Becoming a better tennis player AthensTennis.com Duane Smith

I am often asked by players and parents what they can do to improve or become a better tennis player. First let me tell you there are no quick fixes or magic bullets but there are several things you can do to improve your game in the long run.

1) Work on your consistency. You will never improve or win many matches if you cannot consistently put the ball in play. See how many shots out of 10 you can get back into the court. If you currently can hit 6 out of 10 then practice until you can hit 7 out of 10, then practice some more until you can hit 8 out of 10. Hitting lots of balls and grooving that shot is the best way to improve your consistency and become a better player. Constancy first, placement, power, and spin come later.

2) Make sure you are hitting the shots correctly. While not everyone has to hit a shot exactly the same way you need to do the fundamental correctly. A coach told me once that most people say “practice makes perfect”, but what they should say is practice makes permanent. If you practice the shot incorrectly then your shot will not get much better it will get permanently bad or mediocre. You need to get coaching or a private lesson periodically to make sure you are doing things correctly. Sometime videoing yourself is a good thing. You can often see the problems that might have crept into your shots that you might not be aware of.

3) How often are your playing? If you are only hitting a few times a month then don’t expect any improvement. Most people need to hit at least twice a week to see real improvement in their games. It is not uncommon for young players or eager beginners to hit 3-7 days a week. Once that tennis bug bites you it is hard to stay off the court.

4) Are you trying to add new shots to your game? Many players let their games get stale. They keep doing and hitting the same shots and are unwilling to try new things. If you are not good at the net then work on it until you improve. If you never hit touch shots (drops shots, angles) then practice and try some. Remember Santa is not going to leave the shot under your Christmas tree and you cannot buy the shot at Walmart, you have to get out there and work to develop those new shots. The more shots and weapons you have the better.

5) Become a student of the game. I have been playing tennis seriously for more than 40 years but I still am learning new ideas and strategies about the game. The physical and mental aspects of the game can never be completely mastered unless you are Rodger Federal or Rafael Nadal. Read and watch all you can about the game. Talk to experience veteran players and coaches and pick their brains for all you can learn from them. Tennis magazines, books, websites, match videos, TV commentators, etc. are easily available and should be studied. I just watched the top college players and teams play in the NCAA tournament and was surprised to see some of them make basic position and strategic mistakes. Keep an open mind to new ideas and strategies and act like a sponge and soak up as much tennis knowledge as you can.