



Introduction

The server arches his back and sends a heavy twist into the corner of the ad court, knowing that it will spell trouble for the receiver's one-handed backhand. The receiver knows better than to try to be aggressive with this high-kicking serve, and besides, the server's partner is left-handed, so a low, quick lob return will travel over his backhand. The server can't get there in time to hit an overhead and knows that a sharp cross-court volley would leave too much court exposed, so he plays a safe but firm volley down the line, back to the receiver's backhand. But the receiver's partner has reviewed all of this, not in his head so much as with his instincts, and is already two steps past the center line. His knifed backhand volley splits the court for a well-deserved point against serve.

How often do your points feature this much finesse and acumen? Maybe only one out of 20, but the mere prospect of the delicious chess match that is competitive doubles is enough to keep us returning to the court, day after day, season after season, decade after decade.

If you seek a book that explores strokes and physical fundamentals, this is not the one for you. You'll be able to count on one hand the instances in which I discuss stroke mechanics. But if you seek a deeper appreciation of doubles strategy, if you want to better understand the dynamics of competitive doubles, if you want to inch closer to mastery of the nuance of this wonderful game, and if you want a book that you can actually enjoy, not just study, go ahead and click that Buy Now button.

This book places in its crosshairs adult players like you and me who play in USTA leagues and in local club events. We do not aspire to play open tournaments or earn a national ranking. We play in men's and women's leagues whose NTRP numbers start with a 3 or a 4, mixed and combo leagues of all designations, and intermediate and advanced mixers everywhere. Our best tennis might or might not still be ahead of us, but we know our ceilings. We are amateurs who sit in awe of the Top 4 in the men's game and the parade of European women who hit with more authority than we could ever imagine.

Unlike most authors of tennis books, I did not play at Wimbledon and I received no scholarship offers to play in college. Nobody has ever asked me for my autograph and no company pays me to wear its stuff or even gives me free stuff. And that's what qualifies me to be at my keyboard right now: I know the game that you play. I've been playing it for my entire adult life. I have played alongside 3.5 men and women and I have been on the court against 6.0 guys.

I could throw a few credentials your way, like a pair of national championships in 10.0 mixed and an undefeated season at the 5.5 level. But that was a lifetime ago, before rampant inflation compelled the USTA to devalue its currency, and practically overnight, turn me into a 5.0 player. The passage of time has presided over the rest of my descent, down to my place on 4.5 rosters today. I win more than I lose, but I don't dominate. I struggle with wild fluctuations in focus, energy, and confidence, just like most aging tennis players.

Through these pages, I won't preach at you and I won't ask you to remember a litany of unfamiliar phrases. I won't expect you to take notes and I won't give you homework assignments for the next time you play. And you do not need to read this book from start to finish—you can browse it and flip through it, stopping at any passage that sounds interesting.

These chapters are uneven—some of them a few pages and others a few dozen—and that reflects the coverage of topics, where biases are obvious, not hidden. And not just mine: when any one of my playing editors has a contrary point of view, I do more than just take it into consideration; I invite him or her to share it with you. Disagreement is good, don't you agree?

Similarly, I neither expect nor hope that you will agree with all of my assertions; in fact, if you do, your experience might be a bit diminished.

Tennis is too mysterious and there are too many legitimate and disparate points of view about effective doubles play for us to believe that we can have consensus. And besides, the greatest reward of all might be in the debate and I invite you to partake in it at the Killer Doubles Facebook page.

If I did my job across these 147 pages, this book holds equal appeal across lines of gender and aptitude. While the sweet spot is the 3.5, 4.0, and 4.5 camps, it's not like these concepts are lost on 3.0 players, nor is it inconceivable that 5.0s and 5.5s can't be reminded of things they take for granted.

I have played as much, if not more, mixed doubles than men's doubles. I have all girls in my household. I have two sisters. My mother was the stronger personality in the house while growing up. Even our dog is a girl. I know the women's game practically as well as I know my own game. But, news flash, I'm not actually a woman. If you think there is a female point of view that I am completely missing, write to me at rick@killer Doubles.net, and I'll make sure it is represented in our next edition, which, thanks to the miracle of self-publishing, might be sooner than you think.

On that note, I have made every effort to be even-handed in the often-grammatically-suspect pursuit of proper use of pronouns. I alternate between him and her when it doesn't matter, try to point out the times when it does matter, and stop short of making you dizzy with a bunch of "his or her" constructions. Let me know how I did on that score, too.



So let's get started. Just about every point of view that I will share, each stratagem or tactic offered, all of the philosophy espoused can be traced back to three axioms that I have developed in my 40 years of playing competitively:

1. Good doubles teams win by controlling the middle of the court.
2. When in doubt, hit the ball crosscourt.
3. Confidence does not come from a belief that you can hit any shot, but from knowing which shots you really can hit.

If you already place into practice those three principles, you can stop reading right now. If you would like to explore these axioms with more depth, this is the right read for you.