

**THE ZONE**  
**A Short Tennis Mystery**

**by**  
**Scott Ford, USPTA**

## The Mystery

**The Zone.** This is the name given to a strange phenomenon in tennis. It has other names, of course, fancier names, more scientific names, but playing tennis "in the zone" seems to convey the extraordinary feeling described by tennis players who have experienced this remarkable occurrence.

What do we know about playing tennis in the zone? The general consensus in the tennis industry is that the experience of "the zone" seems to come upon a player by chance. In essence, the zone just happens. The player cannot control it. Some players even say they are playing unconscious.

Sorry, that's impossible. You can't play tennis while you are unconscious. Yet the overriding view within the tennis community is that we cannot consciously control the experience of playing tennis in the zone. It's like the zone pops in on some unsuspecting player who proceeds to play the best tennis of his or her life, perhaps even realizing that this experience is the essence of the game. Mind and body working together in total harmony. The game taking on an ease of its own, relaxed, fluid, like it should be.

Then poof! It's gone. Just like that.

"Sorry. Gotta go now. Maybe I'll visit you again some day. Maybe not. Too bad everyone thinks I'm just an accident, a chance occurrence in nature. Not much help, are they? Oh, well. At least you got to see what the game is really all about; what *you* are really all about as a human being on a tennis court. Bye!"

Frustrating, isn't it? The zone tends to leave the same way it came - no explanation, no notice of quitting time, no regrets. Except for the player who, for a brief span of time, realized his/her full potential on a tennis court.

Therein lies the problem with playing tennis in the zone. Traditional thinking says it is virtually impossible to duplicate the experience of the zone every time you play tennis. Tell me the last time you played tennis in the zone, then went out the next day and played tennis in the zone *again*? And then went out the day after that and played tennis in the zone *again*. Bet you can't, can you? There's the kicker. You just can't seem to consciously duplicate the experience whenever you want. That's what makes the zone so mysterious, so tantalizing.

"OK, mind and body, let's go out there today and play tennis in the zone again, just like we did yesterday! Boy-oh-boy, I can't wait! Oops! Hey! What's the story here? I'm not in the zone today! I'm playing like I normally

play! What's the problem? Where's the feeling? I can't reproduce the feeling! I can't reproduce the magic! I just can't do it! Damn! They must be right. Playing tennis in the zone must be an accident. Crazy thing just happens. Nothing I can do about it. Guess I'll have to play my normal game. Normal tennis. Bummer. Oh, well...at least I have the memory. Boy, was that great! Tennis in the zone! What an experience!"

Wouldn't it be something if you could reproduce at will the experience of playing tennis in the zone? What is it about the zone that is so baffling, so elusive? Why can't anyone explain how to do it? There's a bunch of people out there studying it, that's for sure, each with a theory, each with a bundle of facts obtained from retroactively interviewing players who have been in the zone. But, when you get right down to the nitty-gritty, no one tells you exactly how to do it, do they? No one says, "This is *exactly* how you play tennis in the zone." You'd think with all that information they'd be able to figure out something so fundamental to the game of tennis.

'Course, if they figured that out, they'd be figuring out how we human beings operate at maximum efficiency on the tennis court. A bit daunting, when you put it that way. Better study up a little more on the old mind/body continuum. Maybe do a little research on the subject of "maximum human potential."

Now there's a mouthful for you. Human potential maximization. Kind of rolls off the tongue. A worthy concept. Brings up images of the human operating system all greased-up and oiled and running smooth as silk. No pain, no strain, all gain. So, why the big mystery? Why can't we figure it out? What is it about the experience of playing tennis in the zone that makes it so difficult to reproduce? Surely all of us who have experienced the zone have *something* in common. We must be doing *something* that causes us to have this similar experience.

What could that "something" be? What do all tennis players who have played tennis in the zone have in common? What are they doing as human operating systems that causes them to operate at a higher level of efficiency than normal?

Boy, this is getting heavy. Now we're talking efficiency relative to the human operating system. Do you suppose this whole mystery of the zone could have anything to do with the operating instructions being given to the operating system? Wouldn't that be something? *Give your operating system a more efficient set of operating instructions and your operating system operates more efficiently. Cool.*

But it begs the question - how do you give your operating system a more efficient set of operating instructions? For that matter, exactly what are the operating instructions by which the human operating system operates?

Here are some things we know about the human operating system that are common to tennis players:

1. Your eyes send information to your brain about the *movement* of the ball along its flight line. Visual input.
2. Your brain processes that information and sends out *countermovement* information to your body. Cognitive processing.
3. Your body performs these countermovements to create *contact*. Motor output.

It's pretty basic.

Eye -> Brain -> Body.

Movement -> Countermovement -> Contact.

There you have it. That's everything there is to the equation, all the components, everything it takes to play tennis "in the zone." The trick, of course, is figuring out how to make the Eye->Brain->Body part operate to its maximum potential within the Movement -> Countermovement -> Contact part. It's quite a mystery. In fact, the zone is *the* mystery. The most imposing mystery in tennis. If you don't believe me, try to figure it out for yourself. All the clues are there, right in front of your eyes. Visible, if you look with an open mind. Hidden, if you look through the eyes of tradition. You might say, to solve this mystery, you need a new pair of glasses.

Let's review. What do we have so far concerning this mystery of the zone? First, we have you, a human operating system, running around on a tennis court, operating in your normal operating mode, hitting the ball the way you normally hit the ball, moving like you normally move, playing like you normally play, thinking about the things you normally think about when you play tennis. Everything normal, nothing special, nothing extraordinary. Tennis "in the norm."

Then, suddenly, without warning, something happens. Something comes over you. You're not sure what it is, but you can sense it. You can feel the change. Everything seems a little different. You "see" the ball like you've never seen it before. Your thoughts are focused, concentrated; your mind relaxed and unencumbered. Your movements are fluid, well timed; your contact solid, positive. You "feel" a little different, like you're in a trance. Yet

everything is working. You've finally put it all together on the court. You're in command. You know it. You sense it. You feel it. Your body is operating at maximum efficiency. You are playing tennis "in the zone."

Sounds like fun, doesn't it?

So, if you can do it once, why can't you do it every time? Why can't you reproduce the experience of playing tennis in the zone every time you play tennis? Given a choice, would you rather play tennis like you normally play, or whip up a little maximum human potential every time you walk on the court?

Tennis "in the norm" or tennis "in the zone." It is the grandest mystery in the game. Care to investigate?

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Clues

If you've been paying attention, you might well be asking yourself: what the heck are these clues he's talking about? What do we know for certain about this mystery of the zone?

We know one thing for sure. We know that while you are in the zone, your human operating system, your Visual/Cognitive/Motor operating system, is operating at a higher level of efficiency than normal. That part's pretty obvious. You're playing out of your mind.

Well, not exactly .

We also know that while your V/C/M system is operating at this higher level of efficiency, you experience a slightly different view of the reality of tennis. For instance, while you are in the zone, you "see" the ball better than you normally see the ball. Also, while you are in the zone, you sense that you are in a deeper concentrative state than normal. And, finally, while you are in the zone, you perform at a recognizably higher physical level than normal.

Jot these down, they're important:

1. You see the ball better when you are in the zone.
2. You concentrate better when you are in the zone.
3. You play better when you are in the zone.

These are your clues. The ones everybody knows about. The ones you experience when the zone decides to tap you on the shoulder and dance with you the magic dance of maximum potential. It's an elegant dance, a

transcendent escape from the norm, a wide-eyed expedition into that hidden part of you called extraordinary.

But wait! Did the zone tap you on the shoulder? Or did you, yourself, create this glimpse of personal excellence? Did the zone drop in on you, or did you drop in on the zone? Conventional wisdom, remember, says that the zone is an experience over which you have no control. It simply happens, coming and going with will and whimsy.

"Hello! Here I am!  
Goodbye! It's been fun!"

And there you stand, wondering what happened and how do you do it again? If you listen to western culture expertise, you get some fuzzy explanations generally indicating that you need to focus yourself at a higher level.

Well, duh. Of course you do! That's what playing tennis in the zone is all about - focusing at a higher level. But how do you do it? How do you focus at a higher level? For that matter, what constitutes a higher level of focus?

Keep asking around, and you'll eventually get something more intellectually fulfilling like - *one must bring together a series of factors that, when coupled simultaneously with relaxed tension and peak performance, will give one the best chance of reaching one's maximum potential on the tennis court.*

Yada, yada, yada. Gobbledygook.

Answer me this: how do you do it? How do you bring together all these factors at the same time? For that matter, what are they? The answers are still a bit hazy here in the West.

Move a little farther to the East and you might be told that in order to realize your maximum potential you must "center your being" or be "in the present." That's a good one:

"Okay, George, listen up! Here's what I want you to do in your big match today. I want you to go out there and be 'in the present.' Got that?"

"Uh, not exactly. I thought I was already in the present."

"Nope. You're not in the present."

"I'm not? Well, where the heck am I if I'm not in the present?"

"That, George, is an incredibly profound question. Food for contemplation at another time, a quieter time, a time of meditation and inner awareness. For now, let us simply visualize the present as the reflecting pond of synchronicity.

Cause and effect melting together into nothingness. The unbearable delight of being 'one with the universe.' It's all part of the great mystery of life. The ebb, the flow, everything, yet nothing, simultaneously. Understand, Grasshopper? The game of tennis is the game of life. That will be fifty big ones, please. "

Ain't paradox grand? Brings 'em back every time. That's what the East has all over the West. And it works, too! They know what they're talking about over there in the land of the rising awareness. Timothy Gallwey sure knew what he was talking about when he wrote the Inner Game of Tennis. Back in the 70's he blew the lid off traditional tennis teaching, ticked off a bunch of big-time, heavily-credentialed tennis professionals, and proceeded to line the inner-pockets of his inner-wallet. (Right about here, if you listen carefully, you can hear a faint echo of inner-laughter.)

\*\*\*\*\*

Higher focus and being in the present notwithstanding, perhaps the best place to start investigating the mystery of the zone is with our three ever-present clues. Remember what they are? They happen every time a tennis player plays tennis in the zone. And they happen anywhere on the planet, eastern culture or western culture. Here they are again:

1. See the ball better than normal.
2. Concentrate better than normal.
3. Play better than normal.

Eyes->Brain->Body  
 Movement->Countermovement->Contact

Oh! And one more thing. This mystery of the zone takes place within *measurable dimensions of space and time*. You don't have to jot that down, but it is important. It means that not only can the mystery be solved, but the solution can be measured. *Proven*.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Clue # 1: Seeing the Ball Better

Here is a very important question that generally gets overlooked right from the get-go. You'll see how important the answer to this question is as we start solving the mystery of the zone. And, as an aside, this part needs to happen before you can get to the part about being "in the present." So, if you want to be one with the universe when you play tennis, better start paying attention right about here.

This will seem like one of those silly questions that has an obvious answer. Trust me on this one, the question is neither silly nor the answer obvious.

Here is the question: Why do you "see" the ball better when you are in the zone?

The obvious answer: because you "watch" the ball better, dummy! *Everybody* knows that! In order to *see* the ball better you have to *watch* the ball better. This ain't rocket science, kid. This is tennis. And some things in tennis are best left alone, like the concept of watching the ball better in order to see the ball better. That's what watching the seams of the ball is all about. That's what watching the shadows of the ball is all about. That's what watching the fuzz of the ball is all about. These are proven methods of watching the ball better that will allow you to see the ball better. Everybody knows that, and anyone who says different is just plain dense!

"Excuse me, sir." A small voice from the back of the room. "But, you're wrong, sir. Watching the ball better does not mean you will see the ball better."

"What? What are you talking about, kid? How you gonna see the ball better if you don't watch it better?"

"By watching it differently, sir. By using your eyes in a different focusing pattern."

"A different what?"

"A different focusing pattern, sir. You don't have to focus on the ball better to see it better. You just have to focus on it at the right time."

"The right time? What do you mean the right time? When is the right time to have the ball in focus?"

Now there's a leading question for you. When is the right time to have the ball in focus?

This may sound too obvious, but the best time to have the ball in focus is when you hit it with your racquet. Simply put, this would mean that you would have the ball "in focus" in your Contact Zone.

Sounds easy enough. Just keep the ball in focus from start to finish along its flight line and, bingo, you have the ball in focus in your Contact Zone, right?

Wrong.

This is perhaps the biggest visual fallacy in tennis – the notion that your eyes are capable of keeping an object moving as fast as a tennis ball in focus.

They cannot. Sorry. And because your eyes cannot keep the ball in focus along its flight line from start to finish, they often end up sending your brain erroneous information about the Movement of the ball. And, guess what? Your brain doesn't take this bad visual information and say:

“Hey, eyes! What are you dummies doing down there? Quit giving me bad information!”

Instead, your brain takes this bad visual information about the Movement of the ball and uses it to put out relative Countermovement information to your body. In this case the relative Countermovement information is the type of relative you get in the ever popular garbage in/garbage out syndrome.

Bad visual input = Bad motor output.

Unfortunately this is the nature of the Visual/Cognitive/Motor beast. You get out what you put in, and if you put in erroneous visual information, then your brain puts out erroneous motor information. End result: erroneous Countermovement, a bad stroke, you mishit the ball, you mistime the ball, you generally screw up your shot. Erroneous Countermovement takes on many faces, all of them ugly. Next time you miss an easy forehand ask yourself this: how well did I “see” the ball when I mishit it? NOT was I watching the ball, but *how well did I see the ball?*

If you saw it clearly and still missed your forehand, please consult your local tennis pro as soon as possible. You have a crummy forehand. If you didn't see it clearly, keep reading. Your problem is not in your stroke, it's in your eyes.

Try this one on. If bad visual input causes bad motor output, then would it not be reasonable to assume that good visual input causes good motor output?

What a concept! It certainly holds true when it comes to playing tennis in the zone. Remember the clues – see the ball better, concentrate better, play better.

Seeing the ball better takes on considerably more weight when you realize that the V/C/M operating system you use out there on the tennis court relies directly on the quality of your visual input. And the quality of your visual input can be measured by how well you have the ball in focus when you hit it. The trouble is, if you can't refocus your eyes fast enough to keep the ball in focus all the time, what are you supposed to do?

"Prefocus, sir." That small voice again.

"Do what?"

"Prefocus. If you can't refocus fast enough, you can always prefocus beforehand. It's easy, sir. You ought to try it. All you have to do is prefocus your eyes on your Contact Zone, then every time the ball comes in your direction it will also be coming into focus. It gets clearer as it gets closer. Every time."

"What the heck are you talking about, kid? You can't focus your eyes on your Contact Zone. There's nothing there to focus on. Ha! Focus on nothing! What a stupid idea!"

"Actually, sir, it's a very old idea. It's been around for thousands of years. It's called *open-focus* or *soft-focus* or *fixed-focus*, and this subtle change in your focusing pattern will cause you to see the ball better."

"Wait a minute, kid! What are you trying to say here? Are you trying to tell me that playing tennis in the zone has something to do with how you focus your eyes?"

"That's exactly what I'm trying tell you, sir. In fact, I'll tell you again. A fixed-focus visual input pattern is the reason you see the ball better when you are in the zone. Think about it. If your visual focus is fixed on your Contact Zone, then every ball hit in the direction of your Contact Zone will increase in focal acuity as it moves toward you. Guess when it's in focus the best?"

"When?"

"Right when you hit it, sir. Want to give it a try?"

"No way, kid. I'll stick to watching the ball and let the zone come to me."

"Don't hold your breath, sir."

Excuse me. That was rude, and I apologize to all you ball watchers out there. Now, let's review. The first clue to the mystery of the zone is that you see the ball better when you are in the zone.

**BZZZ!** Pop quiz. This will be multiple choice. Pens only.

**Question #1:** Which of these two focusing patterns would create a visual scenario in which you see the ball better?

A. A variable-focus pattern in which you seldom, if ever, have the ball clearly in focus because it is moving way too fast. Or,

B. A fixed-focus pattern in which the ball comes into focus as it comes toward you no matter how fast it is moving.

If your answer is A, please stop reading now and go home. You will never solve the mystery of the zone.

If your answer is B, please continue. There is light at the end of this tunnel. Guaranteed.

For now, think about the difference between these two concepts:

#### Proactive Focus and Reactive Focus

Proactive means to take an action in anticipation of an expected occurrence, a *future* occurrence. Reactive, means to take an action in response to a prior occurrence, a *past* occurrence.

Playing tennis in the zone uses proactive focus, which anticipates the Movement of the ball into your Contact Zone and prefocuses your eyes at that depth. You might say you are focused on the future depth of contact.

Remember that - the future depth of contact. It will be on the final exam.

Q: On what are you focused when you focus on your Contact Zone?

A: You are focused on the future.

Normal tennis uses reactive focus, which anticipates nothing. Instead, watching the ball requires you to refocus your eyes in response to the movement of the ball. A response that necessarily occurs *after* the ball starts moving. In other words, you are reacting to something that has already happened - the past Movement of the ball. Another question for the final.

Q: On what are you focused when you focus on the ball?

A: You are focused on the past.

Reactive focus = focus on the past.

Proactive focus = focus on the future.

Guess which one is more efficient?

Oh! I almost forgot. Remember that part where I said that in order to solve the mystery of the zone you would have to drop your traditional way of looking at things and put on a new pair of glasses? Well, time to polish up those new shades and look at the game a little differently. After all, playing tennis in the zone *is* different, and if you expect to experience the zone through traditional methodology, then you're paddling in circles and the zone will continue to remain a distant peripheral enigma. A sad memory of self transcendence, lost. Human potential, unattained, unexperienced.

I feel a tear.

The point is, tradition won't cut it in the zone. Ask your local tennis pro what you should focus your eyes on when you play tennis. Ask just about anyone you meet what you should focus your eyes on when you play tennis and you will get several variations of the same theme.

Here is the most popular version of what you should focus your eyes on when you play tennis: "The ball, of course."

Short, to the point, slightly condescending.

Yet another version: "The ball, you fool."

Also short, but with the introduction of incidental name calling.

And, my personal favorite: "You have to focus on the ball, you idiot! What a stupid question!"

I love that one. *What-a-stupid-question*. Smacks heavily of contempt prior to investigation, doesn't it? The doctrine of perpetual ignorance. Of course, if you choose to close your mind, then, yes, it is a stupid question. Even more ridiculous is the concept of high level concentration that accompanies playing tennis in the zone.

But, hey! The zone is a choice, not an accident. And if you choose to play tennis in the zone, then you are choosing an experience in which high level concentration plays the leading role. High level concentration that cannot be achieved in your normal state of consciousness.

That's right, everybody. We're talking *altered states of consciousness* here. Tennis in the zone is tennis in an *altered state*.

**STOP!**

Time out for Mr. Serious.

If the concept of altering your state of consciousness while you play tennis scares you or makes you uncomfortable or offends you, you are not alone in your concerns. Although everyone is capable of playing tennis in the

zone, tennis in the zone is not for everyone. Some people like to stay home on a Saturday night, some people like to party.

Tennis in the zone is a party.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Clue #2: Concentrating Better

Perhaps the most confusing aspect of playing tennis in the zone is the altered state of consciousness that accompanies the experience. What is this altered state, and what makes it more efficient than your normal state? And, most importantly, how do you make it happen? How do you do it?

Whew! You sure ask some tough questions. The first one's not so bad. Check out your local library under psychology of consciousness and split brain theory. The altered state we're talking about is the state of consciousness brought about by engaging the subordinate hemisphere of your brain and switching from an asymmetrical cognitive pattern to a symmetrical cognitive pattern. This simply means that you switch from your normal, dominant/subordinate hemispheric pattern with its coincident normal state of consciousness, to a cognitive pattern of hemispheric non-dominance, hemispheric equilibrium, which brings with it the strange, trance-like feeling of deep concentration, the almost hypnotic feeling of total focus, the altered state of consciousness. Think of it as switching from half-brain tennis to whole-brain tennis.

Which answers the second question: what makes this altered state more efficient than your normal state? Tell me which one sounds more efficient to you - half-brain tennis or whole-brain tennis?

Talk about a no-brainer.

Some people are always going to be uncomfortable altering their conscious state. The experience can be disturbing, unsettling. But here's something to think about. If your brain is operating in its normal cognitive pattern, you will feel normal. However, when you engage the subordinate hemisphere of your brain, you create a different cognitive pattern, and with that different pattern comes a different state of consciousness.

Different, yes. But a state of consciousness that is a common part of human nature. It happens all the time, especially when you are doing something creative like drawing, painting, dancing, building, singing, or even playing tennis. Some

people love the feeling, some people want nothing do with it. Human nature is, at best, unpredictable.

Here's a tough question: why would anyone choose *not* to experience their full potential on the tennis court? Why would anyone choose normal tennis over tennis in the zone?

Try fear.

Fear of the unknown - what's it like to play tennis in the zone?

Fear of failure - what happens if I can't do it?

Fear of success - what happens if I can?

Fear of change. Underline that one. Change is a biggy. At least with normal tennis we know what to expect. Maybe a little better one day, not so good the next, some ups, some downs, but we pretty much know what to look for. We know our limits. We know the boundaries of our comfort zone, and although these boundaries nowhere approach our true capability on the court, we settle. We settle for the safety of normal tennis. Then we go about manufacturing all these wonderfully complex and rational excuses for playing poorly.

Sound familiar?

Don't worry, you're not alone.

Fear stands insidiously in the path of human potential, and to step outside our comfort zone is to run headlong into the face of our own fear. Could it be that we would rather accept the ordinary, the average, tennis in the norm, than delve into our own potential? Some people will do almost anything to stay within their comfort zone, such is their fear of change, such is their fear of letting go of the attachments and beliefs that entrap them in their prison of normalcy. For them, playing tennis in the zone is silly, stupid, unreal, and I wish them the best in their daily battle with ordinary tennis. But for those of you who are willing to take a risk, to leap into the unknown, let me assure you, if you leap, a net will appear.

End of speech. I promise not to do it again.

\*\*\*\*\*

So, you've got this altered state of consciousness. The state of consciousness you experience when you visualize something, when you meditate, when you pray, or even when you daydream. And there is something similar about all these experiences besides the engagement of the subordinate hemisphere of your brain. You ready for this? All these

experiences, visualization, meditation, prayer states, daydreaming, they all require a *fixed focus*. That's right, a fixed-focus.

Ever tried to visualize something or see something in your mind's eye while your eyes are flitting around the room from object to object? Ever tried to meditate while you are focused on your opponent, then the ball, then how you are going to hit the ball, then where you are going to hit the ball, then your technique, your footwork, your form, your flashy new duds, your flashy new racquet, the flashy babe on the next court, what you're having for dinner, who you're having dinner with, maybe the flashy babe on the next...oh, sorry. My mind sort of wandered a little bit there. Lost my focus. Where was I, anyway? Oh, , I was trying to meditate while watching the ball. Or should I say, I was trying to engage my subordinate hemisphere while using a variable focus input pattern. Doesn't work very well, does it?

Take a good look some time at a person who is daydreaming. Look at their eyes. You'll see a far-away look, a thousand-yard stare, a fixed-stare. A *fixed-focus*. The same fixed-focus you use in a fixed-focus visual input pattern. Not to hammer home a point, but visualization, meditation, prayer, all these altered states of consciousness have two characteristics in common: a fixed-focus and a switched-on subordinate hemisphere.

You know what that means? It means that when you are daydreaming you have the Visual/Cognitive configuration necessary for playing tennis in the zone. The fixed-focus and the altered state of consciousness.

Wouldn't it be something if you could somehow superimpose that Visual/Cognitive configuration onto the existing reality of a tennis court? In other words, what if you could insert a *daydream* into the reality of a tennis match?

"WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, KID! I can't believe my ears! That's the dumbest idea I've ever heard in my life! Don't you know you can't daydream out there when you're playing tennis?"

"Actually, sir, you can. In fact, given the right daydream, you might find yourself playing the game more efficiently than ever before."

"Oh, great! An efficient daydream."

"A directed daydream, sir. A daydream with purpose. Visualization with intent. The idea is to create an imaginary reality on the tennis court that is more efficient than your normal reality. An imaginary game in which your operating system automatically switches to a more efficient V/C/M pattern that includes fixed-focus visual input, whole-brain cognitive processing, and perfectly timed motor output."

"Hold it, kid! Stop right there! Did I just hear you say this imaginary game you're talking about includes Perfect Timing?"

"You heard right, sir. Think about it. There has to be a reason you play better when you are in the zone. You don't just play better by accident. The tennis gods don't drop in from Olympus, bless you for a few good matches, then hit the bricks. What really happens is that you play better for very logical reasons. The logical reason you see the ball better when you are in the zone is the switch from variable-focus to fixed-focus. The logical reason you concentrate better when you are in the zone is the switch from a half-brain dominant state to a whole-brain state. And the logical reason you play better when you are in the zone is the switch from variable timing to Perfect Timing."

"Perfect Timing! That's impossible! Nobody has Perfect Timing. This is stupid!"

"There you go again, sir. Contempt prior to investigation. When's the last time you played tennis in the zone?"

"A year ago Friday. I couldn't miss. My stokes were great. My technique was flawless. Everything was going in. Everything seemed easy. Everything was working. I was awesome!"

"Why do you suppose that was, sir? What was different about your strokes that day? What was different about your technique? What was different about your Countermovements that would logically explain why everything was working?"

"Let me guess - Perfect Timing, right?"

"You're a quick study, sir. And you're exactly right. The reason your Countermovements were working so well *in space* is because they were relating perfectly *in time*. Perfect Timing, sir. You really ought to give it a try."

"Come to think of it, kid, my timing was pretty good that day. And I *was* seeing the ball better that day, too. Hmm... I was really concentrating, too. Felt a bit spacey. But, hey! It was working, so I went with it. I figured I had nothing to lose. So I just did it!"

"That's right, sir. Nothing to lose and everything to gain. Care to give the zone a try again?"

"Tell you what, kid. If you can explain Perfect Timing, I'll give it a try."

"Is that a promise, sir?"

"That's a promise, kid. And, by the way, you still haven't answered the Big Question. You've told me all about the zone. All about the Visual/Cognitive/Motor operating differences. You've told me how wonderful it is, how it's more efficient, blah-blah-blah. But you still haven't told me how to do it. You still haven't told me exactly how to play tennis in the zone. What do you have to say to that, kid?"

"I'd have to say that a good mystery always waits for the final clue."

\*\*\*\*\*

### Clue #3: Playing Better

In the end, playing tennis in the zone is all about playing better, and playing better deals directly with how well your Countermovements relate to the Movement of the ball, not only *in space*, but *in time*. So, let's talk timing. Good timing. Bad timing. And, yes - Perfect Timing.

But first, a word from our sponsor, THE TIMING BUDDY.

Do you have bad timing? Do your friends at the club shake their heads and whisper behind your back? Do you have trouble finding a decent doubles partner? Are you embarrassed by your game? Unsure of your strokes? Frustrated? Lost?

Then you need THE TIMING BUDDY!

That's right, Ladies and Gentlemen! THE TIMING BUDDY! It's light-weight, durable, portable, travels with you wherever you go! Take it on trips. Take it on vacation. Take it to the club and watch those nasty whispers turn to admiration! Watch those snooty little backbiters line up to be your doubles partner! Never again be embarrassed by bad timing. Frustration take a hike! You've got THE TIMING BUDDY!

That's right, THE TIMING BUDDY. It's all that and more! It's expandable. It's transparent. It's flat. And best of all - get this - THE TIMING BUDDY is TOTALLY FREE!

You heard me right, ladies and gentlemen. I said totally free! Costs nothing! Not one thin dime! The bargain of a lifetime! And you can order your very own TIMING BUDDY right now, today, for instant delivery. Just remember, send no cash, send no checks, and, please, no money orders. THE TIMING BUDDY is yours for the price of a little wonder.

Here's the address:

Your Mind/Your Body  
Your Game/Your Choice

That's right, ladies and gentlemen! THE TIMING BUDDY is already yours! You simply create it with your own imagination.

And, now, back to our regular programming.

Hello there. We were talking about timing. Good timing, bad timing, and yes, that ever-elusive experience called "Perfect Timing." Strange as it may seem, Perfect Timing is a possibility, a potential, a physical reality that can be yours with a little imagination, a little practice and a Perfect Timing Certificate.

"A what?"

"A Perfect Timing Certificate. Proof that you graduated from Timing-101. Where have you been all your life, sir? Haven't you taken the Timing-101 course?"

"There's no such thing as Timing-101, kid! Who the heck are you trying to bamboozle, anyway? First you tell me I have to change the way I focus my eyes to play tennis in the zone. Then you tell me I have to change the way I focus my mind. And now you're telling me I have to get some stupid certificate from some stupid class that doesn't even exist! If that's what it takes to play tennis in the zone, then you can keep it, kid! I don't want anything to do with it! Goodbye and good riddance!"

"You're breaking your promise, sir."

"What promise? Oh...that's right. I did promise, didn't I? Okay, kid. I'll take the Timing-101 course. Where does it meet?"

"On the tennis court, sir. And don't forget your TIMING BUDDY."

"Gimme a break, kid! I don't have a TIMING BUDDY! I don't want a TIMING BUDDY! I don't need a TIMING BUDDY! This whole thing is ridiculous!"

"Actually, sir. It's your timing that's ridiculous. That's why you're taking the course, remember?"

"Well...maybe you're right. I guess my timing could use a little help. But I don't believe in this TIMING BUDDY thing. I mean really, kid. Do you actually expect me to believe that there's an imaginary product out there that's light-weight, durable, portable, expandable *and* transparent?"

"You forgot flat, sir. THE TIMING BUDDY is also flat. That's important if you're going to use it to represent your Contact Zone. Flat it good in tennis. Flat like, say, a big imaginary window."

"Time out, kid. Are you telling me that this TIMING BUDDY is nothing more than a big imaginary window? This whole thing is about visualizing a big imaginary window for my Contact Zone?"

"That's right, sir. A big imaginary window. It's light-weight, durable, portable, expandable, transparent and flat. Visualize a window spanning your Contact Zone and you simultaneously engage the subordinate hemisphere of your brain while switching to a fixed-focus input pattern. Fixed-focus visual input, whole -brain cognitive processing. Pretty cool, huh? All you need now is a motor output pattern that gives you Perfect Timing. Ready for the real thing, sir? Ready to go on court?"

"It's about time, kid."

"Actually, sir, it's about timing."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Timing-101

You probably know plenty about the different stroking techniques

involved in modern day tennis. Take a look at the top players in the world and you'll see an incredible medley of techniques. Eastern grips, Western grips, open stances, closed stances, the ever-popular inside-out forehand, two-handed forehands, two-handed backhands, even an occasional one-handed backhand. You name it, someone is trying to figure out a better way to do it, a better technique.

Technique is everywhere. Technique is fashionable. Technique is in. We understand technique. We teach technique. We know technique.

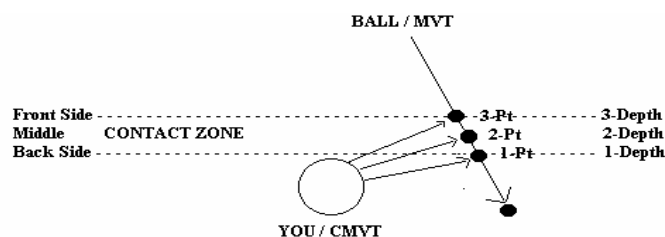
Question: what do you know about timing? How do you know if the timing of your fashionable technique is good or bad? Furthermore, if your timing is bad, how do you make it good? For that matter, what the heck is timing in the first place?

Here's what timing is. Timing is the relationship *in time* of your Countermovement to the Movement of the ball. That's timing. But in order to understand the difference between good timing and bad timing you need a measuring stick, a standard by which comparisons in time can be made.

This is where your imaginary window comes in. Actually, to get a true measurement of your timing, you need two windows, one window spanning the court in front of you at a comfortable arm's length, stretching up as high as you can reach your racquet and reaching down to the surface of the court. This first window represents the front side of your Contact Zone.

The second window looks just like the first one, except the second window is directly in front of your body, like you're standing with your nose against it. This second window represents the back side of your Contact Zone.

Here's a top view of these two windows which will give dimension and depth to your Contact Zone.



Simply put, there is a front side to your Contact Zone (3-Depth), a middle (2-Depth), and a back side (1-Depth). Every time your opponent hits the ball in your direction, a vital relationship begins. A relationship *in time* between Movement and Countermovement. A relationship that will determine the

success or failure of your technique, as well as answering the question of who controls your Contact Zone?

If you don't know the answer to that question, then you can find out quickly by playing "*The Timing Game*."

\*\*\*\*\*

*The Timing Game* has nothing to do with *how* you make Contact with the ball. Instead, it's about *where* you make Contact with the ball. Understanding that *where* you make Contact is also *when* you make Contact. And *when* you make Contact involves the relationship *in time* of your Countermovements to the Movement of the ball. Ergo, *Timing*.

The object of *The Timing Game* is to observe your depth of contact and immediately report your observations. To do this, you simply call out-loud your depth of contact. For example, if you make contact at a 1-Depth, you call out-loud, "*One*." A 2-Depth, "*Two*." A 3-Depth, "*Three*". Nothing to it. Call your depth of contact on every ball you hit. *Every* ball.

Sounds easy, but beware. In order to play this game you need an acute awareness of your Contact Zone. You will find that *The Timing Game* gives you a brutally honest look at your own awareness of your Contact Zone, and, by extension, your awareness of Contact.

Think about it. When you play the game of tennis, how often are you acutely aware of making Contact? How much attention do you give to the actual event of Contact? How accurately can you measure the event of Contact?

The object of *The Timing Game* is measurement. Did you make Contact at a 3-Depth, a 2-Depth or a 1-Depth. 3, 2, or 1. Give it a try, but be patient. No one is totally aware of their Contact Zone at all times.

"I am."

"WHAT! Did I hear you right, kid? Did you just say that you were totally aware of your Contact Zone at all times?"

"Brazen, I know, but true. And would you like to know how I can be totally aware of my Contact Zone at all times?"

"Let me guess. Because you are totally focused on your Contact Zone at all times, right?"

"And I thought you weren't paying attention back there, sir. I'm impressed. And you're right again. The reason I am totally aware of my Contact Zone at all times is because I visualize a big window out in front of me at all times. I fix my focus on my imaginary window. You know, fixed-focus, whole-brain, all that stuff. Sure makes it a lot easier to play *The Timing Game*."

And it makes it a lot easier to figure out who's in control of my Contact Zone, too. By the way, sir, who's in control of *your* Contact Zone?"

"What do you mean, who's in control of my Contact Zone? I'm in control of my Contact Zone. It's my Contact Zone, isn't it?"

"Not if you make Contact at a 1-Depth, it isn't. If you make Contact at a 1-Depth, then the Movement of the ball penetrated the full depth of your Contact Zone while your Countermovement didn't even enter your Contact Zone. I'd say the ball controls your Contact Zone when you make contact at a 1-Depth. There's a term for that, you know?"

"Oh, yeah? What's that?"

"Bad timing, sir. Nice technique, though. Loved your open-stance."

"Thanks. Did you check out my western grip? Pretty snazzy, huh? Generates tons of topspin. I love topspin."

"I'm thrilled for you, sir. But we're talking timing here. Snazzy grips and topspin are technique. This is timing. So, let's stick to the subject of time. At what depth did you make contact the last three times you hit the ball?"

"Uh, let me think..."

"Sorry. Too late. If you have to think back on your Contact, then you weren't paying attention when it happened. Fess up, sir, you weren't concentrating on your Contact Zone; were you?"

"No, I was concentrating on my outside-in forehand...or is it inside-out? I forget, but I get your point. I'm not very aware of my own Contact Zone, that's for sure. So, what you're saying is that contact at a 1-Depth is bad timing, which must mean that contact at a 2-Depth is good timing, right?"

"Right. Contact in the middle of your Contact Zone is good timing. But when you look at contact at a 2-Depth what you really have is the ball controlling the front half of your Contact Zone while your racquet controls the back half of your Contact Zone. That's good, but it's not perfect."

"And I suppose contact at a 3-Depth means my Countermovement controlled the full depth of my Contact Zone. Hey! That makes sense. If I make Contact at a 3-Depth, that means I'm in total control of my Contact Zone? Cool!"

"Perfect Timing is very cool, sir. When you make contact at a 3-Depth your Countermovement forms a perfect relationship *in time* with the Movement of the ball. A relationship in which Movement and Countermovement come together at the exact moment in time when the ball first enters your Contact Zone. That's Perfect Timing, sir. You ready to keep your promise?"

"My promise? What promise?"

"You promised to try playing tennis in the zone if I explained Perfect Timing."

"Sure, kid. And I'm supposed to believe that contact at a 3-Depth explains Perfect Timing?"

"You got a better explanation, sir? Contact at a 3-Depth. Whatever technique you use, whatever your Countermovement looks like, you know one thing for certain. If you make contact at a 3-Depth, then your Countermovement, fashionable or otherwise, created contact at the exact moment the ball entered your Contact Zone. That's Perfect Timing, sir. By the way, here's your Perfect Timing Certificate. See you tomorrow?"

"Okay, kid. See you tomorrow."

\*\*\*\*\*

### Playing Tennis "In the Zone"

Playing tennis in the zone is about change. Playing tennis in the zone is about risk. Playing tennis in the zone is about potential. But it's also about letting go. Letting go of your normal game. Letting go your normal attachments on the tennis court. Detaching from the ordinary to investigate the extraordinary, to investigate yourself.

Playing tennis in the zone is about focus. It's about concentration. It's about performance. But playing tennis in the zone is also about higher consciousness. Altering your conscious state in such a way that it alters your very perception of the game.

The zone can be intimidating. It can scare you away. It can also excite you, draw you in, challenge you in ways you never imagined possible.

Playing tennis in the zone is a lot of things - confusing, paradoxical, illogical, strange, transcendent, spiritual - but it is never, ever normal. Nor is it as complicated as *bringing together a series of factors that, when coupled simultaneously with relaxed tension and peak performance, will give you the best chance of reaching your maximum potential on the tennis court.*

One can only shudder in anticipation of the moment when all these factors come together. I hope you're there when it happens.

By the way, does anyone know what "relaxed tension" is? Call me.

If you want to play tennis in the zone, then here's the most important series of factors you need to bring together on the tennis court:

1. Your visual input factor.
2. Your cognitive processing factor.
3. Your motor output factor.

These are the factors you work with every time you play the game of tennis. Dress them up any way you want - Nike, Fila, doesn't matter. Arm them with the latest weaponry - graphite, titanium, doesn't matter. Put them on a court anywhere in the world. - Wimbledon, your private club, City Park, doesn't matter. We all work with the same fundamental series of factors, the

same fundamental operating system. And that V/C/M operating system has one job to perform every time the ball is hit in its direction, and that job is to create Positive Contact between Movement and Countermovement.

Look again. This is tennis at its most fundamental level:

Eyes->Brain->Body  
 Movement->Countermovement->Contact

You are not going to play tennis in the zone by tweaking the fringes of the game. Better technique will not put you in the zone. Better footwork will not put you in the zone. Better equipment will not put you in the zone. You have to look deeper. And on a tennis court that means you have to look at your fundamental operating system. How efficiently are you using your eyes, your brain and your body? Are you really utilizing your V/C/M operating system in its most efficient configuration? That's an extremely important question to ask yourself, especially if you have thoughts of exploring your maximum potential.

So before you get all hot and bothered about whether your tension is relaxed enough to bring about peak performance, you might want to consider whether your V/C/M system is operating in a configuration that will literally block you from experiencing your full potential, or whether you have configured your V/C/M system to run at maximum efficiency.

Simply put, playing tennis in the zone ain't gonna happen if you're in the wrong V/C/M configuration.

Oops! I'm sorry. There's really no right or wrong here. Instead, we have two discrete V/C/M configurations, one creates the experience of playing tennis in the norm, while the other creates the experience of playing tennis in the zone. Unfortunately, they are mutually exclusive configurations that create mutually exclusive experiences. The occurrence of one precludes the occurrence of the other. In other words, you can't use your normal V/C/M configuration and expect it to create the experience of tennis in the zone. That won't happen. Conversely, you can't use the zone's V/C/M configuration and expect the experience to feel normal. That won't happen either. Mutual exclusivity. Normal tennis precludes the zone. The zone precludes normal tennis.

Why is this important, you might be asking yourself? Because mutual exclusivity means you get to *choose* which V/C/M configuration you want to

use every time you play tennis. If you choose to use your normal V/C/M configuration, then don't expect to play tennis in the zone. In fact, don't expect many changes all. You get what you pay for. No risk, no zone. No zone, no maximum human potential. I'm sorry.

If, however, you choose to use the zone's V/C/M configuration, then don't expect to feel normal when you play. Expect to feel different. Expect to feel strange, like you're in a trance, like you're in a daydream. After all, when you alter your cognitive pattern you simultaneously alter your conscious state. Expect it. Go with it. Let it feel different. It's supposed to.

It's also the price you pay to play tennis in the zone. You have to give up the way you normally feel on a tennis court. It's all about throwing normal out the window for a short period of time and letting yourself experience the extraordinary. That's what you can look forward to when you play tennis in the zone. You the extraordinary, not you the normal.

Is it worth it to see the real you, the potential you, you at your best? If you are willing to pay the price of letting go, then come on the court right now and let's play tennis in the zone. Are you ready?

"All right, kid. I'm here. I'm ready. I'll pay the price. But don't expect it to work with me. I don't believe tennis in the zone can be learned."

"Now, now, sir. Where's that open mind?"

"Oh... sorry. You're right. I'll try to keep an open mind. But if this stuff gets too weird, I'm outa here."

"Fair enough. Now, let's both start at half court. That's important. Start close. Stand on the 'T' and visualize a big imaginary window arm's length in front of you."

"Stand at the T. Big imaginary window in front of me. Okay, I can do that. Big imaginary window. Got it. What next?"

"Your imaginary window spans the width of the singles court and goes up from the surface of the court to the highest point you can reach your racquet. Can you visualize that?"

"Big window in front of me. Goes all the way across the court, high as I can reach my racquet, down to the surface of the court. Got it. Hey, kid! So far, playing tennis in the zone is pretty easy. What am I supposed to do when the ball comes over the net? Hit it with my imaginary racquet? Ha! Get it, kid? Imaginary window? Imaginary racquet?"

"Good one, sir. Very clever. Actually, all you have to do when the ball comes over the net is keep it from getting past your imaginary window."

"C'mon, kid! There's gotta be more to it than that. Are you saying that all I have to do to play tennis in the zone is use my racquet to keep the ball from getting past my imaginary window?"

"For now, that's all you have to do. Defend your imaginary window. Are you ready?"

"Not so fast, kid. You forgot something. What kind of strokes am I supposed to use to defend my window, huh? What about my footwork? You forgot that, too! Should I hit with an open-stance? What about my backswing? How much should I turn? And you totally forgot my snazzy new grip. Should I hit tons of topspin? I love topspin. You didn't say anything about topspin.

Hey! Wait a minute! You didn't say anything about technique at all. What's the deal here? What technique am I supposed to use?"

"Whatever it takes to keep the ball from getting past your imaginary window, sir. This isn't about technique, remember? It's about timing."

"Oh... that's right. Perfect Timing. I'm supposed to contact everything at a 3-Depth. Hey! I get it! If I don't let anything get past my imaginary window, then I'm actually contacting everything at a 3-Depth, right?"

"Very perceptive, sir. Whatever Countermovement you use to keep the ball from getting past your window, whatever the technique you use, will be perfectly timed. Plus, if the ball never gets past your imaginary window, then you're always in control of your Contact Zone. Are you ready, sir? Let's start slow. That's important. Dink a few over till you get used to defending your imaginary window, then we'll pick up the pace. Ready?"

"I'm ready, kid. I'm visualizing my big old imaginary window right out there in front of me right now, and I'm not letting anything get by it. No way, no how, partner. Nothing's getting past my window. You got that? Nothing."

"Wow! Sounds like you're in a daydream. You're definitely ready."

\*\*\*\*\*

## The First Step

Defending your imaginary window is not about hitting the ball back and forth over the net – strange as that may sound. Instead, this is a game about making Contact at the exact moment the ball enters your Contact Zone. A Contact Zone you visually predefine by focusing on it with your eyes.

More importantly, however, this is the game in which you first venture into the world of altered conscious states. Your very first experience with *consciously* engaging the subordinate hemisphere of your brain while you play tennis. You've done it before accidentally; this time you'll be doing it on purpose. Think of it as a grip change on your brain.

You do it with visualization. But learning how to visualize a big window in front of you can be as easy or as difficult as you make it. Kids have no problem with visualization on the tennis court. It's all a big game to kids.

Adults are more skeptical, less willing. More dubious, less open-minded. All those years of watching the ball or focusing on the seams or watching what your opponent is doing makes visualizing a window in front of you seem unnatural at first. Which is why it's a good idea for both you and

your practice partner to start at half court. The whole visualization process is easier to get used to if you start close. Trust me on this one. It's best to start slow, start at half court and gradually get used to defending your imaginary window.

Remember this: if kids can do it, so can the kid in you. You just have to let that kid come out and play. If you need further reinforcement, remember, too, that as long as you keep visualizing your window in front of you, you are actively engaging your subordinate hemisphere and creating a whole-brain state, so don't expect it to feel normal. It won't. It's an altered state of consciousness. It's not supposed to feel normal. It's supposed to feel different. Let it.

Question: if this exercise requires an altered state of consciousness with which you are unfamiliar, then how do you know if you are really in this altered state or not? How do you know if you are really visualizing a window across your Contact Zone and successfully defending it against this onslaught of tennis balls?

Answer: Instant feedback. Say "yes" if you keep the ball from getting past your window, or "no" if you don't. And try to say yes or no at the exact moment it happens. This is called *instant feedback* and it will instantly tell you if you are visualizing your window or not.

"Yes" if you make contact at your window.

"No" if you don't.

Verbalize your feedback. Every time.

If you are not sure one way or the other, then you simply stopped visualizing your window, and slipped back into your normal state of consciousness. This will happen. Expect it to happen. Expect to go back and forth between states of consciousness. There is a learning curve involved in training your consciousness. Be patient. You are learning to control the focus of your mind as well as the focus of your eyes, and controlling your focus takes practice. Visualization takes practice. But here's the payoff, and it's huge.

When you start defending your Contact Zone, when you start to keep every ball from getting past your imaginary window, something happens. Something comes over you. You feel it. You sense it. You become totally immersed in this imaginary game. And when it happens, you will absolutely know it.

Know this, too. That as you let yourself slip into playing this imaginary game; you have also let yourself slip into a symmetrical cognitive pattern, a whole brain state. You have let yourself slip into “the zone.”

Stay in this imaginary game as long as you can, knowing that the whole time you are defending your imaginary window, you are right square in the middle of the zone. And, guess what? You brought it on yourself. No tennis gods. No accidental fluke of nature. You created the zone yourself, and you can create it every time you play the game.

Oh! By the way. That’s *exactly* how you do it. That’s how you create the experience of playing tennis in the zone. By creating a V/C/M configuration that utilizes a more efficient visual input pattern (fixed-focus), a more efficient cognitive processing pattern (whole-brain) and a more efficient motor output pattern (Perfect Timing).

But that’s still not the answer to the Big Question.

\*\*\*\*\*

### Positive Contact

Here’s another payoff. Almost immediately, the Countermovements you are using to defend your imaginary window start creating Positive Contact. The ball starts going back over the net. Mind you, your objective is *not* to hit the ball back over the net. Your objective is to keep the ball from getting past your imaginary window. Yet, without really trying, the ball keeps going back over the net.

Sounds illogical, but the end result is Positive Contact. The ball keeps going back over the net. You’ll be amazed at how this imaginary game with a defensive objective can produce such positive results.

But don’t be amazed for too long. Remember, there is a very logical reason for all this Positive Contact. It goes like this: although the Countermovements you use to defend your imaginary window bear a striking resemblance to your normal strokes, there is one enormous difference. These Countermovements are *perfectly timed*. That’s the real purpose of defending your window - to create Countermovements that are perfectly timed. Each Countermovement creating a positive relationship *in time* with the Movement of the ball. Perfect Timing at work in your game. End result - Positive Contact.

\*\*\*\*\*

Starting at half court is just the beginning. As you get more comfortable with visualizing a window in front of you from mid-court to mid-court, then it is time to lengthen the depth of field between you and your practice partner. Pretty soon you'll be moving around the court from baseline to net, all the while remaining in a whole brain state by continuously visualizing your imaginary window moving around with you.

Go slow, give yourself time to get used to the visual input pattern. Remember, the secret to playing tennis in the zone is a *fixed-focus input pattern*. Let me repeat that. The secret to playing tennis in the zone is a fixed-focus visual input pattern.

*Give your operating system a more efficient set of operating instructions and your operating system operates more efficiently.*

Maximum human potential. Cool.

There is obviously more to playing tennis in the zone, but this is a starting point. To explain more now would be to explain an experience that you have to experience for yourself. The only way to get better at playing tennis in the zone is by doing it. The only way to get comfortable with an altered state of consciousness is by entering into it. It's a bit like walking into a darkened room. It takes a while to get used to the darkness, but pretty soon you start seeing what's really inside.

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Big Question

Hidden within the mystery of playing tennis in the zone lies an even deeper mystery. The mystery of "being in the present." You've probably heard it referred to as being in the *here* and *now*, which would indicate that being in the present has something to do with space (the here) and time (the now).

Makes sense. But what the heck does it mean? What does it really mean to be "*in the here and now*" on the tennis court? Is that what playing tennis in the zone is all about? Is playing tennis *in the zone* the same as playing tennis *in the present*?

Short answer: yes. Playing tennis in the zone is the same as playing tennis in the present.

To be more precise, playing tennis in the zone is actually “being in the present” while you play tennis. You see, this zone that we’ve been talking about is, in fact, a *time zone*. More exactly, a dimension of time – the Present.

In the end, “being in the present” while you play tennis is what playing tennis in the zone is all about. So the next time someone comes up to you and says, “Hey! What’s this playing tennis in the zone thing all about?” You’ll have a really cool answer. You can simply say, “playing tennis in the zone is all about being in the present while you play tennis.”

“They’ve been saying that for years, kid. Playing tennis in the zone is nothing more than being in the here and now when you play tennis?”

“Very profound, sir. But let me ask you a question. Which dimension of time are you in when you play tennis? Past, present or future?”

“Well... I guess I’m in the present. I’m in the here and I’m in the now.”

“How do you know that, sir?”

“What!”

“How do you know you’re in the here and in the now?”

“BECAUSE I’M HERE AND IT’S NOW, AND I CAN’T BELIEVE I’M HAVING THIS STUPID CONVERSATION!”

“Calm down, sir. And, if I may be so bold, there is nothing stupid about being in the present. Besides, all I was doing was asking for some proof.”

“Proof? What proof?”

“Proof that you are actually in the present when you play tennis. You do know how to tell which dimension of time you’re in when you play tennis, don’t you?”

“Wait a minute, kid. Hold it! Are you trying to tell me that it’s possible to know which dimension of time I’m in when I play tennis?”

“It is if you have a Space/Time Map.”

“A what?”

“A Space/Time Map, sir. Remember those fundamentals of the game we were talking about earlier?”

“You mean - Eyes, Brain, Body, Movement, Countermovement, and Contact?”

“Right. Here’s how they look *in Time*:

Movement -> Countermovement -> Cnt

1 -> 2 -> 3

Past -> Present -> Future

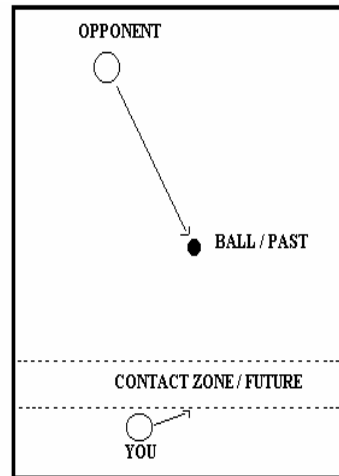
“Here’s how they look *in Space*:

Movement -> Cnt <- Countermovement

1 -> 3 <- 2

Past -> Future <- Present

“And here’s how they look on a tennis court:



“You, sir, are Countermovement. And although your body is obviously ‘in the present,’ this Space/Time Map will show you what dimension of time your mind is in.”

“Just a minute, kid! Are you trying to tell me that my body can be in the present while my mind is in another dimension of time?”

“I could not have said it any better myself, sir. Thank you. Would you like to know what dimension of time you’re in when you play tennis?”

“Do I have a choice?”

“Of course you do! You always have a choice. But if you choose to focus on the ball, then all your visual input is about the past movement of the ball. Your rotational eye movements and your refocusing eye movements are both inputting information to your brain about the past location of the ball. Nothing wrong with that, sir. It’s just means that you’re not playing tennis in the present, you’re playing tennis in the...

**BZZZ! Sorry, class. Time’s up. Pens down, please. It’s time for the Final Examination. The Big Pop Quiz. The one you’ve been cramming for out there on the tennis court. Don’t worry, though. It’s an open-book test. You can take it home with you. And, for that matter, it’s optional. You can take it, or leave it. The choice is yours. All you need is your Space/Time Map and a little imagination.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**The Final Exam**

Using your Space/Time Map, please respond to the following two scenarios. Scenario A involves a Variable-Focus Input Configuration while Scenario B involves a Fixed-Focus Input Configuration.

### SCENARIO A: Variable-Focus Input

When you focus on the ball, the *rotational* movements of your eyes are inputting information to your brain about the *past location* of the ball while the *refocusing* movements of your eyes are inputting information to your brain about the *past depth* of the ball. Here's what your eyes are showing your mind in Scenario A.

Rotational movements = Past location of ball

Refocusing movements = Past depth of ball

QUESTION: In what dimension of time are you when your mind is simultaneously receiving information about the *past location* and *past depth* of the ball.

ANSWERS:

1. In the Past
2. In the Present
3. In the Future

If your answer to this question is #1, then please continue to Scenario B.

If your answer to this question is #2 or #3, then please continue to play normal tennis. Some day the party will visit your house. Hope you're home.

### SCENARIO B: Fixed-Focus Input

When you focus on your Contact Zone, the rotational movements of your eyes will still be inputting information to your brain about the *past location* of the ball, but the refocusing movements of your eyes will now be inputting information to your brain about the *future depth of contact*. Here's what your eyes are showing your mind in Scenario B.

Rotational movements = Past location of ball

Refocusing movements = Future depth of Contact

**QUESTION:** What dimension of time are you in when your mind is simultaneously receiving equivalent information about the *past* and the *future*?

Raise your hand when you know the answer.  
It's the answer to the Big Question .

\*\*\*\*\*

### The Paradox

Quite a mystery, isn't it? And here's the paradox. Even when you know how the mystery ends, it remains a mystery. It has to. Playing tennis in the zone is first, and foremost, a mystery of personal potential. A mystery that can only be played-out on your own private stage. Call it interactive. You are the only one who can solve the mystery. And the only way to solve it is by doing it. You can't experience the zone from the outside looking in. It doesn't work that way. You have to jump inside. You have to take the leap. Then, and only then, will you truly understand what this magnificent mystery is all about.

*How* to play tennis in the zone is not the issue. It can *absolutely* be taught and it can *absolutely* be learned. The cat's out of the bag on that one.

Nor is there an issue of *why* you play better when you are in the zone. It's not magic. It's your Visual/Cognitive/Motor system operating in its most efficient mode. Magical, yes. Magic, uh-uh.

The real issue is choice. To risk or not to risk? Do you settle, or do you abandon the confines of your comfort zone and step into the unknown regions of your own potential?

Choice.

In the end, playing tennis in the zone is a personal journey. A singular investigation of yourself. You see, the real mystery is *not* playing tennis in the zone. The real mystery is *you*.

"Bye, Sir."

"See ya', Kid."

\*\*\*\*\*