

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Tennis

for
dummies[®]
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Learn how to
play tennis at any age

Understand the rules and
scoring system

Find tips and strategies to
improve your game

Patrick McEnroe

ESPN tennis commentator, former
pro player, and Davis Cup Captain

with Jon Levey

Tennis

**for
dummies®**
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2nd Edition

by Patrick McEnroe with Jon Levey

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dummies[®]
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Tennis For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

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Published simultaneously in Canada

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2025930730

ISBN 978-1-394-25466-8 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-394-25468-2 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-394-25467-5 (ebk)

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Introduction

I was about 3 years old when I first picked up a tennis racquet. More than 55 years later, I still haven't let go. This incredible game had an amazing impact on me from the first day: I fell for it hook, line, and sinker. Or better yet game, set, and match.

Before I could ride a two-wheeler, I was hitting tennis balls against a wall, playing make-believe matches with Rod Laver and Ken Rosewall, who were two of tennis's greatest stars at the time. I rode my tricycle to get to the tennis club.

Realizing my childhood dreams, I eventually worked my way up and played in the big leagues of tennis. Even after all these years in the sport, I still want to get out and hit some balls every day. Or almost every day — I'm approaching 60 after all.

You may wonder what keeps me interested in this sport, so interested that I've spent my life with it. More than anything, the thrill of hitting the perfect stroke, of having that day when it all just "clicks," has kept the sport interesting and challenging for me every day I've played it.

I hope that tennis has the same effect on you. No matter where you stand on the tennis ladder in terms of ability and skill, there are always new challenges and new mysteries to solve. That's why tennis is in my blood. With the help of this book, I hope it will get into yours, too.

About This Book

In tennis, everything is in motion, most of the time. The ball. Your opponent. You. Your state of confidence. Your grasp on a match. The already challenging job of developing a consistent stroke is made more difficult by the fact that you have to use that stroke while on the run, out of position, slipping, sliding, changing direction, and even falling or diving. The only thing you won't have to do is hit that stroke with your eyes closed.

With everything happening so quickly on the court, you need a book like *Tennis For Dummies* to put the action in slow motion. In fact one of my favorite teaching

techniques with players of all levels and ages is to help them learn how to slow down the swing. I think this really helps players understand how to control their racquet and, thus, better control their shots. How else can you grasp the fundamentals of the game? After you read this book and master the basics of your strokes, feel free to close your eyes and swing away.

Whatever your level of play, you'll find what you need and want to know in this book. For the beginner, I cover the basics of the sport, showing you step-by-step how to play the fundamental shots. For the club player looking for a way to beat that opponent who always has your number, I include some secrets to help you be a more winning player.

If you're a big fan of the pro game, I give you the skinny on the professional tennis tours. I tell you what to look for if you attend a real live pro event and how to maximize that ticket price. If you're stuck at home, I tell you what to look for when you watch on a screen. It's all here.

I grew up in a house full of left-handed people, so I know I'm going to get ribbed for this: I show you everything in this book from the perspective of a right-handed player. If you're a lefty, please just substitute the word *left* for *right* in the appropriate spots in the text.

Finally, within this book, you may note that some web addresses break across two lines of text. If you're reading this book in print and you want to visit one of these web pages, simply key in the web address exactly as it's noted in the text, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist. If you're reading this as an e-book, you've got it easy — just click the web address to be taken directly to the web page.

Foolish Assumptions

You probably picked up this book for one of the following reasons:

- » **You're an absolute beginner and you want a straightforward and fun guide to learn everything you need to know about tennis.** We all have to start somewhere, and you've picked a great resource.
- » **You've dabbled in tennis in the past and now you want to get back in the game, but you need a refresher.** Not only will this book help you brush up on all your strokes, but you'll learn about all the changes in the sport since you last played.

» You're a coach or avid player and you want to add to your tennis book collection. Even if you already have a solid foundation in the game, there's bound to be useful nuggets in this update to increase your knowledge and understanding of the sport.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, I use icons in the margin to grab your attention. Here's a guide to what the icons mean:



MAC SAYS

This icon marks the stories and insights I've picked up during my years in tennis.



TIP

The Tip icon makes your life as a player or a spectator easier and more rewarding.



REMEMBER

This stuff is so important that I may repeat it a few times. I hope you wake up at night chanting this stuff.



WARNING

Watch out for the information next to this icon — if you don't, you could end up hurting yourself or really flubbing up your shot.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

When I get into the weeds on a subject, I mark it with the Technical Stuff icon. You can skip anything marked with this icon if you're short on time.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the information in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at Dummies.com. Check out this book's Cheat Sheet for a diagram of the singles court, tips on how to play a tiebreaker, and essential tennis terms to know. Just go to www.dummies.com and type **Tennis For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

You don't have to read this book from cover to cover, taking care not to miss a single syllable. Of course, I will be very flattered if you do. But if you want to get in and out of the book quickly, you can pick it up, turn to any section that interests you, and start reading (kind of like skipping the meal and going straight to dessert). The great thing about this book is that you can pick it up anytime. You can read it and find out what you want to know about your game, even if you're 20 miles from the nearest tennis court.

If you're a complete beginner, I do advise you, however, to stop by Part 1, which covers some really fundamental concepts regarding the game. If you're looking for help with particular shots, you should probably start in Part 2.

No matter where you start reading, keep your tennis racquet handy as you read — that way, you can play-test my advice as you go along. Think of this book as your guide to developing a lifelong passion for a great sport.

1

Getting Started with Tennis

IN THIS PART . . .

I start you out nice and easy in this part of the book, giving you a firm foundation for exploring the rest of the game. You can read about the basic goals of the game, the structure of the court, all the equipment you need to make it happen, plus all the rules and manners you need to know to play the game like a pro.

- » Finding out why tennis is the greatest game of all time (okay, I'm biased)
- » Getting the basic gist of the game

Chapter 1

What Is Tennis?

So, you want to play tennis. Well, you've made a great choice! And I don't say that just because I made the same choice when I was about 3 years old. Tennis can catch and hold you for life, so be warned! If you pick up a racquet to play tennis, you may never want to put it down.

In this chapter, I touch briefly on all the aspects of tennis that make it such a wonderful game (in case you need a little more convincing). I also tell you the fundamental principles behind the game.

Tennis: The Sport for a Lifetime

Many years ago, the United States Tennis Association (USTA) ran an ad campaign promoting tennis as “The Sport for a Lifetime.” This slogan wasn't just a catchy phrase thought up by some advertising genius — tennis really is a game that you can enjoy long-term, both as a player and as a spectator.



MAC SAYS

I sat down and made up a quick list to show you why I believe that tennis can be the sport of a lifetime, for almost everyone:

- » **You can play tennis, even competitively, at any age.** If time and work haven't killed your inner weekend warrior, you can compete in organized

tennis tournaments and league matches at virtually any age, at almost any skill level.

» **You don't need to find 17 other people to play a game.** Unlike a sport such as baseball or softball, you need only one other person to play tennis (and if just want some practice, you can play by yourself, hitting against a wall). Of course, if you do have 17 other people who want to play tennis with you, then great — you can get a great tournament going. But you may need a few more balls!

» **You don't need a whole bank full of money to play tennis.** Tennis often gets labeled as an elitest sport. This truly rankles me because it doesn't have to be. Sure, for professionals and top amateurs, tennis can be very costly, but at the recreational level, it's a much different proposition. If you want, you can spend all day at the public courts without spending a nickel on anything other than some sunblock.

Because tennis can be a cheap game to get into, people from all kinds of backgrounds can get interested in (and get really good at) the game. Tennis isn't just a game for people who can afford to pay \$100 a pop for lessons. In fact, some of the greatest players in history, such as Andre Agassi and the Williams sisters, had pretty humble beginnings.

» **Tennis brings people together.** No, I'm not getting all sentimental on you — in tennis, people of different ages and genders can match up well as partners. For example, you can find yourself in a spirited mixed-doubles game along with your spouse, your grandson, and your daughter-in-law. The only thing you may have to worry about is initiating a family feud.

» **Playing tennis well gives you a sense of accomplishment.** Tennis is a skill-intensive sport. Like playing a musical instrument or learning a new language, playing tennis requires dedication to keep improving — which is what makes it so awesome. When you're good at it, it's very satisfying.

» **Tennis is a great way to keep fit.** Tennis has a high fitness rating, and you can dial in the degree of workout you want.

Getting the Point: Singles, Doubles, and Winning at Both

You can play tennis in one of two formats: singles or doubles. Singles involves two players, one on each side of the net, playing against each other. Doubles is just what the name implies — you've got four people on the court with two people playing as a team against another two-person team.

Singles is a more physically demanding game than doubles, for two reasons:

- » You get the intensity of one-on-one competition.
- » You have more court to cover all by yourself.

Regardless of whether you play singles or doubles, your goal is always the same: to win points. A point begins with a serve (see Chapter 11), which puts the ball into play. The player who keeps the ball in play the longest wins the point. How do you keep the ball in play? Read on, Grasshopper.

Racquet, balls, and an opponent

You don't need much to play tennis, but there are a few essentials. First is a racquet. Racquets come in many different varieties, but all share some basic features (see Chapter 3). Finding one that suits you makes the game more fun and easier to learn. But the racquet won't do you any good unless you've got something to hit. That's where having some tennis balls — preferably fresh ones — comes in. They're sold all over, and you'll want to keep plenty around so you're never caught without them. The final thing you need is a worthwhile playing partner of a similar ability level. You could just practice against a wall (see Chapter 15), but you'll never win bragging rights.

Clearing the net

The biggest obstacle that you face on the tennis court is the net that divides the court into two sides — your side and your opponent's side. The first thing you need to do, no matter how goofy you may look doing it, is to make sure that any ball you hit makes it back over the net. If the ball doesn't clear the net, the point is over. You've lost it.



MAC SAYS

When we first started dating, my wife, Melissa, didn't know much about tennis. Once during a close, important match, she called out between points, "Come on, Pat! Just get the ball over the net!" I looked at her like "Gee, thanks, honey!" But there it is — the fundamental truth about tennis.

Officially, the net must be 36 inches tall at the center strap. (See Chapter 2 for all the details on net and court measurements.) But even though 36 inches may not seem very high, I assure you that sometimes that darned net looks as tall as the Great Wall of China.

Keeping the ball inside the lines

Tennis is basically a game of controlled power. Ideally, you hit the ball pretty hard and pretty far, but it must always land inside the lines (or court boundaries) to remain in play. If you hit a ball and it first bounces outside the lines that define the singles or doubles court (see Chapter 2), you've lost the point.

One bounce only, please

Tennis would be a snoozer if all you had to do was clear the net and keep the ball inside the lines. The real degree of difficulty comes from this little kink: The ball can bounce only once on your side before you hit it. Of course, if you're standing at the right place at the right time, you don't have to let the ball bounce at all before you hit it. But more than one bounce, and you've lost the point.

Causing the ball to bounce twice on your opponent's side wins you the point outright, which is called a *winner*. Winners are by far the most satisfying way to win a point. When I played, often my preference was to keep the ball in play until my opponent missed a shot, which is called an *unforced error*. Whether you smack a winner or your opponent makes a mistake, the points count the same. Cherish them for all they're worth!

Scoring basics

The winner of a tennis match is almost always the player who wins more points. You win points when you hit winners or your opponent makes errors (for example, they hit the ball into the net or beyond the lines). You lose points because of your opponent's winners and your errors.

In some cases, the winner of a match may have won just one single, solitary point more than their opponent. For example, when Pete Sampras and Goran Ivanišević met in the semifinals of Wimbledon in 1995, Sampras won with a grand total of 146 points to Ivanišević's 145 points. It's even possible for a player to lose more points than their opponent and still win the match! At other times, the victor may have won dozens more points than the loser. That's the difference between a blowout and a nail-biter.

- » Walking around the dimensions of the court
- » Looking at the different court surfaces

Chapter 2

Meet Me on the Court

People make tennis courts out of all kinds of materials — only the dimensions of the playing surface stay the same from court to court. In this chapter, I show you around the court and explain all about the various types of courts you may encounter. I also explain how the different court surfaces can impact your game.

Court Dimensions

The tennis court, which you can see in Figure 2-1, is a rectangle measuring 78 feet long and 27 feet wide for singles and 36 feet wide for doubles. The *doubles alleys* (on either side of the singles court) account for the extra width of the doubles court. (See Chapter 5 for more information about playing doubles.)

Net height

The court is divided into two equal halves by the net, which is anchored to the net posts just outside the boundary lines that make up the court. The net is usually made of a soft, mesh material, and it customarily has an adjustment strap in the center; you use the adjustment strap to achieve regulation net height.

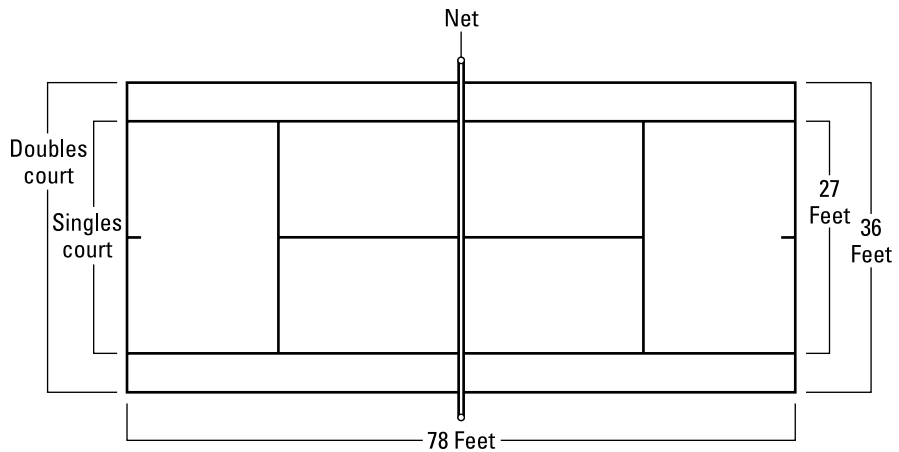


FIGURE 2-1:
The stock-in-trade
of singles and
doubles players.

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TIP

The net is supposed to be 36 inches high at the center strap and 42 inches high at either side of the court. Unfortunately, nets with center straps at some public courts are about as rare as basketball rims with nets! Not to worry. You don't really need a center strap. Just take a tape measure and check the center height of the net. If it's below 36 inches, raise the net by using the crank on one of the net posts. If it's above 36 inches, turn the crank to lower the net. Don't worry about the height at the sides. When the net is 36 inches high at the center, you'll be fine. All that said, there's no need to get crazy about the net height. As long as it looks reasonably close, play ball.

NO PLAYING IN THE ALLEY

Occasionally, you may see (or even play on) a *dedicated singles court*, a court without doubles alleys. Although most singles games are played on a court also designed for doubles, you can't play doubles on a dedicated singles court, which is why so few of them exist. You may also come across some courts that have *singles sticks* (wooden sticks used to raise the net height to the 42-inch regulation on the singles sidelines on courts with a doubles alley). Singles sticks essentially serve as net posts, but these are for real sticklers and aren't required to play.