

## Essential Tennis Podcast #122

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 on the Podcast I have a really exciting guest who is back for his second time being a guest on the show. And we are going to be talking about adding offense to your singles' game in tennis. It's going to be a really good discussion and let's go ahead and get right to it.

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

My guest today on the podcast is Dave, the Koz, Kozlowski. Koz, welcome back to the show I'm really happy to have you back on the Podcast.

**Koz:** Ian, always a pleasure. Great to be here with you this evening and I know you have a great topic so I'm eager to get going with it.

**Ian:** Awesome. Well, I want to welcome you back to the program. The Koz was a guest on the Essential Tennis Podcast for episode 108. And for those of you that haven't heard that episode, definitely go to the archives and download it. We talked about power versus control for the recreational player in that episode. And we discussed why control is so important for those of you listening. We discussed things like rhythm and being able to maintain a steady rally back and forth.

Not only was the topic excellent for us to talk about, what really shown through for myself and I've heard this over and over from my listeners-- your enthusiasm and passion for the game was electric and was really fun to listen to. So I'm really happy to have you back on the program.

**Koz:** You are so kind, my friend, but let me tell you. I'm only as good as the audience allows me to be and only as good as a host brings out of me. So you brought it out and the audience was very attentive. But indeed we did, we talked about control first and then some power and some offense coming second.

But it's so important to get that repeatable and dependable shot that you can hit the same swing, the same type of tempo time after time so you get the shot groove. Now you've got this audience very excited about adding some offense and what I think is very important is that they realize that offense doesn't only have to come with power. It can certainly come from change of spin and change of speed--

adding a slice to your game. And let's not forget the impact that dropshots have on the tennis game. Especially at the 3.5 level where it's difficult to change direction and get to a dropshot. We saw a lot of drop shots coming from Paris the last couple of weeks. We are going to see a lot of drop shots coming from the Wimbledon championships because they will be dropshotting just as much on grass as they did on clay because the bounce stays low.

But what does the dropshot do for the average player at a club level? Well, it throws off the rhythm of the opponent. First of all, you make the opponent come in. Sometimes that opponent may not like to be in the four-court or may not like to be at the net. And all of a sudden you are testing their volleys.

Plus by bringing someone in on a dropshot, it adds to your confidence. When you have a target at the net, your passing shots are supplemented and all of a sudden you feel that you've got confidence and have more trust in your shots. You can then pass the player at the net.

So let's not overlook the importance of a dropshot. Along with the dropshot, once you get a player in there, let's throw in a lob. So you hit a dropshot and then you hit a lob and then all of a sudden, you are getting offense to your game. You are getting scoring opportunities without relying on slug power only. And it's so important to add these shots to your game. You know that there are a lot of opponents that you can beat in singles. Especially on the female gender-- and I'm not distinguishing men from women. In match play, it's even but a lot of women don't like to run forward and then have to back peddle. So if you have a drop shot and follow it up with a lob, that is offense personified. You have offense glorified there and you can get a lot of mileage out of two little simple shots-- a drop shot followed up by a lob.

**Ian:** It's really interesting that you bring up the point that offense and aggression doesn't necessarily have to equal power. And you hitting the ball hard and I think that's definitely a misconception among today's recreational players who watch modern professional tennis on TV and no doubt you have to have weapons at that level and you need to have a certain level of paste to your to your shots and we talked in episode 108 about so often recreational players these days try to copy that to their own detriment. And we're definitely going to get into a variety and how that can help the question asked for today's show and let's go ahead and get into his question. His name is A. J. Glenn A.J. How are you? Let's hear this question--

So A. J. wrote to me and said I'm about a 3.5 player and play two to three times per week. I'm really trying to up my consistency with my strokes and get away from the all or bust type of game where I really go for too many winners I have been doing a lot of work on the wall and have gotten my consistency up quite a bit over the past few months however in my matches my consistency doesn't really put me on the offensive side of the ball and i find myself playing a lot more defense then I would like I end up running a lot throughout the match and by the end i have nothing left what can i do to find that blend of consistency that doesn't always put me on the defense? When should I go for the aggressive play?

**Koz:** Well excuse me I'm sorry that you finished that statement you had me all excited about this wall i

wanted to mention that as soon as your finished and i did not mean to interrupt i was encroaching in on your territory there pardon me.

Ian: I just wanted to say that basically id like to split this conversation up into two main categories number one when is it appropriate for a recreational level player to start working on offense and the number two how does a recreational player start to achieve this? We've already thrown out a couple of ideas there lets um, tell you what go ahead and run with that cause because i agree i was excited myself when i read that a recreational player would actually take the time and concentration necessary to hit against a wall.

Why don't you talk a little bit about how good a practice that is?

Koz: Well i will tell you this this is kinda sounding corny but anything coming from the cause at times can sound corny but where there is a wall ladies and gentlemen tennis fans there is a way because theres instrumental practice and skills that you can gain from hitting against the wall Monica Sellis is seven times slam-- nine time slam champion would spend a minimum of two hours a day hitting against the wall. Now this was an addition to playing several sets a day doing a number of conditioning and drills on the court but she would supplemented with hitting against the wall.

Theres no better practice area to work on getting confidence to hit passing shots so this guy is on the right track keep on the wall. Make that part of your weekly supplements to your game now lets talk about this offense. Many players are equipped to give there opponents chances to lose very few players that were actually talking even at the high level, high college even the respectable pro level there is not always equipped to beat there opponent but they are equipped to get give there opponent a chance to lose.

So were only in a point you gotta take the perspective i want to play investment tennis. I'm willing to hit three, four shots. I want to work the point I'm going to give this guy a chance to lose before i try to go for one strike tennis meaning get that ball and try to hit a winner that's overly aggressive for most players you still have to get the opponent some opportunity to lose now on the other hand i heard this guy Aj saying that hes not able to have the offense because the guy is running him around and you want to take the point you want to take the perception that is that your trying to orchestrate this point your trying to set it up your trying to build the point so your hitting slightly wide shots to the other side making the opponent run and hoping that he coughs up a short ball then the option starts to arrive arise when you have a chance to hit an approach winner perhaps a short ball to set it up that your going in to terminate it with a volley or that drop shot that we talked about so those options are available if you move the opponent early in the point but your not necessarily trying to win the point your not trying to conclude the point or terminate it on the first shot

**Ian:** Going out to play first strike winners so that you're willing mentally and physically. You have the patience. You have the prudence to try to set it up. And perhaps it will contribute to your funds. He may cough up some outright unforced winners.

Unforced errors rather. Before you have the chance to try to terminate it yourself. So, my advice always is try and keep the ball in play. Give him a chance to make some errors. Then when the opportunity occurs you try to strike.

And you may not even go after an outright winner. What your trying to do is to put him more in an awkward spot. Maybe run him wider to the side with some short angle crosscuts. Trying to hit the ball deep. So that he coughs up that short ball that you can eventually attack.

So the key is to have a combination of some patience. Along with some prudence. And that prudence, need'nt be in many times, just includes knowing the right shot to hit at that time. Going with the shot selection.

Now there are times where the ball actually puts you on defense. And the trick is to be as smart as Federer is. And as talented as Federer is. When he's on defense he's at one he's one of the best coming up with a shot that is going to next put his opponent in an awkward position. That doesn't mean hitting a winner.

It means having the ability to perhaps dump the ball at the opponents feet as he's coming in. Whereas that in the middle of the court. So you find a way to make it awkward for the opponent. Is that getting offense out of your game? You better believe it is.

So it's a combination of knowing when you're in that ability to go for something big. And when you're in the location that you, matter, may be better going for so something at a more moderate type of offensive shots.

**Ian:** Good stuff guys and lets take that one step further and get really specific. And your talking about being patient on the court. I like how you how you use the work orchestrate.

It kinda to to conduct the points. And be able to work your opponent back and forth. Which does take patience. To be able to do that without going for the out outright winner too quickly. And your talking about waiting from errors from your opponent.

And lastly you, you were discussing waiting for an opportunity to be able to make your opponent uncomfortable or catch them off balance. Not necessarily through power. Now let's talk a little bit. Or I'd like to hear your thoughts on and keeping in mind that AJ is a 3'5 player.

**Koz:** Oh that's, that's respectable and he can play with 85 percent of the people that are playing tennis

**Ian:** absolutely.

**Koz:** out there.

So that's, that's applaudable right there.

**Ian:** Yeah, yeah no doubt. And yeah that puts him above average for recreational tennis players. Which definitely is outstanding. Keep keeping in mind his his ability level.

What should he be looking for in terms of opportunities? When he he goes out to play a match and when the rest of my listeners go out to play a match and they're around a 3.5 level. What does opportunity look like at that level? What should they be looking for?

**Koz:** Well I think a lot of times the all court games separates levels of players.

And often times that they let's say 3.0 level they're able to volley very well close to the net. But their volleys go down. Their confidence goes down. They're not as comfortable as they start to volley from the midcourt. And it's imperative that players who want to go to that 4.0 and above level that they learned how to hit volleys from all over the court.

And that means tempered volleys from defense at the service line. Or with high volleys at the base line instead of letting the ball drop in and bounce in over their head. But they are able to come in and pop it deep. Maybe if it's floating and they're able to move forward. They take a more offensive stroke volley swing at it.

But you know Ian I think that one of the keys is that often times players don't really supplement enough underspins of their game. Everybody is so caught up on hitting heavy top spin. And top spin I in fact I try to avoid the word top spin. And just try to refer to it as adding more gravity to the shot. Because basically the club player is going to obtain sufficient top spin by starting low and finishing higher than where he started.

Of course the higher he comes up the more quickly he comes up the more added gravity he puts on the ball. As we refer to it in the industry as top spin. But instead of trying to generate top spin by trying to turn the wrist and flip the racket and trying to make the top spin. Then just get into a confident mode of starting undefined undefined the ball up higher so you get it in an unfavorable strike zone for the opponent, but it's also time to spend some time on your tennis career, adding a underspin. And what happens often times, those who start hitting only flats or hitting only top spin, or let's just say hitting top spin initially, that's about the extent of their game. They can only hit top spin and they can't [inaudible] on the short ball or on the low short ball, they have trouble because they haven't learned how to slice. The best advice you can give yourself is to try to explore all these shots.

Look at how this underslice is hit, the value of coming under the ball, getting that rub wipe across the ball and the action that the ball picks up. And it's important that you add these early, because I know for a fact there is some very accomplished players at even a higher level, at 4.0, 4.5 that can't hit the underspin. And they used to talk about Ivan Lendl when he played on grass. He looked like someone

where a black tie outfit, wearing a tux but wearing brown shoes, and it's almost the same. [laughter] They can hit excessive top spin at the baseline but when it comes in to hitting something else, some dropshots, some change of pace, some chips going in, they're not as comfortable. Part of the reason is that they may have hit top spin only for too long of a time.

Can you add the shot later in life? You bet you can. Is it tougher for some? Yes it is, because you become so secure with what feels comfortable, what feels secure, that you have some challenge adding those under spins. So the advice you should give yourself--I'm going to give it to you right now along with you giving it to yourself, is do not be afraid to start to come under the ball. Open the face of the racket. Explore with some grips. Turn the hand halfway between a forehand and a backhand. Maybe even start to hit some backhands. Now this is not radical. This is good, solid training stuff to hit a backhand grip on a forehand side and you're going to force yourself to open the face and to come under the ball. And all of a sudden you're starting to supplement your game with some underspin shots.

**Ian:** So Koz, let's talk a little bit more about the actual application of that slice as it pertains to being offensive and being able to throw our opponents off balance and relieve some pressure, I guess is what we're looking for. AJ was talking about being able to run down shots and building his consistency so he's doing a lot of great work on the courts and improving his game. And now your advice to him is to work on more variety of shot by using that slice or the underspin. So I've heard you throw out the idea of dropshotting. I've also heard you, during our discussion, talk about just throwing the slice in there as a change of pace. Let's talk a little bit more about specific application and how he can make his opponents uncomfortable, maybe even while he's playing a touch opponent that's maybe pushing him around the court a little bit.

**Koz:** Well I think anytime that you see a ball that bounces around the service line, that has a bit of topspin on, there are options that occur. You can flatten out, you can topspin it back, or you also can go in and hit the opposite spin that's been delivered to you. And many, many times the best time to hit a dropshot, or a shot as a chip, or a chop or a change of pace is when someone's hit a soft topspin into the middle of the court. That ball is most favorable to hit as a drop shot or as a slice coming back, and this drop shot--the key on the dropshot is to be able to think in terms of a miniature lob. When you ask yourself, what is the characteristic of a lob, most people will say, 'It's a ball that goes up and it's a ball that comes down.' Well believe it or not, that's what a dropshot is. It's a miniature form of a lob, and people are going to have better shots with the dropshot, better results with the dropshots if they get the mentality that they're not trying to hit straight ahead as a line drive, because they may spin that ball. They may underslice it but if it's going straight ahead with a low line drive trajectory, that ball is going to carry much more deeply than a ball that is arced, that once it hits, it kind of sits down. It doesn't  
undefined

**Koz:** So what you're trying to achieve, is a ball that has some arc. So it's going up, going down. Characteristics of good drop shots are soft hands, strong legs. So that you're actually, in your mind, attempting to hit a ball so softly, that you want to see it drop on your side of the net. Now you really don't want to do that, because you're going to lose the points. But when you're practicing, you want to

feel that you're trying to hit the ball so softly--out of the hands--that the ball goes up. But it comes down, hitting your side of the net. Well how do you get that ball to go over?

Keep the hands just as soft as they are, but widen your stance. As you go to hit that drop shot, take an extra 8, 10 inches wider stance as you hit. So that the wider stance allows you to lean forward more, to push the ball forward with your body. But you have the soft hands, and the strong legs.

The drop shots are very effective. The trick is, as you know as being a quality coach, once you learn one of these underspin shots on your forehand, you have the ball. You have a drop ball or you have a dropshot. You have a lob volley, you have a chip return serve. You have somebody that smashes the ball at you. Instead of trying to drive swing, you just chip it as a lob, or you chip it as an underspin. So I can't tell you the value that one gains by learning this drop shot.

A key trick on learning underspin; I've had players go to the net--and I'll try to speak this as we're listening and not seeing it--but actually stand on the opposite side of the net than I am. Place his or her racket flush against the net on the forehand, taking the arm out as far to the right as it it'll go. And the racket cannot go forward. Once it goes forward, you drive. But the racket can go from right to left.

It can go across the ball, so that you get that rub, wipe effect. So as the player is stretched out far on the side, on his side of the net, I'm standing on the other side. I deliver a ball--an underhand toss--that bounces, perhaps 4 or 5 feet in front of the net. As soon as that ball hits the net, he gets the sensation that he's rubbing and wiping across the net. All of the sudden, the player starts to get the identity, that it's not a hit, it's a rub. It's a wipe, you're starting to sweep across the ball.

You get that shot, you'll learn all types of chips. You'll learn how to hit inside the ball, and veer the ball out to the side. You'll learn how to hit behind the ball, and throw it up for a drop shot. You'll learn how to chip and charge behind a second serve, or a short ball that's hit as your starting to approach the net. Here's the beauty--you add these drop shots, these shots are going to get better all your life.

I know I'm on record tonight, but I'll go on record, and I'll say this: There is no way in Heaven or Hell, that I can hit the ground strokes, or the serve as hard as Federer, or Roddick, or any of them. No way. You know that, maybe you can't either. But I will tell you this. Can I hit the drop shots as well as they do? Can I hit the spins as well as they can on the approaches? I would say I can. Because, these shots don't acquire power, they acquire finesse. These are shots that are going to stay with you for life.

Many times, as you age--and we all do playing tennis--all of the sudden, you're out of the 35's. You're approaching the 50's, and you want the specialty shots to be able to terminate the point,. And that's where some offense comes without having the power.

**Ian:** Great stuff guys.

**Koz:** You're so kind, thank you.

**Ian:** I've got to admit to you, I would have come at this from a different direction. I definitely would have-- I'm more of a student of the more modern style of play than styles past.

**Koz:** Nothing wrong with that at all.

**Ian:** However, I do appreciate these touch shots that you're talking about. They're a big part of my game, so I definitely enjoy hearing you talk about-- I agree with you. Once you learn one type of this type of soft, finesse type shot, so many options become available. That's absolutely true.

**Koz:** Well, let's touch a bit on the power. The key is to be able to generate power when someone has not given power to you. We'll go into a bit of stroke production. There must be some reason why 95 plus percent--maybe closer to 99%, take a circular back on their back swing on the forehand and many on the back hand, because they can generate pace off of a slower ball. Most times the most difficult for everybody is to generate pace when the pace isn't given to you. But I think if a lot of players start to try to try (1) keep the foot work continuous and it may mean three, four steps going nowhere. The foot work is continuous, and the back swing is continuous.

And the mentality that you want to have when trying to generate power is to feel that you have a slow start maybe at 10 miles an hour, it's increasing to 20 miles an hour, and all of a sudden as your racket goes to hit the ball, your racket is moving at a 30 mile plus speed. So it's a slow start. Let it build up, and then a fast finish. When one tries to hit power and generates it from the initial part of the swing, one has a tendency--and there's a strong propensity to get a bit more muscular than you can afford to be and still hit a powerful shot. Most of the power from the top players comes from racket head acceleration.

A much better chance of getting that racket head acceleration by starting slowly in the beginning allowing the racket head to speed up. But I think that all our players at a 3, 5--all our players even at a start off 20--are going to be better with a more conventional--and we call it conventional because it's been around longer than your age and my age, and that's close to 100 combined-- over 100 years of a circular back swing, but it's very vogue today, because they know the advantage of keeping the back swing continuous.

So the folks and the tennis fans that want to add power explore with the circular back swing. One of the tricks in the circular back swing, instead of going straight back initially take it slightly up so it's slightly up, back, and around so there is a flow, a loop. Almost feel that you're trying to trace a backward letter of a C on a blackboard that it's up, back and around, and slow start, fast finish.

I think the other to get power, there's nothing wrong with getting the confidence on a short ball to move into side shuffle, and to skip, and to karaoke step in. But you're moving in and actually get the legs low and as you hit it, come off the ground. I can't tell you tell you what kind of confidence that builds. That is a confidence maker right there, is to actually jump up as you hit that ball so that you have the



confidence and the trust that you're not holding back. Are you working hard? Not so hard on the arm. You're starting to use racket head speed, but you're also getting tremendous leg lift into the shots.

But I've got to comment. You talked about today's game, and [inaudible] figured out the male dog around the fire hydrant on the back hand. Now, some players lift the back foot and jump, and I know that's for power. Perhaps you can touch on that, Ian. You see a lot of that where the back foot actually comes up to add some power, and jumping along with it.

**Ian:** Are you talking about more a forehand, or a backhand stroke or both?

**Koz:** I'm seeing it more on the backhand. I don't know if it's more suited on the two handed side versus the one handed side, but it reminds me of a male dog hanging around a fire hydrant and a bit of a leg lift coming up with it.

**Ian:** Yeah, I can definitely picture what you're talking about and I kind of associate that with what you were describing a second ago having to do with kind of a hop, skip, or a jump moving into a shorter shot where players are trying to hit more aggressively. And I think the lifting up of that back leg is something that just kind of happens naturally for a lot of players who are trying to transfer their body weight around and into a shot kind of leaning forward into the court as they make contact. I think that's probably--the back leg lifting is probably a good transfer forward a lot of times.

**Koz:** You know what I used to do in the past is to have a 12 inch high platform out there wide enough that you could have both feet stand on it. So you this in your mind. You're standing on this 12 inch high platform, I give you the ball to your back hand where it's out in front and tell you to jump higher than where you're standing off of that platform so you're a good 24, 26 inches into the air as you're hitting that, and that really gives you the sensation of not being afraid to come off the ground and really attack the ball. Plus for a lot of players that builds another dimension of coordination in their game. Coordination ...was brought out multiple ways the way you can jump in any sport. The more you can jump and leap in tennis you're supplement that coordination. You're bringing coordination out of some players that might not have had that athletic coordinated movement.

**Ian:** I've just got more more question for you Koz before we wrap things up.

**Koz:** Absolutely.

**Ian:** Of course the time is flown by during our conversation here. In fact we are already over time but I am really curious to hear your comments on one more questions I have. We started off our discussion with AJ's question and he wanted to figure out how to keep away from being so defensive during match play. You started the conversation discussing the use of slice. Being able to throw his opponent off balance, put in a change of pace and regain control of the points.

You also just talked about the addition of some more power by using more of a circular back swing, also

using the legs more to propel the body forward, especially on short balls. What I am curious about, let's try to bring this all together a little bit, how can AJ and the rest of my listeners tell which one is more important for them right now? In other words, are there symptoms during their match play, when they lose matches that more touch and finesse and variety would be a bigger benefit for them to develop? Or are there also symptoms where adding more power is probably what they need to be able to make it to the next level?

**Koz:** That is absolutely a superb and a great question and I'm going to spin it this way. You ready. Accomplished teaching professional, when you go to play some three five players, you can actually beat them by ball placement by some chips, by some change of place, some change of spins, some drop shots, some lobs. Are you over powering them with your offense? No. You're just using an all court game. Along with adding power, I'm not against that at all, but I think that it's just as important. I holding fast on steadfast [laughter] on the fact that you supplement all the shots. Because you can become one dimensional and only have access of topspin and losing out in a myriad of other areas. Flattening out. Changing speed. Coming under it. Lobbing as an under spin ball. Drop shotting. Drop volley.

I think that it's important that they supplement the power game with some change of pace. The question was not so much how they were getting power but how they could add more offense. What I saw that question without adding more power how can I add more offense, I was very excited to take it first, or take it in an area that we hadn't talked power. We talked about finesse and using all court tennis. I would still open that same talk the same way, Andy.

**Ian:** Alright Coz, Thank you very much for your thoughts today. It's been great to have you back on the podcast and before we send you off can you please tell my listeners where they can find you online. I know you are doing some projects with a website, correct?

**Koz:** We are. The website is the website is [indietennis.com](http://indietennis.com), and indie is spelled indie tennis is [tennis.com](http://tennis.com). We just a did a great resort review in your area [inaudible] down in Bethany Beach.

We did an extensive program 7 days of day after post at the National Spring Championships down in Mobile. We will certainly be in New York doing a number of things at the US Open. It's [indietennis.com](http://indietennis.com). I doing some things with [tennisballs.com](http://tennisballs.com) and that tennis is [10sballs.com](http://10sballs.com). Those are some interviews that were pickup that are not always being video taped but they are audio mp3s that are on [10sballs.com](http://10sballs.com).

**Ian:** OK. Alright There you go guys. Go check it out, [indietennis.com](http://indietennis.com) and [10sballs.com](http://10sballs.com). Go check out the Coz's other materials. Coz thank you very much for spending time with me and for answering AJ's question. I really appreciate it. I know my listeners are going to enjoy today's show so thank you your time.

**Koz:** The pleasure is mine. Tennis fans remember in tennis scoring, love means nothing, but love of the

game means everything. You keep alive your love of the game Love you tennis fans. Love you too Andy.

**Koz:** Thanks for having me on. [music] [music] [music]

**Ian:** Alright. That does it for episode #122 of the Essential Tennis podcast. Thank you very much for joining me on today's show and I hope it was interesting, entertaining and instructional for you. It hopefully gave you a couple new ideas about how you can develop some offense in your tennis game.

If today's show was helpful, check out the archives. Go to [www.EssentialTennis.com](http://www.EssentialTennis.com), go to Podcasts and then Archives. You can access all 122 episodes of the podcast, which I need to sit down and edit up, but it's something like 60 or 70 hours of instruction now.

We are actually working on reworking that section of the website in the near future. You, guys, will be able to browse by category and topic, and it'll be more convenient in the near future.

It's free to access. All you have to do is sign up for the free Essential Tennis newsletter and that's it. So go check it out.

Alright. That does it for this week. Thanks very much for tuning in. Take care, and good luck with your tennis! [music] [music] [music] [music]