

# Essential Tennis Podcast #158

Narrator : 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, equipment or the mental game tennis professional Ian Westermann is here to make you a better player. And now here's Ian.

Ian : 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 [www.tennisexpress.com](http://www.tennisexpress.com) and [www.tennistours.com](http://www.tennistours.com).

Thank you very much for joining me on today's episode. And I want to tell all of you real quickly that Doubles Domination 2.0 is now available and opened for signups. Just started earlier today, let's see it 's about 4:00 in the afternoon right now the course opened up at noon, and it's been just absolutely crazy since then. Lots of signups, tons and tons of emails going back and forth to different people. And because of that I'm going to be doing a re-broadcast today. I feel badly that I've done a couple of these over the last couple of months and basically all due to Doubles Dominations and I promise this will be last one that I do in a really long time. And the rest of the shows I do hopefully the rest of the year will all be new material, but this is still going to be I picked out a show that's about beating pushers, beating people who are just very consistent and just get the ball back in play.

And I'm going to talk in this show, in this re-broadcast, about dealing with low short shots as well, so two really good topics. And by the way Doubles Dominations 2.0 is only going to be available through this Saturday the 26th so if you're interesting in improving your doubles game big time this is a huge course, really, really comprehensive tactics and strategies, go to [www.dobulesdomination.com](http://www.dobulesdomination.com) and check it out. I've got a video explaining All right with that let's get down to business, sit back, relax and get ready for some great tennis instructions. [music]

All right. Let's go ahead and get to our first question on today's show and it comes to us from Zach in Cincinnati who has listed himself as a 4.0 player. And his question's a little bit lengthy here but bear with me guys as I read through it. It's a really good question and a question having to do with competing against a game style that most recreational players really struggle against. You guys will start to recognize this right away. And I think the advice that I give today is going to be definitely helpful for most of you guys out there who compete on a regular level anywhere between a 2.5 and a 3.5 level, and probably most of you 4.0 players out there as well. So Zach wrote to me and said "I play weekly with an older player about 65. In his prime he won many local tournaments in the 3.5 level. Because I am not a member at a club or part of a league I am subjective to playing a lot of different players who are scattered along the lines of ranking. He is among the lowest level players I play yet I seem to play worse against him.

Most of it is due to the fact that he hits junk balls mostly with little to no pace and very little spin and angles. I have to rely on myself to generate my own pace on each and every shot. He has never "beaten me" but rather I do not want to resort to just hitting his balls back with nothing on them because that will be no fun for me and also set my game back. This experience is very frustrating because I seem to play like a 3.0 player

when facing him, yet if I face a 5.5 or 6.0 player I seem to play much, much better, almost feeling like a 4.5 player. Because they use pace and spin it kicks the ball up into my stripe zone and I can use their pace and add a little of my own for my What are some ways to help generate my own pace and spin on a ball with absolutely nothing to work with. This problem is extremely exaggerated on my forehand side." I wrote an email to Zach to get some clarification and just one follow-up comment from him.

He said "My problem with this particular player, or at least on most days, is that my game doesn't seem to click at all. It's real not a question of keeping my shots in consistently but keeping them in at all. It's really hard to describe this problem because for instance today I didn't get mad or upset I was just simply lost out there. Nothing is more demoralizing than just seeing any shot you try to hit with pace go straight into the net or out long.

Maybe he just has my number and I have to accept that but I refuse to quit Zach. There's so many people all over the place, all over the world listening to this right now that are nodding their heads in agreement with you and they totally understand where you're coming from.

Now I've done a podcast on dealing with pushers already and that's kind of the phrase or the word that we use to classify these types of players, players that don't really do anything with their shots besides just get them in play without a whole lot of on them, nothing really special, but they don't really miss a lot. And that's something that most So first of all, I want you to realize that you're not alone here so don't get too frustrated with us. I understand it definitely sucks, a ll right, I totally understand that this is hard to deal with, but this is the most difficult type of opponent for 99% of players out there that are 4.0 and under. And the reason for that I wrote down four reasons here why this is so difficult First of all, the type of person that you're talking about playing here is usually somebody who's very experienced. And so a player who's been around for a long time they're very smart, they know how to figure out what really bugs you, and they've just been around the block a couple of times. They're usually more experienced than the types Secondly they're usually very crafty.

They're very aware of your weakness when you play them. They have a way of kind of picking out exactly what annoys you. And this type of player typically will kind of mix things up and not give you any pace to work with but will give you a lot of different looks usually. Now this player that you're describing Zach you said that this person doesn't put a lot of spin on the ball, doesn't use many angles you made it sound like this guy basically just hits right down the middle of the court soft and easy. I'm going to get to that a little bit later, but typically this type of player is somebody who will put junk on the ball. And you used the term junk ball I think here. Yeah you said "He hits junk balls with little or no I might reconsider your use of that term. Junk baller typically refers to a player who puts a lot of spin on the ball. And lots of different types of spin that kind of throws their opponents off. I wouldn't call this player that you're describing a junk baller I would call them a counterpuncher or a pusher. I would not call this person a juk baller if he puts no, you said he puts very little spin on the ball. This is somebody who's That brings me to Number 3 consistency. Number 1 this is person is experienced. Number 2 he's crafty. Number 3 these types of players are always consistent. And very often it's not pretty.

They don't have nice looking strokes, these types of players, but they can typically make just about everything you hit in their vicinity. And the person that you're describing Zach is no spring chicken anymore, not that he still can't play the game, well obviously

he's still competing and I hope that when I'm his age I'm still able to run around and play. I think it's awesome that he's still playing however his Number 1 weapon is his consistency.

He probably doesn't move around the court as well as he used to but anything that he does get to he probably misses very, very rarely doesn't make very many unforced errors. And that's really what makes this person difficult you have to force him to make a mistake and that's very difficult for most players around your level S And Number 4 I think this is what really bugs recreational players the most about this type of player. Number 4 I have written down that this type of player is usually shameless. They could care less if you respect them or not. They don't care if you walk off the court and complain about them and say "Aw man he's just a pusher. He doesn't really have any real shots. He just hits weak balls down the middle every time."

You know what this type of of player doesn't care, otherwise he probably wouldn't be playing. This guy is just out there to compete he's out there to win and that's it. He's out there to enjoy himself and probably loves driving people crazy and he doesn't care what people say about him he just loves to be out there and he loves to play and he loves to win. And so that combination somebody who's experienced, crafty, consistent and shameless he doesn't care how he does it, but he keeps the ball This is the type of player that everybody struggles with. Again I wrote down 4.0 and under is definitely the main level of player that has a hard time with this type of style. But lots of different players do even above a 4.0 level. Now I've got two main ways that you can deal with this Zach things I'm going to tell you that are hopefully going to help you out. Number 1 and I talked about this in the Pusher Podcast, which is in the archives by the way, I definitely suggest that you and everybody else listening who hates playing this type of player, not only listen to this show but go to the archives at [www.essentialtennis.com](http://www.essentialtennis.com) and download the Pusher Podcast also.

But Number 1 you must respect this player, it's not an option. Respect this player for what he's good at for what he's accomplished over his career as a tennis player. Don't put him down in your head about his age, about his tactics, about his style of play, whatever. If you start to let that get in your head it will throw you off. It will put you in a negative mood and you're outlook on the match will just get worse and worse and you just won't want to be there anymore. And you'll make more mistakes and your attitude just Now you said in your second email Zach that you weren't having a bad day, you weren't getting upset the particular day you were talking about, and that's good hopefully you continue to keep a positive attitude about it.

So I guess this is more for everybody else listening. Don't respect this player and walk off the court and say "Oh, you know, he didn't really beat me." Well yeah he did. He hit more balls in the court than you did, you missed and you don't deserve to win. A lot of you guys out there need to hear me say that and you need to accept it seriously. Don't walk off the court after playing a pusher and say "Well he didn't beat me I beat myself." Well guess what, that means that you didn't deserve to beat that player. You didn't have the game, you didn't have the skills to be able to consistently attack. And so you lost, you got beat. Whether you're the one that made the mistakes or whether your opponent made you make a mistake is irrelevant at the end of the day your score was less than your opponents.

So stop disrespecting this type of player. And again this is not necessarily directed towards you Zach but my listeners in general you guys need to start respecting these types of player a little more, even though they might not have a pretty game to watch

they get the job done so give them some Now let's talk about actually improving your game Zach. This is what you need to do to actually start beating these types of players. First of all, you know this goes without saying but I'm going to talk about how to do it specifically, you need to learn how to create pace on your ground strokes reliably and you're going to do that in three main ways. Number 1 you need solid rotation of your core of your body. Your chest and your torso need to rotate back and then around again as you make contact with the ball a t least 90 degrees.

On your forehand ground stroke you need to turn to face to the right p erpendicular to the baseline and then at least turn forwards as you make contact to be facing forward towards to the net so that your shoulders are parallel to the baseline, a t the very least, turning a little bit past that will even be And the same thing on your backhand side if you have a two-handed backhand. If you have a one-handed backhand you don't want to make quite as much of a turn, I take that back, you will still rotate your core but it's a little bit different. You'll turn a little bit farther than 90 degrees initially so that your back is facing towards the net a little bit.

But more work is done by your dominate shoulder you should still rotates forwards. But anyway in general you need a good rotation of your core o n both your forehand and back hand side. That's Number 1 technique wise. Number 2 you need a long and confident racket path. Most players who struggle against a pusher can't generate pace reliably because they have a relatively short swing. And they're accelerating the racket quickly but they have a hard time controlling where it's going because they accelerate the racket really fast over a relatively short racket pass. Y ou should be making a long and relaxed swing at the ball and generating pace more with the rotation of your body than the actual acceleration of your arm. And shoulder, forearm, and hand and wrist. You should be letting everything from your shoulder down be pretty relaxed.

Obviously we want to accelerate the racket with that part of your body but really we should be using a core more So we can be a little bit more reliable And lastly Number 3 I strongly suggest that you learn how to create, at least a little bit of topspin to create some margin for error. You should be able to clear the net by 2', 3' feet hit a solid shot, not necessarily super aggressive, but definitely a challenging shot, and be able to do it over and over again at that same height, at that same pace, and be able to hit a good solid shot without over doing it and getting all crazy. And you need to repeat this a million times both forehands and back hands and learn how to create again a strong rotation with your body, a long and and relaxed swing with your arm and with your racket, and good margin for error over the top of the net and be able to do it over and over and over again.

And you have to practice until you can do this. There is no substitute for solid fundamental And if you're unable to do this now well... I'm going to rephrase that, you're unable to do this now all right you described it in your question to me. And especially in the second email that you wrote to me you were describing how every time you try to put pace on the ball you either hit the net or it goes long and that tells me that you have no curve to your shot, there is no arch in the path of the ball, you're hitting it dead straight. You don't have the margin for error that you need built into your shots.

So you need to start adding a little bit of top spin, making a little bit more of a vertical swing toward the ball instead of just hitting straight through it and trying to power the ball through the courts. You need some more margin for error. And that's only going to happen by improving your There's no magical fix here you need to improve your technique so that you can create more reliable results and still be able to hit a solid shot.

Without doing that you really only have two options to try to beat this player.

Number 1 you can try to out push or out jump ball this guy, but I don't want you to do that. I want you to move past this level where you're struggling against this type of player. I want you to improve your technique so that when you see a pusher you look forward to it because he's sitting up on a silver platter easy ball after easy ball. And you should be able to dominate this type of player eventually I'm not saying next week just because you listen to this podcast you're going to be able to go and crush this guy it's going to take some practice, but I do want you to be able to beat him without resorting to just playing his style of tennis, which quite honestly is probably exactly what he'd like to see.

He'd love to see you step out onto the court and try to beat him at his own game because that's exactly what he's probably comfortable with, he'd love to push the So without improving their technique, that's Option Number 1. Or you can just keep trying to attack with inferior technique hitting the ball the way you are right now and essentially just hope that you have a good day. And everything kind of clicks for you that day and everything goes into the court even though you're hitting the ball the exact same way with low margin for error. And you're going to have some good days out there and that's great but I don't want you to be satisfied with using a low percentage ground stroke on both sides, you said especially your forehand, and just waiting until everything clicks one day and you do awesome that day and that's great, but I want you to be able to Just one more thing Zach, I also want you to work on your positioning.

You need to work on moving yourself to the right place so that you can hit a confident shot. And the reason why I say this is because you described playing a 5.5 or a 6.0 player and being more comfortable. Now I got to be honest with you Zach if that's the case well you're probably not actually playing a 5.5 or 6.0 level guy, not legitimately. If you feel more comfortable against them than hitting against a 3.5 65-year-old guy I just got to be real with you here it's probably not actually a 5.5 level player. But regardless let's just say it's a strong 4.5 player and they hit with more pace and more top spin, if you're more comfortable against that type of ball because it's got more pace so you don't have to create your own and you said the ball is kicking up more so that it's going into your strike zone, well to be honest with you it should be much easier for you to put yourself in a comfortable place against this weak, spinless ball down the middle.

You said he doesn't hit angles it sounds like he just hits a weak ball right down the middle of the court with no spin. And because it's not traveling very fast and it's got no spin the ball is going to bounce up and sit in your strike zone where it's easy for you to hit much longer than against somebody who hits the ball and And so the fact that you tell me that you're having a harder time against this guy than against somebody who hits a strong solid top spin type ground stroke tells me that your footwork is definitely lacking and you need to be able to identify and read that weak shot coming down the middle of the court. You need to react quickly and get there so that you can hit the ball in a comfortable place and so that you can hit it confidently with that good So Zach that's pretty much it man. First of all again, respect this type of player. Secondly you've got to improve your technique and that includes rotation of your body, length of your swing adding some top spin so that you have some margin for error. That all has to happen.

And then work on your positioning as well so that you can get yourself to a comfortable place where you can recreate those solid swings over and over again. But Zach best of luck to you. I hope you start doing better against this guy and if I can help you any

further All right next up we've got a question from James. He wrote to me and said "Hi Ian. I wondered whether you would consider doing a podcast specifically about how to deal with short balls correctly. By short balls I don't mean the easy type that bounce high but the difficult low ones that are played deliberately to draw an opponent into the net. Yesterday I played against somebody who plays a lot of squash and who basically tried to slice almost everything short draw me into the net and then lobed me.

This player simply did not seem to have any top spin ground strokes but had very good placement and consistency, especially using a slice back hand. Many of these short low balls were very effective I was completely unable to play my normal game but However I'm still very uncertain about where to hit these short balls. Assuming my opponent is staying on the baseline is it best to play them deep, short, or angle them. Also is there a way of deciding whether it is best to continue to the net or sprint back tot he baseline after hitting these balls. This type of shot also seems to occur quite often against more regular opponents so I feel it would be a really good area in which to improve my tactical play. Thanks as always for any help Sure James I'm going to try to get through this quickly here since we're running out of time. I'm probably going to go overtime today, hopefully that'll make up for having a little bit shorter of a show last week.

Now you basically have three choices when dealing with a short low ball like what you're describing James. And I'm definitely keeping in mind here that this is a shot that's kind of difficult to get to, it's definitely dropping, we're not meeting this ball at waist height or shoulder height and able to really attack on it, but rather it's definitely dropping kind of towards the bottom end of our strike zone. So you've got three Number 1 you can play a slice deep down the line. And I'm going to list the pros and cons of each of our three main options here. And most of my options are going to have to do with hitting the ball down the line. If you guys don't know why it's smarter to hit down the line in an approach situation definitely go to the video section of [www.essentialtennis.com](http://www.essentialtennis.com).

And I have a video showing you guys why it's smarter to go down the line on an approach shot. But I'm just going to mention right now it's usually smarter to go down the line. It's not always there's some situations where cross court is a good play but in general down the line is a little bit better shot So Option Number 1 play a slice deep down the line. The pros of doing this the benefits are if hit well it can stay nice and low making a passing shot a lot difficult. If you guys are able to hit a nice kind of biting slice that stays low over the net and low to the ground this can be a really good play to use that slice. And taking that low shot and putting back spin kind of makes it easier to guide deep into the courts and place it easily down the line. I'm kind of getting ahead of myself Pro Number 2 it's to aim and direct. In general that slice shot is just really direct technique wise, you're lining your strings up and hitting straight through the ball towards your target. It's a much simpler And Number 3 it's relatively high percentage for most people. Most people have a pretty easy time playing the slice.

Now if that's not you if you're not good at putting back spin on the ball and directing it accurately then I suggest that you work on this James because it can really help out on a low Now the cons of playing a deep slice down the line are Number 1 if you don't hit it well that back spin can cause the ball to kind of check up and sit there and become kind of a sitting easy shot for your opponent back on the baseline. So this is a shot that you need to practice. If you can't keep it low already, if your slice shots tend to kind of float up into the air and you kind of slow and just kind of sit there then you're going to want to work on it. I'm not going to go over the technique now but you want to try to play kind of a biting lower slice.

So that's Con Number 1 if you don't hit it Number 2 a slice in general travels more slowly than a drive/top spin shot. And again I said generally it's not necessarily true all the time but it's definitely easier to hit the ball harder and more aggressively when putting top spin on it. And I realize that this a low ball so most people don't have that shot. We're going to get to that a little bit later. So slice is a great option for this shot but one of the cons is that it's not going to travel through the courts as fast. It's not going to be as aggressive of a shot as if you were able to drive it All right Option Number 2 hit a drive/top spin shot deep down the line. And the pro here, the benefit is that you can hit it with more pace and more aggressiveness than a slice and still be able to keep it in play. Slice back spin causes the ball to float and travel farther through the courts.

A top spin shot pushes the ball back downwards into the courts. And so if you're able to get below it, even though it's a low shot, if you're able to get your racket below and hit up on the ball aggressively enough to spin it you can curve the ball back down into the court again and that's going to allow you hit with more pace and be able to kind of hit right through the courts and pressure your opponents a However, there's several cons to hitting with a drive/ Number 1 if you don't really play it well the ball doesn't get hit through the court the top spin if you spin it quite a bit and get kind of a heavier ball and if you don't hit it solidly that top spin can also cause the ball to kind of bounce up right into the strike zone of your opponent, which can give them an easy ball to hit a Secondly, and I mentioned this before, it's definitely technically more complicated and more difficult to make.

In my opinion it definitely takes more skill to take that low ball, hit it with top spin and make it then it does to use the slice. The slice is definitely And thirdly, it definitely takes more confidence to hit because it's a more complicated swing and because it's a more aggressive swing you have to really fill confident about going for it otherwise you're going to dump it into the net or not put a lot of spin on it and make it float long. So it definitely takes more confidence than just hitting that slice and directing it deep into the courts. Option Number 1 was slice deep down the line. Option Number 2 was hit a drive - top spin shot deep down the line.

Option Number 3 is hit a short ball right back. Just drop shot them as you're running into the net. And this definitely takes some touch and I'll go over the pros and cons. Pros it can be thrown in as a change of pace/surprise play. You can mix this in along with some deeper approach shots and catch this guy off guard Number 2 if you do hit it well it makes passing shots and lobs more difficult. As he runs forwards into the court he's got less room to hit around you because he's getting closer to you and there's less visibility around you because you're taking up more of the courts from his vantage point as he gets close and closer to the net to recover So those are the two main pros. Con is that if you don't hit it well you're just a sitting duck.

If you try to hit it short and you just kind of pop it up and it's not very short and it just sits up there in the air obviously, unless you just has no ability to hit the ball aggressively and hit it pass you you're just going to be sitting there an easy target. So that's definitely the con of trying to hit short right back. So which one of these three options is best? Well when trying to select which one is the best play you know to two things, you have to know your opponents, and you have to know what they're good at, whether they're forehand or backhand side are stronger, whether they're better at passing shots or better at lobs, whether they prefer to hit lower in their stripe zone or higher in their strike zone. How mobile they are? If they can run and hustle and get to a short drop You need to know all these things and you have to take them into account and

really very often you want to mix these options up to keep your opponent off balance and make them have to hit a lot of different types of shots in order to beat you. Number 2 you have to know your strengths and weaknesses. So walking onto the court that day you've got to know do you prefer to hit a slice or prefer to hit a drive or top spin shot?

Do you have good hands where you can take that short ball and hit it really short right back and make them have to run into the net himself. You got to know your own game and you have to know his game, and then you got to kind of mix those together and come up with a game plan, come up with a good solid tactical plan And again lastly I'm going to mention one more time that you should be practicing all three of these options James so that based on what opponent you come up against, whether it be this squash player guy or somebody else who gives you a lot of short shots, practice all three of these options so that when you figure out what play is going to be the best suited for that day against that opponent you can do it confidently and use whichever of these three main options makes the most So James hopefully that's helpful to you. Thanks very much for your great question. Good luck with this and let me know how you do. [music]

All right. That does it for Episode Number 158 of the Essential Tennis Podcast. This was originally Episode Number 128 and originally broadcasted by in July of 2010. Remember that the podcast archives are always there and always free if you just signup for the Essential Tennis Newsletter. So much good information there. If you haven't gone to check them out yet definitely do so just go to And lastly before I sign-off for today remember to go check out [www.doublesdomination.com](http://www.doublesdomination.com).

Again that will only be open to new members until the 26th, this coming Saturday. So go check it out and I look forward to working with with some of you inside the course. All right that does it for this week. Take care and good luck with your tennis. [music] [silence]