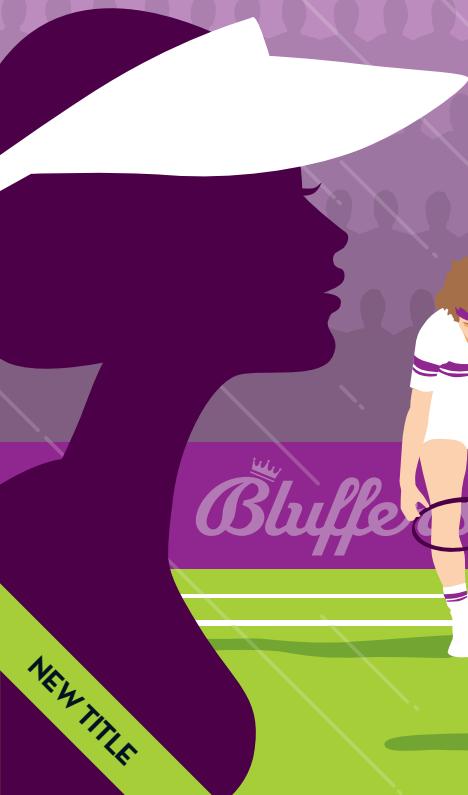


THE *Bluffer's*[®] GUIDE TO

TENNIS

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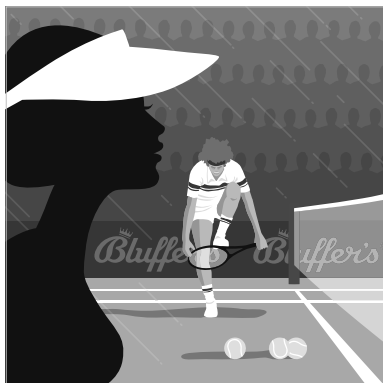
Bluffer's *Bluffer's*

NEW TITLE



THE *Bluffer's*[®] GUIDE TO

TENNIS



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The major tournaments at the time
banned the greedy pros because
they seemed to possess all the moral
backbone of a filleted rabbit.

TENNIS GENESIS

It's a demonstrable fact that most tennis players are people, and that most people are humans. Furthermore, humans have all sorts of failings. These failings are called 'human failings'. Which is good because nobody wants to go around with hamster failings.

Two of the most prevalent of these human failings are greed and hyperbole. Both are particularly present in athletic competitions, which of course include the game of tennis. Studies indicate that more and more people are becoming prone to describing their achievements, athletic and otherwise, in the most glowing and grandiose terms. In their vaulting ambition to be better than their friends and neighbours at everything from dog grooming to eighteenth-century French literature, people constantly overstate their abilities. Indeed, these descriptions are similar to Hercules: very heroic, but undeniably mythical.

Tennis players are not immune to these failings. Far from it. In fact, if you were to get bored and wander onto an online tennis forum, you would be amazed at how many 'players' say something along the lines of:

I have no problem hitting winners off my forehand and backhand wings, but every time I try to volley, the ball either gets wedged in my racket's throat or hits me in the eye.

This sort of statement sends red flags up to tennis aficionados. If the player is getting hit in the eye, he or she is clearly not very good. Not only that, but said player probably solely plays people on crutches, the only opponents against whom he or she can possibly hit winners.

To become the armchair expert at tennis you deserve to be, the particular human skill known as 'bluffing' should be harnessed. Claim it. Embrace it. Own it. As a result, you will be able to impress total strangers with your command of the vast array of tennis facts and minutiae that tennis and this guide provide. You will be able to walk from tennis venue to tennis venue, confident and sure of your ability to hold up your end of semi-profound tennis discussions. For example, when passing by the Royal Box at Wimbledon and the Duke of Yorkshire Pudding enquires, 'I say, my good citizen, do you happen to know if these chaps are on serve?', you will not only know what the hell he's talking about, but you will also know how to answer him without being escorted from the premises by the royal henchmen at the order of the royal factotum.

But before you do anything else – before you even consider opening your mouth and venturing an opinion on this hallowed game of skill and athleticism – you're going to need a crash course in tennis history. So take a deep breath and strap yourself in. Tennis history won't ever get any shorter than this...

In the beginning... Oh, never mind. Nobody cares. But some say that the game began in France in the fourteenth century, albeit without racquets. So it was more like 'patball' than tennis, and it evolved into another precursor of the modern game called 'royal tennis' (after the French word *tenez* – which means 'hold' or 'here you are', not that this really helps). Apparently it was popular at the court of Henry VIII, and subsequently became known as 'real tennis', which never really took off because the indoor courts were so expensive to build. Ultimately, the game became 'lawn tennis' and only a nerdy tennis historian or a citizen of England's reputed second city would know the following titbit of tennis trivia.

The modern game can be traced back to 1860 in Birmingham. Apparently, they had a lot of free time in this Midlands manufacturing powerhouse, which later became the birthplace of heavy metal music (Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Judas Priest), not to mention The Move, ELO, The Moody Blues and a few more. This is all vital bluffing information, but back to tennis history. In those days there weren't quite so many opportunities to let your hair down and 'headbang', and what with most women walking around in conservative Victorian garb back then, it is safe to assume that men would have spent a lot of time wildly imagining a game which at some point in the future might involve the fairer sex wearing noticeably shorter skirts. So they invented a primitive form of tennis, played on a lawn.

All you need to know is that a couple of young Birmingham blades, one called Major Harry Gem and the other with the

unmistakeably Brummie name of Juan Bautista Luis Augurio Perera, met in a pub called the Welch Harp and agreed that there wasn't a suitable sport which could be played by both sexes and which involved women wearing rather fewer clothes than was then considered acceptable. Actually, the history of their exact conversation is a little hazy, but it is safe to assume that it was something along those lines. So Harry and Juan (who was a Spanish-born entrepreneur) set about inventing lawn tennis. This is absolutely true. And the Welch Harp is now better known as the Racquet Court Inn.

This knowledge may be useful in conversations in pubs to indicate that you are either a tennis nerd or from Birmingham. Perhaps after a couple of pints with your friends, when the subject has turned to the weather, you can say:

You *Birmingham has more miles of canal than Venice.*

Friend *How extraordinary.*

You *And not only that, Birmingham is the birthplace of modern tennis!*

Just don't be surprised when the pub landlord shows you and your friends the door after relieving you of your car keys.

A whole lot of historic things have happened in Birmingham between then and now. Most, like canals, the industrial revolution, gunmaking, inventions, jewellery, heavy metal music, more canals, etc., did not concern tennis. So it's time to jump ahead to an even more modern tennis history.

From its beginnings in Victorian Birmingham to well into the next century, tennis players were divided into two main

groups – non-paid amateurs and paid professionals. The amateurs played for the love of the sport (and doubtless some under-the-table hard cash). As for the pros, getting paid over the table to play tennis was considered to be cheap and seedy. Therefore only players of high moral fibre played top levels of tennis for ‘free’. The major tournaments at the time (e.g., Wimbledon) banned the greedy pros because they seemed to possess all the moral backbone of a filleted rabbit.



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moral fibre played top levels
of tennis for ‘free’.

Then the turbulent 1960s happened and people began to question the existing cultural mores. ‘What the hell is it with all these cultural mores?’ they would ask. At the same time (actually, over the course of many years), people started thinking ‘free love’ (aka ‘no-strings sex’) was a better cultural more than most existing ones.

In 1968 the tennis world turned upside down. The prestigious major tournaments were opened to the pros, and it was immediately decreed by tennis pundits the world over to be the beginning of tennis’s ‘Open Era’. Those same tennis pundits then wondered what the era before the Open Era should be called. Some pundits thought it should be the ‘Closed Era’.

Frankly, it's surprising that when trying to come up with a clever name those pundits didn't tap into whatever mind-altering substance the inventors of tennis's harebrained scoring system used. Instead, they came up with: 'Before the Open Era'. Brilliant.

You are now sufficiently well versed in the development of the game of tennis to venture an opinion on how and when it all started. But there's a lot more to it than that, as you're about to discover. Many a hidden peril lies in wait for the unsuspecting novice preparing to dip a toe into the turbulent waters of tennis debate.

This short but definitive guide will therefore conduct you through the main danger zones encountered in discussions about the game of tennis and will equip you with a vocabulary and evasive technique that will minimise the risk of being rumbled as a bluffer. It will give you a few easy-to-learn hints and nuggets of essential information that might even allow you to be accepted as a tennis expert of rare ability and experience. But it will do more. It will give you the tools to impress legions of marvelling listeners with your forensic knowledge of the game, and your skill at playing it – without anyone discovering that, until you read it, you didn't know the difference between tennis elbow and a housemaid's knee.

GETTING IN GEAR

Before you get anywhere near a court, you'll need to know how to look the part. Tennis, like ballet, fishing, motorcycling and hang-gliding, needs specialised gear. And, in theory, the more expensive it is, the better your performance. You should spare no expense when reciting what comprises your imaginary kitbag.

WHAT A RACQUET

The number-one item you need to say you have is a racquet. From their modest wooden beginnings, racquets have become remarkable objects of advanced engineering. Every racquet manufacturer retains teams of scientists and engineers who work to develop ever more advanced racquet technologies.

These dedicated and brilliant minds create racquets from space-age materials such as titanium, molybdenum, thorium and delirium, and today's models come in various forms of non-dietary fibre. There are Kevlar fibres, graphite fibres, glass fibres (or fibreglass if you prefer), intellifibers and even plant fibres (they don't say which plant, so you're safe in assuming that it's probably hemp). Somehow, according to

some of these same engineers, fibres affect how a tennis ball flies. Note that, unlike the fibre you eat, they have nothing to do with easing constipation.

Other advances at play in modern racquet technology include liquid metal, magnets, boron and strategic holes. You only need to remember these when you're in the company of tennis geeks (and you really should try to avoid this sort of company). This technology is intended to give the player either more power, more spin, more control or any combination thereof. It goes without saying, but say it anyway: most tennis players would play the same way whether they used a racquet manufactured using the latest technology or a shovel.

The pros get their racquets by the container-load from the various racquet companies. Everyone else has to get theirs at retail outlets, where earnest young salespeople in pleated shorts apply the latest selling techniques to get you to buy something you neither want nor need. But having made a purchase, you should claim to own at least two racquets of the same brand and model, one of which you actually play with. The 'other' is the one you use when your main one is in the pro shop for string repairs. You should select your imaginary racquets from one of the following leading manufacturers:

- Wilson
- Babolat
- Head
- Prince

There are about 20 models for each brand, so instead of memorising one, just tell inquisitive people that the racquet you chose ‘felt good’ in your hand. That’s all you need to say.

Note that there is a valuable old bluff which you can always call on if you want to make a statement on a tennis court. That statement is: ‘I know I’m going to lose and I don’t care. I’m a Corinthian by nature, and it’s the taking part that counts.’ The best way of making this statement is to choose to play with an ancient, pre-graphite racquet. A good example is something like a 1960s wooden Dunlop Matchpoint, with one of those wooden stretchers with wing nuts on each corner. About £24 on eBay. Slazenger has a good range of antediluvian racquets as well. People will probably pay to watch you play.

RACQUET HEAD SIZE

You may be asked for your racquet head size. Just say mid-size. Only a great player or an ignorant hack would play with a smaller head size. Only a bad bluffer would play with a larger one. It doesn’t make it any easier to hit the ball (actually it does, but there’s no guarantee it will land in your opponent’s court).

GRIP SIZE

This is the circumference of the racquet’s handle. If the subject comes up talk about the importance of ‘effective power transfer’ via the right size of grip. Then find one that feels comfortable.

OVERGRIPS

Overgrips are thin and tacky grip covers, and good things to claim to be aware of (as in: 'Damn, forgot to pack my overgrips'). If a player doesn't use one, the base grip will eventually lose all tackiness and begin to slip in his or her hand. Players don't like grips that slip, so they use overgrips and toss them out like used cat litter when they wear out.

STRING THEORY

Tennis strings are now as high-tech as racquets. Players can still use good old gut, made out of animal intestine (the most resilient material for strings), but that's not what the pros use. So, be like most players and use something as modern as polyester, which (you will say) provides 'increased topspin'. Players have nicknamed these strings 'polys'. Polyester was invented in 1941 by British scientists John Whinfield and James Dickson. It is one of Britain's few contributions to lawn tennis (apart from inventing it).

Amazingly, the primary string manufacturers are the same as the racquet manufacturers. Nevertheless, be sure to select a different manufacturer from your racquet manufacturer. It demonstrates that you have given some (hopefully) reasoned thought to your decision. If asked why, just say your brand gives 'more feel'. 'More feel' is so personal that, like 'felt good' (*see above*), everyone will accept it.

A useful bluffing note is that although it is frequently known as 'catgut', the vast majority of animal gut strings are made from cowgut.

BAGS

Tennis players need to tote their gear from place to place. They tend to use tennis bags and/or a lackey for this purpose. You can generally tell a tennis bag from a regular bag because it more or less resembles the shape of a large tennis racquet and the manufacturer's name will be printed so large it can be read from passing aircraft.

As a general rule from a bluffing point of view, the bigger the bag you carry, the better the player you are. The better players require bigger bags because of all the stuff they



As a general rule from a bluffing point of view, the bigger the bag you carry, the better the player you are.

carry: multiple racquets, sweatbands, sunglasses, hats, socks, towels, sports drinks, lottery tickets, Viagra, voodoo dolls and soap-on-a-rope.

In fact, your tennis bag should have shoulder straps, like a backpack. A great bluffer will sling a vast bag over his or her shoulders like a Sherpa and head out for the court with jaws clamped and an air of Zen-like focus. If first impressions count for anything, your opponent will be ready to concede the moment you unzip your impressive appendage.

BALLS

It takes balls to play tennis. The minimum number of balls that tennis players play with is called a 'can'. (Most cans contain three balls.) Players use all three at a time. You are allowed to use two balls if you have hit one over a fence and into the backyard of a house with a slavering dog at the end of a chain.

Better (and better-funded) players will use two cans of balls at once. In this way, the balls stay 'fuzzy' – meaning good – longer and there's always a ball nearby to pick up and hit. Bluffers should follow their example.

ATTIRE

People have been wearing various forms of purpose-designed tennis attire since Harry and Juan started batting a ball back and forth in Birmingham wearing long white flannels and boaters.

Female players of that day wore the feminine equivalent: long dresses with hemlines down to the alluring feminine ankle, usually concealed beneath black-laced ankle boots in case male spectators should see a titillating flash of fibula. Then there were the mandatory two or three stiff petticoats as well as bustles and corsets, not to mention full bonnets tied with a scarf. It's amazing that they didn't self-combust.

At some point since then, fashion design became an actual career path instead of a hobby. Those career fashionistas subsequently made a thorough study of women's legs and correctly concluded that tennis dresses weren't short enough. The tennis-playing public eagerly agreed. Fashion

designers colluded and very quickly all hemlines rose like vampires' coffin lids in the night.

At around the same time, men's fashion lurched toward short sleeves and shorts. The tennis-playing public were largely indifferent. 'So?', they yawned.

For some reason (probably to do with Wimbledon), tennis clothing designers could only secure white fabric. Therefore, tennis as a sport became synonymous with white: white shirts, white dresses, white shorts, white socks, white shoes, white balls, even white players and spectators.

Then, in the mid 1970s, a tennis clothing designer discovered a roll of yellow cloth. Immediately, he was struck by a bolt of inspiration. 'What would happen', he mused, 'if tennis players were to wear something other than white?'

The rest is tennis history. Colour exploded onto the tennis scene like a direct hit on a paintball factory – confined, at first, to the pastels section. When the tennis pundits didn't complain about those Easter-egg colours, designers tried bolder ones, like black. Today, colours are as ubiquitous on tennis attire as double-glazing salesmen on the end of your phone.

You should also be aware of the most prominent tennis clothing manufacturers. These are the biggies. They're the ones who pay the pros gazillions to wear their fashions. They are also the ones you need to say you wear. Any of the following will do:

- Nike
- Adidas
- Sergio Tacchini

- Uniqlo
- Lacoste

If you want to push your luck, you could say you wear a different brand, but only if you say the owner is a friend.

SHOES

The clothing manufacturers also generally make the shoes. As a general rule, there should be two of them, unless you are playing a dangerous bluff by deliberately handing your opponent an advantage.

Try to avoid wearing anything that squeaks or has soles with flashing lights. Your shoes should be both understated and functional. If asked, say that you chose them for their 'Zelcron cushioning', 'Adapttrex mould' and 'breathable vamp' (deliberately perforated upper). None of this means anything but it sounds good. They should also fit comfortably, because tennis and blisters are not happy bedfellows. Finally, ensure that they have none of the following written on them: 'turbo', 'precision', 'performance', 'power' – not least because none of these bold claims are likely to be reflected in your play.

WARM-UPS

Unless it's very hot, professional tennis players wear warm-up suits. Of course, they have a very compelling reason to wear them, mainly that they're paid to (a nice gig if you can get it). You don't need to strain yourself guessing which companies make them; go to the attire list and pick one.

SWEATBANDS

Some players use sweatbands, because they sweat. The pros wear sweatbands even though they have people loitering around the court ready to hand them towels after every point. Do not claim to have such an entourage, because they're expensive. For the record: an entourage is a group of people, each of whom provides a particular service for a given individual. One keeps track of the money. One does the shopping. One sees to dietary needs. One arranges social activities. Another drives them around. Amazingly, at one time, everybody had one. She was called 'mum'.