



# What You Can Learn From the U.S. Open



By **Barbara Wyatt**

**O**n Sept. 10, 2018, two phenomena will begin. First, tennis players will rise from their living room couches, pick up rackets and return to the courts after a two-week hiatus. Second, their tennis skills may have improved—if they were watching closely.

The date marks the end of the 2018 U.S. Open, a time where recreational players will have spent two weeks of near-total immersion watching the world's best tennis players compete in person at Flushing Meadows or live on television.

When you watch people doing the right thing nearly all the time, the visual image is remembered as though it had been recorded. You've learned this since your first tennis lesson. The instructor told you where and how to hit the ball, then demonstrated a tennis stroke. You were asked to mimic all the steps, from preparation to follow-through. Over a few weeks—or months for some—tennis strokes begin to

resemble those of your instructor.

You used a social learning technique called "Observational Learning." You watched, retained, and then replicated what you saw.

Think of the questions you asked at your first lesson: How far do I pull back? Where do I put my right foot? Left foot? How do I make the ball land inside the white lines? Instinctively, you knew what to ask to improve your tennis stroke and you did it. You mastered basic strokes.

Observational Learning is available when watching U.S. Open matches. Only the questions have changed. Select a favorite pro and pose questions that could lock in dynamic improvement to your game.

Watch your pro for the answers. Where do you aim your first serve? Toward the forehand, backhand or the center of the serving box? What tactics do you use when you are down 30-40? Is it different from what you do at 40-30? Where do you aim your return-of-serve? Where do you stand to receive the first serve? Do you change your position for the second serve?

When you watch a match, your brain

thinks it is playing the match. This is why your respiration and heart rate increase when your player is caught in a tough rally. This is why you jump to your feet when they finally win a point with a killer put-away. This is why you pump your fist at a smashing cross-court angle and your head drops in despair when the next rally ball hits the tape and drops on the other side of the net.

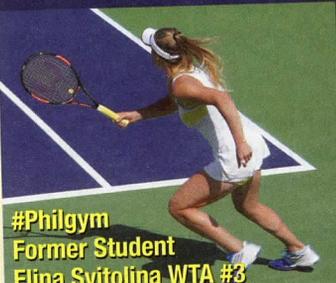
Your favorite pro does the right thing with the best stroke nearly every time. Prepare your questions. Engage your best observational techniques and prepare for a quantum leap in your game.

You'll learn almost as much from watching a professional match with intention as you did at your first tennis lesson.

*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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