

How To Play Annoying But Winning Tennis

By Art Stevens

As we all know, the whole point of playing tennis is to win. Disregard what your friends tell you. They tell you that the joy of tennis is in the exercise, the camaraderie, the gossip that's shared at the net between games. Forget it. Behind every smiling face on the other side of the net lurks a serial killer. A tennis court killer who wants to humiliate you, hit the ball as hard as he can into your gut and when it's all over to bury your face in the clay court and stomp on your head.

At least that's what he's thinking when the two of you approach the net after the match to shake hands.

Tennis personifies the mid-life crisis we all go through. Except in tennis parlance it's known as the "mid-court crisis".

"Damn," you say to yourself as your opponent's cross court forehand whips by you as you make a feeble attempt to run it down. "I could have run down that ball ten years ago. I wish I still had the legs of a twenty-year old. No way I would have missed that shot then."

Out loud you say, "great shot, John."

Inwardly you say, "that slimy son of a bitch. Why does he hit balls to my forehand side when he knows I can't run them down anymore? Why doesn't he just hit the ball back to me so that I could hit it back and ram it down his throat?"

And that's when your pop psychology kicks in to thwart his serial killer mentality.

"Great shot, John, but just out", you exclaim as his ball lands two feet inside the court. Of course, you pretend not to see the astonished look on his face and the agony he goes through to decide if he should call you a liar and a pervert or pretend he's a good sport.

Then you realize that his counter punch is not to lift the quality of his game but to counter your bad calls with his own. So for the rest of the match the following calls are made at the end of almost every crucial point by each of you. "Oh, just out. Tough luck. Good idea, though."

"I'm afraid that's a foot fault."

"Let's do that point over. That bird overhead threw me off." Good serve, but let's play a let. That nuclear explosion got me to take my eye off the ball."

"Can we play that point over? There's some lint on the ball that threw my timing off."

"Let's play a let on that point. I think the net is an eighth of an inch too high."

The tennis racquet in your hand begins to feel like a banzai sword. And your tennis shoes have the feel of Marine combat boots. Somehow the match is over and you and your opponent approach the net, as is the custom, to shake hands. Your first thought is to wish you had a semiautomatic assault weapon in your hand so that you could spray him with

as many bullets as it would take to render him into a shapeless mass of matter. Instead, you smile and say, “good match, John. Want to try it again on Thursday at two?”