



## GOT A PROBLEM WITH YOUR GAME? WE'RE HERE TO HELP

**Q** Since the 'grunting' issue came to the fore again this summer, I've noticed that more and more players at my club are getting noisier when they hit the ball. What's the best way of 'channelling this out' so it doesn't bother me?

Sarah Maclaren, Barnet

**A** Roberto Forzoni replies: Players should focus on their own game play and other controllable factors (such as effort, attitude and responses), rather than uncontrollable factors such as their opponent's behaviour. I suspect that players who are easily distracted by the grunter may well find something else to be distracted by in the absence of noise.

So beware. If you start focusing on things beyond your direct control, you are setting yourself up for a hard time. By focusing on the fact that your opponent is grunting, you are losing track of your primary objective, which is to hit the ball well and win points. My advice when playing against a grunter is to stay focused on what's important; listening to your opponent is not one of those things.

**Q** I've been impressed by Andy Murray's improved form since he started hitting the gym hard. I'm 15. Is that too young to start weekly weight training?

Henry Hankin, Bromsgrove

**A** Andy Ireland replies: Age is not the only factor to consider when deciding whether you should start a regular strength training programme. No two growing bodies are exactly the same; one

might not reach physical maturity at the same time as the other, with there potentially being as much as two years' difference between a young person's physical development and their chronological age.

One of the biggest concerns when a young person starts strength training is the risk of injury, particularly to the ligaments within the joints and the growth plates that are found in the ends of growing



bones. If the forces used are excessive, or the exercise technique is poor, you can damage a growing body. Serious damage to the growth plates can result in stunted growth of the bone. On the positive side, however, bone strength can actually increase as a result of strength training, since the pull from muscles at the point where they attach to the bone stimulates increased bone thickness.

The risks involved shouldn't put you off starting a sensible strengthening routine – remember any activity, including tennis itself, carries a slight injury risk. The risks

## ASK THE ACE TENNIS EXPERTS...



### PHYSIO ADVICE

**Andy Ireland is the lead physio at the LTA**

'Needles', as he is known, is most famous for being part of Team Murray, but he is also the lead physio at the LTA and for the GB Davis Cup team.



### MENTAL ADVICE

**Roberto Forzoni is the national performance psychology manager at the LTA**

One of the world's leading sports psychologists, Forzoni has worked with some of sport's top athletes.

of weight training can be minimised if you keep your loads sensible and always follow correct technique. Don't start a strengthening programme on your own – seek advice from a qualified strength and conditioning coach who will write you a safe and effective programme using good technique on equipment that's appropriate to your size.

Resistance training with any young sportsperson should involve a higher number of repetitions using light-to-moderate resistance. As a guide, muscle endurance is built with repetitions of 25-30, while muscle strength is built using fewer repetitions (of, say, 8-10). Using lighter resistances initially will help you practice your technique and will stimulate better neural and muscle firing patterns, both of which will improve your strength without necessarily increasing muscle size.

I would strongly suggest that you seek the advice of a qualified strength and conditioning coach who will be able to give you specific advice appropriate to your needs.

**Q** I always do a quick stretch before I play a game, but I've noticed that my opponents can always do much deeper movements than me. I can barely touch my toes. Is this going to be detrimental to my game?

Alex Edwards, via email

**A** Andy Ireland replies: Research shows that tennis can make certain muscles become short and tight due to repeated actions (such as serving). These tight muscles include the internal rotators of the playing shoulder, the back of the shoulder joint (joint capsule), the

elbow flexors (biceps), the wrist flexors, the forearm pronators (front of forearm) and the dominant hip external rotators. Other muscles can become stretched and looser the more we play. Although stretching tight muscles is an important part of injury prevention and should be done for this reason alone, it will only improve your game if the tightness is affecting your technique or mobility around the court in some way. A qualified coach should be able to watch you play and advise as to whether poor flexibility is an issue.

It's worth remembering that some people are inherently more flexible (even hypermobile) than others and these individuals need to take greater care when stretching. Also, whatever our degree of inherent flexibility, the older we all get, the stiffer we all become due to the decreasing elasticity in joint and ligament tissues. Flexibility is therefore often more of an issue in the older player.



# Q&A

## GOT A QUESTION?

Ask our experts by emailing it to [letters@acetennismagazine.com](mailto:letters@acetennismagazine.com)