

Tennis Tip – Exhale at Contact!

Here is a tennis tip that has been passed onto others by one of the former top 100 ATP players back in late 90's, Jeff Salzenstein. Many coaches hadn't passed this tip to others until recently. I wished I was told about this when I started playing tennis over 40 years ago.

And the tip is: Exhale at contact!

Like in Karate, where they give a big "Hi yah" when striking their opponents and things, we tennis players should give out a good grunt or an explosive exhale when we strike the ball every time we hit a ground stroke, overhead or serve. By making a conscience effort to exhale at contact even when volleying, we can make a big difference in the quality of our shots.

By exhaling at contact we automatically release muscle tension in our arms. Excessive muscle tension in the arms and the whole body can decrease our efficiency in our strokes. Be it ground strokes, overheads or serves, tight and tense muscles can slow the racquet head considerably that could cause errors and miss hits.

The harder we want to hit the ball the more tense our muscles get and that causes errors and injuries.

In tennis, as it is in table tennis, the more tense your hand and arm are, the more you are prone to have the ball ricochet off your racquets or paddles without much control over direction.

With a relaxed grip and arm, we will have a "live" arm which will allow us to whip our racquet or allow us to soften the impact of the ball that will allow us to control the direction and pace much easier.

Most players tense up as they are about to hit the ball. It's a bit like fight or flight reaction to the situation.

We either tighten up to brace for impact or we tighten up because our adrenaline prepares our body to fight, and before you know it, you sprayed the ball wide, long or into the net! How many times would a coach tell you that you had held your breath at contact? Not many. Too many focus on technique, and tactics. The players are known to choke at critical situations in the match. Like when you have match point and 5-0 and lose the set 5-7. Most "chokers" had stopped breathing when they play because they are ready to fight or they are in fear of losing!

To combat this condition, players should practice exaggerated exhales when making contact with the ball during warm-ups and match play.

Be sure to inhale first before the ball bounces on your side and exhale vigorously at contact. Not before or after.

Do this on your serve because you want a fluid arm motion to accelerate your racquet head on your serve. Many tighten up and the racquet head decelerates which makes the ball fly long or wide or most likely into the net.

So next time, have one of our pros observe your breathing during your lesson. He/she can let you know if you are exhaling at the right time during your stroke. Along with the proper technique, the vigorous exhaling will improve your performance on the court without a doubt. Everyone of my students had noticed a vast improvement in match situations when they employ that breathing technique.

Armed with this knowledge, tennis will be a life-long sport you can really enjoy.

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