

Local Spotlight Feature  
**Confessions**  
of a Tennis Junkie

By Meg Ebner

*The word "bubbly" must have been invented for Meg Ebner. Her enthusiasm for the sport of tennis and her desire to share her delight with friends and readers seems to be just another facet of her attitude towards life-gregarious, engaged and engaging. Meg's article for this edition is about mastering the challenge of tennis. Her commitment to the sport is equaled by the passion she brings to volunteering, spending time with her family, friends and neighbors, and being on hand for her two girls and their extracurricular activities.*

Meg says she has been inspired by fit active retired people like her older neighbors, from the couple who takes a walk together each day to the retired man who always stops to say hello to her when she is out for a run. "I have a passion for people," says Meg. "I look at each person I meet as a teacher, because everyone has something to teach me from their life's experiences."

For Meg, any experience can be an opportunity for both teaching and learning. "Sharing my passion with others gives me so much energy," she says. "I feel the same way about tennis. I don't want to be selfish with my love for tennis, I want to share it with everybody."

We hope that Meg's narrative "confessions" of her passion for tennis will not only inspire, but motivate you to pursue excellence in your sport (s) of choice—remember that all (that) you have to accomplish is your own personal best!

It all started quite innocently with one tennis lesson. I had always been interested in health and fitness. Thanks to a program of step aerobics and weight lifting, I thought I was in pretty good shape. So when I saw an ad in one of the fitness magazines that I read that said tennis was

a great sport for an all-body workout, it sparked my interest. I was eager to try tennis because it would provide variety and allow me to cross-train.

During my first tennis lesson, I was surprised at how tennis blended aerobic and anaerobic exercise. I loved the challenge of trying to get to EVERY ball. After about a month of taking one hourly lesson a week, I decided that I wanted to learn more quickly. I started taking two private lessons a week. In addition to the tennis, I started running so that I would improve my ability to move quickly around the court. After about three months, I realized that I was passionate about tennis. I was on the court 3-4 days a week and loving every minute of it.

Everything I did revolved around tennis. I changed my workouts at the gym so that I would be stronger and quicker for tennis. I had always been interested in following a healthy diet, and became even more devoted to it. I took out my juicer and pureed carrots, beets, celery, ginger,

and zucchini. I ate spinach salads, egg-beaters, strawberry and blueberry-soy smoothies, and lots of other fresh fruits and vegetables on the list of top twenty healthiest foods.

Five months into my quest to become a tennis player, I felt awesome. At the age of thirty-eight, I felt like I was twenty one. I had never been in better aerobic shape. I was lifting weights 2-3 times a week, taking one step aerobics class a week, running 2-3 times a week (5 miles), and playing tennis four days a week. Life was great!

About four months into my lessons, my coaches told me that if I wanted to get better, I would need to start playing games and playing against other people. I had never even considered competing because I always thought that you had to have a killer instinct. I learned that there is such a thing as a nice competitor.



Front (L to R) Meg Ebner, Peggy Orishimo, and Vivian Lowenstein.  
Back (L to R) June Wreen (tennis pro) and Leona Ziegler.

I definitely wanted to keep learning and getting better at tennis, so I was willing to take the next step - playing a match against another woman. I was so scared during my first match that my hands were shaking and I couldn't throw the ball up straight to serve. When the match was over, I almost cried. Playing the match was way out of my comfort zone.

I was just glad that I survived that first match. I talked to my coach and he suggested reading several books that would help me get over my fears of competing. I figured that at thirty-eight, it was too late to change my personality and that each match was going to be torture for me. I have always been my worst critic and definitely had set really high goals for myself. My first few matches, I defeated myself on the court.

Thank goodness help was on the way! Before I started competing, I told my coach that it really didn't matter to me if I won or lost. After losing those first few matches, I quickly decided that it DEFINITELY mattered if I won or lost. Losing stunk! I wanted to win! My favorite book was, "The New Toughness Training for Sports," by James E. Loehr. It gave me hope. One of Loehr's aphorisms is that "Toughness is learned." How freeing it was to read that sentence? I didn't realize that at thirty-eight, I could change part of my personality. I was eager to have some toughness.

After six months of tennis lessons, I started competing in USTA (United States Tennis Association) singles matches. My adrenaline level peaked at the beginning of the USTA matches because I was so nervous, but I had a special mindset. I always hit some of my worst shots during the first couple of games. When I did so, I would hear my coach saying to me, "Next ball, Meg. Forget about that last ball, focus only on the next ball." During my matches, I wasn't Type A at all. I was my best cheerleader. Even if I were losing, I would tell myself that I could still win. I played five singles matches during my first USTA season and I won all five of the matches. I definitely have to give most of the credit to my coaches and James Loehr. Now I love to compete because I know that a great match will push me to a higher level of tennis.

After nine wonderful months of tennis, I sprained my ankle and then injured my wrist (not from tennis). I spent four long months going to different doctors trying to get a diagnosis for my wrist. During those grueling four months, I felt like somebody had ripped my heart out because I missed tennis so much. I kept training (running, step aerobics, and elliptical machine) so that when I could return to tennis, I would be ready physically. Not playing tennis anymore because my right wrist was injured wasn't an option anymore.

I started learning how to play tennis with my left hand just to be on the tennis court while I was rehabilitating my right wrist. Learning to play with my left hand has definitely been a humbling experience. I missed the mental and physical challenge of tennis, the anaerobic drills, the competition, and the friendships that I had made during those intense nine months.

It's been five and a half months since I hit the ball with my

right hand. My physical therapist just gave me permission to hit the tennis ball right handed off my garage door. Because of all of the rain, I am hitting the ball in my foyer off the wall. The other night as my husband saw the tennis ball rolling into the family room, he said, "What are you doing in there?" I told him I was working on playing tennis with my right hand again. 'Whatever it takes' is my motto. I feel like I am a rocket ready to launch.

Challenge yourself! Add something new to your exercise program. Mix things up with cross training. Treat yourself to a tennis lesson. It just may just change your life!



A nationally published journalist with a background in features, book reviews and beat reporting, Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans is also an ordained Episcopal priest. Currently a freelance writer whose opinion pieces on religion and other topics appear periodically in the Philadelphia Inquirer, Evans also does marketing and development writing for local commercial and nonprofit institutions. While by no means a gym rat, she runs regularly in her Glenmoore neighborhood, trying to live down the stereotype that clergy always have their head in the clouds.

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