



# Tennis Behavioral Baggage? Off My Court!



By **Barbara Wyatt**

**C**hizu, my tennis captain, asked me to play with a new 4.5 partner, Nathan, in an upcoming match. I agreed and asked if she would arrange a practice. Silly me, I like to meet new partners and play at least one practice match before a tournament. Nathan and I met at a centrally-located tennis club for the practice.

We hit it off immediately. In warm-up rally, I discovered his pace-driven strokes, wicked topspin, ability to run like the wind, and most important, an engaging spirit. Chizu is obviously a talented captain to recruit this player! Our opponents, Liana & Matt, joined us. We did not know them, but we knew of them. Nathan and I were pitted against an experienced doubles team.

Balls whizzed over the net and back again at double-speed; at least it seemed twice as fast. The court resonated with players' comments such as "nice shot," "great rally," and "amazing get."

During one point, the ball hung sweet and juicy in the air. I lunged forward to drive a mighty down-the-line shot into the alley on the ad side. My racket had a different idea. I shanked the ball and a wimpy drop shot dripped over the net and onto the deuce side of their court. Matt said, "Never seen THAT before." Empathic compassionate smiles broke out on everyone's faces.

At the conclusion of our practice, Nathan and I walked off the court filled with pride on the balls we did keep in play and an admiration for our winning opponents. Later, I reflected there was no behavioral baggage on the court.

Have you played with players laden with

baggage? They bring suitcases full of behavioral issues, little concept of courtesy and a misunderstanding of many tennis rules.

Baggage players can dissolve a friendly practice game into a show of narcissism when they slam the ball because of their unforced error. They cry out with a venomous yell that makes even their mother cringe when their groundstroke hits the bottom of the net. They deliberately drop their racket and growl like a wounded Wookiee when they double-fault their serve.

When Liana, Matt, Nathan and I stepped inside the 78-x-36-foot rectangle outlined in white court paint, we practiced the true game of tennis with its rules and courtesies. Each player was scrupulously honest on line calls. Courtesies were granted when a stray ball interrupted a serving motion. Compliments were given on sharp-angled shots and superior serves. Empathy resonated when a player made an unforced error.

When faced with a baggage player, I reflect on the first phrase of the Serenity Prayer, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change." Because we cannot change those players, we must ignore their antics, focus on our tennis strengths and make decisions based on the rules and courtesies of the game of tennis.

Still, if you simply must try to change the behavior of a baggage player, try this: draw a big circle around this article, drop it in their tennis bag, then hot foot it out of there.

The wounded Wookiee will cry out again.

*Barbara Wyatt is a Writer, Photographer, USTA Official, and Mobile App Developer of iKnowTennis!, the tennis rules app. Her poem, Ode to Tennis, an amusing poem on the joys and frustrations when learning tennis, is available at Amazon. She can be reached by e-mail at BarbaraW@iKnowTennis.com.*



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