

Dear Glen,

It sounds like you had a great time at the U.S. Open. Are there any changes that are taking place in the tennis world?

Jeremy

Dear Jeremy,

It is amazing what is going on in tennis these days. There will still be a big emphasis on the QuickStart program in America. The USTA is working toward creating a larger pool of players that will not only play the game, but elevate to the High Performance level. It was pointed out that we were behind numerous other countries in development of world-class level players, but are closing the gap quickly. The USTA continues its facilities in California and Florida and now is working at its training sites with players that have come up through its QuickStart program.

To really get an understanding of the importance of the QuickStart principles, take a look at the youtube clip of the 8-year-old hitting tennis balls. One clip is with regular equipment and the other is with smaller racquet, shorter court, and softer balls. The proper stroke technique is maintained when the appropriate principles are used.

As we all know, tennis boasts more people playing the game than in the last thirty years - more frequent players than golf at this time in history. The key focus now is to keep America's youth playing the game after it is introduced.

At the tennis teacher's conference, there were a couple of sessions addressing the role of the parents for a promising junior and world-class player. I found this of great interest. The dominate message was that the moms of world class players didn't put up with a bunch of nonsense from their child at a tournament. They would pull them from their match. This is a great message and the lesson that all parents need to teach their children.

As far as how the game is being played, the women's game has heightened with the ball being hit harder than ever before. The backhand is the dominant shot. This can be struck effectively crosscourt or down the line. The game does seem to lack rivalries with exciting contrasts in style. The next evolution will probably be an improved forehand and or serve.

On the men's side, it is not uncommon to see serves in the 120's and 130's mph. Many of the players are working toward a baseline-based game with calculated attacks to the net. The one big change that has taken place over the past couple of years is how the backhand slice has made a comeback. It seems to be most effective to throw off rhythm and not give an opponent much to hit.

The other shot that more world-class players now have is a slice forehand. This is usually used when drawn wide and out of position. The shot buys time as well as making the opponent hit from below the level of the net.

All in all, the convention and US Open experience was sensational hugely due to the USTA's commitment to tennis. They have spent a great deal of money to continue to nurture tennis from club level business to producing the next American champion. It is my hope that more teaching professionals will support their efforts and work at their trade.

Hey Glen,

How about some guidance for a dad new to the tennis scene? I have two sons (10 and 7) who just picked up rackets for the first time a few weeks ago. How would you advise keeping them interested in the game without burning them out? Are there games the kids and I (and their mother) can play together on the courts that might make this a family outing we can all enjoy? And, seriously, when do I have to worry about high-priced equipment?

Jim

Hi Jim,

These are the exact concerns of all parents when it comes to sports and their children. The key is making it "fun" and if you keep that in mind, things will be just fine. In many cases, if the parent starts teaching his child, the line becomes confusing. The junior is not sure if the parent or the coach is speaking. I would advise to get your kids some foam balls or low compression balls so they can play in their driveway at home. If they want to play, encourage them to play, if they don't, then you and your wife should play. Many good players have seen their parent's enjoyment of the game and it soon became theirs.

There is no need to get the "high priced" racquet. All that is needed is a \$30 racquet at Wal-Mart that they help pick out. My children are in their late twenties and when asked about the exposure I gave them to tennis, two of them said I pushed too hard and the other said I didn't push enough...Go figure...

Dear Glen,

After watching Venus Williams Monday night at the US Open, I wonder why one of the greatest players of all time still foot faults. Any insight?

Dear Tennis Fan,

I was at the match with several other National trainers and we made several observations. It was our belief that her toss was off its mark and in trying to regain her balance, Venus moved her feet. The simple answer would have been to either toss the ball again or move back an inch or two from the line. Neither one of these corrections were made, so she foot-faulted four times in the first set.

It is always easier seeing what other people are doing wrong and almost impossible to correct yourself.

Dear Glen,

As a parent of a junior that plays in tournaments, I have noticed a change for the worse as far as his on-court behavior. This is quite embarrassing and I'm not sure what to do. Can you give me some insight into how other parents have dealt with these situations?

Dear Parent,

We had a session with the mothers of several world-class players this past week at the US Open. Their consistent answer was to tell their child that they would be "yanked" from the court for bad behavior. The next key is following up on your threat.

Dear Glen,

Most of the female players have great backhands on the pro tour. I am a 4.0 player and looking to improve my level. Do you have some suggestions for a player that has a two handed backhand?

Ann

Dear Ann,

It is hard to compare to the pro level because of the aggressive nature of their backhand stroke. What I would recommend is to work on diversity of the stroke. Learn a one-handed underspin shot for defense, dropshot, and approach shots. I would also recommend learning a neutralizing backhand ball that is hit higher over the net to buy time and push your opponent back.

Dear Glen,

I have noticed that many of the players on the pro tour wear a baseball cap when they play. After trying to wear a hat while playing, it is not comfortable when competing. Are there benefits to wearing a hat?

Dear Player,

It is important in direct sunlight to wear a hat to protect your scalp from direct sunlight. This sun will "fry your brain" and then in-turn increase the body temperature. In addition, many players use the hat brim as a training tool to promote the idea of getting the ball tossed out in front on the serve. I would suggest that you drill with a hat on to get used to the potential distraction.

Dear Glen,

During my regular singles games, during the week, I have tried to make a change to an all-court game. The only problem is that I am constantly passed when attacking the net. Should I be satisfied with my baseline game or do you have some insight in how to come to the net?

Mike

Dear Mike,

The game has changed considerably with technology being what it is. All players can now hit with more topspin and more speed than ever before. There are a number of elements to a successful move to the net. The first step is to create distress in your

opponent. This will cause a weak response. When the ball is hit short, an aggressive ball must be hit deep and away from an opponent. If this is done, you will find that the only ball you will need to hit will be a simple block to the open court.

Dear Glen,

I bought a couple of extra models of my favorite racquet when it was discontinued. They came with factory strings and I am hoping not to need them for a few years until my current frames need to be retired. Should I leave the factory strings in, or relieve the tension on the frames by cutting them out? Any other suggestions for long-term storage?
An Aging Early Bird

Dear Early Bird,

Remember that the strings have tension and if they are left in the racquet, this will weaken the frame. In addition, by the time the racquets are used, it will be time to get new string jobs. It would be my recommendation to cut the strings out until you are ready to use the frames. Another item to consider for those of you that come to play tennis after work. Your strings and racquets are susceptible to weather elements if they are left in extreme conditions. My recommendations are to take you racquets into your office.

Dear Glen,

I saw a tip on Tennis Channel that stated that a beginner should use an open stance on a backhand when being drawn wide. How do you feel about this?

Dear Player,

There is not one way to teach the game of tennis. The open stance backhand is usually used by advanced players but I know of numerous pros that teach this concept. The technique is used to get behind the ball on shots that are hit wide. I tend to try to keep a synergistic motion where the player steps forward as the ball is being hit. Using the concept of $\text{Mass} \times \text{Acceleration} = \text{FORCE}$ a more consistent power and balance are created. In my opinion, we should teach footwork to beginners, but this tends to overcomplicate stroke production for the beginning player. If a new player does this naturally, then it should be pursued.