

Pony Up and Bring the Balls



By **Barbara Wyatt**

Tennis is in my life and I am grateful.

It fulfills an important part of my health and social activities. Yesterday, I booked two courts and invited seven friends to play one set, no ad, then switch partners and play the second set. I admire these players and will play with or against them, any time, any day.

The balls soared back and forth intently in both sets. In the second set, a ball popped up into the sweet spot on my friend Pat's racket. She aligned her body to deliver a formidable slam against me. I curled into a fetal position and waited for the blast. She smacked that ball into my court and won the point. We laughed then threw the ball into action for the next point. I couldn't have been happier. Friends engaged in healthy competitive sport.

I made a mental note to discuss anti-Pat strategies and how to avoid being caught at the net with my coach.

But this story is not about my inability to return Pat's put-aways. It is about the pre-match ceremony that decides who brings the balls. Before we began the first set,

Sally, Sue, Ramona, and I chimed in unison, "I have balls," as though we were standing belly up to the bar and announcing, "This round is on me."

Sally popped the lid off her ball can first. Not one player in this group has the reputation of never bringing balls. I've subbed into groups with players who never bring them, causing the others on the court to roll their eyes. How do some people always manage to forget? Why do they behave that way?

In one of my weekly groups, we pre-plan the provision of balls. I bring them the first week, Bill the second, etc. In another group, we collect \$20 per player for six months of play. One player purchases the balls and brings a can each week until it is time to collect again. In other groups, we follow an unstructured pre-match ceremony where everyone chimes in, "I have balls."

Once, one player was having financial difficulties, so I placed a can of balls on his tennis bag without the others noticing. He caught me; I smiled; he smiled. He grabbed the can and announced, "I have the tennis balls."

Six months later, after I had invested a total of \$18 in our friendship, he covertly placed a can on my bag. I smiled; I under-

stood. His financial crisis was over and he was again able to participate in the unstructured ball provision.

I recently subbed into a group that includes a wealthy player who never brings balls. The others confront, tease and comment, which didn't change anything. I tried the stealth delivery again, placing a can on the player's bag, which brought a puzzled look since that player didn't know who placed the balls. The next week, guess who brought balls? A simple act had turned a withholder into a regular ball provider.

How does your group handle the need for balls? Do you collect a \$20 bill? Do you set up a schedule? Do you follow an unstructured honor system?

To those players who never bring balls and are fiscally able: you're making your fellow players uncomfortable. Just pony up and bring balls.

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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