Course Notes:

Strokes of Tennis

Consistency, depth, and placement are all key ingredients for the strokes of tennis. Additionally, one of the primary ingredients for powerful groundstrokes specifically is to make sure the racquet is gathering momentum as it comes into contact with the ball.

Ball spin or rotation is also a factor in producing quality strokes. When the ball is hit with the racquet moving from a point lower than the contact point of the ball and finishes higher than the contact point, topspin will be the end result. Balls hit with topspin can be hit harder because the spin pulls the ball downward into the court. If the racquet direction is from high to low, the ball will have backspin. This is also called a slice groundstroke and has the effect of keeping the ball low as it comes off the bounce. The downside of backspin or slice is that the ball tends to ‘float’ and can go farther than intended, especially if it goes out. It is also possible to hit a ball with sidespin as the racquet moves across the ball from left to right or right to left. This type of spin has the effect of curving the ball in flight and off the bounce. A slice serve is characterized by side spin.

Spin is imparted to a ball by racquet direction upon impact and racquet direction is, at least in part, controlled by how the racquet is held. The traditional forehand and backhand grips are called the Eastern Grips. A grip halfway between the Eastern forehand and backhand is called the Continental Grip and is used for volleys, serves, and overheads. Another key to hitting successful groundstrokes is to make sure the wrist is held firm through the hitting zone.

When serving, there is common misconception that a server must hit ‘downward’ on the ball to send it into the proper service court. Ironically, for a successful serve a server must hit upward and forward on the ball. The most common grip for the serve is the Continental Grip. With this grip a server can control the amount of spin placed on the served ball and is the necessary grip for the topspin or kick serve.

The first law of serving is to get the ball in. It doesn’t really matter how hard the ball can be hit if it doesn’t go in. A proper toss on the serve will help ensure consistency on the service motion. The placement of the toss is different for different types of serves. For a flat serve, one that has very little spin, the toss is in front of and in line with the hitting shoulder. For the kick serve or topspin serve the ball toss is lifted further back and more toward a direction over the head to allow for the upward path of the racquet. At an intermediate level of play it should be considered an advantage to serve.

The stance for many tennis strokes can be considered as closed or open. The position of the stance is characterized with reference to the player’s body position and the net. In an open stance the body of the player is facing toward the net or parallel and in a closed stance the body is facing toward a direction perpendicular to the net. Many players hit groundstrokes from an open stance. The stance on the serve is typically closed.

While some may think that the serve is the most important stroke in tennis, the stroke that influences the outcome of more points than any other single stroke is the return of serve. The return of serve is one of the least practiced strokes in the game. Often times the receiver over hits the return of serve by taking too big a swing, especially on the first serve. On a slower second serve a receiver can afford to take a fuller backswing because of the slower ball speed. As a receiver, when the served ball is in flight you should be ready to move forward and toward the serve in order to cut off the angle of the serve. The same is true when finding it necessary to hit any ball on the run. It is essential to run diagonally in order to cut the ball off as early as possible. When determining where to stand to return serve, it is important to bisect the greatest possible angles to which the serve can be hit. Lastly, when the server stays back and does not approach the net following the serve, the best place for the return of serve is deep in the back court. When the server is approaching the net following the serve a good place to return the ball is low and short so that the server is having to hit up on the volley or half-volley. By forcing the server to hit up on a volley to get the ball over the net you effectively take any offensive potential out of the shot. In fact the half-volley is considered to be a defensive shot and should not be hit unless no other options are available.

There are two basic kinds of lobs, the offensive and defensive lobs. The offensive lob is lifted just over the player’s reach while the defensive lob is hit higher to give your self more time to recover your court position. There are other shot which are considered ‘touch’ shots and include the drop shot and the drop volley.
Singles and Doubles Strategy

The first law of singles strategy is to keep the ball in play. The second law of singles strategy is to keep the ball deep. By focusing on keeping the ball in play you can reduce the percentage of unforced errors. An unforced error is a shot missed due to careless shot-making. By keeping the ball deep you reduce the potential for your opponent successfully hitting angles toward either sideline that you cannot get to. The closer toward the net you let your opponent get the more potential they have for greater angles on their shots. Against a strong groundstroke player, the ball placed deep and down the middle of the court limits the good groundstroke player’s opportunity for hitting angled shots. Against a good ground stroke player it may also be a good strategy to bring them up to net by hitting a few short balls. There are some players who love to hit the ball. They do not hit hard or even place the ball particularly well, but they are good at hitting every ball back. Sometimes these players are called ‘human backboards’ or ‘ball counters’. A good strategy against such a player is to increase the pace of your own shots slightly and attack the net when possible to take them out of their comfort zone and force them to hit a better shot. In fact one mark of an aggressive is their propensity to come to the net at every opportunity. When playing against a net rusher, it is wise to hit the passing shot low and near the service line. Tennis is a little like playing chess. A lesson in chess-like playing is to make your opponent move from side to side and up and back.

The doubles game is primarily a net game and as a general rule it is safe to say that the team that controls the net controls the point. That is not to say that by controlling the net your team will win every point, but theoretically you should win most of the points. Clearly the greatest opportunity for winning points in doubles is at the net.

When serving in doubles, the server usually stands at a position farther away from the center mark than when serving in singles since they generate more angle on a wider serve and they only need to cover their half of the court on the service return. There is also a formation for serving where your partner stands on the same side of the court from which you are serving. This is called Australian Formation. In doubles most players will serve and come into net for the volley since the goal is to control the net. On occasion your partner may poach, which means they cross over in front of you to return a crosscourt shot. Overall, the main objective in doubles is to hit the ball low and to get the ball past the net player. If you do find yourselves back on the baseline with your opponents at the net the team at the net is most vulnerable up the middle.

Equipment and Court

The grip size of a racket increases or decreases in 1/8 inch increments.

The three common racket head sizes found on the market today are: Midsize (85-95 square inches), Mid-Plus (95-105 square inches), and Oversize (greater than 105 square inches). As a racquet head size increases string tension must also increase in order to achieve the same playability and feel as a racquet with a smaller head size strung at a lower tension. Additionally, varying string tensions will change the power and control characteristics of a racquet. Lower string tensions produce more power and higher string tensions produce more control. More skilled players, who hit the hard will generally string their racquets at a higher tension.

The parts of the tennis racket.
The correct court lines and areas are presented below:

The height of the tennis net is three feet at the center strap and three feet and six inches at the singles and doubles sidelines. A singles stick is used to insure the proper net height at the singles sideline in tournament play.

Rules of Tennis

A tennis game is scored by points. The player reaching 4 points and being ahead by at least two points wins the game. If a player has zero points it is called ‘love’. One point is called ‘15’, two points is called ‘30,’ and three points is called ‘40.’ If a player has won four points and is ahead by at least two points it is called ‘game.’

If a game goes to three points all or ‘40-40’ it is called ‘Deuce’ and since a player must be ahead by at least two points to win the game at least two more points must be played. If the player serving wins the next point following deuce the score is called ‘Ad-In’ or advantage to the server because if they win the next point they win the game. If the next point following deuce is won by the receiver the score is called ‘Ad-Out’ or advantage to the receiver because if they win the next point they win the game. If the server or receiver wins the next point after deuce and the other player wins the next point the score goes to deuce again.

To practice scoring see if you can correctly identify the following scoring examples:

- Server has won 0 points and receiver has won 1 point.
- Server has won 2 points and receiver has won 3 points.
- Server has won 4 points and receiver has won 3 points.
- Server has won 2 points and receiver has won 4 points.
- Server has won 2 points and receiver has won 2 points.
- Server has won 3 points and receiver has won 3 points.

It is also noted that any time the score is even, meaning that the combined score of both players adds to an even number of points you know that the next serve will be delivered to the deuce court. Conversely if the combined score of both players adds to an odd number of points you know that the next serve will be delivered to the ad court. For example, if the score was 30-30 the serve would be delivered to the deuce court because a score of 30-30 represents 4 total points.

To which court, the deuce or ad court, would the serve be hit if the score was:

- 40-love
- 15-all
- ad-in
- love-30
To win a set a player must win six games and be ahead by at least 2 games, and to win a match a player must win the best 2 out of three sets. There are some professional matches where men must win the best three of five sets to win the match. Players will also change ends of the court after the first game and after each odd game is played (for example: after games 1, 3, 5, 7, etc.).

- If the set score was 5-1 would players stay or change ends?
- If the set score was 6-1, 2-0 would players stay or change ends?
- If the set score was 4-5 would players stay or change ends?
- If the set score was 3-2 would players stay or change ends?

Another type of scoring uses no-ad scoring. This type of scoring makes the games go faster because there is no potential for the score to reach deuce. Simply stated, the player to reach four points first wins the game. In order to give some advantage back to the receiver in the no-ad scoring format if the game score goes to three points all the receiver may choose which court, ad or deuce, the serve will be delivered to on the seventh point.

Here are a couple other pieces of information that will help understand some of the rules relating to scoring:

- Ninety seconds is allowed for players to change sides of the court and commence play when players changed ends of the court.
- Twenty-five seconds is allotted for players to commence play between points?

If, during the course of a set the score reaches six games all a 12-point tie-breaker is played to determine the winner of the set. The player who served the first game of the set serves first in the tie-breaker and only serves the first point of the tie-breaker. The person who served second in the set then serves the next two points (points 2 and 3) of the tie-breaker by delivering their first serve to the ad-court (point 2) and then their next serve (point 3) to the deuce court. Each player then serves two points each until one player has won seven points and is ahead by at least 2 points to win the tie-breaker. During the course of the tie-breaker players will change ends of the court after every six points. Remember, the tie-breaker counts as a game, so the player who served second in the tie-break set will serve first in the next set.

To see how well you understand tie-break scoring try to answer the following questions. Of course the best way to learn tie-break scoring is to actually play a tie-breaker.

**Player A** has served first in the set now being played. **Player B** received serve in the first game.

- A player must win ____________ points and be ahead by at least ____________ points to win a tie-breaker.
- What is the set score when a tie breaker is used?
- Based on the information above, which player (A or B), serves first in the tie-breaker?
- Which player (A or B), serves first in the second set following the first set tie-breaker?
- How many points does the first server in a tie-breaker serve?

There are many rules related to playing tennis and you can go to the United States Tennis Association web site to read all the rules (http://www.usta.com/home/default.sps). Fortunately you do not need to know every rule of the game in order to play. However, having a basic knowledge of the fundamental rules is necessary to play and enjoy the game. The following represent some of the basic rules.

- A let serve occurs when a served ball hits the top of the net and falls into the proper service area.
- If a service from the wrong half of the court occurs and is undetected, all play resulting from such a wrong service or services stands and the next serve is delivered from the correct side of the court.
- In doubles, if a player serves out of turn, the player who ought to have served should serve as soon as the mistake is discovered and all points scored shall count.
- A pro-set is completed when a player or team has won at least eight games and is ahead by at least two games.
- If a ball, other than a serve, hits the top of the net and falls into the proper court, it must be returned by the opponent.
- If the ball is returned outside the net post and lands in the proper court it is considered good.
- If a player commits an act that hinders the opponent in making the stroke they lose the point
- If the ball lands on the line it is considered good.
If a player reaches over the net to hit a ball that has blown or rebounded back to the other side of the net of its own accord and does not touch the net with their racket, body, or clothing it is a good ball.

The player winning the toss or spin of the racket at the beginning of a match has three choices. To make the opponent choose first, to serve or receive, or choice of sides.

A server does not have to make an attempt to hit all tosses on the serve, even if it is a poor toss.

It is a fault if the server misses the ball in attempting to strike it.

It is legal to serve the ball underhanded as long as it does not bounce first.

If the receiver makes any attempt to return a served ball, they may not claim they were not ready.

All practice and warm-up must be completed before the first point of the match is played.

A foot fault occurs whenever the server makes contact on or within the baseline before hitting the ball.

An outgoing ball is still "in play" until it actually strikes the ground, backstop, a permanent fixture, or a player.

A player is not allowed to throw their racket at the ball and hit it.

If a player's shoe brushes against the bottom of the net during play, it is an infraction and the player loses the point.

A player standing outside the service court may not be struck by the ball on the serve before it touches the ground, or the server wins the point.

A player's request for the removal of a ball or balls lying in the opponent's court must be honored.

The order of serving for doubles is determined at the beginning of each set.

The determination of side for receiving serve in doubles is established at the beginning of each set.

In doubles if the served ball served touches the server's partner or anything he or she wears or carries it is a loss of the point.