

# // THE FEIN POINTS OF TENNIS"

## A REVIEW BY BOBBY BAYLISS, USPTA ELITE PRO

When I was approached to write a review of Paul Fein's new book, "The Fein Points of Tennis," I was more than flattered. Almost all of us in the tennis world know about Fein. Heck, I have his books on the bookshelf in my office and have learned to appreciate what he has done, but I was not prepared for this great addition to the state of tennis literature and all that it contained. To say it is comprehensive is to say that Roger Federer is a pretty good tennis player who has won many tournaments. Both are true but quite lacking in true assessment. In fact, after looking thoroughly through the book, I asked for two weeks to finish my review, such were the depth and scope of this work.

In just over 500 pages, Fein has covered a veritable cornucopia of information complete with extraordinary photographs and illuminating interviews with outstanding players, coaches, and others who have impacted our sport. More than 50 chapters cover a myriad of topics, from how to execute different shots (technique), to strategy and tactics, the geometry of tennis, the use of various types of spin, adjusting to the elements, and playing against left-handers. The last section of the book falls under the heading of "Final Points." In his foreword, legendary Stanford coach Dick Gould calls this instruction book "an engrossing potpourri of lessons learned from some of the best players and greatest matches at the most prestigious venues of our time." My great fear is that I may fail to adequately highlight why I believe it is the greatest single work tennis has produced.

Insightful interviews with many top coaches and players such as Allen Fox, Gene Mayer, Patrick Mouratoglou, David Macpherson, Nick Bollettieri, Rick Macci, Pat Cash, Bob and Mike Bryan, and Harold Solomon, plus in-depth quotes from Martina Navratilova, Richard Williams, and Doug MacCurdy to name only a few, offer insights into their diverse approaches to achieving greatness. Under the heading of "Technique," Fein discusses how it has changed, modern equipment vs. the standard wooden rackets of an earlier era, why today's players use smaller grips, the debate between 2 hands vs. only 1, the "swing volley," and playing defense. Subtle observations include commentary on the half-volley, touch and feel, the toss for the serve, deception, and the lob and overhead. Fein also explains why technique is even more important today than in yesteryear. Fein even discusses whether or not to elect to serve first and all the complexities that accompany that decision. Analyzing one's opponent and the importance of unforced errors are discussed in terms a layman can understand.

Under "The Geometry of Tennis," Fein adds his thoughts on shot selection, tactical mistakes, anticipation, depth, the



use of spin, momentum, and the art of closing out a match. In another section, the author delves into the art of doubles, citing the Bryan brothers frequently and addressing today's differing formations, when to use them, and how to best defeat them. "Miscellaneous topics" include playing other sports to supplement tennis, the growing importance and impact of analytics on modern tennis, balance, all-time great tennis quotes, senior play, what we can learn from watching the pros, and how the U.S. can regain its once-proud tennis prominence.

As a long-time college tennis coach (the US Naval Academy, MIT, and Notre Dame), I wish this book had been available to me when I began my coaching career in the late 1960s. It would have resulted in greater improvement in my players and made my life immeasurably simpler. What is remarkable about



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“The Fein Points of Tennis” is the manner in which so much information is organized and the ease of understanding it. Fein seems to anticipate all of our questions in advance and to somehow find a way to answer them. His writing style is easy to read and understand. His ability to reinforce concepts with anecdotal stories makes technical information easier to comprehend. If ever there were a “one size fits all” book, this would be it. Numerous books offer ‘how to’ advice and an even greater number tell stories, but none in my reading experience match “The Fein Points of Tennis” in doing both.

I particularly enjoyed insights into why and how modern stroke mechanics have evolved. That modern equipment is approaching the “spaghetti stringing” of a bygone era when it was quickly banned is a concern. Fein suggests that today’s lighter, stronger frames with smaller

grips and polyester strings have brought us to the point where it is not unfair to consider a mandatory change in frames and/or strings similar to the ban in the 1970s without which would have, for all purposes, eliminated the serve and volley. Certainly, we are not far from seeing them only in our memories. Just as 1960s-era tennis became boring to some because of its tendency toward very short points, today’s tennis lacks the true, all-court play we all enjoy watching. He forces us to think out of the box about what is best for this game we all love.

Additionally, I truly appreciated reading how Paul Fein has blended and compared today’s modern teaching concepts with older, more traditional ones. He explores many, and sometimes conflicting, concepts and lets us know what he thinks while allowing the choice to be our own. He also quotes and paraphrases many coaches

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TECHNIQUE AND TACTICS TO UNLEASH YOUR TALENT

Paul Fein  
Foreword by Dick Gould

COACHES CHOICE

and players from different eras. This has been of particular interest to me. He acknowledges that, while there may not be only one single most successful path to excellence, modern players, much like Hansel and Gretel, have at least left us some breadcrumbs to follow.

The best thing for me about being asked

to write this review is that I now have my own copy of "The Fein Points of Tennis." I find myself re-reading parts of it almost daily. Not only did I learn a great deal, but I now know the reasons why certain things work when others do not. I thoroughly enjoyed the depth of the interviews with former players and prominent coaches.

I now better appreciate the importance of analytics. I better understand today's training and have a greater appreciation for the sacrifices made by today's players. I have an increased concern that modern evolving equipment might make tennis less fun to play and watch. My knowledge of how different coaches changed some of the techniques and patterns of play of world-class players has been broadened. It helps that Paul plays tournament tennis himself. He can better understand why some players choke and others thrive in the biggest moments.

While I have enjoyed many books that cover tennis, I have yet to find one that covers the sport so well and so thoroughly. It is thought-provoking, easy to read, and truly an exceptional examination of all things tennis. ★

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