

The Talk



By Barbara Wyatt

Travis storms the net, finger pointed ... “Stop calling my balls out. That ball was in.”

Without a pause, his partner says, “We’re calling for line judges.”

Thank heavens, I thought, There IS a player with intelligence on that side of the net.

Travis’ partner demonstrated she knows tennis rules when she requested line judges. Travis needs a reminder about courtesy on court (The Code Rule 1) and not making line calls from his side of the net (The Code Rule 5). His combative behavior made me want to leap from the bleachers and launch into “The Talk,” a lecture about line calls.

First, it’s difficult to identify a split-second ball-landing position. The ball, and maybe the player, are moving. Travis’ view from over 70-feet away and through a net, is not as accurate as two players less than 10-feet from where the ball landed.

Vic Braden, tennis aficionado with books, videos and legendary coaching techniques, published a “Tennis Ball Vision Study,” a video summary that

can be viewed on YouTube.

Second, if you believe there has been an incorrect line call, ask: “Are you sure?” If a second call in the match appears to be incorrectly identified, ask again: “Are you sure?” and mention you might call for line judges. If you believe a third ball is incorrectly called out, formally ask for line judges.

Yet at any time, you may request line judges. If the first bad call happens in a tie-break or at a critical match point, call for line judges.

Third, three bad line calls rarely result in a complete loss of the match. In a three-set tennis match, more than 100 points (ball landings) could determine the winner of the match. A set that ends at 6-0, with all six games at 40-0, means there were 24 points in that set. A match won 6-0, 6-0, all games at 40-0, means the set was won with 48 points. If the match was 6-4, 6-4, it may have required 80 points to determine a winner. Matches with tie-breaks require more than 100 points to determine a winner. Some points land on or near a white line.

Bad line calls may earn a player three points out of 100. Line judges prevent further abuses. Players need to focus

on the 97 other points: Get the first serve in, make fewer unforced errors and discuss strategies with a partner.

In Travis’ match, even with line judges on the court, he was obsessed with lines and questioned his opponents’ line calls throughout the remainder of the match. The judges corrected him more than 10 times saying, “Yes, Travis, your ball was out. Their out call is correct.”

Travis threw his anger at the judges. His gestures of intimidation and his fight-invoking finger-waving left an unpleasant taste for spectators and players.

The opponents ignored Travis’ tantrums and focused on the 97 other points: First serves in, tennis strategies and fewer unforced errors. They won and it wasn’t a surprise.

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.