



That Water Bottle Didn't Help My Game



By Barbara Wyatt

I'm grinding it out on the court. My footwork is better, I'm hitting the split-steps, my coach is helping me with my slice, and I've made some cool friends from the team.

This is a hard letter to write, but this is how I really feel. After I lost the match yesterday, you yelled at me. You threw a water bottle at me. On court ... in front of my friends.

The bottle hit me in the chest and water splashed all over the court. It didn't hurt, but I can still feel it smack against my ribs. I can still see my teammates' jaws drop.

Don't throw a bottle at me because you don't like a match score. Don't rip this let-

ter up and throw it in my face 'cause you don't like what you're reading.

I knew I lost the match. Yeah, I double-faulted more than the earlier match. But did you notice the extra spin on my serve, especially in the second game? You know, the one I won 40-0? Did you notice my backhand down-the-line shots? I was killin' it! You only counted my unforced errors. You didn't see what I was doing right or tried to do right. #CoachToldMeTo.

Tennis is not football or pro-wrestling or basketball ... you're not supposed to shout and yell from the sidelines.

Sometimes, during a point, all I think about is what my elbow is doing. Or if my right or left foot should be in front. I might be locked in a long powerful rally, then struggle to make a nearly impossible shot.

Don't groan or yell at me when the ball hits the net or the back curtain. I see it.

C'mon. Stay silent during live play. After the point is over, go ahead and cheer and clap for good shots by me and my opponent. Don't laugh at errors. Don't call balls in or out. Don't boo my opponents ... it's only a game!

Let me handle any on-court challenges. I don't need Mom or Dad to rush out to save me. I must learn how to ask for help from the official. If I forget the score or the opponent makes a really bad line call, that's why the officials are there—to keep the game fair.

Support me, win or lose. C'mon—read that again—support me, win or lose.

Don't argue with other parents in the bleachers. Oh yeah, stop bringing D'Angelo to my matches, or at least stop him from running around and yelling during a match.

And when I do something right like a great put-away after a long rally, I want to hear a loud and spirited cheer. That's when I need you the most. At the end of the game, I want to hear five words from you. If you want me to be the absolute best I can be, say: "I love watching you play."

That's would mean the world to me.

Your son,
Caleb

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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