

Podcast 111

by Ian Westermann

Welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast. If you love Tennis and want to improve your game this podcast is for you. Whether it's technique, strategy, equipment or the mental game, tennis professional Ian Westermann is here to make you a better player. And now, here's Ian.

Ian : Hi and welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast. Your place for free expert tennis instruction that can truly help you improve your game. Today's episode of the Essential Tennis Podcast is brought to you by the interactive transcript provider, ProTranscript.com and TennisTours.com.

Today before we get started I want to tell you guys about something I'm doing with Will of fuzzyyellowballs.com. Which by the way, is an excellent source for tennis instruction all in video format. And, I just started putting out some amazing videos from Indian Wells. So, go check out his website if you haven't already.

But he and I during the men's final of the Sony Ericson Open, which is in Miami, being played right now, he and I are going to be doing a live webcast. And, we're going to be doing commentary during the men's final of the Sony Ericson Open. We did this during the Australian Open Final. It was a lot of fun. And, we're looking forward to doing it again.

So you can watch us do that live. It's going to be a video commentary. Watch us do that live during the , again the men's final. Just by going to fuzzyyellowballs.com and the stream is going to be up on his website. I think it's going to be up on essentialtennis.com as well. But, I'm not positive on that yet.

So, definitely check those both out. Alright. Let's go ahead and get to today's show. Sit back. Relax and get ready for some tennis instruction.

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Ian : My Guest today on the Essential Tennis Podcast is past team mate and Jason and I went to college together as well. But, Jason Cole is our guest today who's been on the show before but it's been a little while. Jason welcome back to the show.

Jason : Thanks buddy, good to be here.

Ian : Yes it's nice to have you back. It's a shame that we kind of seem to go long periods of time before having you back on, but I know that you have a busy schedule with your golf game and all.

Jason : Mondays are for golf. I tried to avoid that. I can't get away from it.

Ian : No problem. I understand. It's always good to get away from Tennis. At least a little bit during the week. And, kind of think about other stuff.

Jason : Yes no doubt. --

Ian : Well, we've got 3 listener questions that we're going to be talking about today. None of them really having to do a lot about technique, but it's just kind of topics that I thought Jason and I could have good conversations about. And, hopefully help you guys out and give you some ideas on how you can improve in these various parts of tennis. -- And, our first question today comes from Thomas in Germany and he puts himself down as a 4.0 player. Thomas wrote and said, '... I have a question. How far up should you

actually hold your racket? Where is the budcap supposed to be on the hillpad between the hillpad and the index knuckle? Or even somewhere else? Thanks a lot. Thomas. ' Well, Jason I'll kind of throw that out to you first and then we'll see what kind of thoughts you have on that and I'll put in my two cents to. What do you think?

Jason : I have 2 thoughts. The 1st one is whatever feels comfortable. But, the 2nd one is and probably more importantly your using the long adult racket for a reason. To give yourself extra lenght. Most players have a bit of their hand hitting the opposite direction when hitting with it.

I'm not sure that I've seen too many people at all play with their entire hand up above the budcap of the racket. So, I would say that if things are going awry, you might decide to choke up just a bit. I would do that as a last resort. Try and use the advantage of the longer racket as much as you can.

Ian : Yes. A lot of time choking up a little bit can kind of give players a feel that they're in better control of what the racket is doing. And, that's true because it's a shorter tool at that point. So it kind of allows you to move it around more easily. However, what Jason is saying is absolutely correct. When you use a shorter racket you've got less leverage essentially. You have less force over the ball when you accelerate the racket and swing towards it. And so, I agree. I think probably the lower the better. As long as it's comfortable as Jason also said.

I think the exception to this may be a twohanded backhand. I think in general twohanded backhand players tend to be a little bit higher up with their as compared to a forehand. Where as you said Jason, essentially every good upper level player that I have seen hit a forehand, the heel of the hand is mostly off of the racket completely. What are your thoughts on that? I know that you have a twohanded backhand. Is your bottom hand, your right hand a little higher on your backhand than it is on your forehand?

Jason : Maybe just a little but, not really. Because twohanded's are already giving up the extra reach because they're primarily hitting the righthanded forehand. So, the more you give up, I mean you don't want to handicap yourself. In my opinion twohanded backhands are far superior than one handed. But, as you start using a ping pong paddle you're really giving up a little bit too much. So I don't think that would be necessary. If anything, if you can have that left hand down well on this two handed backhand so that you're still getting the reach.

Ian : I think that more or less wraps up that topic. Anything else to talk about as it pertains to that?

Jason : Not really. I mean the leverage and the distance is there for a reason. That's why there was such a big deal made when long bodied rackets came out. Because it did give you an advantage. So, it would be kind of silly to steal that from you myself.

Ian : Alright. Well, Thomas hopefully that's helpful to you. Basically what Jason and I are saying is, allow your hand to go down on the racket. Maybe even off a little bit at the bottom. As long as it's comfortable to you. I like what Jason said. Maybe if you're having a period of time where a certain stroke is really off. Maybe choke up a little bit to give yourself some more control and kind of get back into it again. But, the longer the racket that you have, the more leverage that you're going to get. So, I like how Jason is kind of saying don't cheat yourself and choke up too much.

Alright. Let's move on to Jason in Illinois who's a 3.5 player. And this is going to be an interesting tactical discussion having to do with doubles. And mixed doubles specifically.

It's got a little bit longer of a question. So, bare with me here for a second. He wrote in and said, '... My wife and I recently played in a mixed doubles tournament. I am a 3. 5 level and my wife is probably around a 3. 0. We did well, advancing to the semis before losing in 2 close sets.

However I found mixed doubles to be both frustrating and maddening. As our opponents continually found ways to hit only to my wife. She did well and held her own hitting back 5 or 6 vovs in a row on a few points. But, eventually got worn down.

I found myself standing there as a spectator during most points looking for an opportunity to jump in and pouch. But, couldn't as my wife doesn't hit very hard. Leaving my side of the court exposed when I try to pouch.

In one match we tried the I formation and forced them to hit returns down the line against my wife's serve. Giving me a better chance to pouch. Out of frustration I also started blasting returns at the net player which made it harder for them to hit a good reply towards my wife. These 2 tactics helped us win a match.

So I'm wondering if there are any other strategies we could employ. During the entire tournament I think my wife hit 4 times as many shots as I did and probably 5 times as many in the semi final that we lost. I believe we could have won if I could have found a way to contribute more during the match. '

I think that's a really good question, well thought out. And, it sounds like Jason and his wife did try a couple of different variations on their strategy and tactics to try to make things a little bit more even. But, this is a great question. Not only for mixed doubles, but for doubles in general when you are playing with somebody who's significantly weaker than you are. Or, when you're the person who's kind of the weakest on the courts and your opponents are trying to pick on you.

So, Jason what are your initial thoughts here? What could they have done to maybe have a little more advantage out there on the court?

Jason : Okay. Well I have a few first things. When you're playing regular doubles as apposed to mixed it's a lot harder to see one man and say he's probably weaker than the other. But, when you step on the court for mixed doubles everybody just assumes that the woman is weaker, whether that's true or not. So, it's definitely, I would say, good strategy by your opponents. They should be hitting to your wife who is weaker. Good job by your wife making 4 or 5 volleys.

You definitely need to be pouching more. And, this is something that I really stress in all doubles. But, in mixed doubles you really just can't avoid it. And that they're hitting to your wife, assuming they know where she is standing. You can't have her standing there. She's got to be moving or you've got to be moving in front to make it a lot smaller of a target. If you camp out on your side and she's camping out on her side then any 3.0 level player should be able to hit it to her repeatedly. That just shouldn't be the case. If you watch professional level mixed doubles the woman is always moving. The man's always standing in front of the woman. There's a reality where it's 4 or 5 shots by the woman in a row. That's something that's better for work and better strategy effort that you can really get away from.

I've heard not only you said you did the I formation which is good but you don't always force them to hit it down the line. She can go down the line. She can go across court. They should have a 50-50 gap of where it's returning. Whether it's going to her or you. And, the same should be happening when she's serving , when you're serving. It really doesn't matter.

Ian : Yes, and Jason said that he tried to pouch or at least thought about it however, he was really worried about leaving the court open behind him and Jason say advance as a doubles player. This is a fear that eventually you're going to have to get rid of, is being worried about being caught down the line.

And, especially when you're trying to kind of make up for a partner who's weaker. Whether it's your wife who happens to be at a lower level than you or anybody else for that matter. When you're the net player and your partner is back, or starting back. You need to play a really strong supportive role out there as a net player. And, you really should be dictating play as the net player.

And, Jason mentions making the returning essentially you have to guess and kind of figure out. Alright, where am I going to have to hit this return in order to avoid Jason up there at the net? Because, he's, I don't know where the heck he's going at this point. And, you want to disrupt that returner or that server as much as possible and just make things miserable for them. And, that means that you probably will get caught a hand full of times with them hitting down the line. But, that's a tougher shot to hit anyway. So you should

really be disrupting and making their life miserable as much as you can. And, it kind of takes some trust in yourself and it takes confidence in yourself to kind of just go and leave your comfort zone and cut over to your wife's side of the courts or whomever else you're playing with.

But, that's absolutely something you should get comfortable with.

Jason : You should also be giving signals. So, if I stand at the net and I tell you I'm going to pouch if they hit the ball down the line you'd better be there. You knew I was pouching and I'm going to be a cross defender. So, if you're not getting to cover that line you're failing there. It shouldn't just be that they hit me down the line. I lose now. You can feel free to be a maverick and give it that shot every once in a while but, that there's no way you should just be getting beat repeatedly down the line just because your wife or whoever else should be there. They know it's coming.

Ian : That's a great point. You guys should be talking between every single point and working these things out. Sometimes maybe you'll plan to stay and the return is going to be within your reach. In which case you should just go and kind of be , if I can use the word maverick there. Jason that's all.

Sometimes you have the opportunity to just cross and it wasn't planned. But, you guys should also be planning those types of switches and movements all the time so that you really keep your opponents guessing. Something else I had thought of Jason, is maybe playing double back. What do you think about that?

Jason : I mean, I inherently hate that idea. If you're playing somebody who's decent at the net, then you're really putting yourself at a disadvantage. Because if you play double back you cannot step in front of your wife. That's ridiculous. So it's really easy just to give the ball to her. That's assuming on a serve. On a return if you're playing double back versus somebody who's really crush and serves at your wife and she can't handle it, that's certainly more acceptable to try and get in the points. But again, I wouldn't just go to that. Most woman , as I said, obviously I don't know Jason's wife. Most woman are pretty capable returners. That's usually not where their weakness lies. So, it's not something I love.

Ian : Fair enough. I mean don't get me wrong. It's not something that would be my first choice either. You know how much I love to come to the net. But, I guess if all else fails Jason you could try that and essentially just play defense and maybe play for, hopefully a good lab hit by one of you 2. Or, a well hit ground stroke that gets down low to your opponents and give you guys a chance to move back in together. But I think that should be the last ditch effort more of less to just give up the net and go back.

Jason : Well you do have another excellent point in that it does depend on the level. Not a lot of 3.0, 3. 5 women can put overheads away. So if you start back and just start lobbing the women, it's really tough for a 3.0, 3. 5 women to put overheads away consistently. So that's not a terrible strategy. Usually though, you get a little better and the women get a little better-- can't rely on that quite as much.

Ian : Sure.

Jason : But you still can use it.

Ian : Just one other thing I had for an idea of what they could do better-- what about picking out the weaker player on the other side of the court and having a plan between the both of them-- both Jason and his wife... Anytime that we have a choice with a shot, to hit to one player or another, assuming that they are kind of in an dual positions on the court in terms of being offensive or in a defensive position. Do you think they should direct as many shots as possible towards the weaker player on the other side to kind of give them a taste of their own medicine?

Jason : Without question. In mixed doubles, there is women to women rallies until the man can step over and do something. Not meaning to sound condescending, but that is how it should go. There is no way that any woman should try to take on the man unless it's well determined that that man is weaker then his partner. So that's really not often the case. It should go man hits it to the woman, woman pops it to the

woman and they rally it out until somebody can do something a little bit better. - But yeah absolutely. His wife should just pick out the female on their team and assuming she's not trying a really difficult shot, put it over to her every time.

Ian : In all fairness to the ladies out there, I would like to point out that what you are describing definitely takes place more often in upper level high competitive tournaments -- 5.0 and above type level. Where it is kind of a given that the two women are the weaker of the two players. I mean Jason's describing himself as a 3.5, his wife is a 3.0 and at the club level, having a man and a woman on the court-- I guess in general you could say that the man should be stronger but it doesn't always necessarily mean that when you are playing a club match.

Jason : Yeah that's true. I guess I'm just making that inference if your situation is reversed, then [inaudible] I guess.

Ian : Alright. Any other thoughts of ideas on that situation Jason?

Jason : No. The only tough thing is if you are the guy picking on their women over and over it's really a morally tricky thing to do for sure. But your wife should have no problem doing that and she needs to if you want to be successful.

Ian : That's an interesting topic. Let's talk about that briefly. Is there an unwritten rule or you said moral obligation for the man to not hit to the women a lot. What have you noticed across different levels? I guess ranging from club all the way up through professional mixed doubles? Are there unwritten rules or is it completely fair game to just go towards the weaker player if it happens to be the woman.

Jason : I want to say there are unwritten rules, but they sure get broken a lot. I've played several [inaudible] tournaments and I had a really strong partner-- she was a national champion a couple years in a row. But she still just got picked off right and left by certain teams and it depends how bad the guy on the other team wants to win in a lot of cases. So I guess there is not really unwritten rules. Obviously if you have an absolute put away and she turns her back, you shouldn't try to hit her but unfortunately other than that, most people don't seem to care which is not how I feel but it is the case.

Ian : Well my thoughts are personally is that at the club level if you are out playing at your local club or your local park or public courts, I don't think that's the time or the place to really make one person feel really singled out and abused on the court. I just don't think it's worth getting people angry over. And some people-- there are some women out there who don't care. And they are going to say you know what? If my partner is stronger than me, then absolutely, you should be hitting at me. But other times they are not going to appreciate that. I think unless you have a prior knowledge of your opponent and you know that the woman is OK with it, I think that in a recreational match, it's not something that is a good idea. Nothing good is going to come of it essentially. Maybe once in a while they aren't going to mind, but the times when they do mind, you are definitely not going to make any friends out there.

However, in a prize money tournament, I'm a little surprised to hear you think that there still should be an unwritten rule there Jason and like you were talking about actually playing for money. Isn't that just kind of good tactics to go towards somebody who is a little weaker on the other team?

I guess it is. And there was a couple times when there was several thousand dollars on the line, I just couldn't bring myself to do it. And I would say that probably 70% of the guys out there are in the same boat where they just-- you know you hit for the women and you go for the right shot, but you won't just abuse her like we are speaking of. And there is probably 25-30% of the guys who just don't care. And I can tell you that my partner, although she was a phenomenal tennis player, absolutely hated those guys who just went to her with ever single ball no matter what. That did not go over well.

Ian : I think that's probably a really important distinction to make. There are times in most doubles points where a certain player who is in a position of offense and has the opportunity to do something offensive with the ball, there is always going to be situations where tactically it just makes the most sense to go in X place

on the court regardless of who is standing there. If you have an overhead or an easy volley and you have the choice between a player behind the baseline and a player who is on the service line, whether it's the man or the woman, it just makes sense to go to the direction of who is closest to you not to hit at them, to hit towards the person who has the least amount of time to react. So I think it's important to point out that there is a difference between going towards to woman in that situation and just going towards the woman on any single ball possible. And just overtly, I guess kind of being a dick about it. There is a big difference between those two things isn't there?

Jason : A huge difference. I've definitely hit around with my fair share of women, but it's with balls that make sense. It's not every single return. It's not every single volley. It's not every single overhead. It's more towards points that make sense and obviously there is some strategy in trying to win so it's not like I'm picking on the guy, but yeah, there is a big difference between hitting 97% of your shots to one person no matter what and just being smart.

Ian : Good discussion. This is the first time actually that a mixed doubles question has come up on the Podcast. I wanted to kind of get that out in the air a little bit and I'd be curious to see what listeners think about that. Send me an email this week guys and tell me what your opinions are on I guess what the protocol should be in those situations.

Now before we get to our last question I want to tell you guys briefly about our sponsor at the Essential Tennis Podcast and that is TennisTours.com. Since 1987, they've been putting together ticket packages to professional tennis events including all of the grand slams and most of the ATP 1000 events. If you are going to watch professional players play, whether it's WTA or ATP which is an amazing experience, please check out TennisTours. Com to see what they offer and very often for most of these events, they offer lots of different options in terms of the quality of seats, you can get luxury suites, you can get individual tickets, grounds passes. All kinds of different options as far as exactly how close you want to get to the action. And they also offer packages along with hotels and accommodations.

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So again, TennisTours. Com, use the promotional code 'Essential' when you checkout and I thank them very much for their support of the Essential Tennis Podcast.

Now we've got one more question to get to. So let's shift gears a little bit and this comes from Adrian in the Philippines. He's a 3. 5 player. He wrote to me and said 'basically, I don't know what kind of serve I should be practicing. I already have reliable, moderately paced ground strokes and can place them but I'm struggling with my serve. I'm 5'7 tall and I can't do flat serves. I'm now trying to put more pace on my slice serve which is my best first serve now in terms of reliability although it doesn't go in as much as I'd like it to. All in all, I would very much appreciate your advice on how I should progress with my serve practice. For now, I am just looking for a decent first and second serve to get me through my matches. So what do you think about that Jason?

Jason : Well a couple things pop into my head. For one, saying that you can't do flat serves, I have to wonder why.

Ian : I agree.

Jason : I just can't think of a good reason. If your arm hurts, that means that you are doing it wrong. I can't think of a good reason that you say you can't do flat serves other than you don't know how and you should probably check out the website a bit and learn to [inaudible] and do a flat serve because those are really quite important. Wouldn't you say?

Ian : Yeah. Absolutely. Although on the other side of the coin, I would say that at his level, in my opinion, typically I'm trying to get students to learn how to have a good, reliable, I guess aggressive spin serve first that they can be really confident with and accelerate at.

But eventually, having a flat serve is definitely something that you guys listening are going to want to develop at some point. And Adrian throws in their his height, and I think he's using that as his reason. He says he's 5'7 and can't do flat serves and that is an excuse for having a flat serve. I've known plenty of people shorter than you who have a good flat serve. So that's not a reason why. It has more to do with mechanics and technique like Jason was talking about.

That being said, I think he should probably develop his spin serve first. What do you think about that Jason?

Jason : I kind of tend to go a different way from most people when I try to teach people serves, I like them to try and figure out how they are manipulating the ball more so than [inaudible] making the ball. So if he already knows how to hit a slice serve, so he's hitting around the right side of the ball just fine. He should be able to [inaudible] wrists over and hit through the middle of the ball. And he should be able to drop the racket head down and hit up with the side of his racket over the ball for a kick. I traditionally will teach people all three serves at the same time so that when they hit something, they can feel what they did-- whether it's on purpose or an accident. And then progress from there and it's, in my opinion, it's way easier to learn that way than just trying to hit once serve and figuring it out from there. - My advice would be figure out how you are manipulating the ball, watch the way it bounces, listen to the sound that it makes. Check out how hard it is. All of those are clues to what just happened and then figure out ways to manipulate your racket differently to create all three serves. And for sure, your height means nothing as far as not being able to hit a flat serve.

Ian : There was a player when Jason and I were at Ferris State, there was a player who played on the women's team and her nickname was 5'1 which was her height. And she had a pretty big serve as far as the women's team was concerned. She had one of the better serves on the team. So her height did not hold her back at all. And I'm able to hit a pretty decent flat serve on my knees as well. So the height definitely doesn't have a whole lot to do with it.

Jason : If I was teaching somebody and he had a slice serve and wanted to learn others, the big thing that I would try to make points of is to just move your racket around the ball and hit it differently and figure out which spin you've just created and move on that way. There is no good reason why you can't teach himself how to do kick serves by watching videos and reading and just paying attention to what he has done for the ball.

Ian : Alright, good stuff. And with that we're going to wrap it things up. And I want to thank the people who have submitted questions for today's show. Adrian in the Philippines, Jason in Illinois USA and Thomas in Germany-- a nice diverse group of people. It's always cool to hear questions from all different parts of the world. If you're listening and would like to have one of your questions featured on the show, you can always send me an email at ian@essentialtennis.com or on the Podcast page at essentialtennis.com there is a form that you guys can fill out to submit a question also.

But Jason, I want to thank you very much for your time. Thank you for talking with me about these topics and me and my listeners both appreciate it very much.

Jason : Thanks for having me Ian.

Ian : You bet. I hope to see more of you around the forums.

Jason : I hope to see you on the golf course.

Ian : Touche. Sometime soon we definitely have to meet up and play.

Jason : Alright. [music] [music] [music] [music]

Ian : That's it for today's episode of the Essential Tennis Podcast. Thank you very much for joining Jason and myself. Hopefully you enjoyed today's show and in wrapping up, I'd like to do a couple of shout out's here to people who have donated over last week. First of all Tychi in Maryland donated \$20 to Essential Tennis. Patrick in Nebraska donated \$10. Shelly in New Mexico made her \$10 monthly subscription donation and John in New Mexico made his \$5 monthly subscription donation. So thank you to all four of you very much. I appreciate your support and Tyche in Maryland I'm going to be sending you an Essential Tennis shirt free of charge for being the top donator of last week. Thank you very much.

Now if you are listening and the Essential Tennis Podcast has helped improve your game, please consider making a donation. Any amount is always helpful and each week, the top donator gets a free Essential Tennis t-shirt. Just go to EssentialTennis.com and on the front page on the lower right, there is a button that says donate. So check that out.

Alright that does it for this week, thanks very much everybody. Take care and good luck with your tennis.
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