

**The
Court Side
Notebook**

**A Personal
Scouting Planner
For Tournament
Tennis Players**

John L. Danise Jr.

PREFACE

Whether traveling to one of the many United States Tennis Association's Local Excellence Training Coaches workshops, the National Tennis Teachers Conferences, the National Conference on Sports Medicine & Science in Tennis, or the International Symposium of the Professional Tennis Registry, the two questions I hear asked of high of high performance coaches are, "What patterns of play are used?" and "How does a player perform under pressure?"

Dr. Jack Groppe's "High Tech Tennis" which discusses the biomechanics of tennis and James E. Loehr's "The Mental Game" are two of the many book I would suggest reading if you are serious about competing in tennis at a high performance level. At the John Danise School of Tennis we stress these philosophies and give our Let athletes the book "The Courtside Coach" by Dr. Bryce Young and Linda Bunker. Our high school age LET athletes also receive Linda LeClaire's book "Yes God Speaks to Women Too!"

I'm sure you suspect by now that we treat the mental aspects of tennis equally with the stroke development and physical fitness aspects of tennis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the many coaches I have met, worked with, and stolen many of the concepts that I have taught, over the years. I am especially grateful to my wife, Bobbie, who supported my decision to leave the corporate world and allowed me to do what I love: “being a coach.”

Thanks to all of my children for their understanding and support, especially my son John, from whom I learned so much when I thought I was teaching him. Later, I had the privilege and enjoyment of working with him when we started the John Danise School of Tennis. I still believe he is the best Teaching Pro I have had the pleasure of working with.

Thanks to Connie Beliveau for editing this notebook.

Special thanks to District 15 JTT & NJTL Junior Olympic Association who recognized the pathways between USA 1-2-3 Team Tennis and The USTA Competitive Tennis Committee had a ravine between them. This NJTL chapter uses the district’s Local Excellence Training, (LET) programs to bridge this gorge, keeping the pathway open. Their foresight and wisdom to financially support the LET program have already produced results, but the fruit is still ripening and the District shall continue harvesting in the coming years.

Coach Danise

DISTRICT 15 JTT 7 NJTL

JUNIOR OLYMPIC ASSOCIATION ACKNOWLEDGEMNT

This association is appreciative of the parks & recreation departments in our district; especially Martin County Park & Rec., St. Lucie County Recreation, Sebastian Recreation and Vero Beach/ Indian River County Recreation Department.

Thanks to the USTA Florida Section for its support and the USTA training center in Key Biscayne, especially Lew Brewer and Rodney Harmon, who helped us develop the district's first coach, parents, and player workshop.

Thanks to Gamma Sports who has supported all seven of our AAU Junior Olympic teams.

Thanks to all the tennis clubs who offer their facilities for our USA Team Tennis, youth league.

Where would we be if the Sebastian River High School athletic Director Michael Stutzke didn't have the foresight to realize that the tennis courts could be an asset to the community during non-school hours?

Thanks to the John Danise School of Tennis and the other LET programs for their dedication and excellence.

A special thanks to John Danise, who when asked, authored the "Court Side Notebook" and then gave its property rights to our organization.

INTRODUCTION

As soon as tennis players learn to serve, develop good forehand and backhand, start developing better conditioning and quickness, the competitive juices start to flow and often they start playing tournaments. Most of these players never develop a game plan, nor have an understanding of what pattern of play best suits them.

While tournament play is essential for future development of tennis players, it is important that they also learn to recognize their opponent's patterns of play. You must recognize your opponent's strengths and weaknesses, and understand your own strengths and weaknesses. Once you know this, you should develop a plan for each match. When your game reaches a serious level, you should then have an alternate plan.

The best way to develop this plan is to know thyself and to know your opponent. The best way to know your opponent is to scout them. The accompanying pages will help you develop the discipline needed to develop and define your game plan and to understand if you need to make adjustments during your match.

PATTERNS OF PLAY

The United States Tennis Association has an outstanding video and book titled “Tennis Tactics” subtitled “Winning Patterns of Play.” This book has a lengthy selection of drills which reflect the four patterns of play; it breaks down the drills and explains the patterns; Aggressive baseliners, All-Court Players, Counter Punchers and Serve-and-Volleyers.

We use this book to develop our lesson plans, assist our students to take inventory of their tennis skills and identify the strengths and weaknesses of their tennis game.

While your tennis coach may be developing the best pattern of play for you, (depending upon your stroke development, physical characteristics or you and your parents, as well as your willingness to be open to change) YOU must be responsible for knowing your opponent’s strengths and weaknesses. The best way to learn your opponent’s pattern of play and what they normally do, or change, when under pressure is to scout them.

You probably already have a pattern of play and don’t know it. You can be sure that if your opponent is scouting you, they will learn your patterns.

WHEN TO TAKE NOTES

The best time to take notes is immediately following your match, but unlike school (where you take notes during class), you might want to take notes between changeovers.

You should be able to refer to your notes and know when your opponent's unforced errors occur, and what weaknesses, strengths, patterns and favorite shots they use in critical situations. In Brad Gilbert & Steve Jamison's book "Winning Ugly" they like to ask, "Who's doing what to whom?"

Why Take Notes

Besides learning from your opponent, you should also learn from your mistakes and lost opportunities. In Bryce Young & Linda Bunker's book "The Courtside Coach", training session #15 asks, "Why is scouting your match and learning from it important?" Too often, when players do not win their match, they think they lost, while this is not necessarily so. I would ask you to think of session #15 where it states; "The key to learning from your mistakes is to change your perception of them. Instead of thinking of each error as a personal failure, consider each mistake as an opportunity to learn by giving feedback to your body."

During the high school tennis season, whenever one of our players loses a match, they must come to the next practice with three things they did well. I understand that missed

opportunities are important, but we would rather have a player come to practice on a positive high.

Is taking notes all I need to do?

Will taking notes replace the other components that your coach is expecting? NO!

You must continue to fine tune your strokes, maintain your physical conditioning calendar, challenge your self continuously by playing tournaments and be disciplined enough to not only make sure you tennis equipment is ready, but also your mental capacity for matches and practices. Knowing your body and recognizing stress and controlling it is important.

Being a student athlete is like having a part time job. You must be able to manage your time and respect your whole body. Getting the proper nutrition, making sure you are hydrated, receiving the proper rest and understanding and respecting your body should help you know yourself.

Controlling your emotions is so much easier once you are prepared to play and know yourself. As University of Minnesota coach Linda LeClaire states in her book “Yes God Speaks to Women Too!” “Competence comes from practice, from training and experience.

Your journey through tennis tournaments should show you how life is played. If you take Linda’s advice and “play

from love rather than fear”, tennis (and life) should be a joyful journey.

When playing from love you should feel the energy flowing from the knowledge and confidence your body is generating. You must also recognize fear, because your body is letting you know that you must take corrective measures,

The best way to control fear is to have a well-planned training program that sets a timetable for a reasonable rate of expected improvement. Understand that peak performances are the result of careful preparation, not chance. By correcting one mistake at a time you will become successful, if you are patient.

You have chosen a journey that is not easy, but could be very rewarding. The challenges before you will help prepare you for other challenges you will face in life. I hope you look at these challenges as opportunities and learn from each one of them.

Scouting Questions

Tournament

Weather court service

Round Set Date

Name of player scouted

City

Seed or ranked

Righty or lefty

First serve

Second serve

What is your opponent's
weakness?

Did my opponent
avoid my strength?

Did my opponent
attack my weakness?

What was opponent's
style of play?

Counter puncher

Aggressive baseliner

Serve-and-Volleyer

All Court Player

Did I stick to my plan?

If not, when did I change plan?

Your Preparation

Match time

Did you have delay or wait?

Have I played opponent
before?

When did you eat?

What did you eat?

Did you do dynamic stretches?

How long?

Were you warmed up?

How?

Length of time?

What was your plan?

Would you change
plan if you played again?

Comments

Progress Check List

If you're winning most of your matches you either don't need this section, or you need to play up in a higher age group.

If you're struggling I would remind you that all tennis greats struggled sometime during their career.

The first question I would ask is, "Are you having fun?" If not, then why not? If you have lost sight of why you're playing tennis, maybe this check list can help you get back on track.

Are you relaxed?

Are your feet constantly moving?

Are you talking positively to yourself?

Are you showing frustration on key points?

Are you giving up too much court?

Are you catching the ball on the rise?

Are you using your time properly between points and changeovers?

Are you getting the return of serve in play?

Are you prepared to serve prior to stepping to the baseline?

Is your opponent attacking your serve?

If you're having problems with any of the above, you should talk to your Pro and develop a plan for correcting the problem.

Don't give up on your dream. Remember, if you can dream it you can do it. Plan for success and work at your plan.

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