

Essential Tennis Podcast #120

Narrator: Welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast. If you love tennis and want to improve your game, this podcast is for you. Whether it's technique, 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 where you can receive a discount off your next purchase of professional tennis event tickets by using the promotional code Essential.

Thank you very much for joining me on today's episode. I appreciate you taking the time to download the file and to listen to the show. Before we get started with today's topics, I'd like to do a quick shout-out to some very special people that spent a weekend with me this past weekend in Baltimore, MD. This was for the third Essential Tennis clinic and we spent a full two days working on different parts of their game. Their stroke technique, their tactics in both singles and doubles, their mental toughness-- everything.

So real quickly to Steve, Brian and Dana, Michelle, Sonya and Psalm in Florida. Amadeu, Debbie, Charles -- I had a really great time working with all of you. Only one person from MD, everyone else flew or drove in from other states here in the US and that shows great dedication and all of your guys were great.

If you are interested in working with me over a weekend, the next clinic is going to be in Galveston Texas this coming July, I believe it is the 18-20th and there is only one spot open for that. So if you'd like to work with me this July in Texas, shoot me an email at ian@essentialtennis.com and maybe you can grab that last spot for the Texas clinic.

Sit back, relax and get ready for some great tennis instruction. [music] [music] [music] [music] [music]

This segment of the podcast, I have a special guest named Steve from NC. He posts as steveo in the forums at essentialtennis.com and he just completed the 3rd essential tennis clinic in Baltimore Maryland with me over the weekend. Steve, welcome to the show and good to have you here. You are the first person to ever record a segment with me live on the podcast, so good to have you here.

[speaker] Thanks, good to be here.

[speaker] The reason why we are doing a segment together is he is the writer of the fitness blog at essentialtennis.com. He knows what he is doing when it comes to working out and keeping your body in peak condition. And we have a good question coming from Romy in the Phillipines. Romy writes and

said, "Since last week, I was watching my son playing in an age group tournament. He is playing in 14 and under and 16 and under, playing conditions are harsh this summer in the Phillipines. It gets to be 38-40 degree celcius which is 103 degrees-- temperatures above our normal body temperature. Would you be able to discuss the tips in handling this situation? Many thanks."

So yeah, obviously, above average temperatures. For most of us here in the States and I would guess for most people in general, so that gives us a unique challenge. Especially for kids I think. It seems like you have to be pretty careful. So Steve, what are some tips for you on how to handle this kind of heat and be safe out there while competing on the tennis court?

Steve: You bring up an important point. It is really difficult to play in those conditions. The first and main thing that you want to be aware of is the hydration factor. You can get really dehydrated quickly as I know it's very humid in the Phillipines. So you want to be aware of a couple things. The first is to have proper pre-hydration. This begins, not the day of, but the day before and a couple days leading up to it. You want to make sure that you are drinking as water as you are comfortable. And have the kids drink as much as it is comfortable for them to drink. An 8 ounce glass of water every hour is probably adequate. The body is able to eliminate up to 32 ounces of water per hour and so this may seem like a lot of liquid to be intaking, but it's really not. You want to make sure that they are getting a good diet in. Some lighter foods as well. You want to have them avoid caffeine, any kind of sodas or coffee because caffeine can act as a dieratic. It causes the kidneys to increase urine production which is going to eliminate a lot of water from the body.

The day of, you want to make sure they get up and drink plenty of water. And make sure that they are drinking water continuously throughout the day. And especially as they begin to work out and exert themselves. At least every 10-15 minutes, give them a break and let them get as much as they want but not too much, but definitely more than 8-10 ounces of water at a shot. But give them frequent breaks and for any play lasting over an hour, you would want to add in an electrolyte beverage because at this point, your body is really going to start getting depleted of sodium.

A proper sodium balance in your body is crucial for ensuring proper hydration. A large amount of sodium is lost through sweat and you want to make sure that you are putting back in some of those elements such as potassium, sodium, and a small amount of carbohydrates in order to keep the body going.

What a lot of people don't realize is that when it is really humid, that acts against the body's natural cooling mechanism. Your body cools off by producing water in the form of sweat. And when that water evaporates it cools the body. It's kind of like a car's radiator-- you get cool air running through the water and it cools off the body.

But when you are playing in humid conditions, the sweat tends to not evaporate and it will negate the body's natural cooling effects. So there are a couple things you want to be aware of. You want to stay covered up, as this will create a barrier between you and the heat and the sun. And you want to be

aware of factors such as cramping and heat exhaustion. This is a really -- symptoms that can be exasperated by extreme heat and high temperatures to obviously ensure that they are taking in the proper amount of fluid but cramping and heat exhaustion can become serious issues even if they are maintaining proper hydration.

Some symptoms of heat exhaustion are going to be paleness, nausea, fatigue, dizziness, light-headedness, vomiting, fainting, clammy skin. If you get those kind of conditions, you definitely want to stop activity immediately. Get them into cool air, drink moderate amounts of fluids and just let them cool down.

Ian: So, extreme climates or situations like this with the temperatures so high, is it possible to still get those kind of symptoms even when properly hydrated or is the dizziness, fainting, is that possible even with proper hydration?

Steve: It can be just depending on the athlete's conditioning, body type, background, depending on how much work they have been doing. Depending on what they may or may not have eaten. You know, if they are properly fueled with nutrition and food.

Sometimes, you are more susceptible to those things -- if you didn't get enough sleep, many factors can contribute to it. So yes Ian, even if you are having proper hydration, you can have some of those things happen.

Ian: Alright. So what else, beside the hydration and you mentioned the electrolyte beverages, trying to get some sodium.. by the way, I know that Gatorade and popular sports drinks, I know that sodium, part of those beverages is key. How come sodium is so important to our bodies?

Steve: The sodium is what enables the muscles and it really acts as a stabilizing agent. It stabilizes your blood Ph level and it makes the water in your body and your blood able to transport the nutrients properly. It's just a good balance to have in your body, once you start losing sodium, your body will start breaking down tissues and it just enables your body to have a proper water balance.

Ian: OK, besides the hydration in general and the sodium intake, what else is important for these kids playing out there in these hot conditions?

Steve: Well it's important to take breaks and cool off. The best athletes in the world, I know Roger Federer often trains in Dubai in temperatures that are in the mid-40s which is about 110 degrees.

Still it's important to take breaks. You can go and go for a while, and even if you are taking in a proper amount of fluids and staying cool, trying to stay cool covered up etc. It's important to take breaks.

30-45 minutes of hard activity, you need to take a break and have time to cool down. And that is really going to cool down the machine. You can't just run at the red-line for an hour straight and expect the

body to keep going, you've got have some proper recovery time.

Also, just going out and training in those conditions continually is going to help you create more endurance. The more that you place yourself and your body in those tough hard conditions, the more your body is going to get used to it. You are going to start to adapt to it after a while if you are being challenging in there.

Some of things that could help are some off-court trainings. Some good cardio training that is going to get the heart pumping, whether it's riding a bike or running or things like that. Just some general cardio training to increase the heart's capacity to work when it is hot is going to be also very important and often an under rated or under used thing as a tennis player.

Most people think of getting most of their exercise in on the tennis court and that is adequate when really, the top athletes in the world are doing lots and lots of off-court training. So the combination of hydration, the conditioning and the frequent breaks I think are going to be some things that will help your guys out.

Ian: I'm curious, even at age 14, is that still recommended I guess to do a lot of off-court training? I guess my question is, at what age should kids start to actually workout or do physical training off the court.

Steve: Sure, by the age of 14-16, most boys have probably reached their peak height, their bones have stopped growing. They've reached for the most point the size they are going to be as adults. So strength training is OK in moderation.

Of course we aren't going to put them out there and have them do 800lb squats and try to develop full loads of muscle. Those things aren't necessary to playing optimal tennis. You want to do some degree of strength training. A medium program of moderate weight and higher reps because that is going to condition the muscles.

And it's very appropriate that they begin doing a lot of cardio work as well. Tennis is mainly running and if you don't have the foot speed but the cardio endurance to get out there and stay out there and stay running, then you are going to wear out sooner and you aren't going to be as effective as you go into a match later.

Ian: Alright Steve, I want to thank you very much for your time. Do you have anything else to add before we wrap up this topic?

Steve: No, that's it. I think proper hydration is the main key. And that is just for anything that you do outside when it is hot and humid. You want to make sure that you are drinking plenty of water, plenty of fluids in your body and just keep an eye on the heat level.

Ian: Alright, it's been great having you here this weekend. Thanks very much for your time and hopefully I'll see you again in the near future at another clinic.

Steve: Thanks, I enjoyed it and we had a great time in Baltimore and I appreciate you hosting it. [music]
[music] [music]

Ian: Our next question on this episode, I want to remind you guys briefly about my sponsor of the Essential Tennis podcast, and that is Championship Tennis Tours, and you can find them at championtennistours.com. They've been putting together individual tickets to professional tennis events, both WTA and ATP tours and ticket packages including accommodations and hotel to a wide variety of professional events all over the world. And that includes all four of the grand slams and a lot of the Master's 1000 series tournaments. So if you are going to be traveling or going to a tournament in your hometown in the near future, definitely check them out. And if you use the promotional code Essential, you'll receive a discount off your purchase of professional tennis event tickets or travel packages for the next event that you go to.

Please show them your support for having them be the official sponsor of the podcast and I really appreciate their support. Definitely make sure that you check out the US Open packages as well and when you purchase a US Open package and use the promotional code Essential, you'll also get an invitation to a cocktail party in Time Square which I'm going to be a part of live. So check it out, it should be a good time and I'm looking forward to heading up to New York this year and possibly hooking up with a couple of you guys and having a cool event in Times Square during the tournament.

So, tennistours.com and again the promotional code is Essential when you checkout. I thank them very much for their support of the Essential Tennis podcast.

Let's get going with our next topics and they are coming to us from Mark in the Netherlands. He has a couple questions having to do with changing your grip that I'd like to discuss-- His first question is all about the adjustment of grip and he has a few questions related to it. The first one is that somebody gave me a pointer that instead of changing my grip, I could also rotate my wrist a little. You would call it pronating, I think because the rotation is not done by the risk itself but I think you know what I mean. Both adjusting the grip slightly and turning the wrist a little are done to prevent the ball from going long. My question is, what are the advantages of changing your grip as compared to rotating your wrist? By the way, I normally hit a forehand and backhand with an Eastern grip, for these slow short balls I now change towards a semi-Western grip, maybe somewhere in between both grips.

Alright, what he is saying is that for a short shot in the court, he is moving forwards and using a different grip then what he would for a shot a little bit farther back and closer to the baseline. First of all Mark, I want to say that it's smart to want to change your racket face for a shorter ball-- you are on the right track there as far as your technique is concerned.

The closer you get to the net, the less room you have to hit the ball into. The closer to the inside of your

court you get, the less amount of room you have to land your shot back in on the other half of the court. And very often, when players miss a short ball deep when they are trying to attack, they make a technique change and their swing length. Meaning, that typically, they get tentative on the next shot, they shorten their swing because they remember they missed the last one by hitting it too far and the result is an increasingly short and tentative scared ground-stroke swing and I don't like that. When you guys watch the pros on TV, you will not see them let up on a shorter shot. If anything, they will actually accelerate more at the ball. I'm talking about one that is relatively easy, they are moving inside the baseline, it's a shorter shot sitting up in their strike zone or maybe a little bit higher around shoulder height, but not even necessarily shoulder height.

Something that you can get to and hit comfortably is what I'm talking about. And when you watch the players on TV, they don't swing shorter at those shots and yet they are still able to hit them in play. And a big mistake the recreational players make is they miss that short shot, they are trying to pressure their opponent with it which they should be doing because it is easy, you're close to your opponent, it's an easy shot, it's in your strike zone so you should be trying to pressure them with that shot. And very often, rec players miss this shot long and they say to themselves, I hit it too hard, I was too aggressive and that's not the way that I want you guys to think about it. Because when you think that way, you become more and more scared of hitting the ball and you are not going to advance in your tennis game that way.

Instead, you should make a full follow through at these types of shots and the change you should make to keep the ball in play is to close your racket face more. Meaning, that your strings are now facing a little bit more towards the court than they were from back behind the baseline. But you should make the same follow-through, the same swing that you would from a shot at the base-line as you do on a shorter shot, that you are moving well inside the baseline on.

Make sure to continue swinging upwards also so you create topspin to curve the ball back into play. I've talked about this before, as you are making an upward swing to make that spin which is going to curve the ball back into the court and that is not going to happen if you shorten up your swing.

So the result here is a full confident swing on any shot that many recreational players are nervous about. So, before I really answer your question, I just want to congratulate you on having the right idea there. I'm glad that you are thinking about simply closing the racket face a little more to keep the ball from going too far and you are not being scared and nervous about missing it long. It sounds like you are continuing to follow through and I just wanted to put that out there because some listeners might not have heard me talk about this before and it's a really important concept to understand.

So you are correct, closing the racket face is important. Now, let's talk specifically about changing the grip versus just turning your hand or your palm downwards to close the face. Closing the racket face does not involve turning your wrist. You were correct in pointing that out, it's pronation. And pronation is specifically the rotation of your forearm, meaning your arm, your forearm is what actually pronates and that turns your palm down towards the court surface. It's not your wrist. Go ahead and grip a tennis

racket right in front of you, put it out in front of you like you are making contact with a ball and then move your wrist back and forth. And the racket will move back and forth. It won't twist up and down. That motion is accomplished with your forearm, so yes you are correct. And that is what closes the racket face.

Now, to get to answering your question, no I don't recommend changing your grip for a short ball and then changing it back again for a deep ball. This is much more complicated than simply closing the racket face with your forearm by pronating. When you change your grip, many more things change than just the angle of your strings and Mark points this out in a question that is going to come up in a second here. But when you change your grip, it is more than just the racket face that changes. You now need to use a different swing because you are going to have a little bit different contact points, it's going to be a different feeling swing because the mechanics all change when you change your grip. It becomes essentially a different stroke.

The main elements of hitting a good ground-stroke are still the same but changing your grip is a big change. And it causes you to have to change many other things at the same time. It's not just the racket face.

So what you should do instead is learn how to feel, learn how to have an awareness of where your strings are and you need to learn how to make adjustments accordingly based on the type of the shot that you are trying to hit during a point. In other words, a deep rally shot in a really short put-away ground-stroke. We are looking for a very different result on that deep ground-stroke, we are trying to really get the ball up into the air, keep the ball deep back to your opponents again and so you have a really long distance to make the ball travel.

On that short ground-stroke where you are trying to pressure your opponent, you are trying to do something very different. You are trying to attack and we are not trying to get the ball up into the air and get it to travel nearly as far and you need to learn how to change your racket face between those two different types of shots and everything in between while using the same grip.

You need to learn how to achieve those different range of shots using one grip and you are going to accomplish that by making small adjustments to the racket face. The angle of the strings when you make contact.

And a small change makes a big difference, so in my opinion, changing the grip is not necessary, it's just going to over-complicate things. I would recommend that you find the grip that is most comfortable for you in general, whether it be Eastern, forehand, semi-Western, forehand grip or an Eastern backhand grip. Whatever feels most comfortable for you in general, stick with that and practice creating different types of results using that same grip.

Now let's go ahead and move to Mark's second question. "My second question is about attacking these short, slow balls with your backhand. I found that hitting a backhand with a semi-Western grip is much

more difficult. Would that be a reason to stick to an Eastern backhand grip and pronate instead? I discovered the same semi-Western grip also helps me for deep, high, topspin shots. So very different shots from the short slow ones.

You don't hear a lot about players that change their forehand grips during the game, would you recommend that in general or would it be confusing because swing and contact spot would also change. I'm looking forward to your answer, especially because advice on the swing between different forehand grips seems quite rare.

OK, we've got a couple different questions in here. You are talking about a backhand grip with a semi-western grip which I assume you are meaning is another turn past an Eastern grip where your knuckles are up on top of the grip. That's really far over, we are getting into almost a grip that [inaudible] uses on her one-handed backhand and that is a really extreme grip. I wouldn't recommend that you go over that far. And you say that it's an awkward grip to you, I agree.

You shouldn't have to turn it that far in order to keep your racket face closed. And you say should I stick to an Eastern backhand grip and pronate instead... Yes. Although on a backhand, it's [inaudible] and not pronating. You are going to want to turn the racket the opposite direction that you do on a forehand. On a forehand you pronate, and on a backhand your dominate hand will supenate to keep that racket face closed.

Now you talk also about the forehand here, talking about it becoming confusing because the swing and contact point would change. Yes and I'm on the same page with you and I completely agree and that was what I was talking about before. I don't recommend that you try to learn several different forehand and backhand swings for different types of grips. Instead, find a grip that feels most comfortable to you in general on both sides and then learn how to use it to achieve different results as I described before.

Alright, the third question here having to do with changing grips and this has to do with the backhand slice. So we are kind of going through every type of shot here from the baseline. He wrote to me, 'I have a follow up question about switching between different grips for different kinds of shots. Normally, I use an Eastern grip with both my forehand and backhand which is one-handed. One shot where it is often recommended to change your grip is when you play a slice. You often hear that you should use the continental grip for the backhand and forehand slice. However, personally, I wonder if it's really a good idea to use the continental grip when you play the slice. I find that when I use that grip, the racket face is facing too much upward with the consequence being that I only brush the bottom of the ball and it goes up very high. This makes it an easier target for my opponent, the ball goes way up too high and spends too long a time in the air. But is it possible that there is something else that I'm doing wrong? Would you say that the Eastern backhand and forehand grips are also fine for slice shots? Maybe slightly better?'

Alright, let's talk about the forehand and backhand slice and which grip to use. If your slice is popping up too much, it means that your face is too open. And exactly as you said, your strings are facing upwards too much as you are making contact. It could also mean that you are chopping down at the ball too

much, but ultimately it means that your face is too open and so the ball is popping up into the air.

Now, this doesn't mean necessarily that the grip that you are using is wrong, but rather it just means that you aren't controlling your racket face correctly. Traditionally most players do use a continental grip to hit their slice on both the forehand and backhand side as you pointed out. This includes myself, this is how I was taught when I was younger and for volleys and drop shots, and slice shots, anything with back spin, on both my forehand and backhand side, I use a continental grip for both sides. And it's definitely very natural for me and as I said a second ago, traditionally, it's what most top level players including professionals use.

Recently, I've started noticing that pros are using other grips to hit their backhand slice. Specifically, I've noticed that Nadal and Murray both use a different grip from a continental grip.

Now you talked about on your backhand slice, using an eastern backhand grip to try to close the face a little more. But guess what, both Nadal and Murray use an eastern forehand grip to hit their backhand slice. This means that it opens the racket face up even more than what would naturally occur with a continental grip. And neither of them have any problem keeping the racket face closed enough to keep the ball from popping up on their backhand slice.

And you are talking about going two grips farther over than that to keep it closed and using an eastern backhand grip on your backhand side. So, this tells me that you are obviously doing something undefined undefined eastern backhand grip just to keep the racket face closed enough to keep the ball from popping way up in the air.

So in my opinion, you should really be keeping at least a continental grip for that backhand slice and you need to get some more feel for where your racket strings are and start to close the racket face by hand, no pun intended, by supenating a little bit on that backhand side to close the racket face. More than what you are doing now.

I'm not aware of any players who use an eastern backhand grip for their backhand slice or an eastern forehand grip for their forehand slice. Those are definitely grips that are naturally setup to hit with top spin because they close the racket face so much and I highly recommend that you stick with that continental grip and start learning how to close the racket face a little bit more to keep that ball from popping up so much and floating and making an easy shot for your opponents.

So stick with it Mark and thank you very much for the great questions. In review here, going over your questions, I don't recommend that for top spin shots, on your forehand and backhand, that you use different grips. I would highly recommend you stick with one grip and learn how to get different results. However, when you do want to hit a slice, I do recommend that you change your grip on both sides and go to a continental grip. It doesn't have to be continental, use what is comfortable for you. But I don't think that you should have to go to an Eastern backhand grip for a backhand slice or an Eastern forehand grip for a forehand slice. Continental should be more than closed enough for you to be able to

hit a nice deep penetrating slice that stays relatively low to the net and doesn't pop up too much.

So thank very much for your questions. I really appreciate you being a listener over in the Netherlands. Hopefully my descriptions here were helpful to you. [music] [music] [music] [music] [music]

That does it for episode 120 of the Essential Tennis Podcast. Thanks for joining me here today, I appreciate it. Make sure to check out the podcast on iTunes in the music store where you guys can subscribe for free and get the new show every week automatically downloaded to your computer and you can transfer it right to your iPod or iPhone or iTouch or iPad which is pretty cool, to automatically get those downloaded.

I'm going to be signing off here and then going to watch the French Open which I've enjoyed watching so far. I'm really looking forward to the second week and by the way, myself and Will Hamilton over at fuzzyyellowballs.com are going to be doing another live webcast during the French Open final which is coming Sunday. Hopefully it's going to be a Federer and Nadal final which would be awesome. That's going to be this coming Sunday and I think we are going to start at 8:30am eastern time here on the east coast of the United States which makes it very early for my friends over on the west coast. But hopefully you guys get up to watch it live and you can check out the live video stream of myself and Will doing match commentary and chatroom at the front page of essentialtennis.com or at fuzzyyellowballs.com also.

Alright, that does it for this weeks show, thank you very much for tuning in. Take care and good luck with your tennis. [music] [music] [inaudible]