennisexpress.com), and promotional code "essential." I thank them very much for their support of the podcast.

Alright, one more question to get to on today's show. It also comes to us from Jacob in England. He wrote and said that:

"A second question is that due to net rushing, I am often back to get the shots that are over my head. I often end up taking the ball over my head while I am still moving backwards and not particularly well-balanced. Is it still advisable to try to take the ball in the air even while moving backwards? Or should I do everything to get into a better position to hit the ball after it has bounced"

Jacob, good question. Let's talk about that. First of all, let's talk about going back for overhands in general. You use the term that makes me wince when I hear it. [laughter]

And it makes me cringe, and that is "back pedaling." Back pedaling means that you're moving backwards with your chest facing towards the net, and your heels facing back towards the base line. Your toes are pointing forwards towards the net. That's a terrible way to move back! I want to describe real quickly how you should be moving back. What footwork patterns you should be using to be in the best balance, and to move back in the quickest way possible.

The way that you should be doing this--and by the way, this is a huge recreational player mistake on overheads. Definitely the #1 mistake rec players make on overheads is not moving their feet correctly. It's slow and it's dangerous to back pedal. Seriously.

To remedy that, you must get your stance sideways for balance and for quickness of moment. If you're a right-y, that means that your first move when you see that the lob goes up into the air is to drop your right foot back behind your left. So if you're in a ready position and you're right-handed; you're facing forwards; you want to take your right foot, pivot it around back behind your left so that you're now in a closed stance basically and you are perpendicular to the net.

Then from that position, you should either shuffle, which is both feet pointing to the right. Facing towards to the net is forwards. To the right obviously would be to the right of that. So after pivoting that right foot back and getting yourself turned to the side, the toes of both feet will be pointing to the right.

Shuffling would be keeping both feet staying pointed to the right and using a shuffle step without crossing your feet over. That's option #1 is using the shuffle step. Or you can use a crossover step. After getting your right foot back behind your left, you can then cross over your right foot with your left, and continue to take a step out with your right, crossover with your left. Take a step out with your right, cross over with your left.

So you can use a crossover step as well to move back. Crossing over is a little bit more athletic. It will get you back a little faster than using a shuffle step. Using a shuffle step is easier and it takes a little bit less coordination and a little bit less skill. But both types of footwork are much better than back pedaling. Much better!

I use a combination of both. When you watch players on TV go back for an overhead, you'll very often see them use a combination. What I typically do is when a lob goes up in the air, I'll use several quick crossover steps to get myself moving as quickly as possible so that I'm sure I can get underneath the ball. That will be my first price. 3 or maybe 4 steps, depending on how far back the overhead is. Then I'll use a couple of shuffle steps to balance myself, and kind of fine tune my position underneath the ball as it's coming down towards me. So use a combination of those steps, or just 1 or the other is fine as well.

Usually I start players off just using a shuffle step. If they're more athletic than average, or if they pick up the shuffle step real quickly, I'll show them a crossover step as well. But you should be using at least 1 or the other, if not a combination. Stop back pedaling now! [laughter] Don't do it anymore, please! It's slow and believe it or not, it is. It's dangerous. I know that sounds silly, but I've seen many people fall backwards because your body is just not made to move in that direction with the heels leading. So don't do it. Just don't do it! [laughter]

Now your second question having to do with taking the ball out of the air, take the ball out of the air at all costs, Jacob. In doubles you don't want to let the ball bounce if you

have the choice to take it out of the air.

There's nothing wrong with hitting an overhead while still moving backwards. That doesn't mean that you did anything wrong. I would prefer that you were in balance, of course. I would rather that you were able to move back quickly enough that you got yourself set and you're good to go. And you can go ahead and make your overhead swing in perfect balance and maybe even transfer your body weight forwards into the shot and go right into the net again.

But that's not always reality. If your opponent's hit a good lob, then you might have to move back quite a ways, and you might not even get completely underneath the ball. You might have to reach up and take it with your balance leaning backwards a little bit. That's OK. As long as you realize that you're in a tougher spot and you don't go for a winner, play it smart, then I'm perfectly fine with that.

But when you realize it's going to be a tough shot and you can reach it but it's not going to be easy, just don't go for a winner off that overhead. Put it in a safe spot. Give yourself plenty of margin for error. Then continue playing the point.

The reason for this is Jacob, when you let it bounce 2 bad things happen. 1.) When you let it bounce, it gives your opponent much more time to improve their position. When you let it bounce and the ball comes back up again, then it comes back down again, and then you hit your shot, you effectively double the amount of time that your opponents have to do whatever they want. They can move in whatever position they want!

Once they realize that you're going to let the ball drop and bounce, they have a lot of time to either move into the net or maybe the close player will have time to poach and pressure you. To cross over to try to cut off your next shot that you're going to take off the bounce. Whatever. Bottom line is we don't want to give them that time unless it's a total emergency and you just can't reach it, and you have no other choice. When you have the choice, I want you to take it out of the air, and reason #1 is we want to take that time away from our opponent.

Reason #2 why I want you to take it out of the air as much as possible is that when you do let it bounce, it puts you into a significantly more defensive position than taking it out of the air. When you let it bounce and it continues to travel farther away from the net, so do you. [laughter] In order to catch up with it. So it's a bad idea to let it bounce on purpose, because it will end up making you much farther away from where the action is, much farther away from the net. It puts you in a much more defensive position, and the combination of that along with giving your opponent more time means if they're smart at all, they're using that time to get into the net and now you're far away from the net, and the tables have completely turned. So I don't want you to do that unless it's a total emergency.

If you can tell that you'll be lucky to just scrape it off the tip of your frame and you're just not going to get there, fine. Turn around. Get back there as fast as you can. Let it bounce. Do the best you can with that next shot. But if there's any way at all that you can get the ball on your strings and you can do it before it bounces, that's what you should be trying to do.

Plus, when you do let it bounce, chances are it's going to get behind you and you're going to have to hit some crazy over the shoulder miracle lob shot. If you're super fast, maybe you can get back around it. And some of you guys are, and that's great. But it's a



much more difficult shot. Again, it puts you in a much weaker position.

So Jacob, thank you very much for your questions. I enjoyed answering them today. Hopefully they're helpful to you. Best of luck to you as you continue working on developing your doubles game.

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Alright, that does it for Episode #141 of the Essential Tennis podcast. Thank you very much for joining me today. If you're listening to this show before the 31st of October, go to [EssentialTennis.com/Platinum](http://EssentialTennis.com/Platinum) A.S.A.P. and check it out. You'll get the free instructional video about creating power, using the kinetic chain on your forehand or backhand, and you'll have the opportunity to sign up totally risk free.

I know that's kind of a cliché, but it's totally true here. You can ask for your money back after signing up if you're not completely satisfied with Platinum in that first month, and you can keep Doubles Domination, which is again a \$47 value. That's going to help your game a ton! If you're a doubles player, that is going to help you a great deal win more matches. Because it's a great tactical overview of the game of doubles and how to play. There's interviews with professional players. There's an e-book and audio book. It's just a great package. So check that out: [EssentialTennis.com/Platinum](http://EssentialTennis.com/Platinum).

Alright. That does it for this week. Until next week, take care everybody and good luck with your tennis!

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