

## Shrieking Should Be Banned

By Mark Dickson

Shrieking and excessive grunting on the tennis court should be banned from tennis, should be considered a hindrance under the Rules of Tennis and result in a code violation to the offending player.

Fans' enthusiasm and noise has to be encouraged and player enthusiasm should be encouraged, but all this shrieking by players is NOT enthusiasm and should be eliminated and banned.

Several weeks ago I had a boy visit my academy for an afternoon. No one in Sarasota wants to practice with him because of his unsportsmanlike tactics and ridiculous noise level of grunting. I explained to him that we had strict rules in place he had to follow and to just play his best tennis and knock off the grunting and the gamesmanship. Anything construed as unsportsmanlike behavior or negative attitude would result in an immediate point penalty. Any further infractions would result in a seat on the bench.

I went on to explain to him how he was cheating himself and destroying his chances to fully develop his game, his fitness, his relationships with fellow players and his long-term success. He told me that he thought his grunting showed everyone how much he cared, how competitive he was and how hard of an effort he was making. He also felt that his grunting was vital to timing the ball well.

The boy never grunted again at practice that day, played much better than his usual level, was incredibly enthusiastic and everyone enjoyed his company. His father was dumbfounded to see his son compete at such a much higher level without all the customary grunting, fits of temper and gamesmanship.

Parents and other academy students who had endured his previous behavior couldn't believe this was the same child or that he could simply abruptly conform to a professional standard of behavior. No one could get over what a great personality he had compared with his usual demeanor.

For many years this boy had been “taught,” “allowed,” “encouraged,” and “enabled” by parents and coaches to have all these terrible habits. His grunting, shrieking and gamesmanship were learned habits that he had developed just like any other habit.

My experience as a USTA High Performance Coach and former ATP Tour professional is that players can easily turn on and turn off their shrieking and excessive grunting. I have witnessed this for years as players practice at one decibel level and play their matches at another. Shrieking or no shrieking, the level of play stays the same.

For the health of tennis, shrieking is a terrible habit that has to be stopped, either by the coaches of players or tournament Referees having enough courage to properly enforce the Rules of Tennis.

Coaches should take some responsibility, display their love of the sport and concern for a child’s well-being by putting a stop to all the shrieking, gamesmanship, cheating and negative attitudes.

Just as champion players should be willing to do the things others aren’t willing to do, champion coaches should do the same.

In the latter years of my career as a professional tennis player, I slipped into the unintentional habit of bouncing the ball too long before serving and taking the fully allotted time between points. The excruciating pain I felt every time when bending my knees caused me to slow down my routine to the point where it became frustrating to my opponents and tested the patience of fans who had paid a lot of money to be entertained.

I wasn’t using gamesmanship or trying to gain any unfair advantage. I was just trying to get up enough courage to deeply bend my knees and put in an effective serve to somehow remain competitive against healthy opponents.

The bottom line was that my slow play was hurting the game of tennis and the rules of the game were eventually changed to shorten the time allowed between points. Slow play is no longer an issue because tennis officials took a stance and made the correct change for the benefit of the game, the players and the fans.

The same process of enforcing or modifying the rules needs to take place with regard to shrieking and excessive grunting. It is unfair to opponents and miserable for fans to suffer through.

If we can find it easy and important enough to measure and regulate racquets, balls, the speed and accuracy of shots, the size of a patch on a player's clothing and the size of an advertiser's display attached to the net, we can certainly measure and regulate the irritating noise of shrieking.

At professional events, how difficult would it be to place a decibel meter at various places on the courts? We already have wires running everywhere. No judgment by an official would be necessary. Any shrieking or grunting that exceeds a certain level triggers results a loss of the point. Next point, no challenges.

The Rules of Tennis allow for a player who has intentionally hindered their opponent to be assessed a code violation. I feel that shrieking and excessive grunting are intentional acts and it is the responsibility of tennis officials to enforce the rules for the benefit of all participants and fans of our great game.

Mark Dickson is Director of the Mark Dickson Tennis Academy in Sarasota, Florida. A former US Open singles and doubles quarterfinalist, Mark achieved ATP Tour world rankings of #12 in year-end prize money, #32 in singles and #23 in doubles. Internationally recognized for his coaching and motivational skills, professionalism, positive attitude and serving ability, Mark is a 10-time winner of professional tournaments around the world, 3-time sportsmanship award winner, 3-time All-American at Clemson University where he was ranked # 2 in singles and #5 in doubles in the United States and ITCA Senior Player-of-the-Year. For over twenty years, Mark has been a coach and mentor to players seeking to improve their games. He has had juniors ranked #1 in the world, #1 in the United States and #1 in Florida as well as tour professionals travel to train with him in Sarasota. Mark holds Professional Certifications as an ATP Tour Professional, USTA High Performance Coach, USPTA Professional 1, PTR, Pat Etcheberry strength and conditioning specialist and is a Sport Science Level 1 Coach. He is a member of the US Open Final 8 Club, Australian Open Last Eight Club and Clemson University Hall of Fame. Mark is a frequent public speaker and motivator to junior tennis players and can be reached online at [www.markdicksonennis.com](http://www.markdicksonennis.com) or at 941.356.4932.