

Essential Tennis Podcast #113

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 tennistours.com and protranscript.com. Thank you very much for enjoying me today's show, I appreciate it very much.

Before we get started, I just want to tell you guys about a new tennis podcast that has just kind of come out in the last, I think in the last couple of months, they started their show, and it is the tennis.com podcast and it's hosted by several top editors and writers of Tennis Magazine, so you definitely know that these guys know what they're talking about. They've been around the tennis industry for a long time and, it's their job to report on tennis and, the show format is all ATP and WTA Tour commentary, tour news, analysis and, opinions, etc.

So, these guys just get together and talk about both the men's and women's tours. It's a great show if you're a fan of professional tennis and, they do at least one show a week, during bigger tournaments they do more than one show a week. So, check it out. --I'd like to keep on top of podcasts. I love podcasts, myself, and I like to keep up with what's going on in the tennis world, as well. So, these guys are on iTunes, or if you go to tennis.com, you can find the podcast there, as well. --All right, let's get down to business, and start today's show. Sit, back, relax and, get ready for some great tennis instruction. [music] [music] [music]

Ian: All right, let's get going. I'm looking forward to doing today's show. It's going to be a Q&A show. I've got some questions to catch up on from listeners, and I'm looking forward to answering a couple of them.

The first one comes to me from Ben, in Salt Lake City, Utah, and Ben was with me in Palm Springs for my most recent Essential Tennis Clinic. I enjoyed working with Ben very much, so Ben, I'm looking forward to this question. He wrote to me and said, 'This has happened to me in the last couple of tournaments I've played. I'll hit a good approach shot, make my opponent run, and hit back a relatively weak passing shot. It's not hit with a lot of pace, but, it's not really a lob either on my forehand side, high enough that I'll hit it like an overhead, and I hit them long.

This tends to happen near the end of a match, and usually on big points. Any idea as what might cause this?' Well, Ben, I feel your pain, and this is something that can be very frustrating, both to do, and to watch. I can tell you that from a coach's perspective, it's always great to see a student set up a point really well, hit a nice, firm, aggressive approach shot, make their way into the net, get their opponent off-balance. Their opponent hits back a weak shot, and then, my student misses the volley or the

overhead! That's definitely a frustrating thing to do, and as a player, obviously something that you don't want to have happen. And, I've got a couple of thoughts here.

First of all, you say that this isn't really a lob, and I'm going to basically approach this from 2 different perspectives. I'm going to talk about hitting this as a high volley, rather than taking it as an overhead. But, if you do want to swing at it like an overhead, I'm going to tell you how to fix this, as well. So, you're going to have 2 options on how to hit this shot and, we're going to talk about the high volley, first.

And, a high volley, or really volleys in general, are just so overdone by recreational players. They make it much more complicated than it has to be. Move their racket around a ton, try and make it fancy, and usually try and make it more aggressive than it should be and, it's very painful for me to see, because technique wise, volley's the simplest shot in tennis, and it's a big mistake to move the racket around a lot, more than necessary and, I think often times recreational players try to use the volley as a power shot, relatively speaking. Way more than they should be.

Now, let's talk about high volley techniques, specifically you're talking about a high forehand shot, it's not really allowed. But, it's definitely, it sounds like, definitely, above shoulder height. Most players make the mistake of moving the racket back and forth, way too much. Meaning, they take their racket way back and then close the face, kind of like a mini overhead, but not really.

And, often times looking from the side, see if I can explain this to you, the big mistake I usually see from recreational players is looking directly to the side, say a right handed player, and I'm standing on the right side of the court watching them play, and they come up to the net, and I'm directly to the right side of their body. I will see their racket actually get taken back, behind the plane of their body, behind the back edge of their body, with an open face. And so, they'll take their hand, and their racket face way back behind them to where their strings are facing up, toward the sky and, then the ball gets to them and, they'll swing the racket forwards, and close the racket face as they swing to try to get the racket square to the ball, so it that doesn't go to far, because you don't want to hit these high aggressive shots hard, because they are definitely going to end up going to far. So, this player will start with an open face behind them, and then try to turn the racket over, using their forearm, and their hand to close the racket face. And so, the racket is swinging back and forth, back and forth.

Now, this type of swing is way too unpredictable, and that's the problem with trying to hit a high volley this way, is when they take the racket back, the strings are facing up, when they finish the swing, the strings are facing down and, so all throughout this stroke, this volley stroke, the strings are facing in completely different directions the entire time. And, if your timing is just a little bit off, you're going to end up putting the ball all over the court. Which I very often see.

Players very often know how to hit these types of shots hard but, they're very, very inaccurate and, so there is a lot of times, errors associated with this shot, even though it should be very easy. You're close to the net, the ball is high, and it's not moving very fast, as you said Ben, in your particular case. And so, it just sucks to miss this shot! And, it's usually due to people trying to do too much.

Now, if you're missing long, on a regular basis, which Ben said that he is, then your racketbase is too open, it contact. Now, traditionally struck volleys in general, should be hit with an open racketface. But, on this particular shot, when you're close to the net, and the ball is high, and from where you're making contact, you can literally look down st your opponents side of the courts, we no longer need to have the racketface open. At least, not very much.

If you're trying to place the ball deep, you still might want to have it open a little bit. But, if you're trying to put it away, especially with some force, and some firmness, we need to close the racketface up, and this is a good thing. You've kind of earned the right to do this. You've gotten yourself close, you've set the point up well, and the ball is high. And so, you can go ahead and start to close the racketface more. This is not going to happen a whole lot during a match.

Those of you listening be aware of this. Don't think that you can get away with this very often. It's not very often that you're going to be close enough, and have the ball high enough that you can actually close the face. And, face it downwards towards your opponents side of the courts. But, you want to close the racketface enough, that it's bascially facing directly at your target.

And, this is basically the set up, and this is the way I'm going to describe this is a very simplistic way to hit this shot, and it's very straightforward, and this is the way that all of you listening should learn how to hit this shot first. Before you try to hit the shot with any power at all. So, what you want to do, is get yourself turned to the side, as you put your racketup behind the oncoming ball, and then angle your racketstrings, so that they're facing directly at your target. Let's say that you've approached down the line on your forehands side, straight ahead, and your opponents is over to the right side of the court, from your perspective, they have floated up a high forehand volley to you. And, you want to put it away cross-court, away from your opponent.

So, you want to turn your body, at least 45 degrees or so, to your right, the ball is coming to your forehand side, you're on the deuce side, you want to put your racketup behind the ball, and angle it down, probably around service line, around the service line on your opponents side, as far as depth. And, I would suggest a target that's probably 4, maybe 5 feet from the singles sideline, cross-court from you, on your opponents deuce side. So that we can hit it firmly and right at that target, to put it away from them, cross-court, after you hit you're down the line approach shot.

Now, once you've got your body to the side, and the racketis set up behind the ball, you're going to want to use the big parts of your body, your shoulder, and your core, to rotate and push the ball toward your target. Do not use your hand, or your forearm to swing the racketat the ball, and hit it down towards your target.

Now, when I first start teaching people this kind of technique, it feels very under-powered to them, it feels weak, it feel like they're never, ever going to be able to put the ball away. But, to be honest, I don't care! Until they're able to show me that they can make 5,6,7 of these in a row. They're easy shots. Until

they can show me that they can consistently place this shot pretty close to a target, someplace on the court, you know, a certain number of times, consistently, I don't let me students hit this ball with any pace. Being consistent, and being able to place this shot are the two most important things.

Again, this is an easy shot, and missing it is terrible! You have to learn how to control this shot first. As your skill increases, you can use your hand, and your forearm, a little bit at a time to increase speed. I'm not against power on volleys, but, you have to learn how to control the shot first. Period.

And, I will not waiver on that. And, I've spent lots of time, lots of repetition with players, learning this kind of technique and doing it again, and again, and again, until they're consistent, just blocking it.

All right, well that pretty much wraps up the volley part of it, and that's my description of how to hit this as a volley, and Ben, I would say that most of the time, I would suggest, that you take this kind of in between shot as a volley.

It's going to be by far the most consistent way to do it. If you continue to miss lawn, you've got to line your strings up correctly, towards your target, and not open them quite so much.

Now, let's talk about hitting this as a low overhead, because that is an option, assuming you guys are close enough, and the ball is high enough, and I would say it's got to be at least a foot to 2 feet above shoulder height, probably closer to 2 feet above shoulder height to take an overhead, or a serve type swing at this shot. If it's any lower than that, just take it as a volley, and place it well, and hit it cleanly, and that's going to be your best bet.

But, if it is high enough, and it's not really allowed, but it is high enough to take an overhead swing again, you're missing because your racketface at contact is too open. And, Ben said he's always missing these deep, and, this is really obvious, and you know, seems like a simple answer. But, when you're taking a swing at the ball and, it's going to far, we need to close the racketface.

Now, in this situation, it's probably due to you tightening up and decelerating, due to nerves. It sounds like you're getting nervous, here. Ben said that this usually happens at the end of a match, and on big points. And, a lot of times when players get tight, they start to slow down a little bit. An overhead motion, whether it be the serve, or the overhead, and you're still trying to hit it with some force, but you kind of get, you get a little bit tentative, often times that causes the racketface to stay open. Because, you're not releasing, you're not allowing the racket to swing freely, because you're body is getting tight. And, that keeps the racket from closing properly, and facing towards your target. It kind of stays open. And that's what causing the ball to go to far, Ben.

So, in order to fix that, we've got to loosen up, and we need to pronate and also rotate your shoulder, internally. The combination of those two things is going to get that racketface closed. --And, just briefly, I'm going to go over what that means. Pronating means that your palm is going to turn to face downwards, using your forearm. Pronation is referring specifically to the rotation of your forearm, to

turn your palm down, and that in turn is going to turn the racketface down. We're also going to want to internally rotate your shoulder, which is going to bring your elbow up, and again bring that racket down. If we do those two things, we'll be able to easily hit the ball down into the court, and not float it too long.

A drill that I do in order to get my students to feel this, and be able to get the feel for this. And, by the way, one of the most fun shots in tennis, in doubles or singles, is the overhead that you bounce over the back fence. If you're listening, and haven't had the joy of doing this yet, I highly recommend that you work on this shot, because it's extremely fun! It's great to hit the shot, and just watch your opponent stand there, and watch the ball bounce over their head and over the back fence. Nothing that they can do there, at all! Very gratifying! [laughter] And, in order to do that, you have to really get good at pronating, and being relaxed, and allowing your racket to really close, and face down towards the court.

You guys will see pros do this all the time, on TV, when they get a sitter overhead, is they'll just crush it straight down into their opponents side of the court and bounce it up into the stands. And, I oftentimes have students practice this, by coming up to the net, and I'll take the basket of balls up there, and I'll have them toss the ball to themselves, kind of like getting set up for a serve, and have them bounce the ball down across over to the other side of the net, with the goal of bouncing it over the back fence, or over the back curtain, if we're inside.

Now, if they're a little bit older client, or if maybe they're not as very athletic, and have a hard time with the service motion, and pronating in general, maybe I'll alter the target a little bit and say we're trying to bounce the ball and hit the top half of the back fence, or the top half of the back curtain, whatever. But, kind of the ultimate, the ultimate goal here, should be to be able to bounce it over the back fence. And, I'll tell you guys right now it's not easy, and you really have to have the correct technique. You have to be good at pronating in order to achieve this. It sounds easy, especially tossing a ball up to yourself, but, it's not that simple.

But, in order to get the idea of the feel, of how to really pronate, relax, and kind of, people use the term 'snap your wrist', that's not what's going on. But, that's very commonly what's referred here. In order to get the feel of that I really suggest you take a basket of balls, walk up to the net, and try to bounce it over the back fence, Ben, and that's going to really help you get the feel for closing your racketface, a lot.

All right! So, those are my suggestions to you, Ben. Again, I would suggest that you take most of these as a high volley, but if you do want to take this as an overhead, you just to get that racketface closed, so that you can hit directly at your target, and not worry about hitting these shots lawn.

Thanks very much for the question, Ben. If you have any follow-up, definitely let me know. And, good luck with your game out there in Utah.

Before we get to our next question, I just want to briefly tell you guys about the sponsor of the Essential

Tennis Podcast, and that is tennistours.com. I hope you guys have at least gone and checked them out, since they started advertising on the podcast. I really appreciate their support of the show, very much. And if you enjoy the Essential Tennis Podcast, I really urge you to go check them out, and if you're going to be going to a professional tennis event, whether it's men's or women's, definitely go to tennistours.com.

They've been doing this since 1987. You can get individual tickets, ticket packages, also hotel and accommodations, along with your tickets, they do everything. And, whether you're looking for ground passes, all the way up to luxury suites, they can really hook you up with a wide variety of different tickets, and if you use the promotional code, 'essential', while you check out, you can also receive a \$25 discount off your purchase. So, go there, check them out if you're going to a tournament anytime soon. They have all the grand slams. They've got tickets for all the grand slams, as well as most of the upper level ATP Masters Events. So, if there's one of those in your area, and you're going to check it out, go to tennistours.com. I thank them very much for their support of the Essential Tennis Podcast.

All right, let's get to our next question. And, it comes to us from Samir, in Chicago, Illinois. And, Samir, I definitely can't read your name without thinking about the movie, 'Office Space', and if you haven't seen it, I highly recommend it. If you're into comedies, anyway. Funny movie, with a character named Samir. Anyway, let's go ahead and get to his question which is, 'My question has to do with a slice serve, and specifically the wrist action at contact and follow through. I have seen it taught a couple of ways.

Both stress the fact that the racket chops at the ball at the 3 o'clock position, but I have seen one approach indicating at contact the racket curves around the ball, and your wrist moves in a way where your palm moves toward the side you're serving to. The second suggests that at contact, you pronate, so that your wrist and palm move away from the side you're serving to. I have heard the former method produces more spin or skid, but in general, I thought pronation generates more rackethead speed? I'd love to get your take. Thanks again, Samir. ' Well, Samir, that's a good question and this is a technique topic that has a lot of misunderstanding around it, in tennis, in general.

And, if you, well, I'll get to that later. Let's start off briefly with pronation, and supination. Supination is the opposite of pronation, and pronation would rotate, if you're a right-handed player, and you're on the deuce side of the court, and you want to hit a big slice serve, that curves from your right to your left xxx and, so it would curve out, away from your opponent, off the courts, off the deuce side, again, if you're right-handed.

Pronation would turn your racketface, and palm, the palm of your hand, out, outwards, towards the right side of the courts, if you're on the deuce side. Well, on both sides, really. If you're a right-handed player, your palm would rotate out towards the right, along with your racketface. That's pronation.

Supination would rotate the racket inwards towards the left side of the court. And, those are the two different ways that you can rotate your forearm. And, by the way, pronation and supination have nothing to do with your wrist. It's important that you guys understand that. Biomechanically, your wrist

does not pronate, it does not supinate. Your wrist and your hand, does move, I'm not remembering the technical terms for the movement, right off the top of my head, but pronation and supination refer specifically to the rotation of your forearm. It's what's actually causing that rotation to the inside, or the outside.

Now, it seems like, if you want the ball to spin to your left, as a right-handed player, then you would want your palm to turn to the left. It kind of seems logical that you would want to come and kind of scoop the racket around the outside of the ball and kind of spin it to the left, by supinating your hand, and rotating it quickly again at 3 o'clock, kind of around the right side of the ball, and it kind of seems that would be the best way to get spin but, it's not true.

To get the most amount of spin possible, you need the most amount of acceleration possible. The faster that your rackethead is moving, as you make contact with the right side of the ball, again at 3 o'clock or, whichever direction your racket is moving. The more spin you're going to get is going to be dependent on how fast you accelerate the racquet. And, to get the most acceleration possible out of your racquet, every high level athlete with an overhand motion, pronates to achieve the best possible results. It's very important to understand that. And, whether we're talking about American football, or baseball, or tennis; any sport with an overhand motion, a throwing motion, or obviously, with tennis, you've got a racquet, but it's still a throwing motion.

Any professional athlete playing any of those sports, that throws, or does an overhand motion, they are pronating. And, just to really confirm this in my own mind, last night when I was taking notes for today's show, I went to UTube, and I looked at some slow motion, really slow motion footage of some football quarterbacks, again, American football, and also baseball pitchers, and you'll see that their palm, as they release the ball, pronates, and their hand turns out to the right, if they're a right-handed player. Left-handed player, your palm will turn out to the left.

So, it's important to understand that to accelerate as much as possible, you need to pronate. And, I've seen, I've seen articles, recently, saying that pronation is actually not a very large part in the however much you're able to accelerate the racket. I don't agree with that, personally. I think that without pronation you're not going to be able to accelerate the racket nearly as much. I think there's definitely a reason why every top level athlete does pronate with an overhand motion. And so, quite simply, Samir, that's what you need to do. You need to learn how to pronate. It's a very important part of your serve.

To be honest with you guys, I have seen recreational players be pretty successful without pronating. It's not a motion that comes naturally to everybody. But, whether you're hitting a flat serve, a slice serve, a kick serve, a twist serve, any kind of serve, when you're watching a professional player do it, they will pronate on all of those serves.

And, this is a video I plan on doing soon. A video lesson. I want to do a comparison, side by side comparison of the actual technique differences between a flat serve, and a spin serve, and various spin serves. So, look for that in the video section of Essential Tennis, coming up pretty soon. But, for now,

Samir, just definitely know that professional players in every sport with an overhand motion, do pronate, and you should be doing that on your serve. Regardless of what type of serve you're trying to hit, and the reason for that is that it will help you get the most amount of rackethead speed, as possible.

So, Samir, thanks very much for your great question, and good luck developing your serve. Let me know if you have any further questions. [music] [music] [music]

All right, we've got time for one more question here. And, we haven't done a gear question in a little while, so I'm going to answer one. This comes from Francisco, whose a 4.0 player, he said, 'Hi Ian, I was wondering if you could talk about racket customization, specifically changing the main grip. I have been wanting to change my synthetic grip to a leather grip. I know that it will change the balance point, but will it change the swing weight?' Also wondering if I should add lead tape to the head to get it back to the same balance point. I tried that on one of my old rackets but it felt too heavy.

Well Francisco, when it comes to weight and balance issues, we are really talking about a personal preference thing. And, when you're changing your grip from a synthetic one to a leather one, there is going to be a small weight difference, but it's not going to be very much.

To be perfectly honest with you, if you felt a big difference, in terms of weight, in terms of swing weight, and balance between the two, between using a synthetic grip and a leather one, I'd be very surprised. Now, if you do feel a big difference, and that difference bothers you, then yes, you could use lead tape, but as you pointed out, it's going to change quite a bit the overall weight of your racket, and it's probably going to make it feel quite a bit heavier.

Lead tape is something that I use on my current racket. I'm using a Wilson K Pro Tour, and I wanted some more weight in the head to get a little bit more plow through, a little bit more weight into my shots, and so that felt good to me. I don't like the K Pro Tour without the extra weight in the head. But, it's just personal preference. And, I've got 2 of those rackets right now, and they're about, I think they're about 10 grams difference, which is quite a bit. But, I can play equally as well with each one.

Really, if you get it close, it shouldn't be a big deal. And, once you're a professional player, really a small difference between rackets is not a huge deal. And, you should be able to play equally as well with either one.

The really important thing is that you get them close. And so, you want both rackets to have that leather grip. And, whatever changes you make to one racket, you're going to want to make to both of your rackets, or all of your rackets. However many rackets you have of the same frame. You do want to match them as closely as possible, and so using a little bit of lead weight between the two, and finding the same balance point, and the same total weight is definitely worth while.

But, to be perfectly honest with you, changing from one type of grip to another and then worrying about the balance due to a couple grams of weight difference in the handle, honestly is not something I would

worry about. If you do notice that difference, I would be very surprised.

But, then again, it's all personal preference. So, it's up to you. So, there's not really a rule of thumb here, Francisco. Go out and do what feels best to you, and match those rackets as closely as you can. And, that's my advice. Thanks very much for the question. [music] [music] [empty]
[music]

All right, that does it for episode number 113 of the Essential Tennis Podcast. Thank you very much for joining me today. And, just 2 quick things before we wrap up today's show. First of all, I'd like to announce the next Essential Tennis Clinic. It's going to be July 16th, 17th, and 18th in Galveston, Texas. Now, I know I've got quite a few listeners in Texas, and I really urge you guys to sign up for this clinic quickly. We're going to limit it to, somewhere between 6 or 8 participants. I think probably 8 participants.

So, this is not going to open to very many people. It's going to be a smaller group. Myself, and mental tennis expert, David Grumping are going to be running this clinic. And, features are going to include, 8 to 10 hours of on-court instruction with myself and David.

Also, a video analysis workshop, featuring instruction, and analysis from each of the participants in this clinic. A mental toughness workshop presented by David Grumping. And, a group dinner at the club house, at the club where we're going to be holding the clinic.

So, lots of cool features in this clinic. I don't have exact price worked out yet, and I'm working on getting this clinic up on my website, so this is kind of a preliminary announcement and I want to let you guys in the podcast know first, so if you're interested in attending this clinic, in July, in Galveston, Texas, please shoot me an email, and let me know right away if you'd definitely like to participate, and my address is; ian@essentialtennis.com.

Lastly, I just want to get to those of you who have sent donations. Just 2 people this past week. Both of them a monthly subscription donation. William, in Missouri, sent his monthly \$10 subscription via paypal, and also, Bruce in Florida, his monthly \$5 subscription donation.

So, William and Bruce, thank you very much for your monthly support of the podcast. I appreciate you guys very much, and if you guys have found the podcast helpful, please consider making a donation. Either a one time donation or signing up for a monthly donation is also very helpful, as well. Just go to essentialtennis.com and on the lower right corner of the front page, there's a button that says, 'Donate'.

All right, well that does it for this week. Thank you guys very much for spending your time with me. Take care and good luck with your tennis.