



Are You a **Fight** or **Flight** Player?



By Barbara Wyatt

Have you uncovered the magic elixir to an improved tennis stroke or strategy? Was it discovered on a tennis instructional video somewhere in YouTube Universe?

I discovered a new mental dominance tactic to add to my arsenal of tennis strokes, strategies and prayers while watching a video authored by Gigi Fernandez, Puerto Rican athlete of the century. She was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame with a record of 17 Grand Slam doubles titles, earned with various partners, along with two Olympic Gold Medals with Mary Joe Fernandez. The video focused on the "Physiology of Fight or Flight."

Gigi explained reactions to stress ... whether it's the sight of a large furry bear in

the forest or a competitive tennis opponent on a court, the flight reaction is to freeze, then run. The player's feet will feel like lead, accompanied by a sense of "I'm not enjoying myself; I don't want to be here." You'll want to run from the match.

To regain composure in the match, flight players need to move their feet, be aggressive and go for a hard put-away. They begin a soft chant, "Move my feet."

After losing several points in a row in doubles matches, I follow my partners' leads. My partners were always the better players; they bounce on their toes and chant, "Move the feet, move the feet." I imitate their behavior and bounce on my toes and chant with them.

Gigi showed me another way based on my physiology tendencies.

Staying light on your feet is critical for all players. But when confronted with a competitive opponent, like many others, I want

to stand and fight. My fight physiologic response is to be aggressive, go for the winner, and leap into a poach, no matter how far the stretch. Players with fight response hear inner voices that cry out, "Win the point! Now! Right now! Charge the net for an awesome put-away!" You know what happens next ... balls soar out of the court or in a wild poach, rackets connect with the ball and volley it into the bottom of the net.

The chant, "Move your feet," was not the best for my game. Fighters, like me, need to focus on the opposite mental approach as those of flighters. I need to say, "Calm down. Take a deep breath. Have patience. No, you don't have to put away that shot. Wait for the right one."

In a tennis match, players may have butterflies in the stomach, dry mouth, tight muscles, a tightness in the chest, tunnel vision; they may sweat profusely in the match; or feel a pounding heart ... these physiological responses are completely normal. Welcome them, and learn how to identify and manage them.

When I need better control, I will be chanting, "Patience, breathe, wait for the right ball, then show your controlled aggression." My partners, who always knew the correct chant for their game, will hum, "Move your feet, go for it, stay loose and poach!"

We will be in perfect harmony.

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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