

Tennis coach has the write stuff

Book helps players get the most out of their tennis game

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FOR THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

David Ranney especially dreads seeing young people struggle with the mental aspect of tennis, the way he did in his youth.

That's why the 62-year-old Bellingham resident wrote "Tennis: Play the Mental Game."

The subtitle gives a further hint about Ranney's emphasis: "...and be in the zone every time you play."

Ranney overcame his temperament to achieve significant success in age-group and college tennis in the 1960s. He says, however, that he didn't have a clue about the real importance of the mental game until he read Timothy Gallwey's "The Inner Game of Tennis" more than 30 years ago.

Ranney, though, doesn't claim to be another Gallwey, whose book has achieved classic status.

In fact, Ranney says the in-person lessons he sought from Gallwey changed his life.

"I very much encourage people to read Tim Gallwey first," Ranney said. "He does the whole philosophical thing. My book covers the practical aspects of how anyone can improve his or her game."

"I went to great lengths to make it as clear as possible. I feel people are ripe for this."

Indeed, his 127-page volume includes an introductory chapter on core principles of the mental game, then includes 46 of what Ranney calls "mini-lessons" covering as many aspects of the game his experience told him were necessary to include.

These range from the mental, such as "on seeing the ball," to the technical, such as "when you miss the first serve."

Then he wraps the book up with a chapter of 14 drills and another on "two fun quizzes."

No less a member of tennis' royalty than Billie Jean King gives the book this testimonial: "... since reading 'The Inner Game of Tennis' by Tim Gallwey so many years ago, I have not seen another book that addresses such an essential aspect of tennis so well. Watch your game get better and better as you experience what playing the mental game is all about."

Ranney once was a big name on the youth tennis circuit, ranking as high as No. 6 in the country in 18-under singles and No. 3 in 18-under doubles. He played on the Junior Davis Cup team in 1962 and once defeated junior national champion Stan Smith, who went on to become a world-class professional player.

He helped the University of Southern California win three national championships, playing No. 6 singles on each team while playing for legendary coach George Toley. His teammates included Dennis Ralston, Bob Lutz and Smith, all of whom achieved worldwide fame.

"In those days, players stayed in college four years and freshmen were not eligi-

ble," Ranney said.

Yet for all his success, he was frustrated at his lack of success against players with higher rankings.

"I was unbelievably frustrated because I couldn't hit the ball on the court the way I wanted," he said. "I used to yell and scream on the court and I hated that."

Don't get the idea, however, that he was a John McEnroe or Ilie Nastase clone. He said his problem wasn't with the officials, but with his own game.

After college, Ranney spent a decade working as a pro in Southern California. No less an instructor than Robert Lansdorp — he coached Tracy Austin, among many other pro stars — hired him to work for four years as assistant pro at the famed Jack Kramer Tennis Club in Rolling Hills.

It was during his work as a pro that Ranney sought Gallwey's help in person.

"My book is the result of everything I learned from him," Ranney said. "I felt the weight of the world had been lifted from my shoulders. Nobody does the philosophy of the inner game better than he does, but I feel what I've included in my book is what has to happen for success on the court."

Ranney said tennis players don't have to look any further than the top of the current world rankings to see who has it all together as far as the physical and mental aspects of the game.

"Roger Federer," Ranney said of the world's No. 1 player. "You look at Federer and he's so incredibly calm. He'll be the greatest player the world has ever seen, if he isn't already. I tell my students to

watch him closely for a great example of how to play tennis the right way."

Ranney especially stresses his techniques for seeing the ball properly.

"That's what I really want people to get out of reading my book," he said. "Seeing the ball correctly is what I think tennis success is all about."

Ranney, also a highly ranked Scrabble player, spent 25 years in the computer field, with a speciality of developing the most modern ways to time running events. Now he's retired and focuses his energies on playing in age-group tournaments and on tennis instruction.

He and his wife of 25 years, Lorraine Bourcier, moved to Bellingham five years ago with their children Travis Ranney, now 22, and Jo Ranney, 18.

Tennis isn't the only sport he is interested in coaching. He says he believes he can help athletes in team sports where the muscles do many of the same things as in tennis.

"At this point, I really believe I could help baseball players to see the ball much better," he said. "Hitting a baseball is a lot like returning a tennis serve. And seeing the ball better is what I'm really all about."