

Essential Tennis Podcast #185

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'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.

Thanks very much for joining me today. I have a very special guest, Will Hamilton from FuzzyYellowBalls.com. You've probably heard about the Bryan brothers course that he has out for free right now. We're going to talk about that. We're also going to give you a little bit of an inside look at how the course came together, how he met the Bryan brothers, a little bit about how they're like in person, and we're going to spend a majority talking about doubles tactics and strategy and exactly what we can learn from the best players in the world, the Bryan brothers, in this particular instance. So with that, let's get right to it. Sit back, relax, and get ready for some great tennis instruction.

My guest today on the Essential Tennis Podcast is Will Hamilton from Fuzzy Yellow Balls, the man that needs no introduction by this point. Welcome Will.

Will: Hi Ian. How are you doing?

Ian: Not bad. I've had a cold for two days, so I apologize if you hear some hacking in the background. I'll try my best to keep it away from the mic. I'm happy I've got you as a guest today. That can help me relax my voice a little bit.

Will: Nice. Well, I'm on a cellphone because Irene knocked out all the landlines around here, so I guess we're both struggling in one way or another.

Ian: Yeah. I'm in the DC area. Will is actually in the DC. It's been a crazy week inbetween the earthquake and the hurricane. I'm not quite sure what's going on here on the east coast, but it's been crazy.

Will: Yeah. What'd you end up doing Saturday night when the hurricane hit?

Ian: Thankfully up by us where we are out near Frederick, we're further west. We're about 45 minutes west of Baltimore, so we didn't really get a whole lot. Obviously it rained hard for like a 12 hour period, but in terms of wind and stuff we didn't see much here. So we're lucky. We were right on the edge of it.

Will: Ok. I was hanging out with my sister, and we lost power around 11 o'clock on Saturday night. So we ended up, we had some flashlights so we did shadow puppets for about an hour.

Ian: Quality.

Will: Yeah. That was the extent of my Saturday night.

Ian: Nice. Thankfully your internet is up even though the power at your parents is out otherwise it'll be tough to run your Bryan brothers course without any internet connection.

Will: That would be a challenge, yes. That would be very difficult.

Ian: Speaking of which, let's talk about that. I'm sure the first question that comes to everyone's mind is how in the world were you able to get time with the Bryan brothers? Not to say that you're not worthy of their time, but I'm just saying.

Will: The Bryans are I think unique in the sense that they're really into the internet. They have an iPhone app that's been downloaded a lot. I think it has 100,000 plus downloads. They've done a little bit of stuff like this before just short instructional clips, so they're interested in what's possible with the web. So we've got a dialogue going. Their people talk to my people type thing, and my people being me. And it just came together in the late spring. We shot some of it in Kansas City. We traveled out there to shoot with them while they were playing World Team Tennis, and then we finished up in DC right before they played there. So it definitely came together really fast to be honest. I'm not really sure how to answer because I don't know the answer fully. It sort of happened.

Ian: Congrats on being able to work with them. I'm sure it was really exciting. Before we get to the instructional stuff, I want to hear one behind the scenes story about the Bryans. You've got to give us some scoop on what they're like in person or some funny story that happened with them.

Will: They're very cool guys. They're sort of -- I have a similar personality. We like to joke around and have a good time. They were awesome to hang out with and easy to work with. The thing that always impressed me from afar when I never met them and sort of reinforced when I saw them up close is that they are very, very generous with their time. They always sign every single autograph, and this World Team Tennis match that I was at in Kansas City, there was a line that circled the court. They stayed there for probably 45 minutes signing every single autograph. It was impress to me to watch that.

Ian: Very nice. Alright, let's get to the instruction here. That's what everybody definitely wants to hear about is what you learned and what they're going to be sharing with

everybody during the free course. If you're listening to this podcast, you probably heard about the free course that Will put out. Let's talk about exactly what you learned from them Will and exactly what they're going to be teaching everybody who checks it out. But first I'm curious what your response would be to the question of, -- my listeners are recreational players. Players who are looking to get better and try to improve, working hard, and I'm sure that they're really interested in hearing from the Bryans and what they do to be successful, but realistically how much can my audience really take away from that and use themselves? After all the Bryans are world class athletes. Can my listeners actually put into play the things that they teach?

Will: That's a very good question, and when this thing came together I sat down with them and said, there's a lot of things you guys do that rec players, mere mortals, aren't going to be able to copy. There's no point in talking about how to hit 130 mile per hour serve. So we sat down and said, look we've got to figure out here what you guys do that everybody can copy, sort of something that's universal and not just high level. And what I discovered when talking to these guys is that for every situation that they're in during a doubles match, they have a plan for it. They know what to do based on the scenario. And it struck me that these guys are extremely detail oriented, extremely strategic, extremely tactical, and that is an area that a recreational player can copy. And to be honest that's an area that players are very weak in. They just get out there and play the point without giving it too much thought. So that was the path we took there because that's the part that everybody can copy.

Ian: I want to get into the plays concept and pick your brain about that, but first I'd really like to get your thoughts on what you learned about the specific tactics within those plays.

Will: Control of the net, hit as many easy volleys as possible. It basically means don't stay back at the baseline. Don't kind of play doubles like it's single because when you're right on top of the net, the entire geometry of the court is available to you. You can hit off the court versus through the court. You can hit down on the ball. I mean, the top of volley you're able of hitting on top of the net, Ian you obviously know this. You can hit a way better volley when you're right on the net versus back at the service line. Your volleys don't have to get any better, but when you're at the net they just become better based on where you are. So they're always trying to get the net because when you get that easy volley, that's where you can end the point. That's where you're in control. And when you're further back, there's way less you can do with the ball, and that means your opponents can really hurt you. So all the plays are designed to setup the easiest shot possible given the situation.

Ian: If I'm hearing you correctly, the overarching theme, the reason why they're setting up their plays is so that one of them or both can get close to the net to have an easy volley, and easy volleys are the ones that are going to finish the points.

Will: Yeah. That's essentially a good summary of what's going on there. They're always trying to setup the easiest shot possible.

Ian: I think my listeners are probably thinking yeah that's great. Probably many have heard that before. They've heard from their pros in person or they've heard in some kind of internet instruction or someplace else that they're supposed to be more aggressive and offensive, and they shouldn't be tentative and hang back by the service line, which I think is a huge problem by the way for recreation players personally. But they're probably thinking to themselves that's great and I understand the whole geometry and all that, but there's this little play called the lob from my opponents that always beats me. I get up there, I try it, and there goes the lob. It goes over my head and I lose. It happens over and over again. I'm kind of channeling players. I've heard this excuse over and over again from recreational players. What is their answer to the lob?

Will: That's a couple of things Ian. First, the one thing with the Bryans being 6'4, a bunch of people said to me they're 6'4 it's hard to lob them. But if I'm 5'8 then it's way easier to get lobbed. And of course I can say from personal experience I am 5'8 and I don't get lobbed very often because the trick is -- and what the Bryans do is they are actually using the shot they just hit to evaluate how likely it is that they're going to get lobbed. So I think in terms of the recreational player, like oh I'm getting on top of the net. I'm trying to be really aggressive and then get lobbed. You can't just be aggressive all the time, right? When you hit your approach shot, your first volley, whatever, you need to ask yourself is my opponent going to be able to hit a good lob off of the shot that I just gave them. And if the answer is yes they'll be able to lob me effectively, then you don't get as close to the net unless you hit a shot that was really good. You stuck it, and your opponent is running, put a lot of pace on it or whatever. Then you can really crowd the net because the chances of a quality lob becomes significantly less.

So that's the trick there is using your shot to anticipate the lob there. And you'll the Bryans when they play a match, they're vertically adjusting at net. They're moving up when they hit a good shot, and they're backing up when they don't because they recognize that you can't play the same way regardless of the situation. And you can't position yourself the same way during a point. You have to adjust your positioning based on exactly what's going on.

Ian: I think that's super, super smart. And I hope everybody listening is paying close attention to that because I think that really gets to the core issue for most recreational players. I think most recreational players, they're kind of all or nothing with their tactics.

Will: I think it's a bit of a catch 22. If you're hanging out at the service line, might use the term stuck in the mud. Just stand there statuesque. We know the secret sauce allows you to hit better shots. So if you're playing further back, the volleys you're giving your opponent, if you're back in the baseline, those are easy to lob off of. So if players are like I get lobbed all the time. Well, if you're standing in the service line or you're back at the baseline, that's the reason. You're making it really easy for your opponents to lob you. So you need to have strategies and tactics and specifically some plays that allow you to go forward and hit an easiest shot that you'll be able to do more with. Then the likelihood of a lob goes way down.

Ian: Something else that I saw in the -- I know you referenced it in at least the first two videos of the course that you just put out, which was a specific footwork pattern that -- and this is kind of -- let me reiterate for emphasis here. I mean, this is kind of the holy grail. We're talking about being able to be offensive and get up and put the ball away close to the net and cover the lob at the same time. I mean, when people hear that, their ears should be perking up. That's like the best of both worlds. And something I saw you and Mike and Bob demonstrating in the first video was a specific footwork pattern that really allows that to happen much more easily. Can you talk about that, Will?

Will: Yeah. The little dance step? It's going to be tough to describe, but it's very easy to do. It's basically a forward split step, which would maybe carry you a foot into the court. So if you're starting at the service line, you'd be a foot into the service line. You hit that split and got your momentum carrying you forward a little bit. Now if you get a volley, the ball is coming to you, it would be an additional two steps to close on the volley. But then you're really forwarding the court versus hitting a volley at the service line. So you're going to hit a much better volley. But you get that forward split and you get lobbed, you're in perfect position to move back and cover it. You're not too close to the net at that point. So it lets you kind of cover both. You can cover the lob and then it allows you to close should you realize oh the volley is coming to me. So yeah great step. The Bryans have been doing that. Their dad actually taught it to them back when they were little kids. They've been doing it ever since. That's an area anyone can copy. Very simple footwork.

Ian: Absolutely. With that, let's get in the plays a little bit because I know that's kind of a main concept that you're really trying to get across to those people watching the free course. I guess a big part to the success of people getting better is actually having a reason or purpose or some preplanned something out on the court so they aren't just running around doing whatever and making it up. I mean, that just kind of makes sense that we have a plan and things are usually more successful that way, right?

Will: Yeah. Absolutely. Look, I like to distinguish plays a little bit from strategies and tactics, which I might use -- I might use the terminology strategies and tactics when

talking about singles, but with doubles you're a team out there. Teams run plays, like a football team runs plays. So I like that terminology better where you're both on the same page and you're both working towards a specific goal, which is a volley right on top of the net or the easiest shot possible.

So the Bryans have a play like I said earlier have a play for every common scenario they come across. When they're serving, when they're both at net, when they're one up one back, when they're returning, whatever, they always have a plan, and they always know what to do in those situations. And that's really the thing we're trying to communicate here our players is you want to have a plan. You want to know what to do, be on the same page as your partner every single point, every single scenario.

Ian: Going back to what you said about the relationship between strategy and plays, please tell me if you think I'm right or wrong. I think a lot of times, recreational players will try to implement a certain strategy. For the sake of discussion, let's say they're going to try to be offensive at the net. They're going to try to use that tactic. And then they'll try one play to make that occur and it burns them. I think what recreational players do is they'll try one type of play to achieve a certain strategy, but if the very first attempt doesn't work, they'll totally give up on the strategy. In other words, instead of trying different plays to still try to still be successful, they'll just try one and then go back to being super passive again. Does that sound accurate?

Will: That sounds completely accurate. The thing about any scenario in tennis is you can break it down to a numbers game, percentages. Sometimes it's going to work and sometimes it's not going to work. But if you run a play and you happen to get burned that first time, that's the small percentage of the time that you're going to get beat there, but it's still way more effective and you're going to win way more points running that play then doing what you used to be doing, which is being passive and reacting to what's going on. That is still way lower percentage and you'll win way fewer points doing that. So yeah, it's an aggressive mindset and sometimes when you're aggressive it doesn't work out. If you look at an NFL team, they might go deep 10 times a game, but they only connect on 3 of them.

Ian: Sure. So this week, all of you listening can check out the free course that Will has up, and you're going to learn all of the concepts that we've been talking about today. You can check that out by going to EssentialTennis.com/Doubles. That'll shoot you right on over to where you can sign up for the free course, and that's going to be running through -- is it Sunday?

Will: Probably in the next week actually. Probably through Wednesday.

Ian: Okay. So you're going to have a little bit more than a week to check that out. It's 4 videos. Truthfully you're going to learn a lot, and it's just full of really good stuff. And I mean the videos add up what is it 2 hours worth of instruction?

Will: It's sitting around 2 hours. It's a lot.

Ian: Nice. So you're going to get a ton of value just from the free course. As always with what Will does with his promotional courses, there's absolutely no obligation to buy. All you have to do is signup with your email address. Then at the end mid-next week you'll have a chance to signup for the full course with the Bryan brothers. Why don't you tell us a little about the full course Will and I guess exactly what that encompasses and what people can expect from that after going through the free course?

Will: Well, the free course is essentially a very good snapshot of what's going to be going on in the full training. It's the playbook basically. It's what do they do when they're returning serve for example that we're not going to touch on with the free training is an example. They run plays like I said when they're returning serve, which is really interesting. They're actually setting up the secret sauce. So it's more of that, and it's also -- the exercises and drills that they go through that they do on a daily basis that allows them to execute the various plays that they run during a match. So for example in the second video we have the close volley drill, which they use to work on transitioning from the baseline up to net. So that would be an example of one of the exercises they use. And there's a bunch of other ones they use to make them comfortable and make them able to execute the various plays that they run.

Ian: Great. Will, congratulations on putting this together and working with them. It must have been an incredible experience. I really hope that it's successful for you. Again everybody listening you need to check this out. Get the free course. It'll be really worth your time. I can personally vouch for that. Again to check it out go to EssentialTennis.com/Doubles which will shoot you right over there, and if you end up signing for the full course, a percentage of your persona after going through that link is going to come back to help support EssentialTennis.com which I always appreciate. You're going to get a ton of value and information out of it. Will, I would like to thank you very much for your time. As always great to have you on the show. Thank you for giving us some insights on doubles strategy and tactics and plays and for letting us know about your course.

Will: Thanks for having me on, Ian.

Ian: Alright. That does it for today's episode the podcast, episode #185. Thanks very much for joining me on today's show. I hope you got a lot out of my conversation with Will. Go check out that free course with the Bryans. There's a lot of great instruction in there. Let me know if you have any questions as well. Also, if you're going to be at the

US Open a week from today on September 5th, let me know that. You can send me an email at ian@essentialtennis.com. I'd love to meetup with you if you're going to be there. And let's see. Lots of comments on last week's show. Very thoughtful comments. Today's show is already running overtime by quite a bit, so I'm not going to read any comments, but if you have any comments or questions about today's interview with Will, definitely post them. Go to EssentialTennis.com/Podcast, click on #185, and leave your thoughts and comments. I do my best to reply to all of your comments. Have a great week everybody, take care, and good luck with your tennis.