

Hitting with depth helps tennis game

By DAVID W. STEWART

How many times have you heard the sound of the instructor's voice yelling "hit the ball deep?"

And how many times have you tried to hit the ball harder and watched your ball land beyond the baseline or into the net?

After you lose a few points, you develop a complex — get timid and scared and, once again, your balls land around or short of the service line. Then your opponent moves in and pounds an easy shot for a winner.

Chances are that not one has even taken the time to explain how to learn to get depth on your shot. It is rather easy to learn, but you must practice until you feel comfortable with the shot, as comfortable as you are now hitting short.

The first part of learning depth is the proper height to lift the ball over the net. Most people aim low over the net because they think the best players aim low. That kind of thinking prevents them from achieving consistently deep shots. When you are playing from the baseline, your balls should be between four and six feet above the net. Yes — four to six feet.

A higher percentage of balls that are hit low drop into the net rather than go over. And the balls that do get over will drop short. The next time you go out on the court, draw an imaginary line higher above the net and aim for it. You will be surprised how many balls will

land closer to the baseline and stay in. A higher percentage of balls will drop in than the number going out.

YOU MUST develop a feel for hitting with depth. When the ball is on the strings you must be able to feel it. After you hit enough balls you will start to feel depth. Remember, you must feel comfortable with depth and the only way to reach that point is to practice.

Forget the power until you develop the proper feel and control. Power is only as good as the amount of control you have. Most players only think about hitting the ball hard, harder and hardest. They never learn that control is the secret to winning — not power.

The most important factor when you are learning is to be steady. Don't try to hit it hard. Don't try tricky shots. At first make your objective to get all your shots between the service line and the baseline. After you achieve this objective, place a row of balls across the court half way between the service line and baseline and practice until all your shots drop into the marked area.

Once you have achieved consistency and depth try for placement. Work on your cross court shots. Remember no power — just controlled shots. Hit every forehand to your opponent's forehand.

Set a goal of 10 cross court forehands without missing and each shot must be deep. Increase your goal in increments of 10 until you reach 50 or 100 without missing.

Oakland Hills' tough 16th revisited

(Editor's note: With the PGA championship at Oakland Hills Country Club just around the corner, the Observer & Examiner sports section would like to revisit an article of former Birmingham-Birmingham Sports Editor John Rosen, recalling the personal account of the famous 16th hole. This was the first of a series of articles in 1976, examining the toughest holes in local golf courses.

By JOHN BOZZO

Oakland Hills Country Club's famed 16th hole on the south course is the first stop on our golf tour. People are still talking about the great second shot Gary Player made there for a birdie in the 1972 Professional Golfers Association Tournament.

As assistant golf pro Dave Christensen led the way to the hole, he talked about the history of the Oakland Hills course. It was designed in 1918 by Don Ross and altered by Trent Jones in 1951 as preparation for the United States Open that same year.

There have been four U.S. Opens and one PGA tournament at Oakland Hills Country Club, with another PGA tournament in the works for 1979.

As we approached the tee of the famous hole, Christensen said that it "is not impossible, but tough for 385 yards." When I asked what makes it tough, he replied with an ominous, "You'll see."

A dog-leg to the right, there are trees blocking access to the green and a large pond which wraps along the right hand side of the green and extends into the fairway.

Most of the changes for the 1951 U.S. Open involved moving sand traps on the longer holes to a distance of about 230 yards, where a professional golfer's drive is likely to land. The traps were at a distance of 180 to 200 yards. Since then, some of the tournament traps have been removed.

A PAR FOUR, the 16th hole plays at 405 yards from the back of the tee. Members usually play from a stone marker which proclaims the distance at 385 yards.

The hole had gained some notoriety before Player's famous shot. Christensen recalls reading a book around 1989 in which Dan Jenkins picked the best 18 golf holes in the United States for Sports Illustrated magazine. Oakland Hills was picked as having the toughest 16th hole in the country.

As we approached the tee of the famous hole, Christensen said that it "is not impossible, but tough for 385 yards." When I asked what makes it tough, he replied with an ominous, "You'll see."

A dog-leg to the right, there are trees blocking access to the green and a large pond which wraps along the right hand side of the green and extends into the fairway.



"On the tee shot you have to miss the willow tree," Christensen said smiling. "You can't hit over the tree because it's so close to the tee, so you have to hit to the left with a slight fade to the right."

"A hook will put you in the rough with a long difficult shot to the green," he continued. "A slice will leave you behind the trees. Player sliced his tee shot behind the trees (during the 1972 PGA). Instead of a fade, he hit an exaggerated slice and found himself behind the Willow trees."

CHRISTENSEN HIT first and although his drive looked promising, it landed behind the willow tree, near Player's 1972 drive. He hit another shot which landed in good position, about 225 yards down the left side of the fairway.

It took three attempts before I equalled his drive, sending the ball just past his on the left side of the fairway. My second attempt was also in the territory Gary Player made famous, and the first ball was found easily a few steps away from the green.

"Usually the pin is placed on the right side of the green," Christensen said. (This forces the golfer to drive over the largest portion of the water before reaching the green.) "Fortunately the greenskeeper was in a good mood and put the pin in the left side."

"Most of the players aim their second shots at the benches, which are about 60 yards to the left of the green, and play for a five," Christensen said.

Our shots to the right were both in the rough about 115 yards to the green as the crow flies. Gary Player hit a similar shot over the trees and water to within a few feet of the pin. He birdied (Continued on page 3B)

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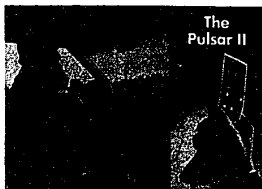
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