



Senior Tennis Times

The 50+ tennis experience

February
2017

Be in the know

By Linda Haller, STPC President

For the second year in a row, our revenue has exceeded our expenses and we are ending the year with a positive bottom line! Kudos to our Board, through their hard work and difficult decision-making, to have been able to make this happen.

Recapping major accomplishments and highlights that have taken place this year:

- The drill program has been restructured: some drills have been outsourced to participating clubs. We promote them but assume no financial responsibility.
- Charges for drills we retain have been modestly increased.
- The website is functioning efficiently and is processing credit cards properly.
- Boat ride for the captains was a major success.
- Joan Thomas was recipient of the Dow award at Annual Meeting.
- Paid advertising space is once again being promoted in newsletter and e-blast.
- Many tennis socials and clinics with great food were lots of fun.
- Group play continues as the backbone of our club.

(Be in the know—continued on page 4)

On the inside

This issue is just packed!

- P. 3:** Have you renewed your membership? Do it online, or here's a mail-in form.
- P. 4:** Indoor Drill season schedule. Improve your game and keep warm too!
- P. 6:** "Play tennis & live longer", "Alcohol and strokes", and "Gopher tennis".
- P. 7:** "Your shoulder, your Chevy". Understanding that complicated joint and how to maintain it.
- P. 10:** "Tennis and the aging brain", by Bill Cosgrove. What happens to our brain, and what can be done?



The Jack Dow Tourney. Sooner than you think!

It's May 1-4. Seems like a long time away, but every year some players miss out because they don't get signed up with partners. You can play in one or both of Doubles and Mixed Doubles.



The cost is just \$15/event/person. For that, you are guaranteed at least 3 regular sets, or two pro sets, plus tasty and nutritious snacks and beverages. Bigger divisions, like men's and women's 3.5, require a second round to determine winners, so you may get more than the minimum play.

If you win or are runner-up in your division, you get a medal and a picture in the next Senior Tennis Times.

Captains! Encourage your players to sign up. You don't need to be an "ace", since divisions are by tennis rating. 2.5's can have as much fun and chance of winning as 4.0's.

Everyone! Recruit your friends for this fun event. Don't wait until "next year."

Upcoming Events

Tennis & Pizza Party

January 28, 6:00-10:00 PM

At St. Paul Indoor

Details & signup on page 5

Valentine Tennis Party

February 17, 7:00-10:00 PM

Details & signup on page 5

Spring Fling Tennis Social

April 21, 7:00-10:00 PM

Details & signup on page 6

Jack Dow Tournament

May 1-4, 2017 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM

Details & Signup on page 9

Annual Celebration

May 13, 11:00-2:30

Town & Country Club

Details & signup on page 8

Senior Tennis Players Club, Inc.
A nonprofit corporation, P.O. Box
5525, Hopkins, MN 55343. On the
web: www.seniortennismn.org

Senior Tennis Times

The Senior Tennis Times is published four or five times annually by and for the members of the Senior Tennis Players Club, Inc. Next newsletter: April, 2017.

Board of Directors

- President: Linda Haller 612-558-1654
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- Treasurer: Steve Bruell..... 952-938-7594
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- Bruce Leng..... 612-209-8001
- Nancy Tarbox..... 952-927-9368
- Denis Woulfe..... 651-263-0749

All Board members serve as volunteers without compensation.

Advertising

Send by email or USPS to the newsletter editor by the 15th of the month for publication the following month. **Please send all payments to the newsletter editor.**

- Ad rates (first issue/additional issues):
- Full page (7.5x10)..... \$165/135
- Half page (7.5x4.9) 110/85
- Half page on back cover 125/100
- Quarter page (3.7x4.9) 70/50
- Eighth page (3.7x2.4) 45/30
- Business card special 30/20
- Horizontal strip ads: \$55 first two inches; \$20 each additional inch.
- Vertical: \$75 first two inches; \$25 each additional inch.
- 2-line ad (free for members only), Additional lines \$5/issue.

Membership information changes, newsletter delivery problems, etc., can be made by writing Senior Tennis Players Club, P.O. Box 5525, Hopkins, MN 55343 or email to David Sommer at dsommer7@usiwireless.com.

February 2017, Vol. 30, #1
Membership total: 851

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Craig Thompson

Craig was a barber for 54 years. He graduated from Northwestern College with a BA degree in psychology and bible studies. He served 6 years in the National Guard. He was the owner/operator of a barber shop in the Midland Bank Building for 20 years before opening The Galaxy Skyway Barber Stylists shop, in the Towle bldg, downtown Minneapolis where he and his niece, Cathy Eagan, were owner/operators for 32 years.

Diane McBride Thompson, Craig's widow, remembers Craig: "He was especially skilled in racquet sports, and got interested in tennis when he picked up a book, and taught himself how to play. He was a member of MSTC (Match Singles

In Memory...

Tennis Club) where he taught a clinic on Saturday mornings at Lincoln HS in Bloomington and I met him in the clinic in 1979. He had 37 trophies in tennis and I had 37 trophies in golf, and soon I got him playing golf and he got me into tennis and we became mix-doubles tennis partners. Craig loved playing singles and was on the 5.5 ladder (self rated). He held the #1 position for several years. Craig and his best friend Bob Hero were a very strong doubles team in MSTC and TCSTC (Twin City Social Tennis Club) and both clubs provided many

(Craig Thompson—continued on page 3)

Mission Statement

The primary purpose of the STPC is to provide tennis playing opportunities to people 50 and older for their mental, physical, and social well-being; and to support the growth of tennis.

As a non-profit organization, the Senior Tennis Players Club gratefully accepts donations, memorials and estate gifts. Please send to Senior Tennis Players Club, P.O. Box 5525, Hopkins, MN 55343.

Newsletter Submissions

To help make the newsletter as correct as possible, please submit all items in writing only, by mail or email. The deadline is the 15th of the month for publication the following month. All material submitted for publication is subject to editing. Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope if you want materials returned.

Send your submissions to:

David Sommer, 3657 17th Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55407
Email: dsommer7@usiwireless.com.

Opinions expressed in articles, letters or advertisements are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent views of the newsletter editor or the Board or officers of STPC.

Membership renewal time?

Is it time for you to renew your STPC membership? On the address label of this newsletter we have printed the expiration date of your membership. You may also see a message alerting you if your membership is expiring soon, or has already expired. Please renew if it is time to do so. You can renew via the website (seniortennismn.org) or use the form to the right. Some explanation:

Your email address is needed so we can remind you to renew and to send you the monthly E-Update.

Enter your home address if it has changed.

Membership options: We've simplified this. Now, printed & mailed newsletters are **included** as part of your basic membership. The only option is to get a printed & mailed Roster for \$4.

Send the form and your check to:

Sharon Gribble
1381 West County Road B2
Roseville, MN 55113



(Craig Thompson—continued from page 2)

opportunities for competitive and social tennis, and tennis was so popular at that time. Another of Craig's closest friends was Gordy Jensen. Gordy, a natural athlete, was just taking up tennis and wanted to play as much as possible. Craig did just that with Gordy, and soon Gordy was one of the top players in the club. It was a good way to meet people while providing a great way to keep fit in a sport for life. In 1984-1985, Craig and I went to the World Tennis Center in Naples, on a trip run by the Senior Tennis Player's Club. Jack Dow and Burt Patch were on that trip and we played tennis,

morning, noon, and night and what fun we had! As people got older they moved into STPC. I thought MSTC and TCSTC were like 'feeder clubs' to Senior Tennis. We got our children playing tennis, and when our grandchildren started coming along, we had more time, and got them interested in tennis as soon as they could hold a racquet. When they were old enough, we played in the Grandparent-Grandchild tournaments for many years."

Craig was an STPC member 1998-2004. Diane McBride Thompson was a member 1997-2014.

Renewal Form

Name _____

Primary phone _____

Secondary phone _____

Email address _____

Skill level (1.0 to 4.5): _____

If your home address has changed, enter here:

Choose **one** of the following membership levels:

Basic membership: \$30

Basic membership + printed roster: \$34

Advertisers: reach 900 tennis players!

The Senior Tennis Times is published February, April, August & November. Mail delivery, plus web presence. Deadline 15th of month preceding publish date.

Ad rates (first issue/additional issues):

Full page (7.5x10)..... \$165/135

Half page (7.5x4.9)..... 110/85

Half page on back cover 125/100

Quarter page (3.7x4.9)..... 70/50

Eighth page (3.7x2.4) 45/30

Business card special..... 30/20

Contact David Sommer for details. 612-276-1313 or dsommer7@usiwireless.com.

Carl Newberg *In Memory...*

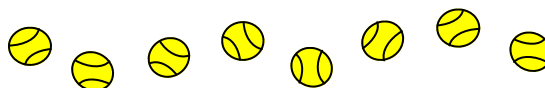
Carl, age 96, passed away December 13. A kind and giving man, he was the best uncle ever. Survived by many nieces and nephews.

Carl was a member of Senior Tennis 1989-2012.

Want Ads

Expert racquet service. Fred Jurewicz 952-496-1018 (H); 612-250-3185. *10% STPC discount.*

Personal Gardener. Garden help in Bloomington, Edina, S Mpls, & nearby. Lee Peterson 952-270-9472.



Indoor Drill Season InnerCity Tennis (9/6/16-4/30/17)
Reservations required. Call 612-825-6844
Mention STPC Membership At Sign-In To Receive Reduced Rate:
1 hour drill - \$13; STPC Rate - \$10
1½ hour drill - \$18; STPC Rate - \$13

Day	Time	Instructor	Fee STPC Member
Monday	1:30 - 3:00 P.M.	Dilcia Pederson	\$13
Tuesday	9:00 - 10:00 A.M. 2.5 - 3.25 Players	Staff	\$10
	9:00 - 10:00 A.M. 3.5+ Players	Staff	\$10
	10:00 - 11:30 A.M.	Roger Boyer	\$13
Wednesday	1:30 - 3:00 P.M.	Dilcia Pederson	\$13
Thursday	9:00 - 10:00 A.M. 2.5 - 3.25 Players	Staff	\$10
	9:00 - 10:00 A.M. 3.5+ Players	Staff	\$10
Friday	9:00 - 10:30 A.M.	Roger Boyer	\$13

Fred Wells Tennis Center (9/12/16-4/20/17)
Reservations required. Call 612-252-8367

Day	Time	Instructor	Fee
Tuesday	2:00 - 3:30 P.M.	Staff	\$13

(Be in the know—continued from page 1)

Since our financial situation has dramatically improved over the last two years, we are now automatically including a printed newsletter in the \$30 Basic Membership. For \$34, membership includes a printed roster (once a year). This reduces our current four levels of membership levels to just two.

What's ahead for 2017? Our Long-Range Planning Committee, which Jim Handy is chairing, is looking for your input. Please contact Jim with any ideas you may have at jimlhandy@gmail.com.

Our first social event in 2017 is open for registration! Sign up now for our fun **Tennis and Pizza Social** on Saturday, January 28th at St. Paul Indoor Tennis Club. We are excited to be able to accommodate our "East Side" members on the St. Paul side of the river.

Good news! Our rosters for 2016 have been printed. For those of you that paid for a roster with your 2016 membership, you should have received one. In error the covers say 2017 instead of 2016.

Happy Hitting,
Linda

Let's play a let

By David Sommer

Here's a review of commonly-misunderstood rules.

Situation: Doubles partners aren't sure whether opponent's shot was in or out, so they say "Let's play a let."

No, no, no! The only time you play a let is when a ball comes onto the court, or other interruption, or for a service let. In this situation, the uncertainty should be resolved by calling the ball "in." From The Code: "8. Ball that cannot be called out is good... One of tennis' more infuriating moments occurs after a long hard rally when a player makes a clean placement and an opponent says: 'I'm not sure if it was good or out. Let's play a let.'" Since there is doubt, the ball is *good*.

Situation: Player scrambles for a ball, and initially thinks it is out, but then realizes it may have been good. He/she says "I think it was good." What to do?

(Let's play a let—continued on page 7)

Baby, it's *cold* outside!

But January 28 we have tennis *inside* at St. Paul Indoor!
A FOUR HOUR Tennis & Pizza Party!

Yes, a party especially for those of you on the east side. We've reserved all five courts from 6:00 to 10:00 on Saturday, January 28. You can play up to four hours, forming your own groups if you wish. Informal! And plenty of pizza and beverages. Questions: Nancy Tarbox, 952-927-9368 or nancytarbox@yahoo.com

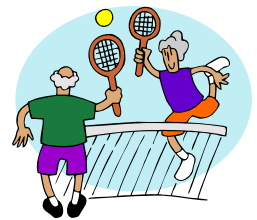


To reserve your place, send a check for \$15 (made out to STPC) to Nancy Tarbox, 5128 Juanita Ave, Edina, MN 55424. Or sign up on our website.

[St. Paul Indoor Tennis Club](#) is at 600 Desoto, Saint Paul, MN 55101. East on I94 to 7th St exit. Left on 7th to Lafayette. Left on Lafayette to DeSoto (1/4 m). Right on DeSoto, one block; club is on left.

Valentine Tennis Party!

For all you lovers of tennis



When: February 17, 7:00-10:00 PM

Where: Fred Wells Tennis & Education Center

What: two hours of tennis, followed by tasty snacks

Cost: just \$15

To sign up, send a check payable to STPC to

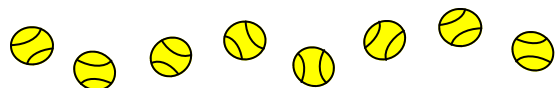
Pam Campbell, 4934 Bryant Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55419

Call Pam with questions: 612-822-0567

Printed Newsletter now free!

Your Board of Directors decided at the December meeting to *include* a printed newsletter as part of the basic membership, which remains at \$30. We've found that our members are more likely to see important news if they get it in printed form. A printed roster will now

cost \$4. But note that a current roster is always available to members on our website.



Spring Fling Tennis Social

When: April 21, 7:00-10:00

Where: Fred Wells

What: two hours tennis, followed by delicious snacks

How: signup on our website, or use this mail form.

Name _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Guests welcome. Cost is \$15/person. Make check out to STPC. Mail to: Jon Holmgren, 5529 Queen Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55410.

Email or phone questions to Jon: e_jon_holmgren@yahoo.com, 612-702-7509

Play tennis and live longer

You probably know that exercise is good for you, but do you know whether you're better off riding a bike or swimming laps in the pool? Actually, if you want to get the biggest bang for your exercise buck, you should pick up a racket, new research in the British Journal of Sports Medicine reveals. An analysis of more than 80,000 adults who were tracked for nearly a decade finds that those who played tennis, badminton or squash had the lowest risk of dying during the study. Compared with people who didn't play racket sports, those who did were 47 percent less likely to die of any cause and 56 percent less likely to die as a result of cardiovascular disease.

Alcohol and strokes

Having one or two alcoholic drinks a day is associated with a **lower** risk of stroke, a review of studies in BMC Medicine has found. But drinking more than that **increases** the risk. Compared with nondrinkers or occasional drinkers, people who had one or two drinks a day had an 8 percent reduced risk of ischemic stroke, the most common type of stroke. Heavier drinking, however, increased stroke risk. Having up to four daily drinks led to an 8 percent increased risk of ischemic stroke, and at more than four drinks, the risk increased by 14 percent.

Gopher tennis

All Gopher home matches are played at the Baseline Tennis Center. Colder than 45°, play is inside; warmer—outside. It's best to verify time of play at

GopherSports.com.

Gopher Women's Tennis – all at Baseline		
1/21/17	NIU	10:00 AM
	South Dakota State	5:00 PM
2/04/17-2/05/17	Courtside Classic	All Day
2/17/17	Missouri	2:00 PM
2/19/17	Memphis	10:00 AM
	South Dakota	4:00 PM
3/04/17	Wisconsin	12:00 PM
3/19/17	Ohio State	11:00 AM
3/25/17	Nebraska	10:00 AM
3/26/17	Iowa	11:00 AM
4/14/17	Purdue	3:00 PM
4/16/17	Indiana	11:00 AM

Gopher Men's Tennis – all at Baseline		
1/20/17	South Dakota St	11:00 AM
	Marquette	5:00 PM
1/22/17	North Dakota	1:00 PM
1/28/17	Western Michigan	10:00 AM
	Green Bay	4:00 PM
2/03/17	Dartmouth	6:00 PM
2/17/17	Middle Tennessee State	6:00 PM
2/19/17	Oregon	1:00 PM
2/24/17	Oklahoma State	6:00 PM
3/03/17	Washington	5:00 PM
3/05/17	Drake	12:00 PM
3/26/17	Iowa	3:00 PM
3/31/17	Illinois	6:00 PM
4/02/17	Northwestern	12:00 PM
4/21/17	Purdue	3:00 PM
4/23/17	Indiana	12:00 PM

Your shoulder, your Chevy

By Terry Buisman PT

As an active tennis player, the health of your shoulders affects your longevity, success and level of enjoyment. I'm a physical therapist, dealing predominately with adult shoulder injuries. The shoulder joint is highly complex and your understanding of its functioning helps in treatment and recovery.

To understand shoulder mechanics, I have adopted the analogy of shoulder and car; something most everyone seems to understand. Having an appreciation in this regard lessens the likelihood of overuse, injury, and subsequent pain and impairment.

Rib Cage ↔ Car Frame: A sturdy car frame is a make or break deal. Bent or twisted and the car does not move smoothly down the road or is not allowed to disperse energy from the engine at its full capacity. The same is true for the rib cage. It is a framework to which the shoulder blade is secured. If one becomes round-shouldered due to poor posture, osteoporosis or scoliosis, the mechanical function and strength output of the shoulder blade and ultimately the ball and socket joint are impaired.

Shoulder Blade ↔ Engine block: The engine block and shoulder blade are the source of power. As one would expect, if the mechanical function is impaired, so is the output.

Scapular Muscles ↔ Engine Block Hardware: The shoulder blade musculature serves like the thru bolts to secure the blade to the rib cage. These include the: serratus, upper and lower trapezius, and rhomboids.

The Socket ↔ The Hub: The ball of the humerus sits in the socket like a wheel on the hub. Obviously, the fit needs to be perfect or the parts start to wear out. Just like the hub rotating the wheel and tire, there needs to be rotation and not shear across the surface of the socket.

The Ball ↔ The Wheel/Tire: As noted above the ball needs to move in a smooth fashion on the socket. If the lug nuts are loose (see rotator cuff below) or one is driving down the road with the brakes on (*adhesive capsulitis/frozen shoulder*), some structures are going to fall into disrepair.

Rotator Cuff ↔ The lug nuts: The four rotator cuff muscles working with ligamentous structure, keeps the ball in the socket. Even the most powerful engine is ineffective if the lug nuts are loose.

Major Muscles ↔ The Drive Shaft: Everything in front of and behind the drive shaft needs to be fully

secured and mechanically sound if the force of the drive shaft is to be efficient. Major muscles such as the deltoid, latissimus, trapezius and pectorals need a stable scapula (shoulder blade) and ball and socket joint to allow us to push, pull, swing and lift.

Keep this in mind as well....

Shoulder Injection ↔ Turning up the radio when you have a bad muffler: I make all of my patients well aware of this fact. Unless the injury is very minor, an injection will not solve a shoulder issue. As with your Chevy, you have to fix the muffler. This is the goal of physical therapy care. The injection serves as a pain killer and concentrated anti-inflammatory to allow for improvements in mechanical function to occur via a guided home exercise program. The anti-inflammatory component will work for multiple weeks and one need be careful not to fall into the temptation of being too aggressive with the shoulder girdle with daily activities and exercise with the sensation of a pain-free status. Equally important, the "no pain, no gain" concept does not apply for someone recently injected with respect to their home exercise.

Patience....

By the time you get to my office, you are no longer a brand new Porsche but more like a '65 Caddy. It just takes a little more TLC to keep things running. But if done consistently and properly, you'll get down the road just fine.

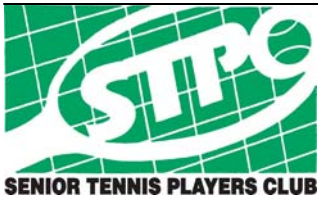


Over 25 Years of Conservative Shoulder Care
See us at: tcshoulder.com

(Let's play a let—continued from page 4)

Answer: from The Code, "12. Out calls reversed. A player who calls a ball out shall reverse the call if the player becomes uncertain or realizes that the ball was good. The point goes to the opponent and is not replayed. However, when a receiver reverses a fault call on a serve that hit the net, the server is entitled to two serves."

(Let's play a let—continued on page 11)



STPC Annual Celebration

- All members welcome!
- Captains' Recognition & Jack Dow Trophy

Saturday, May 13, 11:00 am - 2:30 pm

Town & Country Club • 300 Mississippi River Boulevard N. • St. Paul, Minnesota

Schedule of Events

- 11:00 am Social Hour
- 12:00 pm Luncheon
- 1:00 pm: Welcome, introduction of Board members, Jack Dow Trophy presentation to ?? by Joan Thomas.
- 1:25 pm: Speaker: Becky Cantellano, St. Paul Urban Tennis
- 2:00 pm: Recognition of Captains
- 2:15 pm: Treasurer's report
- 2:25 pm: Closing by Jon Holmgren

Luncheon Menu

Details later, but as always, it will be delicious!

Directions to Town & Country Club

From I94: Take the Cretin Avenue/Vandalia Street exit (exit 237) and turn south onto Cretin Avenue. Turn right onto Marshall Avenue. Turn right onto Otis Ave, then left into parking.

From south suburbs: I494 east to Hwy 5. East across river and exit to Edgumbe. Follow Edgumbe to left on St. Paul Ave, which becomes Cleveland by Ford Parkway. Cleveland to Marshall. Turn left onto Marshall. Turn right on Otis Ave. Clubhouse parking is first driveway on left.

From Minneapolis: Take Lake Street east across river. It becomes Marshall. Take left on Otis Ave (one short block from river). Clubhouse parking is first driveway on left.

Send reservation form by Monday May 8 with check for \$25 payable to STPC to Pam Campbell 4934 Bryant Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55419. 612-822-0567

Captains: \$25 (same as for other members). We'll have a Captains' Cruise in July or August.

Please call to cancel if unable to attend: Pam Campbell, 612-822-0567.

(Cancellations accepted up to **Tuesday, May 9**)

STPC Luncheon Reservation form for members and guests

Saturday, May 13, 11:00 am - 2:30 pm. Cost: \$25

Name: _____

Vegetarian

Name: _____

Vegetarian

Phone: _____

Important: check "*Vegetarian*" as needed.



Senior Tennis Players Club, Inc. 21st Annual Jack Dow Tennis Round Robin

May 1-4, 2017, 9am-1pm

Reed-Sweatt Family Tennis Center

4005 Nicollet Ave. S. • Minneapolis, MN 55409 • 612-825-6844



Round Robin Rules

- **Fee:** \$15 per event, per person
- Applications must be received by Monday, April 24.
- Round-robin format—you will play *at least* three regular sets, or two 8-game pro sets. Round-robin groups will have 3 or 4 teams each.
- Divisions 2.5, 3.0, 3.5, and 4.0 Men's, Women's and Mixed Doubles.
- All entrants must play at or above their rating as published in the Senior Tennis Roster.
- No partner substitution after first set.
- No participant may play in more than 2 events. If in 2 events, one must be Mixed Doubles.
- A first place winner in an event in 2016 automatically jumps to the next rating or *must* change partners.
- Those unable to find a partner *must* state that on the application. We'll help you find a partner.
- All entrants *must* be current members of STPC.

- **Please check in for your match at least 15 minutes early.**
- **Cancel after close date (April 24)—lose entire fee.**
- **Schedule:** Men's doubles and women's doubles will be played on May 1-2 (Monday-Tuesday). Mixed doubles on May 3-4 (Wednesday-Thursday).
- Men's 3.5 (our largest division) may require finals to be played Wednesday morning.
- Detailed schedule will appear on our website Wednesday, April 26. It will also be posted at Reed-Sweatt. You **must** appear on the first date and time shown on that posting.
- Medal awards to the top two finishers per category

More info:

Jon Holmgren 612-702-7509 e_jon_holmgren@yahoo.com
or Pam Campbell 612-822-0567 pmscampbell@juno.com.

Donations needed!

Entry fees do not cover the cost of this great event. We need donations from individuals and organizations! Recognition of your generosity will appear in the Senior Tennis Times newsletter.

IMPORTANT! Keep upper part; send only Application!

Dow Application

Your Name: _____ Your Rating: 2.5 3.0 3.5 4.0

Phone: (____) _____ E-Mail _____

Men's Doubles 2.5 3.0 3.5 4.0 N/A

Women's Doubles 2.5 3.0 3.5 4.0 N/A

Mixed Doubles 2.5 3.0 3.5 4.0 N/A

Check one or two events only!

Partner needed? Write "Needed" for Name in form below.

1st Doubles Partner's Name: _____ Rating: 2.5 3.0 3.5 4.0

Phone: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

2nd Doubles Partner's Name: _____ Rating: 2.5 3.0 3.5 4.0

Phone: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

Send Application and Check* payable to STPC for \$15 per event, per person to:

Pam Campbell, 4934 Bryant Ave S, Minneapolis, MN 55419. 612-822-0567 pmscampbell@juno.com

*** If you paid online, don't pay again! But do send this form!**

Tennis and the Aging Brain

By Bill Cosgrove

You may have noticed that your children and grandchildren can do relatively easily and adroitly what you used to be able to do yourself almost as easily. Or that you used to be able to wrestle your grandkids successfully, or play a respectable game of tag with them, or take them on one-on-one in the driveway, or beat them down the block. Or even how much faster some of them seem to talk in comparison to how we talk.

We're keenly aware, many of us, of how much our physical abilities may have diminished, if only because playing tennis regularly reminds us every time we play, in one way or another. If you aren't a lesser tennis player physically than you were when you were, say, 40 then bottle your stuff up and sell it. I'd like to be your first customer.

Past newsletters have included a number of essays I've written about the lingering and sometimes chronic physical effects of aging on the tennis player's body. They may have put you in mind, as they did me, of something else – the effects of aging on the brains of tennis players. If the body inevitably fails us eventually, does the brain have to, too? Doesn't seem fair, somehow, does it?

It's our brains, after all, that have been keeping tabs on and recording the breakdown of our bodies. We should at least be able to have the small solace of having our brain be able to chart reliably our gradual physical decline, shouldn't we? Is nothing sacred? Give us older tennis players a break, will you, whoever's in charge of small favors?

So I did some modest research about what happens to our brains as we age. What I found was that our aging brain specifically affects what we all have in common, and what we may wish to devote the last best efforts of our aging bodies to – namely, playing tennis as long as we can.

If some of our grandchildren do seem to talk fast in relation to us, it may be because our own speech rate slows down as we age. That's just one of many activities of the brain that experts say are diminished in us as a result of the normal aging process we all go through. And that's just normal aging – no telling what *ab*normal aging may do to some of us.

My favorite metaphor for how our brain's mental processes slow down and change over time is the watching-television-while-reading-a-book scenario. You know how you watch TV across the room with a book

in your lap and then toggle back-and-forth between the two? When the Vikings' opponents score a touchdown you look down to read a little; and then when the Vikes don't score you repeat.

You'll have noticed how it takes a little longer to adjust your eyes from the TV set 12 feet away *down* to the book in your lap 2 feet away, and vice versa. That's the adjustment lag time that in youth is usually instantaneous, but as we age becomes discernibly slower. That increased lag is called *presbyopia* and is one of the reasons we get glasses after age 50 or 60.

Isn't that pretty much what happens in tennis? We home in on the server, watch the ball toss, see it struck and head toward us, unconsciously adjust our eyes and move toward the ball, and then seek to hit and return it. That necessary split-second eye adjustment between serve and return is practically instantaneous when you're young, but slows as we age.

We can't pick up the ball as quickly or effectively as when we were younger. It's not just an inability to focus, but an actual increase in the time it takes to adjust our eyes from one distance to another.

It's that slowing of the processing speed and the overall slowdown of brain function that interests me here; and it becomes crucial because so much of this so-called "executive function" of the brain is used in executing the strokes in a single point in tennis.

MRIs are familiar to many of us personally (I wrote about one in an essay in this newsletter a few years ago). I was intrigued to find them being used to chart some of the physical evidence of the changes in our aging brain and skull. According to Jeffrey Kaye, a neuroscientist at Oregon Health and Science University, MRI scans can track brain atrophy due to age. They show that slower blood flow shrinks brain matter and reduces the oxygen and other nutrients going to our brain cells. The result is that brain neurons over time get less nourishment and healing than they need, which can lead to overall cognitive decline.

In a 20-something, MRIs show clearly that the empty space between brain and skull is minimal, the ventricles holding cushioning cerebro-spinal fluid are narrow, and the "neural highways" made of nerve fibers and glial cells transmit signals effectively. In an 80-year-old, however, the cranial space between brain and skull widens as neural networks shrink, the ventricles expand as brain tissue contracts, and glial cells wither with age and disrupt transmission signals.

(Tennis and the aging brain—continued on page 11)

(Tennis and the aging brain—continued from page 10)

Our brain consists of about 90 billion neuron cells which have about 1,000 trillion interconnections called synaptic junctions. This vast network of pathways is stimulated every time we act or think by increasing the “plasticity” of these synapses. This, in turn, enhances our learning ability, and initiates the creation of new neurons. This neural-plasticity allows adult brains to “change significantly as a result of new experiences.” Even senior citizen brains!! So, all is not lost.

Indeed, playing tennis would seem to offer the possibility that a good deal is to be gained. The acting and thinking that contribute to our brain’s neuron plasticity, enhanced learning, and significant change, experts say, need to be regular, wide-ranging, and mentally and physically challenging. And tennis, many believe, does these things as well or better than most athletic activities we could be doing at our age. (That other activity you play with a bunch of clubs and a little white, pockmarked ball doesn’t seem to come close.)

The normal aging of the brain is due largely to atrophy, which is a kind of withering away of gray matter caused by cells degenerating throughout our lives. From teen years to old age we can lose 15% in total brain volume. So, being in our 70s can mean our brains have shrunk, according to one estimate, to the size they were when we were 2 or 3 years old. 2 or 3 years old! And most of this loss is in those critical neuron cells that conduct the signals that enable us to live and think.

But it’s not just the loss of a small percentage of those 90 billion neurons themselves that’s so important. The most vital loss is apparently in the vast spider web of connections by which individual neurons are connected to thousands of other neurons. This network of so-called “dendritic trees” can lose 25% or more of its connections during adulthood.

Moreover, according to a UC-Berkeley neuroscientist we also lose “at the rate of 5 to 8 percent per decade” a critically important neurotransmitter called dopamine that allows these life-sustaining signals to be transmitted among neurons. At that rate, by the time we’re in our 70s, we’ve lost up to 40% of dopamine function.

So, what with all that brain shrinkage, lost neuron and dendritic connections, and dopamine depletion, what have we got left? What more can we lose? There is more, as it turns out. But let’s just leave it at this for now – the expected exponential increase in the number of 70- and 80-year-olds worldwide in this century means that a lot of aging brains will be losing a lot of valuable stuff over the coming years. And for the

foreseeable future, at least, we may be stumbling over lost neurons and dopamine all over the place, including the tennis court.

With all that in mind, let’s end by looking at a few effects on our already somewhat depleted brains of two attendant sensory deprivations, one known and one not so well known. Our brains, of course, depend on basic information from our immediate physical world provided by our senses to be able to learn and remember. That sensory input affects all the decisions we make on the spot everyday, including tennis.

Loss of hearing and sight as we age are familiar to most of us. But a decrease in pupil size may be news to us. As a result of this change, in dim light our eyes may pick up only about a third as much light as in the past. Needless to say, this deterioration of sight can reduce our reception of essential sensory information from our surroundings. Like a tennis ball being blasted at us. And this loss of such critical input from the outside world can result in an impairment of what the experts call the “very act of thinking itself.” And tennis is a thinking game.

Finally, many tennis players agree that any diminishment in hearing the tennis ball being struck can be telling, especially in the older player. The sound of the ball on the strings tells us almost as much, sometimes, as seeing the ball in judging the spin, pace, and angle of a shot. (Today’s mega screamers and grunters on the pro circuit take note.)

The brain interprets and synthesizes sight and hearing during play accordingly. But when any one of our senses is diminished, how much important sensory information is lost to the brain while playing out the point? Accordingly, the entire thinking process is potentially slowed down in older tennis players like us.

I don’t know about you, but I don’t really need any of my bodily or brainily functions slowed down any more than they already are.

(Let’s play a let—continued from page 7)

Situation: While in play, ball rolls onto court. Player hits a ball out and then claims a let. Valid let call?

Answer: No. The Code says, “18. Let called when ball rolls on court. When a ball from another court enters the playing area, any player on the court affected may call a let as soon as the player becomes aware of the ball. The player loses the right to call a let if the player unreasonably delays in making the call.”

The Code is on our website. Click About Us, then Tennis Resources. Tennis Rules also in same place.

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