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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* page 13), 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.

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 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.

ANATOMY OF A GAME

At this point a table may prove helpful. However, mind the asterisks:

	NO OF POINTS	1ST POINT	2ND POINT	3RD POINT	3 POINTS EACH	POINT AFTER DEUCE
FOR SERVER	Love*	15**	30**	40***	Deuce****	Advantage-in
FOR RETURNER	Love*	15**	30**	40***	Deuce****	Advantage-out

* Love-Love or Love-all is never announced. It is silently assumed knowledge.

** 15-15 is always 15-all. 30-30 is always 30-all (and not deuce).

*** 40-40 is always called deuce, never 40-all.

**** Could consist of 4 or more points each.

Bear in mind that the server's score is always announced first. There are a fairly large number of things you are allowed to forget about with only minor repercussions, like parking tickets and wedding anniversaries. But never, ever forget to announce the server's score first. If you forget and your bluff is called for this infraction, plead a flashback due to substance abuse (preferably Class A) as a teen. It's perfectly plausible, and you may even gain a modicum of respect for being someone who found redemption in tennis.

As shown in the scoring table above, deuce means 40-all. However, since tennis is almost always a win-by-two affair, the point after deuce means that either the server or the returner has the advantage (ahead by one). However, having the advantage is not good enough in tennis. The advantage player still must close the deal by winning yet another point.

If the player with the advantage loses the next point, the score returns to deuce. In this way, a single game can last for a considerable time before the win-by-two condition is triggered and a new game commences with the returner acting as the server. That's because players take turns serving. All clear so far?

SETS

Tennis matches almost always consist of winning two out of three sets. There are a couple of exceptions to this that you will need to remember. First, in the major tournaments, called the Grand Slam events, and the Davis Cup (where national teams annually play a single-elimination tournament), men play three out of five sets. Often interminably. Second, tennis clubs and time-pressured tournaments may play a 'pro set'. These are particularly popular in the USA but not so well known in the UK – so they offer valuable bluffing potential (especially when you're claiming to have played your best tennis as a semi-pro in Florida). A pro set means the first player to win eight games and win by two is the winner and earns the right to play again. They are constrained, however, because at 8-8 they play a 12-point tiebreaker. (Fear not, explanation coming.)

In a normal match, the players play sets by repeatedly playing games with each other until one reaches the necessary total of six games. In keeping with the win-by-two tradition, the other player can have won only four games or fewer.

If the players' skills are equally matched, the score