

## **Essential Tennis Podcast #94**

Speaker : 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 technique player.

And now--here's Ian!

Ian Westermann: 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 [somersetsportsperformance.com](http://somersetsportsperformance.com).

Before we get to today's instructional questions on the show, I'd like to just make 2 quick announcements.

First of all, I'm very happy to announce that I've finally launched a video section of Essential Tennis.com. You guys are going to want to check this out immediately. I'm really happy to finally get some video out there and I plan on keeping up with this and putting out a lot of content for you guys. It's 100% free at the moment. So definitely go take advantage of it and you can check that out at [essentialtennis.com/video](http://essentialtennis.com/video).

Secondly, before we get started, you guys have heard me talked about the clinic in Palm Springs, California. And it's definitely going to be a go and I'm excited about that clinic. It's going to be a great time. There's still spots open and this is the last time I'm going to offer them. The dates on these are January 2nd and 3rd Saturday and Sunday in Palm Springs. The price is \$350 for 2 days of instruction with hotel room included. This is a really excellent deal. It really is. For 2 full days of instruction. And currently there's only 7 people signed up. So if you'd like some 1 on 1 instruction and attention from myself. If you want to improve your tennis game and travel and be in a wonderful place in the middle of the winter as well at the same time. Definitely, send me an e-mail and let me know if you're interested. And you can let me know at [ian@essentialtennis.com](mailto:ian@essentialtennis.com).

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

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Alright, let's get started with today's show. And we're going to kick things off with the question from Ashley in Australia. Who says that she's a 4.5 level player.

She wrote to me and said, 'Here's my question. Do you think that there is any etiquette involved when the rally has started? As in: do you think that there are things you should or shouldn't do during the rally? I'm not talking about waving your arms around or making noise, etc, but about game play.

Here's my example. I was recently playing doubles in the doubles final and our opponents were better than we were, one of them in particular. Our decision therefore was to keep the ball away from this guy as much as possible. The result was we looked like we were toughing this guy by smacking balls down the line with him continually. If allowed win up it was in his direction. If we were both at the net we drilled him. We got some funny looks for these sort of tactic. I've played a lot of tennis in my time, but have never specifically set out to target of player in this fashion.

Do you think this is legitimate means of winning or it is a poor etiquette? The same thing goes from mix doubles. I was playing the match and then the opposition male--the opponent male-- felt quite comfortable smashing forehand than the female at the net. Is this of breach of etiquette or unacceptable form of winning?' -Ashley.

Well, that's a good question. Ashley and there's kind of 2 different kinds of tennis players. Recreational tennis players. Not everybody has the ability to play as a tennis club whether a member and nice facilities etc. Some people have to play at public facilities, public courts, and it's just kind of playground rules out there. There's not really a whole lot of etiquette involved. I'm not slighting people who only play at public courts in the list. However, when you get involved in a club with different members and different groups of people, a kind of politics comes in to play. And so it just kind of depends on what type of tennis you're playing. And there's going to be basically one of two scenarios that you going to find yourself in and you have to make decision for yourself which of these 2 situations or scenarios that you're in when you're playing your tennis match, and what's most important for you in the scenario that you're in. So let me describe this.

The first scenario is the club play or social play. And this is where the #1 priority really for everybody in the court is just to be there for enjoyment, to get some exercise, to have some social interaction, to just have a good time. And fill their time a little bit during the day with something enjoyable. And in this setting nobody should really be singled out exclusively or picked on. And there is a little bit of etiquette involved here, because everybody's there just to have a good time and this is just kind of a style or a flavor of tennis if you will. And this happens that every club in the country or across the world usually is in Australia. And I've never played tennis at a club in Australia, but I'm going to go ahead and assume that it's very similar to here in that people are joining tennis club for relaxation and for recreation, and so in this kind of scenario or setting, no I would say it's kind of look down upon to be super competitive and-- by the way what you did in your match that you're describing was great tactics. It was good strategy. However, if this was during a social match-- just a weekly kind of game at your local club--then yes I can understand why people would look down upon that tactic.

And last thing I'm going to say about this specific scenario is that the best player on the court really bears some responsibility to make things close and fun and once in a while at the club variety somebody won't show up for their doubles group and I go out and fill in. It's my job to just make things even make things fun. My side of the court is still going to win, but I'm not going out there to flex my muscles and prove that I'm the best, etc. It's my job to make sure that the points last as long as possible and everybody has a good time. And so if you're in that kind of environment in the club play then that should be your goal. Is to just have fun and to make sure everybody in the court have fun.

Now the second scenario is tournament or competitive and when you're talking about entering a tournament where everybody has entered for the same reason-- and that is to compete and to kind of judge and compare yourself to other players--the #1 priority is to win. Period. That's why you're there and that's why everybody else is there. Is to win is to go out and compete and the purpose in competing, the #1 purpose, is to try to win your match when every point possible. So any and all tactics here completely fair game. Assuming that there was in the guidelines that the rules of tennis of course. And you talk about waving your arms or making noises or trying to destruct your opponents on purpose. No, that's obviously not fair play. That's against the rules. And so I'm not saying that's okay at all. It's not. However, anything within the rules of tennis that you can be use to your advantage is completely fair game. All the players on the courts signed up to play their best and to be challenge, and really by holding back and not playing a winning strategy, you're kind of insulting them and don't do that. Don't be nice and try to be too political and try to make everybody happy in this scenario, because everybody is there for the same reason and that's to try to win. So in this setting no. It wouldn't be appropriate to hold back. And if you get funny looks in this setting where it's competitive and everybody is trying to win. Well, these people are not very mature. Tennis players are not very mature competitors and they are kind of missing the point.

And so I think you absolutely did the right thing if this was in a competitive environment. There's only one exception to this in my opinion. And that would be if both of the players that you're playing against--you and your doubles partner--if both players that you guys that are playing against are just not even close to your level and they are just completely out classed and it's obvious that you and your partner are much stronger then in that scenario I would say be a good sport and don't embarrass them completely and go a way out of your way to win literally every single points if it's obvious we're

going to win no matter what. Then in that scenario I would say be a good sport. Don't over do it and don't embarrass them. But even then they do need to be taught a lesson and they need to know that they were not signed up for the right even. They are not in the right place. And so you should beat them soundly, but I would not go way out of your way and take it super seriously and get a golden set in both sets and that shouldn't really be your goal is to completely put somebody down emotionally and physically.

But on the other hand if they signed up for the tournament, they are putting themselves in that position. So they should know that they were not in the right place. And they should signed up for the lower class next time or lower level or etc.

But that's my answer for you Ashley and hopefully that make sense. So it depends on the setting. Is it club play? Is it social play or is it tournament/competitive play? You need to figure out which of those 2 environments you're in, and figure out what's most important to you. Is the improvement of your own game more important than everybody else on the court being happy? And if it is, then go out and do whatever it takes to win every single point. If it's more important to you that the other people on the court leave happy, and you guys are all friends and you want to be cordial, and you want to keep everybody happy. If that's more important to you then you need to play accordingly.

So it's kind of up to you and it depends on the situation you're in. But Ashley, thanks very much for your question and let me know if you have anything further on that. Hopefully, that make sense.  
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Alright, next stop we've got a series of questions from James Northcas in the UK and he's got a couple of questions about using a ball machine for your practice play and a lot of really good questions here. I'm looking forward to this topic.

His first question was, 'I recently acquired a ball machine and wondered if you could offer some help with how I might use it to it's full potential. I am practicing with it for about 5 to 15 hours per week. And I'm trying very hard to keep my practice sessions as structured as I can. For example: I usually spent equal time on my forehand and backhand. Aim for specific areas on the courts, and try to achieve specific goals. As an example 10 shots deep cross court in a row. '

Let me stop right there and congratulate you James, because you've really got the right idea here right of the bat. And this is something that bother's me a lot in watching players try to use a ball machine where I teach --and in every club where I've taught-- a lot of players waste their time and you're doing an excellent job with the basics here. So may people go out with the ball machine and they just hit shot. I mean literally. Sure that's sounds obvious, but they are wasting their time, because they are just swinging at the ball whatever happens to come. They have no target. They have no purpose. They are just hitting shots and they are not focused at all. There's no goal and there's no target or purpose. They waste their time, and even worse than that, they're further ingraining bad habits.

So I just wanted to stop right there and say 'Cheers' on starting off with such great habits to begin with. I really want you to keep that up.

Now here's his first question. He says, 'I'm also trying to practice as many different shots as possible. Such as lobs, volleys, overheads, half volleys, etc. However, I'm not really sure what proportion of my time I should devote to some of these maybe less frequently used shots. '

That's a good question, James. I would say that the answer to that question depends on your skill level and your specific skills. Where you're at in your tennis game. And I'm going to be--throughout several answers here to James' questions--I'm going to be giving some ratios. And these are just general guidelines. I'm not saying that my feedback here has to be exactly perfect or precisely followed. I'm going to give you guys some general guidelines and my reasons why.

James, ultimately it's going to be up to you to decide how much time to spend on each type of shot. But basically--and again, this depends on your skill level--what percentage of time you should spend with more extra shots. Like the lobs, the overheads, the half volleys, etc. And in my opinion, the lower level player you are, the more time you should be spending on your basic essentials. What I mean by that are ground strokes, volleys, and serves. You've got to be competent in at least those 3 shots to really go out and enjoy tennis at its fullest. Or at least get started.

If you've got a big hole in your ground strokes. If your backhand ground stroke is terrible. Or if you're not comfortable with the net at all, or if you're always worried you're going to double fault, and you're not confident with your serves. Those are 3 biggest area of your game that you've got to be comfortable with as early as possible.

So if you're at a 3.5 level or below, and if you're not familiar with the NTRP rating system here in the U.S., basically an average level player is right around a 3.5 level. So if you're an average level player or below, then, in my opinion, you should really be spending 90% of your time on the basics: ground strokes, volleys, and serves. If you are above that level--and especially well above that level-- if you are upper level player, if you are a 4.0, or a above, if you are a 4.5, then you do want to start working on those other shots besides the basics. Shots that you are going to have to know how to use at a 4.5 level, if you don't have a good half-volley, or overhead, or lob. You are not going to do very well at a 4.5 level of doubles, or even of singles. More so in doubles, you kind of need these extra utility shots.

So, if you are above average, if you're a 4.0 player or better, then I would say you should be going about 70/30 or so, still spending most of your time improving the basics: your ground strokes, volleys and serves, but spend thirty percent of your time on other stuff as well. Shots that you've noticed that, in the middle of your point plan, doubles or singles, you kind of notice, wow, that's a shot that I miss pretty often, if I could make that shot, I'd really be in a lot more points. I wouldn't lose so many points when I'm in this situation. So, you kind of need to do some detective work and figure out which of these utility shots is really going to help you out the most. And then yes, definitely spend some time on it if you are above average level. So, it depends on your ability level. That's my answer to that.

Next up he asks, "Also, would I be better off working on my bad shots, or good shots?" That's an awesome question, and you're smart to be wondering about how to split up your time. Both in the essential strokes and more utility strokes, and now between your strengths and weaknesses. It's important to do both.

Typically, I see players when they are a little more focused, and they're actually working on specific things, which you're already starting to do, which is awesome. A lot of times, people make one of two basic mistakes. They ignore their weaknesses, because hitting what you are already good at is a lot more fun. [laughter] If you are really good at forehand ground strokes, It's really fun to take a half an hour and just crush forehands, over and over and over. It feels good, because you are being successful, you're hitting your target, over and over again. You're hitting an aggressive strong shot and it feels confident, and that's a lot more fun. It's a common mistake for people to go and work on their strength, and spend all of their time doing that, because it's not nearly as much fun working at what you're not good at. And so people a lot of times will shy away from their weakness, and it just keeps getting weaker and weaker compared to the stronger parts of their game. So, don't make that mistake!

Also, don't make the mistake of ignoring your strengths, because maybe you are bit of a perfectionist about improving your weaknesses. This is the other side of the spectrum. Somebody who says: 'Well, my forehand ground stroke is awesome. I don't need to work on that,' and then they spend all of their time on their backhand, because their backhand is weak. A couple of weeks or months later, their backhand is a lot better, but they're not nearly as confident with their forehand anymore, because they haven't spent any time practicing it. So, it's important to work on both what you are good at already, and make sure that you keep up with that, but yes, you do need to work on your weaknesses as well. That is very important.

Now, I'm going to give you a ratio again based on your level. If you are a beginner on up through an average player, if you're a 3.5 level player or below, I would suggest 60-40 or 70-30 towards spending a little bit more time on your weaknesses. It's really important to bring the level of your game up evenly so that you don't have any big holes.

And so, I would suggest definitely spending some time on both, but I would like to see you spend a little more time on what you're weaker at to hopefully even your game out. But do try to improve everything. Spend some time on both your strengths and weaknesses. But spend a little bit more time on your weaknesses, so 60-40 or maybe 70-30.

Now, if you're a 4.0 level or above, I would really suggest evening it out, and making it about 50-50. Spend equal amounts of time continuing to be confident and be good at your strengths, and definitely spend a lot of your time working on your weaknesses as well, because everything needs to continue to improve if you want to move up another level from where you are already in at more advanced level. Like a 4.0 or 4.5. If you're a 4.5 level player now, it's really going to take everything. Everything is going to really have to move up a whole another level to really bump up to a 5.0. So we don't want to leave anything behind. So at that point I would really suggest spending about 50-50?

Alright, next ball machine question is: 'My other uncertainty is which speed settings to use? I usually go for about 45 or 50 miles per hour and medium heavy top spin--which I am comfortable with--and seems to simulate my normal play. Would I be better off using higher more difficult speeds or working at lower speeds in order to group technique?'

Well, that's a good question James and I think most of your time should be hitting against the speed that you see most in competition. That's really where you want to be most comfortable is at your level of play. So I would definitely suggest spending most of your time there, but if you want to spend some time and challenge yourself more--and kind of give yourself to look at the next level of play--I think that's good too and so again I'll give you a ratio here. I think in my opinion you should probably be about 80-20. Don't spend half of your time getting shots from the ball machine that are way outside the level that are typically to see. I think that's a good use of your time.

But if you do want to spend some time kind of having some fun and trying to really challenge yourself and try to return shots that are really high level--above what you normally see--I don't think there's anything wrong with that. In fact as probably going to be helpful for you down the road when you start facing higher level opponents. So I would say about 80/20. Spend about 80% of your time at least on just hitting shots that you normally have to in competition, because that's really where you want to be most comfortable and confident. But go ahead and have some fun and bump it up a little bit too.

And last ball machine question here. 'Finally, do you have any specific ball machine drills that would be of benefit?' And my answer to that is no. I don't. And the ball machine is such a useful tool guys. And you should be using the ball machine to pick out specific things for your game that you need to work on and so this totally depends on what you're trying to improve, James. And you've already got the right idea. You're already so much farther ahead than most players when it comes to utilizing the ball machine. So I just want you to keep up what you're doing.

No, I don't have anything specific. I mean specific for what? I could give you a 10 ball machine drills for every single stroke: forehand, backhand, volley, half volley, overhead, return serve whatever. So I could wait too much to go into specifics. So I'm going to tell you, what I'm going to tell you is that keep doing a good job of identifying of what you do need to work on, your strengths and weaknesses, and split up the time in a good way. That's where you going to be best use of your time. And continue doing the good job with things like having the target, having the goal and just keeping your focus and concentration out there and that's going to be the best use of your time.

So James, thanks very much. Really good questions, man. And I'm really proud of you for how good of the job. You've already doing with the ball machine and you're really making good use of your time and James said he's doing between 5 and 15 hours per week on the ball machine. That's hardcore. You're doing an awesome job and definitely keep up the good work. Let me know if you have any more questions.

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OK. The last question for today also comes to us from James. A different topic.

And the topic is the 'art of disguise' as James put it. He says, 'This is something I know very little about, but a topic that I thought would make a very interesting Podcast. I would be very interested to hear your thoughts on when and how to create disguise on various tennis shots. '

Good question, James. And I'm going to try to go through this pretty briefly, and give you an idea of what I think about that. And I'm going to starting off by telling you the 3 most often disguised shots. And probably the most useful use of disguise in tennis. And when I say disguise, I mean legitimate disguise. Meaning you're trying to show your opponents and then do another. So were kind of get a little bit tricky going on not something that I normally can do. I'm going to talk more about the at in a couple of minutes.

But the 3 most useful shots to disguise or first of all the drop shot and I love this shot personally. I have to admit. I like in the pros use this shot and this is probably the #1 disguised shot in tennis. Definitely it's a pro level. And you'll see them disguise this by setting up their body the way they normally would for a top spin drive shot that they would normally hit with a lot of spin-- and this is typically done on a short weaker shot that they're inside the baseline on. Otherwise, it's really not a smart play at all. But you'll see a player do this when they are inside the baseline. They turn their body make a good full turn bringing the racket up like they're getting ready to crash it and then open up the racket face. Drop the racket come underneath the ball and hit the soft drop shot and hit it really short. This is probably the number 1 disguise shot you'll see used and probably one of my favorites.

It doesn't always work for everybody all the time. In fact I would say doesn't have a terribly high success rate even at the pros, but it's a lot of fun to hit when it does work.

The second most often disguised shot is the lob. It's kind of similar set up when 1 player is at the net and the other is at the baseline maybe in doubles. And you'll see this disguise by again the player on the baseline taking the racket back and rotating their body like to getting ready to really drive it. And then there's really a little bit different technique. The racket face will open and the ball gets lifted up. Or you can hit a top spin lob and keep your racket close and just swing upwards and really accentuate the upward swing to really hit the ball way up in the air and have a top spin down close to the baseline. Hopefully on the other side, but that's another shot disguise that you can disguise and make it look like you're getting ready to drive the ball and hit it hard, but actually end up hitting it softly, and either coming underneath the ball and opening your racket face or brushing the ball, but brushing it way up into the air to try to hit over your opponent at the net.

And the 3rd most often disguised shot-- and this is probably debatable depending on your definition of the word 'disguise'--but the serve is very often disguise by good players and when one kind of different use of disguise is not so much being tricky, or sneaky, or kind of showing one thing and doing another. It's not so much of that as is it just really mixing it up and just really being versatile and maybe from the same toss is probably the best way to do it. Making the same toss, but being able to hit every part of the box from that same toss or maybe even being able to hit every part of the box with different types of serves both spin serve and the flat serve from the same toss. That's the good way to disguise your serve. And something that all of you guys can work on right now and something that I wouldn't say is trick or you're kind of be sneaky. It's really something that's very practical that you guys should all be working on.

Now shots that you should not try to disguise. And again when I say disguise I'm using the definition of kind of being sneaky or tricky or trying to do a bait and switch in your opponent when you're showing one thing and then you do another. You should not be trying to disguise your ground strokes, meaning: trying to set up and make it look like you're going cross court, but then go down the line at the last second or something like that. That's not something you should be trying to do. You should also not be trying to disguise or be tricky with your volleys. These are shots that we don't want to be tricky or sneaky with. You want to be good and solid with your fundamentals. And you should be practicing being intentional and being able to hit certain places on the court on purpose. And we're going to win most likely based on those types of shots where it doesn't matter who knows where you're going. It doesn't matter if your opponent knows so much of tennis tactics. It has nothing to do with being sneaky or crafty. But it's just a matter of doing the fundamentals well and doing the fundamentals solid and doing them correctly over and over again. That is how you're going to win the majority of your matches. You're not going to win whole tennis matches based on being sneaky and disguising your shots. You're not going to win your whole match based on that.

And so for that reason I would be careful James--and everybody else listening--how much you work on these types of shots and you know what there is to hit and there are fun to work on. So I'm not going to say don't ever do it, because I do it myself. So it's not something that you should never work on, but I would spend the whole lot of your time trying to disguise shots and be sneaky.

So James that's my answer to that. And if you have any more further specific questions on that--or maybe on specific one of those examples different strokes--let me know I'd be happy to talk to more about it, but those are my general thoughts and feelings.

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Alright, that does it for this episode of Essential Tennis Podcast. And isn't that fun guys? We've done almost 100 episodes of the Podcast and all 3 of the topics today were completely new. We talked about disguise, on shots--which we've never talked about before. We talked about competitive etiquette and we also talked about using the ball machine as well. All 3 of those are completely new topics on the Podcast and just goes to show you guys how deep the game of tennis is. And there's unlimited topics and the things to talk about that's part of why I enjoyed this show so much. That's a big reason why I enjoyed the sport of tennis so much. And if you're listening to me right now I know that you agree with me. It's just a lot of fun to work together and continue to improve.

And speaking of which I've got a special shout out today on the show and my shout out is to several players who I've just gotten bumped in their rating here in United States. And we have a standardized rating system the NTRP. And I'd like to give a shout out to several forum members who have bumped to the next level since being members at Essential Tennis. And I'm really proud of them and there's more than the people I'm just about to announce. This topic just got started in the forum of Essential Tennis, so I apologize to everybody in the forums who I'm not going to mention.

But people who have already posted there and said that they have moved up to a new level are Sally, Fightfen, Bibi, Charles O. And also Atomic. These are all guys people who have worked really hard and improved their game and I'm really proud of you guys and really happy to have you as members on the forums.

So excellent job and if you're on the forums and you also got bumped up make sure to go to the competitive results forum and post and let us know if you got bumped. So good job guys.

Alright that brings today's show to a close. Thank you very much for listening. Take care and good luck with your tennis.

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