

Playing For Match Point

When I was 8 years old, my uncle gave me a tennis racquet as an Easter gift. At first it seemed like just another toy. It patiently sat in my room for a few days until I casually decided I'd give it a try. After several sloppy strokes, feeling awkward, and tripping over myself, I decided to ask my parents for professional lessons.

As a shy person, I was initially intimidated by my coach, Greg Langdon. However I set my mind to do exactly as he instructed. Mr. Langdon not only taught me the fundamentals of the sport, but also etiquette and good sportsmanship. I waited eagerly for my weekly lessons. Mr. Langdon saw my passion, dedication and potential for tennis grow with each lesson. I noticed my confidence bloom after each competition. Having control of placing the ball precisely where I wanted it to fall was challenging and frustrating, but it gave me an extreme sense of achievement when I scored.

A couple of years later I became a member of United States Tennis Association. My first match as a novice was a disaster. Admittedly, I shed a few tears that day. However it whet my appetite for more. I continued competing, sometimes winning, sometimes losing. With each match I became more self-disciplined and found self-respect for my hard, yet fair play, humbly accepting each loss. On the court I felt at home, although nervous at not knowing the outcome, I learned to quickly read my opponent and compile a strategy for a win. On the court I felt liberated despite the stress of competition, I was free of life stress.

When I reached high school, I anxiously tried-out for the tennis team and once I made the JV team I was ecstatic. I had never been part of a team, as tennis being an individual sport, I wasn't sure what to expect. The friendships and partnerships I found being part of a team gratified my sense of belonging. I feel the best when I'm on the court, playing my hardest, still doing whatever the coach instructs, which has earned me respect among my teammates. I've since made Varsity, Team Captain and MVP. In my Junior year, I became a mentor to a Freshman trying out for the tennis team. I was eager to pass on my own experiences as well as what I had learned from Mr. Langdon - not only proper positioning for your wrist and the racquet, but also respect. Respect for the sport and more importantly respect for our team.

I am so grateful for that Easter gift. That racquet transformed me throughout the years, from a shy little boy to the confident young man I am today. It has taught me that in my adult life, I will have challenges (opponents), search for strategies (where to aim) and always play to win. I have a feeling that life will be much like my tennis life, match after match, some wins some loses, accepting defeat gracefully knowing I gave it my all, after all it is a gentleman's sport.