

Dear Glen,

Now that I have started playing again in the nice Tallahassee spring weather, I am waking up with my body very tight. When do I stretch in relation to my tennis matches?

Dear Player,

Philosophies have changed in the most appropriate way to stretch over the past couple years. Tennis players start with what is called a dynamic stretching to prepare the body for a tennis match. The goal is to increase the heart rate and gets the blood flowing. Many examples of dynamic stretching can be seen on Youtube.

As far as the cool down, this is where static stretching is most valuable. This form of stretching removes the lactic acid from the muscles and will make a big difference in how the body feels the next day. These stretches consist of holding a muscle position before the body starts tightening up. Static stretching should take place within a half hour of the end of play.

Dear Glen,

I lose focus during singles games if the points last more than a couple of shots. Do you have any suggestions to maintain my concentration?

Claire

Dear Claire,

Breathing techniques are the best way to stay in the moment. Not only should you breathe out at the point of contact, focusing on breathing in between points is critical to maintain focus. Breathe in through the nose in out through the mouth to compose yourself in between points.

The second suggestion would be to track the ball back and forth as a point is played. Many players only watch the ball as it is coming to them, and then lose focus as the ball is traveling to an opponent. Watching the seams on the balls can help tracking the ball during a point.

Dear Glen,

I use a semi-western grip on my groundstrokes. The problem is that I use this grip for my serve also. My first serve is good, but I pity-pat my second serve. My pro told me that I need to switch to a continental, but it is very hard to do. Any suggestions?

Andre

Dear Andre,

There are a couple of schools of thought pertaining to this topic. It really has a lot to do with how much you are competing and the amount of time that you are willing to commit to the improvement of this stroke. One philosophy would be to make the change to the continental grip and go "cold turkey". This is the hardest route and not recommended if you are competing, but quite effective if you are committed to the practice and improvement of this stroke.

Many go the route of a gradual change, but this can take an extended period of time to accomplish. Whatever route you take, the change will be well worth the effort.

Dear Glen,

I am confused by which gauge string is best for my game. Could you explain the differences in gauges and the advantages and disadvantages?

Dear Player,

The higher the gauge number, the thinner the string. Thinner gauge strings tends to be more sensitive and create more feel. The bad news is that the thinner strings tend to wear out quickly. A thicker string tends to last longer, but doesn't always give you the feel a player needs to hit the ball well. There is a trade-off either way and the key is finding which string works best for you.

Dear Glen,

How do I keep myself from hitting so many balls in the net? My pro has told me to hit higher over the net with topspin, but the ball still finds a way to go into the net. Any helpful suggestions would be appreciated.

Jacquelyn

Dear Jacquelyn,

Visualize an area three to seven feet over the net that you are trying to hit through. This will give you the appropriate arc over the net. Our teaching professionals use a "Rope Zone" during lessons to create this effect. Second, getting the racquet head below the ball and brushing up can assist in creating the proper effect. As the ball is struck, breathe out expelling the word "LIFT". This will help from becoming tight during your hits.

And lastly, get your eyes and body down to the level of the ball. Not only will this promote the use of the kinetic chain, there will be a tendency to get below the ball. Most players on the pro tour miss forehands in the net because they are standing too erect at the point of contact.

Dear Glen,

When rallying in a singles point when do you hit your shots down the line? I know the cross court is the high percentage shot, but I'm not sure when to pull the trigger and go for the winner. I am extremely strong off my forehand side.

Dear Player,

The right time to pull the trigger is when you have created enough distress in your crosscourt shot that a shorter return is hit by an opponent. This allows a player to step in and hit the ball down the line. This in turn makes the down the line shot a higher percentage play and better chance of making the shot.

Dear Glen,

I am a slow start in matches and almost always lose the first set. Generally, I win the second set and then go on to lose the third set. How do I get a faster jump on the first set and close out matches that go the distance in the third?

Brett

Dear Brett,

I had the same problem in college and my coach made me play a practice set prior to playing a match. The answer is getting enough warmup to be effective. The second question has to do with stamina. It would be suggested that a little bit of endurance training is added to your regimen. One last thought would be that you probably won't be playing as many third sets if you win the first set. Statics have shown in tennis that players, who win the first set, win 92% of their matches.

Dear Glen,

I am forever losing items at Forestmeadows. After playing tennis, I have left sunglasses, clothes, warm-ups, and my cell phone. Once, I even left my wallet on the bench and someone was nice enough to call me to let me know they had it. Other than hiring a nanny, any ideas of how to keep my stuff together verses adding to your "Lost & Found"?

Dear Player,

Our "Lost & Found" expands daily due to our patrons leaving stuff. There is a simple solution to your problem. Get a tennis bag. The bag will carry everything that you have are leaving on the court. Most tennis bags have many pockets for storage. There is one caveat to this solution; you must put everything in the bag while on the court. The other issue would be to put your wallet or purse in the bag. Tennis clubs have been targeted by thieves for years for valuables left in cars. A thief will generally watch

individuals get out of car than break the window and take what they want. The car alarm system only tells you that your car has been broken into.

Dear Glen,

Looking at the best juniors in the Tallahassee area, why do they change coaches so much? Is this the trend for world class junior players?

Jokim

Dear Jokim,

Juniors tend to gravitate toward pros that are similar in playing characteristics and personality. Junior players switch coaches as their needs change. Some pros teach strokes, strategy, or competing better than other pros. The bottom line is usually based on whether a junior is winning matches.

Years ago, a USPTA Master Professional was coaching a top 100 player on the WTA tour. The player ended up winning an event in New Zealand leading up to the Australian Open. The father and player were very happy with the coach and stated that he would be their coach for a long time. The following week, the player lost and the coach was immediately fired. Moral to the story: "Everything is great as long as you're winning and nothing is forever".

Dear Glen,

During our regular "old farts" game we regularly lose the score in our match. We try and try, but always end up lost in the score. We already tried to remember the points we won. In most cases, I can't remember what I had for lunch. Any ideas?

Dear Old Farts,

I can give you a couple of suggestions, but they only work if all parties are willing to do these steps. First, before the first serve, the set score is called. Second, the score is called before the next point is played. If the server doesn't call the score, one of the other three players needs to call the score. And lastly, use the court scorer to manage the games as you play. Other alternatives would be to mark the score on a claycourt or by a tennis watch that you can put the score down after every point.

Dear Glen,

What are the keys to running and hitting moving shots?

Dear Player,

The biggest key is balance and keeping the head still at the point of contact. My former mentor always told me to run as slow as I could to the ball to maintain good balance and eye contact.

Dear Glen,

I have been playing doubles for a couple of years, but have recently started playing singles. My biggest problem is my court positioning. The ball always seems to be where I'm not. How far back should I stand and do I stand exactly at the baseline tee?

Johnny

Dear Johnny,

This has more to do with your comfort level than anything else. As you become a more proficient player, start moving closer to the baseline. Not only will you take fewer steps, but the reaction time of your opponent will be cut. Personally, I make adjustments to my court positioning depending on the effectiveness of my opponent's ball depths. As far as standing the appropriate spot along the baseline, you should mirror your opponent diagonally to cover the court effectively. Watch soccer or basketball players in how they position themselves between the goal and their opponent. This is also easy to see if you watch Tennis Channel due to the angle of the TV camera.

Dear Glen,

During a tennis match that I was watching on TV, the announcer made an observation that the server was hitting a platform serve. He mentioned that this is a great resource for hitting a powerful serve. Can you give me any tips on how to incorporate this into my serving motion?

Derek

Hi Derek,

The platform serve was introduced some time ago by a player named John Sadri. He played John McEnroe in the NCAA finals and was a very accomplished pro player. During the motion, the back foot slides up and both feet together help launch the player into the strike of the ball. In most all ball sports, power is produced from the ground up using the kinetic chain. Many have found that their balanced improved with the use of this technique.

Dear Glen,

Practice serving is one of the most boring aspects of the game of tennis. How can I find more enjoyment to my serving practice?

Dear Player,

There are a number of things that may take care of the boredom. First, using targets is one of the best things that can give you a goal. Target areas are also a great training tool for keeping your interest as well as improving your stroke. Another thought would be to play a mock game against an imaginary opponent. One last piece of advice would be to wear an Ipod when serving. This not only makes the serving more fun, but creates a certain amount of rhythm.

Dear Glen,

During a USTA doubles match our opponent was foot faulting. On the changeover, I mentioned it to them, but it continued through the entire match. Is there anything that can be done when an umpire is not available?

Lisa

Dear Lisa,

According to USTA comment 18.6, in non-officiated matches, the receiver or receiver's partners may call foot faults after all efforts have been to get your opponents to stop foot faulting. This is an age old problem that has caused many a tennis divorce.

Dear Glen,

I was playing a doubles match last week and a short lob was hit to my opponent. He jumped, swung, and missed the ball. However, his partner reacted quickly and hit a winner. The issue is our opponent that swung and missed, got irritated and hit the net with his racquet. Their contention was that it was their point because they hit a winner. I said they lost the point because he hit the net. Who is correct?

Bob

Dear Bob,

According to USTA regulations, if the net is touched by an opponent, they immediately lose the point. The only exception would be if they touch the net after the second bounce of the ball that was hit for a winner. It is interesting that this series of events was told differently by two opposing players, but the outcome was the same.

Dear Glen,

Why are tennis pros so fussy looking at the tennis balls before they serve? Is there something that they are looking for or is this one of those tennis mannerisms?

Dear Player,

The balls are changed after the first seven games and nine games from then on. Since the game is based on the concept of winning a set by holding serve every time and breaking once, new balls are a big advantage. Freshly opened balls knap is very tight and travels through the air faster than a ball that has been hit numerous times. Players are always looking for the freshest ball since several cans are opened at one time.

Dear Glen,

What grip should I hit when I hit a chop forehand? There seems to be some confusion on my part since I hit a semi-western on my topspin forehand.

Jed

Dear Jed,

The underspin forehand has taken on an important role on the pro tour. They tend to hit a shot that resembles a squash forehand when drawn wide to the forehand. It is effective because the ball struck with slice tend to move slower and buy extra time. In addition, the ball stays low and challenges the opponent to make a tuff shot. For most players, I would recommend hitting this shot with a continental forehand grip. This can also give you the ability to hit a defensive lob with this grip.

I teach a continental to players that are inside the serviceline for all shots. Since reaction time is cut 75%, this will aid for a quicker response.

Dear Glen,

What is the best strategy for playing mixed doubles? I have been told that being the male, I shouldn't hit balls to the female. What do you think?

Dear Mixed Player,

It all depends whether you are playing a social or competitive match. If it is social, shots should be hit in the interest of everyone having a good time. Most mixed matches are won by whichever team has the better female player.

As far as competitive play, a team can isolate the male and hit most of the balls to the female player. This is an acceptable play as long as the shots are not hit with malicious intent. If a male player hits aggressively at a weaker female player, then the gloves are off.

Dear Glen,

I would like to know how to keep my two handed backhand in the court. My opponent shared with me that he knows to attack my backhand because I tend to hit long after a couple of shots. My pro and I have been working on topspin, but it still needs a lot of work. Any suggestions on speeding up the process.

Dear Player,

I think your pro is on the right track, but beyond practicing more backhands, there are a couple of things you may want to try. First, to maintain a consistent follow-through, create a touch of your racquet over your shoulder. This will give you feedback whether you are finishing the stroke consistently. Second, under pressure there is a tendency not to breath and choking occurs on the shot due of tightness. Try exhaling as your racquet is striking the ball. Not only will this help with getting tight during points, breathing tends to help with the follow-through.

Dear Glen,

Lately, I have been tinkering with a one handed backhand and having a lot of fun hitting the ball with friends. My problem is that I am losing confidence in my ability to hit the two-hander. During match play, I seem to be confused which shot to hit. What do you think?

Dear Confused,

The best of both worlds would be to hit a one handed chip for control and reach issues. Second, hit a two-hander when hitting topspin drives, passing shots, or return of serves. Your internal muscle memory is confused as to which topspin backhand that should be hit. The other issue is that the contact point of the one handed backhand is further in front of the body then the double hander. This will lead to lack of confidence if shots are missed and feel of the ball will be lost. My recommendation is to focus on either hitting the backhand consistently one way if you are going to compete.

Dear Glen,

I am new to the area moving from Texas and was wondering what tennis lesson and leagues are available in Tallahassee. Do you have City classes for kids?

Julie

Dear Julie,

Tallahassee is full of opportunity as far as tennis activities. Many of these clinics and tennis courts can be seen at our Talgov.com website. You are in luck as far as knowing all that Tallahassee has to offer in Tennis. On February 26th at 10am, USTA, TTA, and City of Tallahassee will be hosting its First Annual Tennis Extravaganza at Tom Brown Park. We will be showcasing our many tennis opportunities as well as offering lots of prizes at the event. There will be a 12 court carnival in which you and your children will get a chance to try out some of our tennis activities. This is free of charge and a great chance to meeting our City tennis professionals and tennis organizers.

Dear Glen,

Is it wise to play in cold windy conditions?

Dear Player,

If you are healthy and are free of injuries, it should be fine. It would not be recommend if you are playing hurt because the cold and windy condition will tend to make your condition worse. Might I suggest that you go to an indoor gym and try one of the many workout apparatuses?

Dear Glen,

I am a USPTA-P1 certified instructor that you certified in Clearwater last year. I am trying to break into the tennis industry as a teaching professional. My background is in athletics, primarily basketball, and teaching in public schools. I am looking for a full time teaching opportunity. Any advice or direction you can provide would be much appreciated.

David

Dear David,

With the economy being the way it is, the job market is really tough. The average tennis position has more than two hundred resumes going to a single job. Beyond networking with people in the tennis industry, I would recommend that you start with a summer position at a tennis camp. Most all clubs need instructors and help during the summer. Most directors look at these instructors and pros to potentially fill position in the fall.

Once you are in one of these positions, be willing to do whatever it takes to help the tennis director succeed at his facility. String racquets, drag courts, or work at the front desk to show your boss how willing you are to work hard.

Dear Glen,

I think it is great that we have the ability to watch Tennis Channel on a large screen TV at forestmeadows. It was a double pleasure to see another TV in the treadmill room. In this difficult economic time, how did the City pay for this extravagance? Not that I don't appreciate it, but I was curious.

Dear City Patron,

This is a good question. The tennis division holds an annual fund raiser to add improvement or upgrades to the tennis facilities. The event is called Paws & Tennis and has raised almost 8k in the last two years. We plan to have this event again this year on March 19th. We have a tennis round robin and silent auction to raise funds. We have been fortunate that Marge von Goeben has chaired this worthy event and made it a real success. Stop by Forestmeadows to sign up or get more information.

Dear Glen,

What is the best way to learn to take the ball on the rise? They made it look so effortless at the Australian.

Kim

Dear Kim,

My former mentor taught me to practice standing inside the baseline and to move toward the ball to strike. These were very helpful. Beyond those training concepts, remember that taking the ball on the rise means catching the ball before it reaches its apex. In the modern style of hitting, this means to contact the ball at about chest height.

Dear Glen,

The Australian Open was very inspiring and I find myself playing my best tournaments when I see great tennis. The problem is that there are only 4 grand slam tournaments per year. What would you suggest to inspire me for better tennis?

Dear Tennis Fan,

The Slam tournaments tend to inspire most tennis players. A simple solution is to take advantage of our FSU Seminole team. This is truly some great tennis observing one of the best teams in the country. The seats are much closer to the action than at pro tournaments to add to your enjoyment. There is a home match this Sunday starting at noon against the Gators on the FSU tennis courts. Come on out and enjoy the tennis.