

## Essential Tennis Podcast #137

Welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast. If you love tennis and want to improve your game, this podcast is for you.

Whether it's technique, strategy, equipment or the mental game, tennis professional Ian Westermann is here to make you a better player.

And now, here's Ian!

Ian: Hi and welcome to the Essential Tennis Podcast. Your place for free expert tennis instruction, that can truly help you improve your game.

Today's episode of the essential tennis podcast is brought to you by TennisTours.com and TennisExpress.com.

Thank you very much for joining me on today's show. I appreciate having you as a listener no matter how you might have picked up today's podcast, I recommend by the way that you guys use iTunes-- it's definitely the easiest way. iTunes is a free download from Apple and you can subscribe to the podcast in the iTunes store for free. And each week you will automatically download each new show.

So it's nice and convenient and in my opinion, the best way to get the show every week.

This week I've got a special guest on and I'm going to be talking about lifting weights and fitness for tennis. Which I think is a great topic for all of you guys to help improve your game and take yourselves to the next level.

So let's go ahead and get right to it-- sit back, relax and get ready for some great tennis instruction. [music] [music]

My guest today on the Essential Tennis podcast is Steve Beck. He is the owner of PowerOfFit.com which is a great website all about motivation and working out and getting in better shape. He also has a podcast, an audio podcast, which is on iTunes and it is called PowerOfFitness. The PowerOfFitness podcast.

Steve, thank you very much for spending some time with me and welcome to the show.

Steve: Thanks Ian. My pleasure to be here.

Ian: So you've been really active on the forums on EssentialTennis.com and you write some great fitness blog articles that we post on the fitness blog on essentialtennis.com. And you've come to a couple of clinics so you are super involved and I really appreciate that Steve and I'm really happy to have you here on the show to talk about tennis specific fitness topics.

First of all, tell us a little bit about your background as a fitness person and tell us a little bit about your website and your podcast too.

Steve: Sure Ian. Thanks for the opportunity. I started getting into weight training about 17 years ago. And I've been through a lot of phases and a lot of changes in my programme and I've seen a lot of fads and a lot of things come and go.

And really in the past couple of years, I've really just come to enjoy it a whole lot and want to share that knowledge and share things that I've accumulated. And obviously I'm still learning-- I'm currently studying for my personal training certification through the American College of Sports Medicine.

So I'm excited about getting certified and being able to really do some of the things that I love to do recreationally-- be able to help people do that in a professional basis as well.

Ian: Cool.

Steve: And over the past year or so, in getting involved with getting more active with my tennis and staying active with my fitness. You've obviously given me a great outlet to share some things and to help people get into a better tennis shape and a better shape in general.

And at the start of the podcast, the beginning or a couple months ago towards the beginning of the year, and I'm still working on that and really the website is in its infant stages-- it's just an informational blog at this point. A plan on the future incorporating more fitness based routines and nutrition into it. And again, just being able to help people, to give people information and help them see the need to get into better shape.

Ian: Great stuff. What prompted me to get Steve as a guest today was a question from a listener and you might remember this listener from last week's show-- his name is Vedron in Croatia and he has got a question about fitness specifically-- actually three individual questions that are all very closely related.

Steve and I are going to talk about those questions and if we have time, we are going to get to a couple from the forums as well.

So let's go ahead and read Vedron's question. And it goes like this, "My question is about physical training, which I find pretty important even for a recreational player as myself. The thing that confuses me, is how I should approach weight lifting training. Most of the training coaching tips that I Google'd say a tennis player should lift smaller weights and more repetitions during the tennis season and probably bigger weights with less reps in the off season. Is that true?"

He has two other questions which I'll read, but we'll answer these individually. Secondly he says, "How many days in a week should I lift during my tennis season?"

And lastly, "What muscle groups should I focus on and with what exercises?"

So Vedron, thanks very much for your great questions. First of all, I've had a couple different guests on and I've definitely talked about fitness before but I don't think that I've ever focused on weight lifting specifically on the podcast before.

So I'm looking forward to talking about this. I know that it's a topic-- something that I've used in the past to really help my game. Certainly when I was still playing full time-- it's not as important for me now, but hopefully we'll talk about injury prevention a little bit later as well. That's how it effects me now as a teacher.

So Steve, let's get to his first question. And he was talking about lifting during season versus off season and he read that it was suggested that he should be using smaller weights and more reps during season and bigger weights and less reps in the off season.

So his first question is, is that true for the tennis player?

Steve: Absolutely not. But I'll say that with an asterisk on the end.

The first thing before you approach any kind of weight lifting or training program, is you want to involve a professional. And obviously I know a lot but I'm not there with Vedron and I don't know his physiology. I don't know of any health risks that he has.

And the same when I give information to anybody online and removed from it, then personally, is you want to seek out a professional and make sure that you don't have any underlying symptoms and that just doesn't mean any kind of disease or anything obvious.

It could be some physiological symptoms. If you have shoulder strain or a tear or an underlying injury. Those things are going to definitely come into play. And so just to kind of get that exclaimer out of the way first. And I think that's smart for anyone when they are looking to improve their fitness level by going into the gym and lifting weights and doing some serious training-- or any kind of training. Any time you go in and lift weights, it's going to be a serious strain on the body so you need to be aware of some factors before you enter into any kind of program-- and get some professional guidance.

So I hope that makes sense.

Ian: Let me interject here for a second Steve. What about-- I know that a lot of my listeners don't want to pay what it costs in where ever they happen to live for professional tennis instruction and of course professional training or meeting with a trainer to work out can be very expensive as well.

What are you suggesting here? Do you think my listeners need to be with a trainer every time they work

out? Or maybe just once to see where they are?

What are your thoughts on that?

Steve: And that's a great question Ian. A lot of times if you are a member of a gym or if you just joined some place, they'll give you a couple of sessions with a personal trainer who will give you an assessment and kind of see where you're at and find out your baseline so they can measure some results.

So that's a lower cost way to get an assessment. Also, if you have any obvious concerns, pain or if you are maybe having a weight issue...

Obviously you want to consult your physician too and they can give you a green light.

Ian: Great.

Steve: As so far as working with a trainer, every time you go to the gym, fortunately we live in the information era and obviously you're on the cutting edge of providing great tennis instruction-- great virtual tennis instruction. And there is equally some great resources out there on the internet and in print and other media where you can get great exercise and fitness instruction too.

Hopefully I'm able to provide some of that and there is definitely a ton of resources out there-- both online and in print where you can go and get your workout plan together before you even set foot in a gym-- which I think is also hugely important. You want to, you know beginning with the end in mind, so look at what kind of fitness [inaudible] you have.

So no, you don't need someone standing over and barking at you that you need to give them 10 more push ups. Every time you go into the gym. But you just want to arm yourself with information and I think that's good advice for pretty much anything you are going to take seriously.

Ian: Before we keep going, I want to remind my listeners about the official sponsor of the Essential Tennis Podcast-- and that is [tennistours.com](http://tennistours.com).

You guys can go there to find tickets, travel packages, and accommodations to professional tennis events, both WTA and ATP-- all over the world. So if you guys are making plans for next year for the grand slams, definitely check them out. They carry tickets for all four of the grand slams along with really cool packages while you are there at whatever city you might be visiting.

So go check them out and when you check them out, use the promotional code essential which will not only give you a discount, but also show them that you are listener of the podcast and you appreciate their support of the show.

Alright now let's go ahead to exactly why you disagree with his premise of less weight and more reps during the on season and more weights and less reps during the off season.

Steve: Absolutely. The think is, you're not going to find any serious strength coach today, working for any professional team or any professional athlete. And especially with tennis players, it now seems to be the trend in the last couple of years with tennis players to start pumping iron and lifting weights and working out in the weight room.

I don't think that you could find a strength coach or a conditioning coach anywhere that is going to say a weaker athlete is a better performer. And it's just common sense. You see guys-- professional football players-- they are in the weight room pretty much year round. Athletes -- Olympic athletes -- whether they are runners or whether they are gymnasts or you know, shot putters or whatever the case may be.

They are always trying to do things to help them to get stronger. By lifting lighter weights, for more reps, you are not going to develop more strength. It's just a physiological fact.

Maybe you're going to develop more muscle endurance, but you're not going to develop more strength and more power and thereby increase your performance on the tennis court or on the basketball court or whatever sport it is that you are going out to do.

Ian: Let me ask you about that-- you mentioned that more weight would be for actual strength whereas weight and more reps would be for more endurance.

So in your opinion speaking to tennis players specifically, are you saying then that in general as tennis players, even recreational players, we need more strength versus muscle endurance?

Steve: Well, you've got to look at it this way. If you are looking at fitness holistically, as a total package, you've got an aspect of tennis which is cardio vascular endurance which takes a different set of exercises to excel and train your body at-- running, sprinting and things like that.

And then you've got on the other side, the enrobic portion which is the lifting of weights and the increasing of muscle mass and the stimulation of different types of different types of muscle fibers. The idea being that if you want to improve your performance, you want to be working at both of those things and the strength and weight training is going to benefit you in areas that the cardio vascular can't.

Most of the time, in tennis and I think you'll agree with me on this, what is the average rally in pro tennis or recreational tennis? I know it's under 10 shots, right?

Ian: Recreationally, I don't know.. I'm totally making up numbers here, but professionally I would guess in singles on the men's side, we're probably talking 3 shots per point I would guess is probably average.

And recreational players are probably around the same-- 2, 3 or maybe 4 at the high point for a high quality match.

Steve: And I'm sure that you see a lot more rec tennis. And even higher level rec tennis, 4.0 or 5.0 level, you aren't playing long protracted points.

Ian: No.

Steve: So the need for muscle endurance in that performance arena, is not going to be as great as the need for long term endurance performance. [inaudible] hour or two at a time. Or if you maybe have a tournament or something like that-- those are different considerations to train like a long distance runner or like you are going to train for a marathon and be successful playing tennis doesn't make any sense.

Does that help out?

Ian: Absolutely. I think people a lot of times are surprised when I tell them that tennis is not an aerobic sport-- that it's an anerobic sport. It's quick bursts. Where you want to be powerful and you want to be as strong as possible and then you rest. And the resting period is a lot longer than the actual performance period.

I guess that would make sense as far as what you're talking about where tennis players need to focus more on the higher weights and less reps.

In general, should tennis players be doing both Steve? Should we be doing both workouts that have less weight and higher reps and workouts with more weight and lower reps? Is there some kind of balance there we should be doing? Or is it one or another?

Steve: Well I think one is going to depend on your physical condition and starting out-- and obviously we are talking about people that are going to be all over the board here. We are talking about people who are going to be on the weaker or stronger end of the scale. We're talking about different body types. Guys that are [inaudible] and thinner and guys that are on the other side-- the [inaudible] that we've talked about in the past on the fitness blog.

That being said, think about it this way, the stronger your body denotes the more or less, the more muscle fibers that you have and the more you are able to perform and apply kind of denotes how you are able to actively recruit the muscle fibers that you have.

And lifting lighter weights recruits less muscle fibers than lifting heavier weights. And also you've got the idea of a term called hyperprothy-- opposite of atrophy-- which is getting smaller.

If you've ever had a broken arm or a body parts that has been immobilized for a while, you've seen atrophy. I had a broken arm, and it looked like my grand mother after 13 weeks and I had to build it back up.

And on the other end of the scale is hypertrophy where you are building muscle and you are adding on muscle fibers and I think one of the myths today is well I don't want to get big and bulky because that is

going to slow me down.

But if you look like a guy like Michael Vick or an NFL linebacker who is huge and muscular, those guys are sick fast. And they are fast and are able to perform like that because they've done weight training in the gym. They've added muscle and they've worked on recruiting fast and slow twitch muscle fibers to increase their performance.

Ian: So let's go ahead and wrap up his first question. In review then, so it's definitely a misnomer that you should be splitting up his workout between off season and on season.

Just to wrap things up, and I know that you said before, clearly we all have different body types and different strengths and weaknesses when it comes to our physicality and how our body is made up and how it's been trained.

Is it possible to have a rule of thumb when it comes to working out as a tennis player? Or is it always just going to depend on a case by case basis?

Steve: I think the rule of thumb is, and not just related to tennis but any other sport, you want to get stronger and faster. And we do that by lifting more weight and challenging our body.

Now that's not to say that their aren't training cycles that we are going to go through that will have us lifting some lighter weights, and that maybe some higher repetitions. But I think as a rule over all, in order to build strength and build performance, you're going to have to keep continually challenging yourself. And you do that by lifting heavy weights.

Ian: Let's go ahead and move on to his second question now and that is, how many days a week should he be lifting during his tennis season-- while he is actually in season as a tennis player.

Steve: Again, this is going to depend on how often he's playing tennis. I don't know if he's playing 3-4 hours per day or is at 5 days a week. In that case, you're going to want to scale the lifting back some in order to not wear yourself out and totally be dead on the tennis court.

So it's going to depend on how much his tennis demands are going to be incorporated into his total training program.

But I think as a general thumb, you can easily do 3-4 days a week and some moderate heavy strength training. And as long as you are rotating body parts and allowing 24-48 hours between exercising the same body part and allowing that muscle tissue to heal from the training-- you are going to be OK.

Let's give a specific example. I'm going to hopefully try to nail right in the middle of my demographic here-- so let's say for your recreational player who is really taking their game seriously, but maybe they are a mom or a dad and they've got a full time job and they don't have time to be a full time tennis player.

So let's say a rec player who is doing 2-3 times a week on the court playing one or two hours at a time-- how often should that type of player be looking to lift weights, to challenge their body, and get stronger and faster?

Steve: As much as possible. And I know that's going to sound like a broken record, but most people aren't going to put themselves in such duress and stress with their training that they are going to, I think, take away from any other kind of recreation or sport that they are doing.

Again, you've got to keep in mind physical limitations and certain personal factors like that. 3-4 times out of the week, if you're in the gym from anywhere from 45 minutes to 1.5 hours, I think that's going to be perfectly fine.

Ian: Before we get to his last question, just a quick note about the second sponsor of the podcast-- that is [tennisexpress.com](http://tennisexpress.com) where you guys can go to get all of your gear and equipment needs fulfilled. They have everything at great prices. Free shipping over \$75 and they are also a sponsor of the podcast which I really appreciate.

So go check them out and when you do make a purchase from them, please use the promotional code essential which will tell them that I sent you. It's a great way to kind of give back and thank them for being a sponsor of the essential tennis podcast.

Alright, now let's go ahead and move on to Vedron's last question. This could be a big one, so feel free to spend as much time as you feel is necessary here Steve to educate my listeners about what they should be doing as tennis players specifically.

And his final question was, "What muscle groups should I focus on and with what exercises?"

Steve: That's an easy one-- all of them. When I say that, let me just kind of focus in on that for a minute, you want to be doing multi joint exercises and you don't want to be focusing on things like "I just want to get big huge biceps and do heavy bicep curls." Obviously, that's not going to help your tennis performance.

But what is going to help your tennis performance -- and I think we've talked about this in the past in some blog articles -- is developing the kinetic chain. And that's kind of exonerated in the service motion, right? You start with the legs, the energy travels from the lower part of the legs up through to the upper body and shoulders and to the arm and out through the hand and it ultimately ends up in the tennis racket and ends up hitting the ball, right?

So in order to be more effective in that, you have to do exercises that in my opinion focus on working on the kinetic chain.

Now exercises like [inaudible] and dead lifts and even things like kettle bell swings and exercises like that, are going to be great at developing that.

Now the advantage you get is you are working multiple muscle groups. And I think as tennis players, I don't think you'll see any tennis player out there that you'll mistake for a body builder-- I can't think of any off the top of my head. Definitely not [inaudible] or I remember Peter [inaudible] how skinny he was.

Ian: What about Rafa? For a tennis player, he's pretty built. He doesn't literally look like a body builder but he's pretty cut, right?

Steve: Rafa is a tremendous athlete. But look where he's placed the emphasis-- he's placed the emphasis on developing his body. I guarantee you that Rafa doesn't go in and do a bench press with 40 lbs for 50 reps. I can guarantee you the guy is pumping some serious iron. You can look at him and tell.

And how does that affect his tennis? He's bigger, he's stronger, he's faster. He's able to heal faster. He's able to stay out there on the court longer. He's able to blister the crap out of the ball when he hits it which is what we all want to do, face it.

So, I guarantee you he hasn't spent time just working on his biceps or just working on his quads doing heavy squats.

Ian: I dunno.. he's got some pretty nice guns.

Steve: He does, but that can come as a result of working and doing those [inaudible] . Take a bench press as an example, you think that just targets the chest. Well, that targets muscles in the chest. It targets the shoulder muscles. It targets the tricep muscles on the back of the arm. It targets the trapezius muscles on the back to some degree. And so you are getting a ton of bang for the buck sort to speak.

When you go to do a dead lift, you are getting the calves, the quadriceps, the lower back, the [inaudible] . It's almost a total body workout. And you go in and do three sets of [inaudible] with some serious weight, and you are going to be decked. You are not going to want to do a whole bunch else for the rest of your work out period because it's incorporating some cardio into the exercise, it's hitting a bunch of muscle groups, it's forcing those muscle groups to work together to produce the desired effect-- to lift the weight from point A to point B.

So it's getting, it's taking a kind of holistic approach. I don't advocate doing bicep curls or tricep extensions and smaller things. You can do that as a supplement to your main lifting which is are going to be the [inaudible] exercises. The dead lift, squats, some sort of variance of those olympic lifting exercises.

Ian: Let's try to get to one question here from the forums. And then to wrap things up, I have got a follow up question for myself that I think a lot of my listeners are probably thinking to themselves. People will have to write back and tell me but I think it's a pretty high likelihood.

Let's answer a question from Toshi in Maryland. He wrote and said, "I would love to hear a good

preventative exercise routine and I think this is definitely something people want to hear about. Especially, knees, elbow, wrist and legs. Of course as tennis players and recreational tennis players, you don't always have the time to work out a lot to keep our bodies really fit and really strong to be able to avoid those kind of typical tennis injuries-- tennis elbow and shoulder problems. Maybe your knee or joint problems in the legs.

Can you give us some general pointers for trying to prevent those types of pretty typical tennis injuries?

Steve: Sure thing Ian. It's a pretty simple answer. I don't know what specific injuries that Toshi is talking about, so obviously I want to be giving some very general advise here because I don't want to give him anything that is going to exasperate an existing condition that he may have.

As a general rule, having a stronger more fit-- and again, stronger and more muscular body, you don't have to be Mr. Olimpiad. But again, going out and training-- again, going back to those multi-joint exercises -- if you look at it this way, what are muscles attached too? They are attached to tendons right? So the tendons have their basis in and around the joints. So most of the weaknesses you see are going to come from those weaker areas of the joints, taking over and compensating for weakness in muscles.

And so strengthening the muscles that are wrapping around and insulating your bones and joints so to speak, is going to be a great way to prevent injury. And I know that sounds kind of juvenile and kind of simple at the base of it, but if you look at it, look at guys like Roger Federer. He has a ton of off court training-- he's not hugely muscular, but I bet if you stood beside him, he's going to have wider shoulders than you or me put together. And he's going to be stronger than a large percentage-- I'd say 99% of your listener base. And why is he like that? Well he's like that because he's spent a ton of time in the gym. He's as strong as an ox. And look at his injury history-- relatively slim or none.

And you look at a guy like Rafa and obviously he is probably one of the strongest guys on the tennis court. And he's had some knee injuries-- some tendentious injuries. But again, one of the reasons he's been able to overcome that and come back and win three major tournaments this year, is because he probably spends a ton of time in the gym. He spends a ton of time strength training, flexibility training and he just puts in the work off the court that enables him to do what he does on the court.

Ian: OK. I've got one more question for you and I'm really confident that this is something that a lot of people have been thinking and that is, that the types of exercises that you've really hit the hardest and it sounds like you are really more excited about and think are the best for people to do as tennis players kind of involve-- I believe you use the phrase multi-joint exercises? Dead lifts, bench presses are some of the exercises that you've been advocating.

I know that a lot of my listeners are hearing you suggest that and are already getting intimidated about going to their local gym or wherever that they like to work out. You know, your average tennis player is not like you were saying before, is not a body builder looking type person.

Speaking from experience, I'm 6'0 and in college I weighed like 140 or 145. And I remember going into the University athlete weight room and having the hockey team and the football team there and I'm walking around and I'm doing stuff like what you're talking about. I was doing free squats and bench press and all kind of stuff like that.

You are using the bigger weights and I definitely felt out of place. What do you have to tell my audience who is probably not built like a football player or a hockey player and is a little intimidated by going to the gym to do these multi joint type exercises.

Steve: Sure. There are two main things-- knowledge is power and knowledge is key. There are some great resources online that will show you the right way to do these things and for one, injury prevention, and two just so you are using proper form so you get the most out of the exercise.

Guys like Eric Cressing is a great resource -- [inaudible] is a certified strength and conditioning specialist and he has tons of articles and tons of videos out there that show you the right way to do stuff. And he's linked up with a lot of sites-- there are guys like [inaudible] and [inaudible] who are some leading strength coaches in the industry today.

So there is no excuse for you to not know how to do something. Everbody probably has an internet connection. It's not go to the library and read a book on strength training and Olympic lifting and learn how to do it right. That will allay a lot of the fears and a lot of intimidation that you may have by just doing the exercise. Because you are going to be worrying about people looking at you [inaudible]

And the second thing is, who really cares? You are not there to please anybody else. You are not there to go up against the 300lb guy in the corner of the room who has been lifting weights since he was in diapers.

So who really cares? You are there for you, right? Think about it this way. When you go out on the tennis court, you get intimidated by guys three courts over who are 5.0 players and are hitting at a great level. And you are worrying about what your strokes look like? Maybe sometimes, but you aren't there for that. You are there for you and you are there to improve your performance so who cares what looks you get or whatever. You are there for you.

Go into the gym, do your thing and don't worry about what people look like and what you think people are thinking. I think we intimidate ourselves out of fitness a lot of times, and especially in commercial gyms, because we worry about impressing somebody.

Well I don't have to impress anybody but me. And I'm not there for anybody else but to improve my performance. I think those are my two keys and hopefully that has been helpful to our listeners.

Ian: Good stuff Steve. Of course, anybody who has listened to the podcast for any length of time, knows that I love mental topics and confidence topics-- so I love what you are saying there.

That brings us to the end of our time together. And with that, and really kind of brings me back to the fact that I do listen to your podcast Steve and you talk about a lot of those motivational type topics. Because that's such a huge part of about why people don't work out when they do get out of shape. and so if you guys want to hear more information and more feedback like that about working out in general, definitely check out Steve's podcast. It's PowerOfFitness podcast and you can find that on iTunes or-- do you have the podcast up on your website yet Steve?

Steve: I don't have it up there. I'm looking at changing hosts for the website pretty soon so that I can make the audio downloadable to the folks who don't have iTunes or just folks that want to go to the website and listen.

So look for that hopefully in the coming month or so.

Ian: OK, so if you guys have iTunes, go search for PowerOfFitness on iTunes and check it out.

Again, Steve Beck has been my guest. He is an author, and check out his website as well which is [poweroffit.com](http://poweroffit.com).

Steve, any last words or thoughts for the audience before we wrap things up?

Steve: Just realizing what strength and conditioning can do for your tennis game-- I think it can do a lot of things. It can make you faster, it can make you a better all around athlete. It can help you with health issues and living a longer more healthy life in addition to make you a better tennis player which I'm assuming what everybody is tuning into the essential tennis podcast for.

Ian: Absolutely. Alright Steve, thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it. It's been great talking to you and hopefully we can have you back on in the future to talk about more fitness related topics-- thanks very much. We appreciate it.

Steve: Thank you Ian. I appreciate it and I look forward to talking to you again soon.

Ian: Alright. That does it for episode #137 of the Essential Tennis Podcast. Thank you very much for listening. I hope you enjoyed it. I hope that it's given you some ideas on how you can increase your strength and your fitness for being a better tennis player.

It's a great way to, as I said earlier, take your game to the next level and improve yourself which is always what this show is about.

Before I sign off, let me again say to make sure to check out iTunes if you are just going to the website and downloading the file right from [essentialtennis.com](http://essentialtennis.com), it's definitely a lot easier to subscribe to the show. You don't have to keep going back to the website and right clicking and saving the file etc. So check out iTunes. Subscribe to the show on the iTunes music store and you'll get the podcast every single week automatically.

Alright, that does it for this week. Thanks again everybody and take care. And good luck with your tennis. [music]

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