

Essential Tennis Podcast #126

[silence] [music] 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 tournament tickets by using the promotional code essential with a capital "E". But thank you very much for downloading today's show and for listening to us, I appreciate it very much, I am going to be playing the second half of the conversation that I had with master racquet technician Jeremy Plumley. And the first half of our conversation was released as podcast number 124. So Jeremy and I today are continue our talk about gear and how to select racquets and strings and how to use lead tape and all kinds of stuff. So, it's gonna be a good conversation. Sit back, relax and get ready for some great tennis instruction.

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Ian: Back on the podcast with me is Jeremy Plumley. Who's a master racquet technician and we just wrapped up episode number 124. When you hear this conversation it will probably be a couple of weeks later, cause I have some other guests lined up for next week's show. Which will be 125. So, I don't know [laughter] what episode this will be Jeremy, probably 126 or 127, but I am looking forward to continuing our conversation that we've recorded for episode 124.

So, um it hasn't been as long this time. Welcome back to the show.

Jeremy: Thanks, let's hope the technology hasn't changed a lot from the time we recorded this until people actually get to hear it.

Ian: Yeah, good point. Yeah, I know, I hopefully, yeah, I just quit and saved everything to make sure we didn't lose episode 124 conversation file either, so yeah hopefully everything works out here.

But we just got done talking about racquet fad, different types of strings and also using lead tape to change the balance of the racquet. So, if you haven't listened to podcast 124, definitely go back and check that out.

But we've got a couple of more questions to get to in today's show. Jeremy I appreciate you sticking around and continuing to answer questions from my listeners. We all appreciate it very much.

Jeremy: Happy to do it, love it!

Ian: Alright, so let's move on here and this question comes to us from John, he wrote to me and said, "I have been experimenting with lead tape, I tried putting a lot on the throat of the racquet to make it more head light and I put some on the end of the head to put more spin on my shots. Those are the two places on the racquet that I know will make a specific difference in my game. Could you explain where one should place weight on his or her racquet to make a certain change to his or her game?"

So, John here's referencing, putting more weight in the tip of the racquet, at the top of the head of the racquet to create more spin. In episode 124, Jeremy also talked about putting weight up there towards the tip to create more power. Essentially, more racquet head speed.

Um, why don't you tell us the other different places we can put lead and what kind of differences our listeners can expect as far as results?

Jeremy: Oh, well like I've said, you know, putting the racquet up at the tip of the racquet, up at the tip of the head. You're going to get your most bang for your buck! You're going to feel it's the most there because adding the lead tape up at the tip increases your swing weight the most. So, even if you put a little bit up there, you're going to feel a difference.

Um, and then as you take it further down, you get less change in swing weight, but there are other benefits. A lot of times, what you see people do is they'll add lead tape around 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock in the racquet head cause that will stabilize the racquet head a little bit on off center hits.

You know you get that racquet twisting in your hand. By adding weight at 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock, you're putting just a little bit of extra mass on the furthest, the furthest points from the sweet spot and it will sure that up a little bit. Maybe give you a little bit more stability on what might be a little off that are shot. As you bring the racquet as you bring the lead tape further down the racquet you're adding weight to the frame overall but you're not adding as much swing weight, so you are probably going to get a little bit more stability, a little bit more plough through but you are not really raising the weight that it feels while you're swinging through the shot. You're not going to get as much extra pop on your ground shot that way but you are going to you know, bring that balance point just a little bit more towards the bottom of the frame.

Ian: OK, I remember on my racquets personally Jeremy you added, where did add the weight? I remember when I got my first my k pro tour, I liked the racquet overall but I just wanted a little bit more kind of pop behind my volley, I want to be able to hit just a little deeper without trying so hard to be able to have to hit through it to create depth in my volley. Now, I remember you put some at 9 and 3 o'clock, did you add weight in any other places on my frame to give me that specific result that I was looking for?

Jeremy: Ah yeah, I don't remember specifically how much we put on there. But we basically put lead tape from 12 o'clock all the way down on both sides down to 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock. We put some down underneath the bumper guard, um and then the kind of, so it didn't completely get out of whack. I also

put a little bit um, I think we put some towards the top of the [inaudible], I don't think we put any on the throat. Um, but most of the lead was up in the hoop of the frame. OK. Just to give you a little bit more solid surface to hit off for those vollies. Because the racquet was pretty significantly head light not as much as like the KS1. Ah, but it was head light racquet, so just putting a little bit more mass up in the hoop there, just to give you a little bit of extra thump on that volley.

Ian: Yeah, I thought I remembered you putting some in the handle as well, so I mean essentially if you take a racquet and add a little bit of weight in all of those places. A little bit in the handle, a little bit in 9 and 3 and a little bit at the tip. I mean does that essentially kind of accentuate all of the qualities that the frame had originally or is it going to turn it into a completely different feeling racquet by increasing the weight everywhere?

Jeremy: Ah, if you spread that out evenly it's should keep its general playing characteristic but add, but increase in the total weight of the racquet, if you crazy in one direction, it's going to throw things out of whack. We added more weight to the tip of your racquet then we did to the grip. So, we actually brought the balance weight closer to head heavy. Ah, it was still a head light racquet, um but we didn't completely polarize it. Which is when you add the same amount to the top and the bottom, so you are keeping that balance the same. OK.

Ian: Now cool stuff, it's interesting how it's possible to change the playing characteristics of a frame or kind of keep them the same, but kind of get more so of what you are feeling before by balancing it out in different areas. I think that's pretty cool. Is that something you recommend recreational players experiment with or should that be left to trained professionals like yourself?

Jeremy: Um, I think that is something that you can play around with. I think that tennis players are a little bit behind the curve on this one. Golfers for years have been customizing their clubs to fit their specific playing styles. Tennis players however, tend to just take a racquet off the wall and they might do the research to find out how it fits with their game or not and they just go out and play with it. Um, and you know they find a lot success in that, but there are things that you can do, you know to make that racquet play a little bit better for you. I think if you are looking a little bit more for stability and you want to add some weight at 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock that you're probably OK to do that. I think if you are looking to really change the characteristics of the racquet, you should at least kind of consult with your teaching professional or You know you can email into a specific podcast that you and I know of, um But if it's just a little thing here and there um yeah you should go ahead and try it out. But you know, if you are going to do a crazy and try to match a couple or try to make your new racquet feel more like your old one. You are probably want to talk to somebody who has a pretty good idea of what they are doing.

Ian: OK. Let's head to our next question here and we are going to answer a couple of more from Gavin here. Next question from Gavin. How do you think racquet weight affects play? For example, "I love the weights and heft of a dunlop 4D200 racquet on ground strokes." And he says that's about 330 grams of static weight. I feel it allows me to hit a heavier ball and my opponents notice this as well. However, I feel I struggle to get enough racquet head speed on my serve. On the flip side, if I play with say a 300

gram racquet, I can get the head speed on the serve, but I feel that my ground strokes lack penetration and all I seem to get is [inaudible]. Is all of this simply down to ability or is equipment a factor as well? What do you think Jeremy?

Jeremy: Ah, well equipment doesn't change everything, as much as the manufacturers like to tell you that buying [inaudible] is to change your game, but what it comes down to is your technique and how are swinging the racquet. To what's going to happen with the ball. Now that being said You know, you want to use the right equipment. If you have the heavier racquet and you can get through the ball. You are going, you should be able to hit the heavier ball with more top spin because you got more mass imparting its force on the ball. You know, that's the plus size to a heavier racquet, the down size like you said, he's having trouble getting top on his serve because he can't swing the racquet as fast as he could with the lighter one. The down size to the lighter racquet, you know you don't have as much mass parting force on the ball so... Kind of a catch 22 huh? Yeah, I mean it really is. The trick is you know finding somewhere in the middle there where you know you can find a racquet that is thousand [inaudible] pluses and minuses inside and out. I like to tell people that they should probably be using you know, the heaviest racquet that they could comfortably swing for a good amount of time because they are going to get more out of that than they will a super light weight racquet.

You know you might get a lot of power from that 9 ounce racquet that is as wide as a baseball bat but you are giving up control there. I also like to have people use a heavier because it keeps their strokes from getting short and punchy.

Ian: Yeah, that's the main reason why I push people towards a heavier frame and I basically tell people the same, I like to put racquets into the hands of my students that are basically, that heaviest and smallest racquet that they are still comfortable with and exactly for reason that you pointed out. When recreational players, especially beginners get a really light racquet put in their hands that creates a lot of power on it's own without good technique. Usually, beginners will kind of fully take advantage of that and use crappy technique and just let the racquet do all the work. And that's great at first, and it feels you know good at first. But that can really limit you guys technique in the long run as you tried to continue to advance, so that can be a little dangerous can it Jeremy to go for the kind of lighter more powerful racquets.

Jeremy: Yeah, absolutely I really don't like to have beginners use those light weight racquets for the same reasons you were saying. When you're learning the game, particularly if you are working with a professional. You want to really develop your mechanics. Develop the strokes and then you know find that right racquet that goes in there. You don't want to start off, you know with those short punchy strokes because its just going to be harder in the long run to start putting top spin on the balls to start getting depth with it as you start using out your racquets.

Ian: OK. Just one more question, just having to do with this with the weights. What do you suggest Gavin does I mean the two racquets he's talking about they're not a huge, well not a huge difference in weight. A 300 gram racquet and a 330 gram weight racquet. What do you suggest he does to try to bridge the

gap Between these two racquets, maybe put some lead tape on the 300 gram racquet or should he try to find a racquet that is manufactured inbetween these two weights to try to get the best of both worlds. What do you think?

Jeremy: Um, I would tend to probably start off with the wider one and then maybe try experimenting with some lead tape. It wouldn't hurt because he obviously knows of about what weight he's looking for, he's got, you know pretty much an ounce difference in those two racquets but it's all in where the weights distributed. OK, So um, if he goes with the lighter one, he has a little bit more freedom to you know kind of change the playing characteristic of the racquet to something that might suit him better. Um, but he could also [inaudible] some racquets you know that kind of fall in between there and there's no shortage of racquets in that zone. I know he was talking about the dunlop 4D200. Um, you know he could try the 4D 300 Tour. Which is a little bit you know lighter than that 4D200.

Um, but there's no shortage of racquets in that general, with those general characteristics. I'm sure he could find something that he likes there.

Ian: Alright, before we get to our next question, I want remind my listeners about the official sponsor of the essential tennis podcast and that is Championship Tennis Tours. You can find them at tennistours.com and I've been talking a lot about the US Open ticket packages where you guys can customize your trip as far as how close to the action you get and what hotel you stay at. They have a couple of different hotel choices that you can make. Between five stars hotels, you get shuttle back and forth and get to choose between the tour of New York City, tickets to a Yankees game, to a Broadway show.

What I don't think I've been talking a lot about though is that you guys could also purchase individual tickets. You don't have to go for a huge US Open Ticket package. So no matter what your budget is, or no matter how long your planning on going to the US Open this year, go to tennistours.com, check them out and even if you just make your purchase for the cheapest ticket and one day, one session and use the promotional code, "essential" with a capital 'E', you will still get the discounts and you still get the invitation to a cocktail party in Times Square, where myself and Will of fuzzy yellow balls will be as well.

So go check them out and I thank them very much for their support of the essential tennis podcast. Next up, Gavin wants to know, "What are your views about racquet head sizes? I've played with racquets with head sizes of 95 square inches, 98's and 100's square inches. I find that the sweet spot is bigger on the 100 square inch racquet, but I don't seem to have as much directional accuracy as I do with the 95 square inch racquet. What do you suggest? I'm sorry, would you suggest going with the smaller head size so that I'm challenged to improve?" -- What do you think?

Jeremy: Um, as far as the head size goes there, it's a not a big difference from a 95 to a 100. If you put a 95 square inch racquet up with a 100 square inch racquet, you are not going to see a big difference in hitting area. That being said, the larger the head, more powerful the racquet. Which basically breaks down to a larger sweet spot but with the smaller headed racquets, with the smaller sweet spot. That

sweet spot is actually more potent. So, something to think of there.

Now, is that just because the smaller headed racquet typically have more weight to them? Or is it actually directly because the hitting surface is smaller, that it's more of a potency result?

It's just kind of, you just got that smaller area but you've got more energy in that little area because it's not spread out as much. Um, it's kind of like, you know if you take in Taekwondo, or some sort of martial arts class or you know even boxing, you know they tell you that you want to get as much energy into your punch as you can, so it's a very small, you know, hitting zone. But it's very strong and powerful, and it's kind of that same idea with the smaller sweetspot. It's tougher to find a sweetspot, but you're going to get more payoff when you do hit it. The difference between a 95 square on track and 100 square on track it isn't that big, but there will be a difference in the potency of that sweetspot.

Ian: So how come the lighter rackets are always considered to be the power rackets if it's actually the case that you get more out of a well hit shot with a smaller racket face.

Jeremy: Um, normally when they talk about the power level [inaudible] those rackets they're looking at the overall hitting area and you know, they might give a B+ power rating to something that hits an inch outside of the sweetspot in those big banger rackets, and it might be like a C on the smaller ones. The big difference between those large headed powerful rackets and the smaller headed rackets is stability. If you hit an off-center shot on 115 square inch racket out near, you know, the shoulders around 3 o'clock or 9 o'clock, you're gonna get a lot of twisting just because there's so much space in between the frames from point A to point B. On the smaller ones, say a 90 square inch racket or a 95 square inch racket, there's not as much space. So you've got a better chance of actually getting that ball back over and in the court if it's off center with the smaller headed racket.

Ian: So hold on a second. So you're telling me that when the manufacturers say that you'll get more power with that huge, you know, 9 ounce racket, you're telling me that by power they don't actually mean more miles per hour that the ball is travelling as it leaves the racket?

Jeremy: Well, you are... Okay. Um... well, let's talk about this in terms of, you know, all things being equal.

Ian: Okay.

Jeremy: Okay? Because normally what happens is with those wider rackets you have a much wider beam which is going to give you more power. So it's not really necessarily a result of the sweetspot that you're gaining more power, it's the fact that the racket is lighter, you can swing it faster, and you've got a wider, stiffer frame that's going to give you that power. But if you take two rackets that, you know, are the same width and same beam width and different head sizes, you're going to get you know, more power from the larger one just because you get more trampoline effect off the string.

Ian: And by power, you're meaning like, literally like speed of the shot?

Jeremy: Right.

Ian: Okay.

Jeremy: Right. Because you're going to get more of a catapult effect.

Ian: Got ya.

Jeremy: If you're swinging at the same speed, everything else is equal, a smaller head is going to be less powerful than a larger head.

Ian: Okay.

Jeremy: But it's going to be more stable.

Ian: Hm. Okay. Interesting.

Jeremy: Yeah. They might have to post something on the boards to get a better clarification on that one. That one was a pretty complex sort of answer.

Ian: Okay. No, I think it's good to talk through that stuff. And I think there's a lot of misconceptions when it comes to the, you know, the terminology that racket manufacturers use, and I think there's a lot of, I don't want to say misleading, on the... Well, maybe I should use that word... on the side of the manufacturers. I mean, there's a lot of marketing that goes on that leads people to believe that you'll actually hit a better shot because of X or Y technology or because of the size of the racket or whatever. I mean, how much of that is actually the case, and how much of it is just trying to get you to buy the newest, you know, latest, greatest frame?

Jeremy: Well, you know, a lot of it is marketing. But you know what? I don't think that the manufacturers are just going to bold face lie to you. I'm sure that there's a way that they can measure that 20% increase in power from technology A to technology B. Whether you can replicate those findings in a non-laboratory situation, that's up for debate.

Ian: [laughter] Alright, let's move on to our final question here. And this has to do with the gauge of different strengths. And last question here comes to us from Gavin as well. And Gavin, by the way, thanks for all of your well thought-out questions. He wrote me several weeks ago and said that, Ian, you should talk more about gear on the Podcast.

And I said, well, go ahead and submit some questions and next time I have Jeremy on, I'll be happy to answer them. And he really did his homework. He sent in quite a few. So, here's the last one from Gavin.

He said, "On the same subject of strings, what difference do you think the gauge makes to the playability of the strings?" And this is something I've always been a little confused about. I know that certain gauges are supposed to create more or less spin, assuming you're hitting a spin shot correctly. I've heard in some places that you're supposed to get more or less power based on the gauge. What are the actual facts on that?

Jeremy: Um, basically, going back to the all things being equal, a thinner gauge string is going to give you more bite on the ball, which is going to lead to more spin, which should lead to more control. You're also going to have better feel with that. A thicker string, on the other side, it should give you more power. Again, all things being equal. The obvious distinction between a thin gauge and a thick gauge is durability. The thinner gauge is obviously going to break quicker than a thicker gauge.

Ian: Okay. Now, it's interesting, because it seems, it would seem like, I think, to a lot of people at first blush, that a thicker gauge would actually create more spin, because there's more you know, string actually touching the ball as contact is made. Why is it that a thinner gauge is actually creating more spin?

Jeremy: Just because it's, you know, it's kind of the same theory as a knife. You can cut through something better with a sharp instrument, like a knife, than you could with, you know, a thicker one like a 2x4.

Ian: Ah. They must have taught you that at master racket technician training camp, huh?

Jeremy: That's right. Yes. It was boot camp. And what they do is they had us [inaudible] hit with piano wire and 2x4s.

Ian: Nice.

Jeremy: [laughter] But it's, I mean, that's kind of you know, too extreme. You know, the difference between an 18 gauge string and you know, a 15 gauge string isn't that dynamic. But just think about, you know, that thinner string is actually biting into the ball and grabbing it and kind of imparting its force on the ball, while that thicker one is just kind of [inaudible] it [inaudible] through it.

Ian: Okay. Alright. Well, that makes sense to me, and hopefully to everybody else listening as well. Anything else to add, Jeremy? We talked about... In this show, we talked about different gauges just now, different head sizes, different weights of racket, and first question had to do with lead tape, putting lead tape in different positions on the racket. Anything else to add on any of those topics before we wrap things up?

Jeremy: Um, yeah, just a couple things.

Ian: Yeah.

Jeremy: Because there is some confusion, I think, with some people about the gauge, what is thicker and what is thinner. Um, actually, you know, an 18 gauge string is thinner than a 17 gauge string. And...

Ian: That's important to get straightened out, huh?

Jeremy: Yeah. Because, you know, people think well, it's a lower number, it might be a thinner diameter. An average gauge string is normally 16 gauge. And you can normally find up to 18 gauge is the thinnest, 15 gauge normally tends to be about the thickest you can find. So that's just something to think about when you start looking online for strings. The other thing is, in terms of the lead tape. And we always kind of joke about this. You know, you are working with lead. So if you are putting lead tape on your racket, after you do that, make sure to wash your hands. Because, while it is safe to use, you still want to take general precautions.

Ian: Don't let your children chew on the lead tape.

Jeremy: No. No. Keep it away from the kids.

Ian: Yes.

Jeremy: In particular if you have a son like mine who likes to put everything in his mouth.

Ian: [laughter] Leave the lead tape up on the top shelf.

Jeremy: That's right.

Ian: Alright. Well, Jeremy, thank you very much for your time, and for your expertise. It's been good to have you back on the show again. And I know that the listeners of my show all appreciate your inputs and your time, and answering their questions as well. So, thank you very much. [music]

Jeremy: Ah, well, thank you very much for having me. It's always [inaudible] [music] [music] [music]

Ian: Alright. That does it for episode number 126 of the Essential Tennis Podcast. Thank you very much for listening to today's show. I appreciate it very much. And if you're not already downloading the show using iTunes, I really suggest that you do that. You can subscribe to the show and make it download automatically every Monday when I release the podcast. And if you already do use iTunes, please do me a favor, go to the iTunes music store and rate and leave a review for the Essential Tennis Podcast. It helps with the ratings for the show on the iTunes music store. And I would appreciate your time very much, if you wouldn't mind heading over there and doing that, it would be great. Okay. That does it for this week. Thanks again everybody. Take care. And good luck with your tennis. [music] [music] [silence]