

# Essential Tennis Podcast #108

Ian Westermann

Welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast. If you love tennis and you want to improve your game, this Podcast is for you.

Whether it's technique, strategy, equipment or the mental game, tennis professional Ian Westermann is here to make you a better player. And now, here's Ian!

Ian : Hi, and welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast-- your place for free, expert, tennis instruction that can truly help you improve your game.

Today's episode of the Essential Tennis Podcast is brought to you by ProTranscript.com.

Thank you very much for joining me on today's show and especially if this is the first time that you have listened to the Essential Tennis Podcast-- welcome and I appreciate you downloading this episode.

I am going to be giving away a free flip Ultra-HD video camera later this week. Today is Monday, the 8th of March and on the 15th-- a week from today-- I'm going to be announcing the winner. Stay tuned, I'm going to tell you guys how to enter that contest sometime during today's show but until then just please enjoy the interview that I have.

Today's show is excellent-- we are going to be discussing power versus control, so listen to this tennis instruction and the conversation I have with my guest. Hopefully it's going to be instructional and informative to you and give you something to work on that can really help make your tennis game better. And sometime during the show, I'm going to tell you also how you can enter to win that free flip video camera.

So until then, let's go ahead and get started with the show. Sit back, relax and get ready for some great tennis instruction. [music] [music] [music]

My guest today on the Essential Tennis Podcast is Dave the 'Koz' Kozlowski-- Dave, welcome to the show.

Dave : Hey Ian, great to be here with you. This is exciting-- I know that you are into your third year and you've had over 100 of these Podcasts. You are on the cutting edge and you know that. So thanks for having me on and what do you want to talk about tonight?

Ian : Well, let's kick things off by telling my listeners a little bit about you. I want to make sure that anyone that is not familiar with you or your background, know exactly where you are coming from and how much expertise you have in the game of tennis.

So please tell my listeners a little bit about your background in journalism and broadcast and instruction.

Dave : I'm a humble guy and I'm smiling as you ask me to do this but anything that sounds impressive is only because I've hung around the industry long enough and a lot of people have felt sorry for me and have been good to move which has given me a chance to move up through the ranks.

But I've been teaching for, I don't want to say how many decades, but it's approaching 4 decades. I was lucky enough to get into the industry and to be one of the first 17 master pro's in the world and that came about because I was up there early for nominations and I got it before it was a lot tougher to get these days.

I was very fortunate to have enough friends in the industry to vote me into USPTA national pro of the year and that was really was a credit to everyone that has helped me along the way more than it was just for me. And as I addressed the group about this award, and certainly, I was very honored and I vividly remember getting this letter-- I thought it was just a form letter from the USPTA-- but I did open it and I started reading it and all of a sudden it was hard to not finish reading it but I was so emotionally distracted that I had to start from the beginning again. I remember sharing the joy with family members and my wife and it was a very proud, joyous moment.

But then a half hour later I'm on the tennis court and I'm teaching and I get that same high, that same emotional input to that so that this is as good as it gets. So as good as it was getting that award, you get it every day when you are in the teaching industry, when you are relating to somebody.

You quickly find out that you're not teaching tennis to people but you're teaching people through tennis and I immediately knew that that's the award. But as I told so many 1000s of people-- this is a numbers game. And there are 1000s of guys like you but one is chosen per year so there are so many guys in the field that will have the ability and the background and the accomplishments to get it. But it's a numbers game and they may not.

So when I received that award, dedicated to all the guys that were better than I am, that are not going to get this reward just because it's a numbers game.

But as I have mentioned, people have been good to me and the USPTA in the year 2000 honored me as USPTA broadcaster of the year-- and I had no right getting that because I had no formal training and everything I do is hands-on, learning on the spot, trial and error. But it was a passion that came out and I thoroughly enjoyed that opportunity going to all ends of this country and also that I would never have that opportunity in meeting people.

And it's a funny thing when you have a mic in your hand, all of a sudden people will talk to you. So it's been a great experience.

Ian : You are a man after my own heart. You not only really enjoy the game of tennis, but you are a person who is passionate about media as well and communicating your enthusiasm to others. - And so I'm really happy to have you on the show and thanks for being here.

Dave : It's my honor. It's great to be here.

Ian : So, let's go ahead and get to our topic today which I think this is going to be an outstanding show and it is kind of a debate or a topic for the ages as it pertains to tennis and especially to those who listen to my show who are recreational-level players, they are club level players, people who are looking for any way that they can possibly improve their tennis game.

And so often the question gets asked, what's more important? Being able to hit the ball with power or with control and it's kind of a trick question a little bit. Obviously anybody would say that they would like to have both, but often times when players are just beginning and they have to pick and choose what they are working on, I think a lot of times amateur players get faced with the question-- what should I work on first? And control versus power, I think, is kind of a conundrum. So why don't you kind of kick us off here with some initial thoughts on that question? What is your first reaction to that question?

Dave : Well, my first reaction is that I first all thoroughly enjoy your audience so if they are recreation club players, I know the passion they have for the game, and they are all hungry to improve and to find ways to enjoy it more.

So this is a great topic and it's an ongoing question-- power or control, what comes first. First of all to be successful, you need both.

Let me share a thought here-- to be successful in any venue in life-- business, education-- you need to have a respect for the tradition before. In tennis, you need to have a tradition and a respect for the tradition of the game. But you also need to have a healthy welcome for changes in the game and in technology.

However, I think that most players, in the audience that you are dealing, good recreational players, athletes, but maybe folks that are not going to make the top 1% of the professional ranks. They are better to get a foundation and to get the fundamentals first.

And it's so important that they establish a base and that base consists of rhythm and it also consists of learning proper footwork and movement. In today's game where all the emphasis is on speed and power, often times, players find themselves not being able to handle routine situations. They aren't bad and the extraordinary because they are taught to turn and run and to scamper to the ball. But many times, it's just a routine shot down the middle and you need to have some motor-memory so that you produce the same shot 1000s of times-- but this doesn't happen at the club level because time doesn't allow and they are competitive and they'd rather hit 5 minutes of warm-ups and get right into match play so they never really get the shot motor-memorized.

But it's so important that they try to get a shot that is repeatable and by repeatable, I mean, being able to produce a strong resemblance to the previous shot several times in a row so that it's a motor-memory type thing. And if you watch other sports like basketball and someone is working on his foul shots, he is going to stand in the same spot and not move more than 2 or 3 inches and just release 50 shots in a row.

Some of the greatest golfers in the game, like Gary Claire will go out there and hit the same repeatable shot 150 times for 50 yards, just trying to get the motor-memory. Paul Azinger on the Rider Cup as a player and a coach, and I've seen him do this-- both Gary Claire and Paul Azinger were at the club where I was the tennis director and they would come in for golf exhibitions and seminars. He would take 20 balls and put them around a 2 foot area from the cup-- he would not do another thing in golf that day until he was able to sink 22 footers.

Well that sounds like a piece of cake doesn't it? But they do miss, so it's the importance of getting a repeatable shot. And I think that players really need to have an idea of where the racket is finishing. I remember sitting with some legendary coaches in the

game-- Ian Crikerton who was from New Zealand, a really fine college coach-- and Bill Tims, one of the legends in the game-- they really stress the importance of knowing where the racket is finishing with a repeatable-type of excursion.

And we've gotten a bit away from that.. It's very tough for today's players to watch the pro's on TV because they are seeing extreme moves and it's almost as if it's extreme sports. But they are not playing extreme sports when they go out to play, they are playing routine so they need to get more familiar with routine moves.

And if you watch the great players of the game, Justine Ena, who is as pure as they come on the female side and Roger Federer who is as pure as they come on the male side, they have a rhythmic side-shuffle step. It's so important for players to know there is a [inaudible] . And a lot of times, we are taught to get there quickly, to get their early and they get there too soon and all of a sudden they have to stop the move and there is dead time and it's hard to adjust.

But if you watch the great players, it's almost as if they are playing a basketball side-shuffle step guarding a man. They are taking two or three rhythmic steps side-shuffle facing the net then turn and hit on both sides, the forehand and backhand. And I really believe if the average player can learn that rhythm, that everything starts to fall in place. And sometimes if nothing improves except just that rhythmic footwork, the game is going to improve for them. Their shots are going to get better, their rhythm is going to get better and their arrival time is going to more accurate. They are going to find themselves being in a better strike zone to contact the ball and they are establishing a rhythm.

Ian : Great stuff. One thing that really jumped out to me was you were talking about how often times amateur players can come up with an incredible shot at one point in time and miss a shot later that is completely routine and as both a teacher and a player, when I go out to play, I don't think there is anything more frustrating to me than for me myself, or one of my students to miss the easy shots, to miss the routine shots that should be repeatable or we should have a rhythm to those shots.

So let's talk about how can my listeners better obtain that rhythm and you talked about basketball players practicing the free throw and you talked about golfers practicing two foot puts-- so what is the equivalent for that and especially keeping in mind the people who are listening to this show are often times not members of clubs where they are able to go and hire a professional instructor to actually run them through drills and have that expertise in person. Some of them do, but for my listeners who maybe don't have that luxury, how can they go out there and train themselves to have this repeatable follow through and this rhythm that you're talking about?

Dave : I think that is a great question and it's all about motor-memory so that when the ball comes-- the big downfall in any sport-- it happens in golf, it happens in tennis when the ball is lying there in a golf swing, or the ball is coming in a tennis bounce-- when you try to do something to the ball. When you try to hit it, that's when various body parts get involved with the swing and too many body parts are being involved or the wrong body parts are too active.

So the idea is to literally-- and the pros do this because they have sparring partners-- they are hitting 1000s of balls every day in a non-competitive situation so that it just becomes instinctive and it becomes motor-memorized.

The best thing is to try to set a pattern and it's a proven study that a new habit will be formed after 1800 reps. So if you break that down to any month, 30 days, if you do this habit 60 times a day for 30 days, that's 1800 times, then it becomes instinctive. So when that ball is arriving on your right hand side of your forehand, you're not trying to do something to do it. You're not trying to think of what you want to do to it, it's just motor-memory. And simple motor-memory activities can be-- and I'm a strong believer that on the forehand, you really want to have more upper dominance out of the shoulder than you want to out of the hands.

The hands are needed to locate the ball, to find the ball. But once you find the ball, the lower arm from the elbow to the wrist stays still and there is more movement out of the shoulder, the bigger muscle.

So simply what you want to try to do and if you buy into this concept, anatomically when we stand still, there is a gap between the shoulder and the chin. The gap between the shoulder and the chin is about 6-8 inches. So on a daily basis, if you just merely take the hitting shoulder-- let's say you're right-handed-- take the right shoulder and touch the chin 60 times a day so it's automatic -- with a racket in your hand or without -- and any of these motor-memory exercises can be done in the office, on the road in a hotel, then can be done in your house where it's not needed to have a racket but you are actually getting the motor-memory of the motion taking place. 60 times a day, 30 days, your right shoulder travels and touches your chin -- that's one. The right shoulder travels and touches the chin, that's two.

Another good exercise is to actually swing and as you swing, catch the racket in the left hand so that you are giving yourself a reference on extending the arm. And we're so involved with power and you'll see some of the great players finish in a bent elbow position on the forehand but before they've got there Ian, you and I know that there is a period of extension so they are extending but it's happening so quickly that the average viewer see's the quick snap of the elbow and the wrist and they feel that this is the way they hit the ball.

Eventually that's the way to finish at the extraordinary and high level but leading up to that, you can't go wrong and you'll see the William's sisters go back to the roots and actually catch the racket on some of their forehand finishes. Are they doing it to correct something from their previous shots? I don't know.

Are they doing it to extend out to form a good habit? I don't know that either. Whatever they are doing, they are actually practicing extension. So our listeners can 60 times let the right shoulder touch their chin at the same time they're doing that, catch the racket in the left hand. All of a sudden they are getting motor-memory on what the excursion should be taking place on the forehand.

So the next time the ball comes, they are not trying to do something to it. It's automatic, motor-memory response.

Ian : There is something I'd like to hit on that you talked about that really hit a cord with me... A couple minutes ago you mentioned that when amateur players see the ball coming towards them, often times they make the mistake of actually trying to do something to it. And I'd like to go back to that for a second. I first heard this concept on a golf Podcast-- I'm actually a golfer as well.

Dave : I did not steal this from a golfer but I use that concept because if you try to do

something to the golf ball, you are in trouble baby.

Ian : Absolutely.

Dave : And the average player, if you try to do something to it, you are in trouble again. Our biggest fear in tennis at the most entry level is being afraid of missing the ball when he or she swings.

So the attempt is 'I'm going to make sure I don't miss that ball baby. ' Then all of a sudden, they have to make lots of adjustments and compromises to just find where the ball is because they are so inhibited about missing the ball that all of a sudden things don't flow.. They don't become a motor-memorized activity.

So, just like the golfer, you really cannot try to do something to the ball and that's when things are going to break down. But I interrupted you, so finish your good thought.

Ian : The instructor that I had heard talking about this and it really struck me when I heard him say it, the person who was interviewing him had asked him if you had to choose one thing that amateur golfers do poorly, what would it be that you think they should improve? And he said 'amateur golfers so often try to hit the ball instead of learning a good stroke and a good technique and simply allowing the ball to get in the way of that swing. '

And that just struck me as being so profound that amateur players often times, for instructors like you and me it's easy to pick out a lower level player because they are often times so tense and so tight. I'm curious what your thoughts are on how having a repeatable swing and having that muscle memory and having that grooved into play, goes hand in hand with being relaxed and loose and more efficient physically.

Dave : Well, first of all my primary goal with anybody on the tennis court is to make sure that he or she has a good time. I never want to turn them off with too much technique, too much instruction. That's the most fun for me because for us, it's a science and I often times will ask teaching pros 'how many of you teaching pros are teaching for selfish reasons?' And everybody is a bit uncomfortable and won't raise their hand and I raise my hand and say 'well it's obvious, but we have to do it for a living. Wouldn't the world be great if we could teach everybody who wanted to play and not have to charge. But that's not the real world.

How many of you are actually selfish that you actually want to learn more than your student is learning? And a few more raised their hand and I raised my hand because my goal when I go out to teach someone is to walk off that court learning as much if not more than he or she has learned so that I'm learning from them and can then pass that on to future students where I'm planning new innovative ways of doing it. - I need to get back to your question that you asked me which was what again Ian?

Ian : I was curious...

Dave : I had a better answer then I had a response for the question.. Ask it again if you don't mind.

Ian : I was curious what your thoughts were on the relationship between amateur players trying to do something to the ball or trying to hit it too much as opposed to just having a repeatable swing-- I was curious what your thoughts were on the connection between

that and being loose and relaxed and being able to be consistent. We've all seen Federer play and how easy he makes it look. It looks like his body-- he looks like some kind of dancer out there.

Dave : Very smooth. Very rhythmic and there is a real cadence that he brings to tennis and he is a great model to watch and he is so effortless in all of his moves.

I will answer the question that you did ask me and I think one of the key things is for them to try to minimize the body movement. And it's amazing with your golf background, you know this for a fact that some people cannot swing a golf club and retain their balance. The golf club takes the body all over the place and this happens certainly in tennis where people swing and all of sudden they lose some balance and in the process of losing their balance, they have to make adjustments or compromises with other body parts to try to get the body back in balance.

Well this happens to the great players but they can control the balance and regain balance much better. One of the goals needs to be how well can you swing and actually hold your balance in place?

One of the greatest all time-- and I'm not saying just tennis coaches, because this guy was touted by Sports Illustrated as being the best coach in sports. Not just tennis, in sports and his name is Welby Van Horn-- he is still alive and he's out in Palm Springs. He was the mentor of several outstanding world class players and one of them that he taught in Puerto Rico, one of them was Charlie Pasarel. And if you've ever watched him 30 years ago on three days in a row he had wins against Ash, over Laver and Emerson-- bang, bang, bang.

And one of the key things with Van Horne was to try to hold the balance in place with some deliberate extension for 3 seconds. And of course I've used it for decades after hearing him say hold balance and to hold the racket in place for three seconds.

One thing that I try to do with students when they are hitting to one another-- so Ian, if you and I are going out to rally and you hit the ball and it bounces and I still get it back to you and you are at the baseline and I'm at the baseline, in my mind try to hold that balance until my ball lands on your side of the court then I'll come back to a neutral position. If you get players to do this, and they can do this by themselves, and I learned my tennis on the recreation courts and we had to find ways where there is a wall so maybe there is a way.

So anybody can do this with another practice partner but that's a little tough and that's another episode in itself that so many players practice for themselves but they don't practice for their sparring partner, their practice partner. If they would realize that the more they hit to this player, the more balls they get coming back and it becomes beneficial for both.

But getting back to the comment is to actually hold your balance in place. One thing that I do on the forehand and most times if somebody is taking private training, I will spend two minutes working on lead-ups, ie a two handed forehand. And one of the things that I really try to emphasize is a continuous motion in two areas-- a continuous motion in the foot work and a continuous motion in the back swing.

So the feet are moving and the racket is moving and we are referring to a loop right now, so they learn the rhythm about when to take it back and the speed at which to take

it back, so I'll have everybody that really wants to try to improve, buy into this and spend a few minutes working on the side shuffle-step delivery and a two handed lead-up. And what it does, is it gets them closer to the ball. They've got to bring the strike zone in move and anatomically they've got to bend the knees. They've got to get lower. They find themselves coiling the shoulders then uncoiling the shoulders. And all this stuff is a pleasant lead-up to a one-handed forehand.

So I'll have them do that for 2 or 3 minutes but then, I'll have them go to one hand and you'll have to listen to this closely because it sounds inane, it sounds stupid but they will hold the racket in the right hand, swing, contact the ball but the moment they contact it, let go of the right hand, catch it in the left, pull it as far out as they can with the left so they do not try to direct or guide the racket and that their shoulder doesn't get locked in-- they don't get muscular in their shoulder.

Some of the best forehands they hit that day are these shots where they literally hit the ball with their right hand, grab, catch in the left hand so they are letting go of the racket. And I see this tremendously helping players in learning how to relax the arm. And it sounds silly but what they are doing is allowing their racket head to become more dominant and the racket head starts doing some work. So after they do this for a couple of minutes, then they do the same grab and catch but they retain the right hand on and all of a sudden. They have that motor-memory swing where it is the same swing repeated each time.

Ian : Well guys, I want to get to at least one more question here before we run out of time.

Dave : Didn't you ever hear that there were no clocks in heaven, nor are there any clocks on the tennis court. I've never looked at a clock when talking tennis.

Ian : Well unfortunately, I have to watch it. I wish I didn't because I have kind of a tradition on the Podcast especially when guests are on the show, time just flies. That's how I know I've got a good guest on the show-- it's gone by incredibly fast.

I've got one more question I'd love to get your thoughts on. Earlier in the show when you and I were talking, you mentioned that both control and power do have their place in tennis. And all of our time so far has been spent talking about getting a rhythm, having a repeatable swing. Getting repeatable results.

So I'm curious what your thoughts are on when is it appropriate-- let's say we have an amateur, club level player, who is really starting to become a student of the game and they are working hard on their tennis. They are hitting with the wall, with practice partners. They are working hard on being consistent. When is it appropriate for this player to them start working on developing weapons and being able to hit with more power?

Dave : That's a very good question and the answer that I may have to give is that it has to come quickly because they see all the speed in the game. They want to reproduce that speed. They want to certainly emulate that type of game. So that's got to be exposed quickly and I have a friend that we would discuss a lot of tennis with and he's been in the industry as long as I have and a former great coach. But he would spend a lot of time on this ball control where they would have to hit 5 or 6 balls behind the service line and that sounds like a piece of cake until some players try to do it.



You've got to be able to keep the ball at will behind the service line 5 or 6 times in a row. And they would spend a lot of time working on control and trying to reproduce the same swing, the same shot. Then he would tell them at the second half of working on the forehand, and he might do this on the forehand or backhand, it doesn't matter.

Now I want you with the same swing, and trying to keep the same body control, and almost the same finish, now to allow the racket head to speed up. Now, let me see how hard you can hit it.

And one of the key things is that players and we have all levels of club player, some players never really develop the confidence to allow the racket head to speed up and sometimes you can ask a very simple question. Should the racket speed up or slow down as it approaches the ball? Well everyone knows that the racket should speed up but some players may not know that or appreciate that. You absolutely need to feel that as the racket gets closer to the ball, you want the racket to be speeding up. So it's a slow start, a medium pace, middle there when the racket is gaining some speed but at the end, the racket is speeding up.

So I think it's important that when they warm up, they spend time on consistency and that they are also allowed to get back to the baseline and try to hit hard offensive shots. Now one thing that seems to help as well as anything is that and this sounds extraordinary and it's certainly an overload principle-- you want them to not hit the ball out of bounds obviously. But you want them to get it as deep to the baseline as you can because depth allows anybody to play with better players and they can't take advantage of you as you are on neutral terms.

But if one puts a towel or a target 6 feet behind the baseline, and now I tell John, 'John let's rally the ball but I want you to try to hit that ball so it lands near the towel. ' Yes, it's 6 feet out-- I know that and you know that. But that's where I want you to think where you are aiming and all of the sudden starts to speed up the racket and starts to instinctively to get the ball deeper and he hits it harder but he also aims it higher so without really programming it, now you're working on a lot of power. He's keeping the control but he's allowing the racket head to speed up and 90% of the balls do not go outside of the baseline. They fall half way between the service line and the base line and maybe a third of the way behind the mid-court that they are botched 6 feet into the baseline.

So it's important to do both and the same coach that I refer to Jim Fredrica, an old friend, he would have a practice one day a week for his Michigan State team, a Big 10 school, and how many balls do you think he'd give every twosome to go out and practice that one. One ball between Ian and me. So that day, you obviously worked on some ball control. So he mixed it nicely and a lot of our players probably need to go out with 6 balls max to keep the ball in play and then they can start to speed it up and get some confidence to hit up. But they need both, no doubt about it.

Although, if I had a chose between a high school kid who had power but not accuracy or consistency and a kid who kept more balls in play, if I wanted a winning record that year I'd opt to play him compared to the guy who misses more but has the power. And that's not going to motivate any of our listeners, I know that, but it tells the story.

Ian : Thank you so much for spending this time with me and you're a perfect fit for this show. Your enthusiasm for the game and instruction of the game is very obvious and evident and I know my listeners are going to enjoy listening to this conversation a great

deal.

So thank you so much for being on the show with me.

Dave : Hey I like your listeners. Let me tell your listeners something-- remember in tennis scoring love means nothing, but love of the game means everything. You keep alive your love of the game as you do and you have your tennis listeners keep their love of their game and I love you all. Thanks for having me on.

Ian : People, please check out [indietennis.com](http://indietennis.com) as that is where can catch Koz's material and he's got some audio content there you can check out and Koz, I hope that I can have you back on the show in the future.

Dave : It would be my pleasure and I look forward to it. [music] [music]

Ian : Alright, that does it for this week's episode of the Essential Tennis Podcast, episode #108.

Thank you very much for joining me today and let's go ahead and get to the flip cam giveaway. In order to enter yourself into the draw for a free flip cam, and there is lots of other prizes to be given away as well. If you haven't checked that out yet, go to [essentialtennis.com/contest](http://essentialtennis.com/contest) and there is a list of all the prizes I'm going to be giving away including that flip cam.

In order to enter, all you guys need to do is go to [essentialtennis.com/flip](http://essentialtennis.com/flip). And you'll be taken to just a little form to fill out-- just three things, your name, your email address and whether or not you've heard the Podcast before-- that's it. And you'll be entered automatically into the drawing and a week from today, on episode #109, I will be announcing all of the winners in that contest.

So good luck to you and thank you very much for listening today and for your entry. I'm looking forward to giving away all those prizes.

And if this was your first time listening, I release this show every Monday-- every single Monday I put out a new episode all about improving your tennis game and tennis instruction.

Check it out on iTunes, it's the number one rated tennis instruction Podcast on iTunes and you can subscribe to it there. That's definitely the easiest way to get the show every week.

Alright that does it for this week. Take care everybody and good luck with your tennis. [music]