

Essential Tennis Podcast #92

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 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 somersetsportperformance.com. Thank you very much for joining me today and I would like to kick off today's show by telling you guys about something new that I'm going to start working on and hopefully many of you will be excited by this.

I'm going to start doing video analysis and video tennis lessons online. This is something that I have avoided doing in the past, because of time commitments and I want to make sure that whatever I do here in the site I can really commit to fully and I found the way to be able to do this without a whole of time commitments and investment on my own parts.

So hopefully I can start getting a lot of these out. Now if you would like to be one of the few first people to have their video analyzed by myself, whether it be for stroke analysis and technique or point play and strategy singles or doubles you can do that.

And I'm going to analyze for free the first 10 people who send me their videos. Now in order to do this you need to put your video up on Youtube and again this can be of either a stroke technique of a specific stroke or it can be video of yourself playing points either singles or doubles. And I will analyze that video for you and put it back up on YouTube for you to view and receive instruction from me for free that way.

So the first 10 people to send me their video or link to their video on YouTube will get free analysis from myself. All I have to do is send me an e-mail to ian@essentialtennis.com and in the subject line just write video analysis. So first 10 people and if you're not one of the first 10 don't worry I'm going to start to make this service available pretty soon. I'll let you guys know how exactly you can get analysis from me in the future. So let's get down to business. Sit back, relax and get ready for some great tennis instructions.
[music] [music] [music]

All right, let's get started with today's show and I've got three great listener questions to answer today that I'm looking forward to and our first one comes to us from Betran Ben who posted his question on the forums. Ben wrote and said, "Hi, Ian. I am around to 4.0 level self rated. I have a decent topspin forehand, backhand volley serve and overhead. Recently I lost many matches that I was ahead in, won the first set, in base line rally's until my opponent started to attack the net in the second and third sets. I'm so desperate to look for a way to fight back. I think their strategy works well due to the following things--
1. The tennis balls got flat and bounce less in the second and third set. So I did not hit as hard as in the first set. They can start to hit an approach slice shot and go to the net. I was not as fresh as in the first sets. So my shot had less pace and less consistency. And made it easier for them to handle. Usually I

got 70% of my passing shots are lobs in the court once they came up to the net. However, since they can put away 50% of my 70% shot in the end, they won the math most of the time.

I lost to this player, but the matches were close. So I'm sure I will play them again sometime soon. I would appreciate it if you could tell me what is the best way short term and or long term to beat this strategy. Thanks in advance. Ben."

Good question Ben and no doubt playing somebody who is a net crasher. Somebody who loves to come in to the net can be difficult in singles. It really puts a lot of pressure on you being the person who is back on the base line and trying to hit a good shot passed them or over them and that's part of the reason why I enjoyed coming to the net so much. It really challenges your opponents and in this scenario your opponent is the person challenging you. So it can definitely be tough to beat this kind of person.

Now to kick things off here. I'd like first of all I don't like excuses. I tell my students to put away excuses all the time whether it be a destruction on the court or maybe I congratulate them on a good shot and they missed the next one and say, "Oh, thanks a lot for telling me I was doing well. Now I screwed up. " I don't like excuses and I think you saying that the balls being more dead in the second and third set is an excuse. Now certainly there can be a difference, but I don't think that any wear and tear on the balls over one or two sets after the first one is a legitimate reason for losing.

Over a three set of play there is not going to be a large enough difference for you really to get enough thrown off very much especially since you are a 4.0 level. Even if there was a large difference and how the balls were playing between the first set and the third set, you really should be able to adjust accordingly and most of those adjustments are going to be in your foot work and being able to get up to the ball that's not bouncing as much.

So I don't want you to use that as a crutch or as an excuse. I'm not mad at you. However, I think you should take responsibility for what's going on here. And that's only part of what you said the problem was. I'm not saying you're completely making up excuses here. However, I don't think that's really a legitimate reason.

Now moving on to the rest of it. I'm definitely going to give you some feedback here on what you need to do to be able to beat this type of player consistently and you're on the right track. You talk about hitting passing shots or hitting lobs, but I'm gonna give you three main ways to be able to defeat this player who's rushing forward towards the net.

First of all, to begin with, you need to do your best to keep your ground strokes deep in the court to begin with. Don't give them any easy opportunities to approach. So after the first set and you say you're tired. So maybe we need to work on your fitness a little bit as well Ben, but we need to be able to maintain a solid level of play from your ground strokes. We cannot give up weak short shots to your opponents even if you're tired and even if the balls are not bouncing as much. You need to stay relaxed and you need to hit a good solid consistent ground stroke deep in the court back to your opponent if they like to come to the net.

The deeper you can keep your ground strokes. The more difficult it's going to be

for them to approach. Now there's many ways that you can keep your ground strokes deeper, one I just mentioned, make sure that you stay relaxed and this may be part of why you're getting tired and worn out in the second and third sets to begin with. Make sure that as you engage in a ground stroke rally with your opponents you keep your body your body relaxed and allow the racket to swing freely.

So many recreational players play with a lot of tension and a lot of stiffness in their body and if you can stay relaxed, it should help you quite a lot and keeping the ball deeper in the court. So stay relaxed. Also make sure that you're using your core well. And you're rotating the big parts of your body which is your core, your torso, your abs, your chest or shoulders. That means to rotate into every shot well and again keeping those parts of your body relax. So let the racket swing freely.

So use your core well. Stay relaxed. Also keep the ball high over the top of the net. I'm not talking about 6 or 7 feet. However your average ground stroke and the 4.0 level should probably be three or maybe 4 feet over the top of the net to keep the ball deep in the court. If your ground strokes are traveling a foot over the top of the net. They are not go very deep into the court and that's going to give your opponent an easy opportunity to approach and since this person likes to approach. We want to take that away from them.

So make sure your lifting the ball and it's traveling consistently three feet over the top of the net and lastly make sure that you keep the ball in your strike zone and your moving your feet well. If you're allowing the ball to be low down below your knees or high up above your shoulder as you engage in a rally with this player. You're going to be coughing enough a lot more weak shots that are going to give them opportunities to come forward into the net.

So all of those things I've just mentioned. Staying relaxed, using your core, keeping the ball high over the net and keeping the ball in your strike zone on your side of the court. These are all things that are going to help you keep the ball deeper to your opponent and hopefully take away their ability to approach easily. Now even if you do all of these things well it's still possible that they will still come into the net. So it's not going to immediately keep them off the net. Just because you're keeping the ball deep. It's very possible they will still come forward. So it's not a fail safe, it's not going to completely defeat them most likely. However, this is going to be a good first step to beating this player-- is keeping your ground strokes deep to make it more challenging for them to come forwards to the net.

So that's number 1, keep it deep to begin with. Number 2, work on your passing shots. Number 2 and 3 are basically I'm going to be telling you to work on the shots that you are already trying, but we need to hit a little bit higher quality shot since your opponent is beating you when you're attempting these shots.

So number 2 is you need to work on your passing shot and I want you to do this by playing competitive points with a practice partner and I would suggest you do this by both of you starting on the base line and you feed your practice partner, your opponent during your practice play. Feed them a short ball on purpose. Make sure that it bounces in front of the service line and have them approach and come into the net. Hopefully, you can find somebody with a good net game to help you practice this, but I would suggest that you both start on the

base line. You feed a short shot to your opponents. Have them come forwards and approach and then play out the points and you need to practice hitting confidence, full speed passing shots over and over again. You can do this without keeping track of score at first just to give yourself practice and repetition to help you build your confidence, but eventually I want you to do this and keep tracks of score and play a game up to 10 points as an example and every single point you feed your practice partner a short shot and every single point they come to the net and you just pass. Just hit passing shots. Don't even lob and just practice hitting strong aggressive passing shots. This is the shot that you need get better at if your opponent is beating you consistently when you try to pass. That's number 2.

Way number 3 that you're going to get better at beating this player is working on your lob. And your target for your lob should be passed the halfway points between the service line and the base line. Between the service line and the base line there's 18 feet of space. Most players are a little bit surprised to hear that. There's quite a bit of room between the service line and the base line. I would like for you to aim about halfway back between the points in the base line. That gives 9 feet, 9 feet of space between the baseline and your targets. You've got a target area of 9 feet back deep in the court.

That's where you should be aim with your lob and I would encourage you to get some kind of targets. Some kind of way to kind of mark off that area of the court. You could lay down some towels back there or make a line with a bunch of tennis balls halfway between the service line and the base line and actually practice hitting that area on the court. . practice hitting it deep over and over again.

You could also use this as point play and you could do this without keeping track of score or with keeping track of score. I would recommend that you do it both ways and the way I would set these points up is by starting with you and your opponents again in the middle of the base line. Feed a short shot. Feed an approach shot of your opponents have them come forward and hit their approach come back to you. Hit a ground stroke to your opponent to give them a volley and then after their volley once they are up at the net, then lob.

So there's going to be several shots here before you lob. Your feed which is short and approach shot down the middle. A ground stroke hit by yourself back to the net player. That's the third shot. They will hit a volley and then you will lob. So we've got a sequence of 5 shots here and you and your partner both need to be under control and keeping the ball in play up until that 5th shot which is going to be your lob at which point I'd love for you guys to play out the points, but up until that 5th shot be cooperative, keep the ball in play, get into the point just like you would during your match play against this opponent and then work on hitting your lob on the fly.

I would really recommend to you Ben that you work on your passing shots and your lobs independently at first. Practice hitting them with confidence and then eventually play out some points against your practice partner and mix it up and try to keep your partner guessing and hit passing shots sometimes and other times hit lobs and practice hitting them both solid and well and confidently and this is how you were going to beat our opponent through these 3 ways.

And briefly again they were number 1, keeping the ball deep to begin with. To keep your opponent pushed back. Number 2 is working on your passing shots and

number 3 was working on your lobs. If you can improve in all 3 of these things just a little bit each, you're going to start beating this person that you're talking to me about.

So Ben hopefully that answers your question and I've given you a lot of stuff here to work on and I expect you to get out there and work hard at it and I guarantee you it will pay off. If you go out and you actually practice what I'm describing and get the reputation and practice hitting these shots confidently. Your game is going to improve and you're going to start beating this type of player more often. Thanks for your question Ben and good luck. [music] [music] [music] [music]

All right. Next up we've got a questions by David in Seattle, Washington. David wrote to me and said, "Hi, Ian. I just started listening to your Podcast. It's a wonderful source for us tennis nuts-- great job. I have two questions. One, I had a hard time playing with one of my opponent. He is kind of similar to my level. Every time we player matches if he is losing then he will start hitting deep moon balls to my back hand. By the way, both of us are right handed.

Since I'm using an eastern backhand grip it's hard for me to return these high balls cross courts deep back to his backhand. He takes advantage of this by going to the net and finishing the point. Could you please suggest a good way for me to handle this situation? And then question number 2. My slice backhand isn't going forward a lot. It usually just bounces straight up or a little forward. I'm not sure if it is a grip issue or not. I used a continental grip from my backhand slice, in my right. Thanks. David. "

Well, David good questions and yes the backhand that you describing-- the high backhand ground stroke can definitely be one of the most difficult shots in tennis and you said that you were using an eastern backhand grip. So I'm assuming here that you're a one-handed backhand player. David didn't say, but I'm going to ahead and assume that based on how you describing, how you hold that racket. So given that you've got a one-handed backhand and your opponent is giving it's you high back deep in the corner, positioning on the shot is extremely important. Where you actually put yourself on the court to be able to hit this shot back is really going to determine how easy or hard of a time you have actually returning it.

You should be doing whatever possible to hit every backhand at waist height and I typically refer to this as a players strike zone and those of you listening in other countries might not find that phrase familiar, Strike Zone. It comes from baseball here in the US or other parts of the world. Baseball is becoming popular as well such as Japan where right now I've got a couple listeners, but strike zone is basically where it should be easy for to hit the ball and in baseball that's between the knees and the chest and it is pretty similar to strike zone and tennis as well. We want a ball to be struck somewhere in that area and right around waist heights is usually pretty ideal from most shots and the one handed backhand is definitely not an exception to that.

So in order to get the shot in your strike zone David. You've got 2 main ways of doing it. You've got 2 main option. Number 1, your first option is to back up and allow the ball to drop after its bounce on your side of the court. If you're just standing on the base line and your opponent hits a pretty solid deep shot that's bouncing up high and you just stay on the base line and allow it to be a shoulder height shot or higher. Well, that's your fault.

Yes, they've hit a good shot and going to give them some respect for that, but your first way of dealing with this should be to back up and allow the ball to drop. Let it get up to the peak of its bounce. Let gravity do its job and pull the ball back down again and back up far enough that the ball gets down to waist height. If you back up and the ball is still above your waist. If you're still trying to hit a backhand at shoulder height, you didn't back up far enough. Continue to back up until the ball drops down to your waist again. Now this could be a lot of work, because you've got to back up quickly before the ball gets to you. And allow it to drop down to waist height. Hit the shots and then move back up to the base line again and it's possible that you're going to have to repeat that process over and over again. So be it. That's really just what's you have to do to be a good player. You're going to have to use a lot of foot work and move quickly and put the ball in a comfortable position to hit over and over again.

This is probably the easiest way of doing it. It's just to back up and allow the ball to drop. Now there's a second way that you can do this as well and that is called taking the ball on the rise or taking it on a short hop and we're going to do that by taking the ball right off the bounce and before the ball is able to rise above waist height. Now this is little bit more difficult of a shot timing-wise, because we're taking the ball right off the court, right after the bounce and hitting it at waist heights. So timing wise, this can be a tricky shot, because we're hitting it on its way up off the bounce before it gets up above waist heights and so you're really have to position yourself very precisely.

And just on the right spot so that you're both not hitting it really, really low below your knees like literally right off the bounce. You've going to be a little farther back than that to allow it to rise up a little bit higher, but you also don't want to put yourself too far away from the bounce, because then the ball will rise up too high and you're going to end up hitting a high backhand shot again. So you have to put yourself in just the right spot and it can be difficult, because you don't a lot of time between the bounce and when you actually make contact. You're going to be making contact with this shot pretty quickly right after the bounce and so putting yourself right in the right spot can be pretty tough.

However, taking the ball on the rise has a lot of benefits as well. It puts the ball in your strike zone as suppose to letting the ball come up above your strike zone around shoulder height and then trying to make contact there. That's one benefit, you're able to hit the ball in a comfortable spot. Secondly, it takes time away from your opponent as opposed to letting the ball come up and letting it drop again. When you take it right off of the bounce, you're taking time away from your opponent that you would be using to back up and let the ball come up, let it come back down and then hit the shot.

So if they are trying to come in to the net and you take it right off of the court, right off the bounce, you're catching them a little bit more off guard, they're a little bit farther away and you're going to make things a little bit more difficult for them by taking that time away from them. It also keeps you in a much better court position. You're not backing way up behind the base line to allow the ball to drop. You're taking it at the very least right at the base line or maybe a couple of steps behind the base line if the ball is literally bouncing on the base line. You may have to be a couple feet behind the base line

in order to let it come up to your strike zone, but that is as opposed to you backing all the way up to the curtain sometimes or the back fence depending on where you are playing to actually let the ball come up and then come all back down to your waist again. So your keeping yourself in much better position and you're taking time away from your opponents and we're putting the ball in your strike zone.

So taking the ball right off the bounce on the rise has a lot of benefits to it, but again this is a difficult shot timing-wise. So I would encourage you David to practice both of these. Practice backing up and allowing the ball to drop down to your strike zone and also practice taking the ball right off of the bounce on the rise, again hitting the ball at waist height, but right after the bounce and not allowing it to get up above your strike zone. Those are your 2 main options to hit the ball in a comfortable place and not allow it to get high to your back-hand side.

Now to answer your second question. You're talking about your backhand slice and this can be very useful. This is basically our 3rd option which is allowing the ball to get up a little bit higher and hitting a one-handed back-hand slice instead of trying to drive it or hit a topspin shot from waist height. And yes, continental grip is correct for this shot. You don't want to keep with an eastern backhand grip. You should be switching over to continental. That's definitely the way to go.

Now if it's not getting very much drive and you're not getting very much depth with that backhand slice, make sure you're using your shoulder to drive through the shot and you're not using your wrist or your forearm which are both quite a bit weaker than your shoulder and your core. You want to be using the big muscles of your body to really drive through this shot and hopefully get it deep so that you challenge your opponent back again and you don't cough up these short weak shots that are allowing him to come forwards and attack to the net. And also make sure that you're not using a racket path that is predominantly downwards or sideways and you say you're right handed, so that would be a racket path that's left to right putting a bunch of side spin on the ball or a very high-to-low which puts a lot of back spin on the ball and again spins the ball a lot that typically results in a short weak reply-- it doesn't go very deep in the court.

Sounds like this might be your problem with the backhand slice. Make sure that you are swinging your racket predominantly forwards, out towards your target with a slightly open racket face to create some good depth and not cough up the short ball.

So David that's my response to your question. You've got basically 3 main options. Allow the ball to drop to your strike zones. Take the ball on the rise in your strike zone or improve that slice by hopefully improving your racket path and making it a little more of a penetrating shot. Thanks for the great question David and good luck. Feel free to write me back if you have any further questions. [music] [music] [music] [music]

Alright, let's finish up today's show with a good question from Jason FC in the Bay Area of California and this is a difficult question that Jason asks and I haven't left myself a whole lot of time to talk about this, but I'm going to try to be clear on my thoughts and give you guys a good idea of what I think is the answer. Quickly here. Jason wrote and said, "Not many people can afford to

hire a personal instructor or attend tennis classes. The internet is a good source for free instruction. There are thousand of videos and articles that offer help on improving your tennis game, but how many of these video are really going to improve your game? Which brings me to another question. How will you know if the information that you are getting from the internet is good for your tennis game? Is there a way to tell which ones are good and which ones are misleading? Having little or no knowledge about tennis, it's hard to tell which ones are really going to boost your game. Any tips on getting the most out of online tennis instruction? Jason. "

Well, excellent question Jason and I'll start off my answer by saying that I'm not going to bad mouth or list.. . Here's my list of tennis websites that give bad information and here's my list of tennis websites that give good information. I'm not going to do that. I don't think that would be very tactful or tasteful or very professional, but I will give you guys some guidelines and let me start off by saying that there's definitely a lot of good information and a lot of good instruction on the internet and it's just like any other topic online.

You have to judge for yourself if it's good information or not and as Jason said that can be difficult, because not all of us are experts on whatever we're trying to find information on. That's why we're looking for information on the certain topic to begin with, because we're not experts. And we're looking for good solid information. And while there is good information online. Yes there is also bad information. There's subpar tennis instructions online. And there's tennis instructions online that is just plain wrong. I'll definitely say that. There's incorrect tennis instruction all over the internet.

And this is one of the reasons why I started Essential Tennis, was I looked around at what else was available. And I was for the most part I was very surprised. I was surprised that the how popular and how much action, how many views on YouTube and how many comments and etc certain instructional videos were getting when I felt like the instruction was just plain wrong and so I thought to myself geez. I should be able to do this pretty well and give good solid fundamental information and hopefully get some traction as well and gain an audience when people who are giving misinformation are actually getting popular in the first place.

Now I'm just going to give you Jason, 3 main ways, 3 tests that you can hopefully run to get a general idea of whether or not what you're watching or listening to is good. First of all, way number 1 to judge what you're looking at online is does it make sense. And the way that I teach the game of tennis is very common sense. It's very common sense oriented and it should be logical and it should just hopefully just click in the way that it is presented. It should be explained simply.

It should be explained in ways that a lay person can understand and apply to their own tennis game and if it's extremely complicated and just doesn't make sense and you have more questions at the end of the video that you watch or at the end of the audio that you listen to, than when you started, you should probably shy away from that instruction, in my opinion.

Number 2. It should be applicable to your level of play. There's a lot of tennis instruction online that shows Roger Federer hitting a forehand and getting extremely technical with very small details, small parts of the swing and

there's a lot of people trying to apply very detailed and technical things that the pros are doing to an average level, recreational players game. A lot of times, I don't think that's very appropriate when you guys look at the 3.0 level player or a 3.5 level player, it's not the angle between the player's forearm and bicep. It is not the angle of their elbows or the angles in their arm that's going to make the difference between being the 3.0 player and a 3.5 level player. It's going to be the simple, fundamental, easy, essential things that are going to make the difference between being a bad tennis player and a mediocre tennis player. And most of the players looking for instruction online are average level players. There's not 5.0 level players looking for instruction online, because they are 5.0 level players.

For them to really get to the next level of play they are probably going to be more spending time on the courts and drilling and playing against high level players then they are going to be looking for tips online trying to improve their game.

So you guys should be looking for instruction that's applicable to your level of play and it's not just 'here's how the pros serve and looking at little things. It should be the big fundamental things that the person is teaching if you are in fact an amateur player. If you're an average level tennis player which is around to 3.5 level.

Now number 3. There should be specific examples and instances of good players actually performing what's being taught to you and this one, the third one is more on the lines of looking for misinformation and there are lots of videos on YouTube of tennis instructors teaching bad technique. Technique that in my opinion is actually opposite of what you should be doing. And the way that you root these things out and it takes a little bit of work and effort on your part is by listening to what they are talking about and watching and seeing what they are giving in terms of instruction and then actually watching good players and observing them and seeing if that's actually how they do it.

And I know it kind of seems simple, but this how you root out information and instruction that's actually the opposite of what you should be doing and believe it or not there's plenty of instruction out there that's the opposite of what a solid player does.

So these are kind of subjective things guys and just like anybody else online, these are my opinions. And I like to think that my opinions are valuable and they are helpful and they have proven to be so, because listeners of this show do improve their game. I hear back from players everyday and every week all over the world that are getting better and what I teach is just the simple fundamental things and that's usually how most players are going to improve their game.

So you guys should really just be looking for somebody who's teaching the fundamentals and really pay close attention to that. Don't get caught up in the little details and the little quote tricks or tips or complicated things that the pros might be doing. Don't get me wrong. You can learn a lot from the pros, but the biggest things that you guys can learn from the most part are the basics and that's how really you guys are going to improve your game.

So Jason hopefully that wasn't too convoluted. Hopefully that make sense and is actually helpful to you. And I'd be curious to hear your feedback on that. So

good luck Jason. Good luck to all of you and your quest to finding instructions that really helps you and that's really what I am trying to do here on the Essential Tennis Podcast is give out the best information possible to really help you guys improve your game. [music] [music] [music]

All right, that does it for episode number 92 of the Essential Tennis Podcast. Thank you very much for joining me today. I truly appreciate your support of the show by downloading the file and listening to the show. Hopefully it's been helpful to you. Just two quick shout-outs here before we wrap things up and both of these shout-outs go to our most recent sign ups at the forum at essentialtennis. Com.

The first one goes out to Mark and Garrett in Houston, Texas. They are a father-son duo. Garrett is 11-years old and he and his father Mark are both working on their tennis games together. Sounds like really great team as they continue to try to improve their tennis games together. And they signed up under the screen name of Mark Pyke on the forums at essentialtennis. Com.

So welcome to you two and they sound like really enthusiastic and passionate tennis players. So I'm looking forward to their posting on the forums and also Ichiro in Japan. First forum sign up in Japan. So Ichiro really good to have you on the forum as well and I look forward to you posting a lot also. So welcome guys.

That does it for today's show. Take care everybody. And good luck with your tennis. [music] [music]