

## Essential Tennis Podcast #179

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 Westermann:** Hi and welcome to the Essential Tennis podcast, your place for free expert's tennis instruction that can truly help you improve your game. Today's episode of the podcast is brought to you by Tennis Express. Please check them out this week by going to [EssentialTennis.com/Express](https://EssentialTennis.com/Express).

Well, I've got a great guest on today's show. Many of you are familiar with him already. His name is Steve Beck. He's a certified personal trainer. He's been on the podcast before, and he's been doing some great videos with me that I've been releasing on [EssentialTennis.com](https://EssentialTennis.com) showing you how you can increase your tennis performance through fitness. I mentioned last week that I had an announcement, and that is Steve and I have just released a free course that is designed to teach you how to increase your overall tennis fitness so that you can become a higher level more effective player. And you can check that out anytime this week all the way up until July 27th by going to [CompleteTennisFitness.com](https://CompleteTennisFitness.com).

In that course you're going to learn how to increase your speed and quickness, how to become stronger, and how to increase your flexibility all in tennis specific ways. Really simple drills and exercises that all of you can do either at home or at your local court. Really simple stuff. You don't need a gym or special training gear or equipment at home or big periods of time either. So go check it out. Again that's [CompleteTennisFitness.com](https://CompleteTennisFitness.com). With that let's get to my talk today with Steve about tennis, fitness, and increasing your performance on the course. Sit back, relax, and get ready for some great tennis instruction.

My guest today on the Essential Tennis podcast is certified personal trainer Steve Beck. Steve, thank you so much for being on the line with me and spending time with me to talk to my listeners about fitness and tennis performance.

**Steve Beck:** Ian, it's always a pleasure to be back with you. Looking forward to throwing out some knowledge for your fans.

**Ian Westermann:** Awesome. Well, Steve and I have been working on a little project together, and we're going to be talking to all of you listening about that in a couple of minutes. But first, Steve, I kind of wanted to have you spend just a minute or two, and please tell everybody listening at home a little bit about your background in fitness. I know that you're certified now and pursuing a full-time career in fitness, which is great.

Please tell people about your background, where you're at right now, and what you're hoping to do.

**Steve Beck:** Sure. I've been in the gym and training hard for the past 18 years. It's become a real passion of mine. It's something that I've always really enjoyed doing, and it's something that I've built into my lifestyle just in an effort to be more fit long-term, to be stronger, obviously to look better when I look in the mirror, but recently it's become a motivation -- I've picked up tennis hardcore 7 or 8 years ago, and obviously I'm pretty athletic, played a lot of sports as a kid, but tennis was a real challenge for me. It took me a long time to get good at it. But what I immediately saw was I was that I was the more fit guy on the court and that afforded me a lot of success just by being able to run around, being quick, being mobile on the court. So I immediately saw the benefit of being stronger, being faster, being quicker, and more mobile. All those things helped me to become a better tennis level.

So I play at a 4.0 level at my local club. I'm not USTA ranked at the moment, but I will be participating in a 4.0 ladder locally which has some pretty stiff competition. So I've got to brush up on my game. I need to go back and rehash some old episodes of the Essential Tennis podcasts and brush up on the mental thing and some techniques as well. But so far as fitness goes, it's obviously a big passion of mine. I recently in the last couple of years wanted to figure out how I could leverage my knowledge into helping not only tennis players but people in general being healthy, be more fit.

So at the beginning of the year I got my certification through the American College of Sports Medicine. It's one of the better certifications out there you could get. I spent the money and spent the time to go and achieve that. Really happy about that.

**Ian Westermann:** I want to give you all of listening an idea of the level that Steve has taken it to as far as his strength training is concerned. Steve, I saw the video you posted on Facebook a couple of days ago. Is that a deadlift that you were doing?

**Steve Beck:** Yeah. That's a traditional standard deadlift that I was doing.

**Ian Westermann:** Tell everyone how much weight was on that part.

**Steve Beck:** I only had 405 pounds on there. So that's only a little over twice my body weight, which is not -- I weigh 185 pounds, and I'm 5'9 so I'm not a big guy. I'm not a physically imposing specimen, and that's a decent amount of weight for me. My maximum deadlift at the moment is 500, which is a goal I've had. So it's something that again I'm fairly strong for my size, but I just posted it up to get some technique cues for the guys and put a post on the ET forums there for the members asking about it.

**Ian Westermann:** Well, I want to ask you guys specifically about strength like what you're talking about. I don't want to get ahead of myself. We're going to save that for a little bit later in our talk. With that I want to shift over to what we've been working on together, and that's a fitness course specifically for tennis players. In starting off our conversation about that and talking about all the benefits that my listeners and every recreational player can get out of focusing on fitness and training their body to get the most out of their time on the court, I want to quickly talk with you about a pattern that I've seen in recreational players, and that is they seem to think that just by hitting tennis balls and running around on the court is great on its own.

**Steve Beck:** That's kind of a relative perspective. If you're not doing anything else. If you're not going to the gym, if you're not getting the recommended 30 minutes of activity that most folks recommend today either through walking or through doing running or whatever activity, tennis can be a great exercise. And truly that's all it is for most people is maybe a past time. But I kind of liken it and bring it over to when I'm training clients. If they're just coming in the gym and hitting the treadmill for 30, 45 minutes to an hour and they're expecting to get bigger and stronger and burn fat, is that the absolute best thing that they can do? No, it's not. If you really want to accelerate your fitness and really get into good shape, you've got to go to the next level and have a program laid out. You've got to have some goals and be doing specific things to implement and enhance and get you where you want to go.

It's the exact same thing on the tennis court. If all you want to do is keep your cardio enhance, just elevate that, and have a good time, then going out and playing two or three times a week will do that for you. But most people, and I think most of your audience, they're not content with that. They want to get better. They want to get faster, and they want to not only -- tennis has become such a physical game and athletic game today. You watch the top guys playing tennis, and they are truly top level world-class elite athletes, and they don't get there by accident. They have trainers and spend hours and hours and hours not only hitting tennis balls but working out in the gym, strengthening, doing exercises, doing mobility work, doing all those things that get them to the next level. And I think that's what your audience is looking for is something to help them get there.

So the work that you and I have been doing is really designed to help the people that kind of want that brass ring and want to improve themselves. Giving them an avenue and giving them the information and giving them exactly the steps that they need to take in order to get there.

**Ian Westermann:** Absolutely. Yeah. And that's really what Steve and I have set out to do is put together an A to Z how-to series of steps on exactly what you can do to make yourself a faster, stronger, more injury resistant athlete. I'm really excited about what we

put together, Steve, and with that let's talk a bit about it. And Steve and I have put together kind of a free sample course that's going to give you a really nice overview of all the major areas, all the broad main areas that we're going to be talking about in the full-course. And really you're going to learn a lot by watching the free course that we have coming out this week. It's starting on Monday July 18th and run through July 27th, the following Wednesday. Totally free video instructional course on how you can become a better player through fitness.

With that, I want to talk about the main areas that we're going to be covering in that free course. Let's go in order here. The first video that I'm going to be releasing tomorrow is about speed and quickness. So let's talk for a couple of minutes here about some of the exercises that my listeners can do to improve their speed and quickness and exactly how that's going to translate into making them better and higher level player.

**Steve Beck:** Sure. I think one of the first layers -- we like to talk about layering a lot in the tennis instruction world. But building a solid a foundation, and one of the things that I'll say is relatively easy to improve is areas of speed and quickness. The faster you are and the quicker you are around the court, the more balls that you can get to, the more balls that you can get out and play, the more prepared you'll be to hit specific shot, the faster you can recover. The list goes on and on as to what speed and quickness will do for you on the court.

And so the kind of cool things and easy things that we put together for your listeners are just some basic sprinting drills and tennis specific drills that they can do out on the court with nothing more than some tennis balls and maybe a cone or two and some markers put on the court. We put together some really cool stuff that is easy to setup. It takes some effort and it's going to get you hot and sweaty, but nothing comes without effort, right? So we've got some really cool stuff that's going to improve those areas. We setup the spider drill. We setup from you set the racket up at the beginning and go out fetch different balls. You work on change of direction. You work on explosive strength. You work on decelerative elements of that drill. We setup the figure 8 drill which has really specific tennis footwork element and also some more explosive speed with the sprint work that's involved in that drill. So just those two if you were to go off and do those 4 times a week, spend 30 minute doing them, you're going to see huge benefits doing it.

Again, those are things that the pros are doing. They're working on things that don't necessarily involve their tennis strokes or technique, but they're working on things that make them faster and are strengthening their body and enabling them to get into better position to hit the ball. We just watched Wimbledon, and the athleticism of the top guys, those guys are like lightning around the court. Again, that doesn't happen by accident. It happens through concerted effort and working specifically toward that. And that's obviously one area that we've really addressed in the program.

**Ian Westermann:** I think that footwork traditionally is something that's really, really not talked about enough in tennis instruction. Obviously Will over at Fuzzy Yellow Balls and their recent course that they just went through and accepted new students into, they talk a lot about footwork, but besides Will even online I don't see a lot of instruction about specific footwork for tennis and speeding quickness and different types of steps and lateral movements, etc.

So I think it's really important and really most so because yeah you can work on that forehand or that backhand or that volley technique, but what good does all that repetition and all that practice do if when the time comes to hit it in an actual match, you can't actually get to the right spot in the court in time, or maybe you get to the right spot but you're not used to exerting yourself at that speed so you get there out of balance. So you're not able to use the technique you worked on. I think it's really important, obviously.

**Steve Beck:** Definitely. You can have a 6.0 level forehand, but if the ball is 10 feet away from you, that won't do you any good. I myself I think I have 6.0 level quickness, but I have a 3.0 level forehand.

**Ian Westermann:** Alright, I want to move onto the next area here in the course because I think it's one that probably has the most misunderstanding about it, and that is the area of strength. Let me let you introduce this area first. Tell my listeners what kind of things that we go over in the free course that they can check out, and I'll have a couple of questions for you after that.

**Steve Beck:** Sure. When we talk about strength, the first image we conjure is maybe a muscle and fitness magazine with this guy who wastes too much time in the tanning booth and did a full body shave that morning, and you can see every muscle rippling out of his body. He looks like he's been taking steroids and eating steak every hour for the past 3 years, and that's not what we're talking about.

Obviously we talk about strength and building the body, it takes a ton of effort to get to look like one of those guys, and that's not the kind of thing we're addressing. We're addressing levels of what I like to call functional strength. Things that are going to enable you to put your body in some of the extreme situations that we see on the tennis court and be able to recover from those, be able to again have that element of explosive power.

When we strengthen muscles properly, it does a lot of things for us. It can adjust posture. It gives us more confidence. When we're building more muscles, we're developing more effort or more ability to move quickly -- kind of the analogy I like to use is two cars side by side. The one with the bigger motor is going to go faster. It's really no different in strength. Obviously we're not trying to build an elite level NFL athlete, but

we do need to strengthen areas that are of weakness in our day to day lives. It goes from head to toes. Our calves, the legs, the back, the shoulders, those things help us to insulate from injury, and they just enable more explosive power. Tennis is an explosive sport and requires a lot of strength if you want to play at a high level.

So we're showing people an almost unfair advantage. You may not have to have a better tennis stroke, but by being stronger you're going to be able naturally put more power on the ball and be able to transfer more power from the ground up from your legs, through your arms and shoulders through to the tennis racket and to the ball. So you may not even see a benefit in increased technique, but I think your tennis game will get better just by being able to be stronger.

**Ian Westermann:** Please correct me if I'm wrong, Steve, but am I correct in saying that in general working on our muscles to make them stronger doesn't necessarily mean that they physically get bigger. And just by doing strengthening exercises that we're physically going to become bigger, like that muscle-bound kind of picture that people get.

**Steve Beck:** Yeah. And again, it takes a lot of effort to get there. Like we talked about in the past, I've been working out for 18 years and I'm not a big guy by any means. Maybe a little bit above average weight, and I'm a pretty powerful and strong guy. But I'm not huge. We played tennis together several times. I don't think you'd say that I'm muscle bound or unable to get around quickly. I think just the opposite. I'm able to move really quickly. I have good recovery. Again, it takes a lot of effort and a lot of heavy lifting in order to transform your body. And so we're not going for that.

Again, if you look at the top tennis athletes, they're not huge. But when Rafa takes his shirt off, you can tell he's been working out. You can tell he hasn't been sitting around eating fried chicken and potato chips and sitting on the couch. He's been working out and working his body and improving his strength. So again it's not that we're trying to build huge strong people, but we are trying to create muscle balance, make sure our left leg is as strong as our right leg. Tennis is kind of a one sided sport. I'm a righty, and I get a lot of work on my right arm and my right shoulder, and I don't want my left shoulder to be weaker because that overtime can promote a lot of muscle imbalances, lead to injuries, all kinds of bad things when we have those muscle imbalances. So we're designing this in a way that really kind of shores up those weak areas of the body.

**Ian Westermann:** Yeah. And listen for anybody at home listening, Steve is not big compared to like a world-class bodybuilder, but Steve would you agree that compared to your average tennis player you're a pretty big guy, yeah?

**Steve Beck:** Yeah. I might be bigger than your average guy.

**Ian Westermann:** As Steve said, he's been working on lifting and strength training for a long time, so he's definitely bigger than your average tennis player. And yet I will 100% vouch for Steve's ability to still move very efficiently and smoothly. Steve has a one handed backhand that's real smooth and fluid even though compared to me -- when you go watch the videos at CompleteTennisFitness.com and you see Steve standing next to me, he looks like a huge guy. But that's compared to me. I'm real thin. Steve and I are just real different body types, but I just want to be real clear that by strength training that doesn't mean -- there's just a huge misconception that by training our muscles to become stronger we somehow limit our range of motion automatically. And that's just absolutely not the case. I just want to be really clear about that.

**Steve Beck:** Yeah. Physiologically, there's an even if we go to the extreme, there's some 280 pound bodybuilders out there that can do splits and are more flexible than me and you combined. And so again it's how you work out, and obviously if you're using maximal loads and you can -- there's kind of as a trainer I don't design programs for people very often that are designed to make them big and huge. I design programs for them to get them up to a requisite level of strength. I design programs for them to get their core stronger like it needs to be, which leads to helping out. A lot of people have lower back pain. Well, lower back pain 9 times out of 10 comes from a weak core and weak glutes and hamstrings.

Again, we just look at those areas that are weak right now and figure out how to make the body work the way it was designed to work. And that doesn't involve loading you up with a 500 pound barbell on your back all the time. It's working smarter. We're working the muscles through the natural range of motion that they were designed to work through, and it's just again working smarter. Again, we're not out to make big huge body builders. We're out to make athletes.

**Ian Westermann:** One more thing about strength I want to touch on before we move to our last section of the free course at CompleteTennisFitness.com and that has to do with accelerating the racket. Steve earlier in your strength when you were talking about the strength area, you talked about the increased strength leading to power, being able to move on the court faster. But talk just for a minute or two about increased strength also meaning that we could accelerate the racket faster. And what that means for tennis players, because I think that's something most of my listeners probably haven't put together yet as far as increased strength and being able to get more out of their strokes.

**Steve Beck:** Yeah, absolutely. Think about a real easy visual for people to kind of think about is the modern forehand. The modern forehand is -- we'll talk about an open stance forehand. Everyone knows what that is. And with the open stance forehand, you're really loading up the legs and using the muscles of the calves and the quadriceps to really explosively build power that comes from the legs, goes through the core, and

transfers into that coiled position that the upper body has. And really we think about a big hefty forehand that leads with the shoulders and leads through the hips. All that power is coming through the legs. And so I'll just ask a simple question, do you think that you could hit a bigger shot with weaker legs or stronger legs? It's a no brainer.

You're going to want to have stronger legs. That doesn't mean we have huge 30 inch quadriceps and upper legs, but it means that we specifically train those muscles in order to get them stronger. If you think about the core muscles, there's a huge rotational element in tennis, and again go back to the forehand analogy. Our upper body is coiled 90 degrees toward the baseline. All those muscles are stretched and tightened like a rubber band. And then in order to explosively swing forward into the ball, you've got to actively turn the core and lead with that front hip. And again is a stronger or weaker core going to be able to produce more power? Well, a stronger core is.

Again think about a serve. If you strengthen up your shoulder, a lot of people have bad posture and need some correction in that area. And that's certainly something that we address with some corrective technique but also with some strengthening of the back and shoulder muscles. And so if you're going up to hit a serve, a lot of that power comes, goes to the core, heads up to the shoulder. It's important to have a flexible and strong shoulder in order to really put a hurting on that ball and hit. Everyone wants to hit that 100 mile per hour mark on their serve. So again is a stronger or weaker shoulder going to get you there?

Again, it's a no brainer. I mean, even if you're only doing some things that moderately strengthen those areas. You're automatically going to feel a ton of benefit from that on the tennis court just from being able to -- your muscles are going to know how to work in conjunction. And I know on your podcast you reference a lot the kinetic chain, and the kinetic chain is just basically what I just described, the transfer of power from the lower body to the upper body.

So working properly the muscles that are more stronger and more powerful are going to increase the power that we're able to produce and increase the pace and spin that we're able to put on the ball at the same time. Does that kind of answer your question there?

**Ian Westermann:** Absolutely. We're getting short on time, so I'm sorry I don't mean to cut it short, but I want to make sure we touch on the last part of our free course that we're putting out as well. That is mobility. Please tell everybody what mobility means for them and their tennis game and what you mean by mobility.

**Steve Beck:** Yeah. That's a term that is used in modern circles. It's not only mobility being mobile obviously being able to move, but if you think about breaking it down. Instead of the whole body, just down into joints. Mobility to me has a flexibility element



as well as just allowing a specific joint to move in its natural range of motion. Again, we talked about the shoulder. A good example is if you slouch your shoulders and kind of hunch your shoulders forward and then to try to reach as far as you can over your head with your arms extended, you can't reach very far overhead. Now if you sit up straight up and have your shoulders back and your chest a little bit forward, then try to reach up over your head you can reach a lot farther.

So that's kind of a simple analogy that I would describe mobility. It's just ways that we make the body move that are again in the way that the body is designed to move in. So when we talk about mobility in the strength training circle or in training circles, we do a lot of pre-workout work where we activate the muscles. We get the body moving with proper posture and effective and functional ranges of motion.

**Ian Westermann:** Absolutely. So how does that translate -- well you talked about better range of motion. So I can imagine that definitely translates into better potential as far as technique is concerned, being able to accelerate the racket or perform swing techniques better or more athletically. But let's talk quickly about what that means as far as preventing injury for my listeners.

**Steve Beck:** Sure. Again if you're thinking about the shoulder. Let's take the shoulder for example. The shoulder is the most flexible joint in the body. If you just kind of move your arm around in every direction that you can move it in, that's a huge range of motion. And for me in my early tennis years, I know from just playing a ton. I was on the court 4 or 5 times a week for a couple of hours at a time, but I wasn't doing anything to specifically address mobility. And over time, I got issues. My rhomboid which is the muscle in or around your shoulder blade area, I had issues. Just had pain in my trapezius where I'd be super sore because I wasn't doing any kind of corrective exercises or movements in order to facilitate a more freer range of motion in that area.

It's not all about stretching, like a static stretch, but it's about warming up and kind of getting that muscle activated to move in the way that it was designed to move.

**Ian Westermann:** Awesome. Well obviously really important stuff. Especially for those of my listeners who play tennis on a very regular basis. And also especially for those of my listeners who have played for a long period of time. After a while the body just doesn't react as well to a lot of physical activity. So it's super important to keep it healthy and keep it mobile, isn't it?

**Steve Beck:** Definitely, Ian. I'm 38 years old, and I'm peaking over the hill at 40. So I'm finding out that if I want to keep doing what I'm doing, obviously training is a huge passion of mine, and I've got some goals that I want to achieve in the weight room, but I can tell you honestly since I've started incorporating areas of mobility, and obviously flexibility goes along with that and some soft tissue work that we talk about as well. As I

started incorporating those things into my routine, I'm a lot less -- I'm way more pain free. I'm able to go out and lift weights in the afternoon and go and play tennis for a couple of hours. Then I can come home and do some soft tissue work and some mobility work. And I feel right as rain. So it's usually important as we get older, and we can also address some pre-existing postural problems or muscle pain or joint pain that we've been having just through some very simple stuff that I think will pay huge dividends. Most importantly, we all want to spend time on the tennis court. We don't want to spend time being injured. We don't want to spend time hurting and in pain. Those are things that we can mitigate just by incorporating some very simple stuff that we show in our course.

**Ian Westermann:** Well, as all of you can definitely hear, Steve really knows what he's talking about when it comes to fitness. As it relates to the tennis player, I love the fact that you're not only a really enthusiastic person about fitness and training but you feel the same way about tennis. That combination is really what drew me towards wanting to do this course with you. With that, I just want to tell everyone listening that you need to check this out. And the free course again is available from July 18th until July 27th. It's going to come down on July 27th, so check it out before then please so you get all of the free information that we're putting out there. And that's going to consist of 3 videos, and all 3 videos give you specific actionable drills and exercises that you can go start doing right now to improve all of these different areas: speed and quickness, strength, and mobility.

And at the end of that free course, we're going to make available a full comprehensive course. I mean, comprehensive doesn't even do it justice. It covers every part of tennis fitness, and you'll be guided through that step by step by Steve and myself throughout the entire process as we go through the course. To check out the free course, there's absolutely no obligation at all. All you need to do is put in your email address, and you can go check out all 3 videos as they become available.

Steve, I want to thank you so much for spending the time to put this course together. I mean, Steve is the mastermind behind it. He's the one that really designed it and put it together. And I'm really excited to share all this stuff with everyone listening, Steve.

**Steve Beck:** Yeah. I'm really excited too, and that's one of the reasons why I got into personal training in the first place is because I love to help people, and I love to be able to give people quote unquote secrets, which aren't really secrets, but they are things that they wouldn't necessarily know or find out on their own in order to make them better. And when people start seeing improvements in themselves and start getting more confident and start getting stronger and quicker and feel better, that's the payoff for me. Like I said, that's a huge passion of mine is just helping people. Now that I can combine that with tennis and help people be better tennis players and quicker tennis players and

faster and more injury resistant and more mobile, man that's just awesome for me. I'm really excited about seeing some results from folks.

**Ian Westermann:** Alright. With that we're going to wrap things up because we're well over time already. As you all can tell, Steve and I could've easily talked a lot longer about these areas. So go to the free course and get everything that we have to give you guys in those three areas. Again you can do that by going to [CompleteTennisFitness.com](http://CompleteTennisFitness.com) and you'll get immediate access to that first video. There will be 3 videos in total. See what we have to offer, start doing the drills and exercises, and leave us some comments or questions below the videos as well.

So yeah, Steve, with that thanks so much for your time. Thank you for being a guest on the podcast again, and thanks for working through Complete Tennis Fitness with me and putting it together.

**Steve Beck:** Absolutely. It's been a blast and a really good time putting it together with you, Ian. I really love working with you, and I'm really excited first and foremost to hear back from people when they start going through the videos. Really look forward to hearing your comments and looking forward to interacting with everyone as well.

**Ian Westermann:** Alright. That does it for today's episode of the Essential Tennis podcast #179. Thank you very much for taking the time to listen to today's episode and listen to my conversation with Steve. I hope that you enjoyed it and I hope that you learned something from our discussion, and please definitely go check out the free course that we've just released at [CompleteTennisFitness.com](http://CompleteTennisFitness.com). We really put a lot of time into it to be honest with you, and I never put anything out there unless I'm very confident that it's going to be very helpful to the people that take the time to listen or watch whatever it is that I'm releasing. So definitely need to take the time to check it out when you get the chance. Again, it's only going to be available until July 27th.

So with that, typically in this point of the show I would read some comments and questions from last week's show, and there was a bunch of them, really good feedback, and I really appreciate the time that those of you put in who stopped by and left your comments and questions. And it was about losing a stroke. Got a bunch of feedback from players who said yeah it's happened to me. Got some great questions. Today's podcast is already well over time, and I don't want to stretch it out any longer, so I just simply want to say thank you to everybody who left comments and questions. Just want to do a quick shout out. Jim, Chris, Mark, Natalie, Jodie, Ed, and Keith. Really good feedback from all of you, and I replied to all of your comments there. Always great to hear from those of you that listen to the show, and please do that for this episode as well.

With that, I'm going to wrap up today's show. Thanks again for listening. Take care and good luck with your tennis.