

# TENNIS, TRIGONOMETRY, TORNADOES

A Midwestern boyhood  
By *David Foster Wallace*

When I left the boxed township of Illinois farmland where I grew up to attend my dad's alma mater in the lurid, jutting Berkshires of western Massachusetts, I right away developed a jones for mathematics. I'm starting to see why this was so. College math evokes a Midwesterner's sickness for home. I'd grown up inside vectors, lines and lines athwart lines, grids—and, on the scale of horizons, broad curving lines of geographic force, the weird topographical drain-swirl of a whole lot of ice-ironed flatland that sits and spins atop plates. I could plot by eye the area behind and below these broad curves at the seam of land and sky way before I came to know anything as formal as integrals or rates of change. Calculus was, quite literally, child's play.

In late childhood I learned how to play tennis on the blacktop courts of a small public park carved from farmland. This was in my home of Philo, Illinois, a tiny collection of corn silos and war-era Levittown homes whose native residents did little but sell crop insurance and nitrogen fertilizer and herbicide, and collect property taxes from the young academics at nearby Champaign-Urbana's university, whose ranks swelled enough in the flush late 1960s to make an outlying oxymoron like "farm and bedroom community" lucid.

*David Foster Wallace is a fiction writer living in Boston.*

Between the ages of twelve and fifteen I was a near great junior tennis player. I cut my competitive teeth beating up on lawyers' and dentists' kids at little Champaign and Urbana country club events, and was soon killing whole summers being driven through dawns to tournaments all over Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa. At fourteen I was ranked seventeenth in the United States Tennis Association's Western Section ("Western" being the creakily ancient USTA's designation for the Midwest; farther west were the Southwest, Northwest, and Pacific Northwest sections), fourth in the state of Illinois, and around one hundredth in the nation, having flown in 1976, at the regional association's expense, to the U.S. National Junior Hardcourt Championships in Kalamazoo, Michigan, where in the second round I got my rural ass handed to me by a California kid named Scott Davis, who's now a marginal figure on the pro circuit.

My flirtation with tennis excellence had way more to do with a weird proclivity for intuitive math, and with the township where I learned and trained, than with athletic talent. Even by the standards of junior competition, in which everybody's a tight bud of pure potential, I was a pretty untalented tennis player. My hand-eye was okay, but I was neither large nor quick, had a near concave chest and wrists so thin I could bracelet them with a thumb and pinkie, and could hit a tennis ball no harder or

truer than most girls my age. What I could do—in the words of my township's juniors' coach, a thin guy who chewed Red Man and spat into a Folgers can—was "Play the Whole Court." This was a tennis cliché that could mean any number of things. In my case, it meant I knew my limitations and the limitations of the courts I played on, and adjusted thusly. I was at my best in bad conditions.

Now, conditions in Central Illinois are from a mathematical perspective interesting and from a tennis point of view bad: summer heat and wet-mitten humidity; moths and crap gnats forming an asteroid belt around each tall lamp at night, the whole lit court surface aflutter with spastic little shadows; mosquitoes that spawn in the fields' furrows and in the conferva-choked ditches that box each field; and, most of all, wind.

The people I know from outside it distill the Midwest into blank flatness, black land and fields of green fronds or five o'clock stubble, gentle swells and declivities that make the topology a sadistic exercise in plotting quadrics, highway vistas so same and dead they drive motorists mad. Those from Indiana, Wisconsin, and northern Illinois think of their Midwest as agronomics and commodities futures and corn-detasseling and bean-walking and seed-company caps, apple-cheeked Nordic types, cider and slaughter and football games with white fog banks of breath exiting helmets. But in the odd central pocket

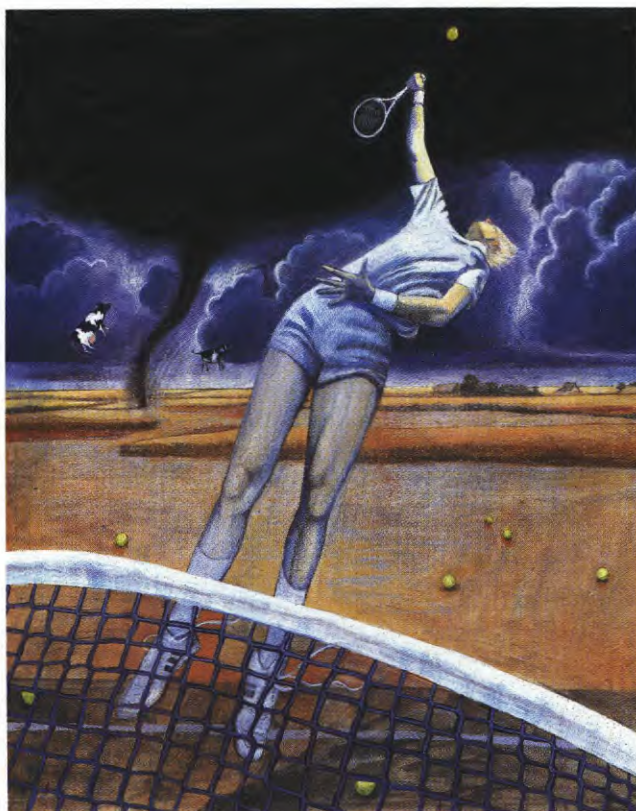
that is Champaign-Urbana, Rantoul, Philo, Mahomet-Seymour, Mattoon, and Tolono, Midwestern life is informed and deformed by wind. To the west, between us and the Rockies, there is basically nothing tall, and weird zephyrs and stirs join breezes and gusts and thermals and down-drafts and whatever out over Nebraska and Kansas, and move east like streams into rivers and jets and military fronts that gather like avalanches and roar in reverse down pioneer ox trails toward our own unsheltered asses. Nobody I knew in Philo combed his hair because why bother.

The worst was spring, boys' high school tennis season, when the nets would stand out stiff as proud flags and an errant ball would blow clear to the easternmost fence, interrupting play on the next several courts. Summers were manic and gusty, then often, around August, deadly calm. The wind would just die, some days, in August, and it was no relief at all; the cessation drove us nuts. We realized afresh how much the wind had become part of the soundtrack to life in Philo. The sound of wind had become, for me, silence. When it went away, I was left with the squeak of the blood in my head and the aural glitter of all those little eardrum hairs quivering like a drunk in withdrawal.

**T**o your average outsider, Central Illinois looks ideal for sports. The ground, seen from the air, strongly suggests a board game: anally precise squares of dun or khaki cropland all cut and divided by plumb-straight tar roads. From ground level, the arrayed fields of feed corn and soybeans look laned like sprint tracks or Olympic pools, replete with the angles and alleys of serious tennis.

The terrain's strengths are its weak-

nesses. Because the land seems so even, designers of clubs and parks rarely bother to roll it flat before laying the asphalt for tennis courts. The result is usually a slight list that only a player who spends a lot of time on the courts will notice. Since tennis courts are for sun-and-eye reasons always laid lengthwise north-south, and since the land in Central Illinois rises very gently as one moves east toward Indiana, the court's forehand



half, for a rightie facing north, always seems physically uphill from the backhand. The same soil that's so full of humus farmers have to be bought off to keep markets unflooded splits asphalt courts open with the upward pressure of broadleaves whose pioneer-stock seeds are unthwarted by a half-inch cover of sealant and stone. So all but the very best maintained courts in the most affluent Illinois districts are their own little rural landscapes, with tufts and cracks and underground-seepage puddles being part of the lay that one plays.

Tennis-wise, I had three preternatural gifts to compensate for not much physical talent. The first was that I

always sweated so much that I stayed fairly well ventilated in all weathers. Oversweating seems an ambivalent blessing, and it didn't exactly do wonders for my social life in high school, but it meant I could play for hours on a Turkish-bath July day and not flag a bit so long as I drank water and ate salty stuff between matches. I always looked like a drowned man by about game four, but I didn't cramp, vomit, or pass out, unlike the gleaming Peoria kids whose hair never even lost its part right up until their eyes rolled up in their heads and they pitched forward onto the shimmering concrete.

A bigger asset still was that I felt extremely comfortable inside straight lines. This was environmental. Philo is a cock-eyed grid: nine north-south streets against six northeast-southwest, dozens and dozens of gorgeous slanted-cruciform corners (the east and west intersection-angles' tangents could be evaluated integrally in terms of their secants!) around a three-intersection central town common. Most of my memories of childhood, whether of furrowed acreage or a harvester's sentry duty along R.R. 104W or the play of sharp shadows against the Legion Hall softball field's

dusk, I could now reconstruct on demand with an edge and protractor.

I liked the sharp intercourse of straight lines more than the other kids I grew up with. I think this is because they were natives, whereas I was an infantile transplant from Ithaca, New York, where my dad had Ph.D.'d. So I'd known, even as a baby, horizontally and semiconsciously, something different, the tall hills and serpentine one-ways of upstate New York. I'm pretty sure I kept the amorphous mush of curves and swells as a contrasting backlight somewhere down in the lizardy part of my brain, because the Philo children I fought and played with, kids who knew and had known

nothing else, saw nothing stark or new-worldish in the township's planar layout, prized nothing crisp.

My first really detailed memory is all sharp edges. I was helping a neighbor kid help his mother till a new vegetable garden out in their backyard one April. The garden's outline was a perfect square, with five quincunx subareas—the center for hallowed zucchini—laid out in an H of popsicle sticks and twine. We little boys removed rocks and hard clods from the lady's path as she worked the Ro-

totiller, a rented, wheelbarrow-shaped, gas-driven thing that roared and snorted and bucked and seemed to propel its mistress rather than vice versa, her feet leaving drunken prints in the earth. In the middle of the tilling my friend's baby brother, maybe like four at the time and wearing some kind of fuzzy red Pooh-wear, came tear-assing out into the backyard crying, holding something really unpleasant-looking in his upturned palm. It turned out to have been a rhomboid patch of mold from some exotic corner of their damp

basement. It was a sort of nasal green, black-speckled, vaguely hirsute. Worse, the patch of mold looked incomplete, gnawed on; some nauseous stuff was smeared around the little kid's mouth. "I ate this," he started crying as his mother shut down the tiller and came to him. My friend and I were grossed out as only kids can get grossed out by smaller kids' repulsive snafus. But the little kid's mother, who now that I think about it disappeared under vague medical circumstances a couple years later, went utterly nuts:

"Help! My son ate this!" she yelled, over and over, holding the speckled patch aloft, running around and around the garden's quadrants while my neighbor and I gaped at our first real adult hysteria, the sobbing little kid forgotten by all of us.

"Help! My son ate this! Help!" she kept yelling, running in tight complex little patterns just inside the H of string that marked the garden's quincunx; and I remember noting, and being alone in noting, how even in trauma her flight lines were plumb, her footprints Native American-straight, her turns, inside the ideogram of string, crisp and martial. She ran and yelled and turned and yelled and ran. My friend's dad, who had a pipe sticking out of his face, had to go get the hose.

Unless you're just a mutant, a virtuoso of raw force, you'll find that competitive tennis, like money-pool, requires geometric thinking, the ability to calculate not merely your own angles but the angles of response to your angles. Tennis is to artillery and air strikes what football is to infantry and attrition. Because the expansion of response possibilities is quadratic, you are required to think  $n$  shots ahead, where  $n$  is a hyperbolic function limited by (roughly) your opponent's talent and the number of shots in the rally so far. I was good at this. What made me for a while near great was that I could also admit the differential complication of wind into my calculations. Wind did massive damage to many Central Illinois junior players, particularly in the period between April and July when it needed lithium badly, tending to gust without pattern, swirl and backtrack

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and die and rise, sometimes blowing in one direction at court level and in another altogether ten feet overhead. The best planned, best hit ball often just blew out of bounds, was the basic unlyrical problem. It drove some kids near mad with the caprice and unfairness of it all, and on real windy days these kids, usually with talent out the wazoo, would have their first apoplectic racket-throwing tantrum in about the match's third game and by the end of the first set would have lapsed into a kind of sullen coma, bitterly expecting to get screwed over by wind, net, tape, sun. I, who was affectionately known as Slug because I was so lazy in practice, located my biggest tennis asset in a weird robotic detachment from whatever unfairnesses of wind and weather I couldn't plan for. I couldn't begin to tell you how many tournament matches I won between the ages of twelve and fifteen against bigger, faster, more coordinated, and better coached opponents simply by hitting balls unimaginatively back down the middle of the court in schizophrenic gales, letting the other kid play with more verve and panache, waiting for enough of his ambitious balls aimed near the lines to curve or slide via wind outside the green court and white stripe into the raw red territory that won me yet another ugly point. It wasn't pretty or fun to watch, and even with the Illinois wind I never could have won whole matches this way had the opponent not eventually had his small nervous breakdown, buckling under the obvious injustice of losing to a shallow-chested "pusher" because of the shitty rural courts and rotten wind that rewarded cautious automatism instead of verve and panache. I was an unpopular player, with good reason. But to say that I did not use verve or imagination was untrue. Acceptance is its own verve, and it takes imagination for a player to like wind, and I liked wind.

I started to win a lot. At twelve, I began getting entry to tournaments beyond Philo and Champaign and Danville. I was driven by my parents or by the folks of Gil Antitoui, son of a Québécois-history professor from

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Urbana, to events like the Central Illinois Open in Decatur, a town built and owned by the A. E. Staley processing concern and so awash in the stink of roasting corn that kids would play with bandannas tied over their mouths and noses; like the McDonald's Junior Open in the serious-corn town of Galesburg, way out west by the river, where in 1974 Antitoi so pummeled Hans Block, son of a prosperous hog farmer who was later to become the most hated man in the Midwest as Reagan's secretary of agriculture, that Hans Block, ranked eighth in Illinois in Twelve and Unders, was never seen on a court again; like the Prairie State Open in Pekin, insurance hub and home of Caterpillar tractor; like the Midwest Junior Clay Courts at a chichi private club in Peoria's pale version of Scarsdale.

Over the next four summers I got to see way more of the state than is normal or healthy, albeit most of this seeing was at a blur of travel and crops, looking between nod-outs at sunrises abrupt and terribly candent over the crease between fields and sky, riding in station wagons' backseats through Saturday dawns and Sunday sunsets. I got steadily better; Antitoi, unfairly assisted by an early puberty, got radically better.

By the time we were fourteen, Antitoi and I were the Central Illinois cream of our age bracket, usually seeded one and two at area tournaments, able to beat all but a couple of even the kids from the Chicago suburbs who, together with a contingent from Grosse Pointe, Michigan, usually dominated the Western Sectional rankings. Antitoi and I ranged over the exact same competitive territory; he was my friend and foe and bane. Though I'd started playing two years before he, he was bigger, quicker, and basically better than I by about thirteen, and I was soon losing to him in the finals of just about every tournament I played. So different were our appearances and approaches and general gestalts that we had something of a modest epic rivalry from 1974 through 1977. I had gotten so prescient at using surface, sun, and gusts that I was regarded as a kind of physical savant, a medicine boy of wind and heat, and could play

just forever, sending back moon balls baroque with ornate spins. Antitoi, uncomplicated from the git-go, hit the holy shit out of every round object that came within his ambit, aiming always for a backcourt corner. When he was "on," having a good day, he varnished the court with me. When he wasn't at his best (and the hours we spent—David Hurst from Bloomington, Kirk McKenzie and Steve Moe of Danville, and I—in meditation and seminar on what variables of diet, sleep, romance, car ride, and even sock color factored into the equation of Antitoi's mood and level day to day), he and I had great matches, real marathon wind-suckers.

Of the eleven finals we played in 1974, I won two.

**M**idwest junior tennis was my early initiation into true adult sadness. I had, by thirteen, developed a sort of Taoist hubris about my ability to control via non-control. I'd found a way not just to accommodate but to employ the heavy summer winds in matches. No longer just mooning the ball down the center to allow plenty of margin for error and swerve, I was now able to use the currents the way a pitcher uses spit. I could hit curves way out into cross breezes that'd drop the ball just fair; I had a special wind serve that had so much spin the ball turned oval in the air, curved left to right like a smart slider, and then reversed its arc on the bounce. As a junior tennis player, I was for a time a citizen of the concrete physical world in a way the other boys weren't.

My betrayal came at around fifteen, when so many of these single-minded flailing boys became abruptly manish and tall, with sudden sprays of hair on their thighs and wisps on their lips and rosy arteries on their forearms. My fifteenth summer, kids I'd been beating easily the year before all of a sudden seemed overpowering. In 1977 I lost in the semifinals of two tournaments that I'd beaten Antitoi in the finals of in 1976. The other boys sensed something was up with me, smelled some breakdown in the odd détente I'd had with the elements.

I felt, as I became a later and later bloomer, alienated not just from my own recalcitrant glabrous little body

but in a way from the whole elemental exterior I'd come to see as my co-conspirator. I knew, somehow, that the call to height and hair came from outside, from whatever apart from Monsanto and Dow made the corn grow and the hogs rut. My vocation ebbed. I felt uncalled. I experienced the same resentment toward whatever children abstract as Nature that I knew Steve Moe felt when a soundly considered approach shot down the forehand line was blown out by a gust. I began, very quietly, to resent my physical place in the great schema.

It's also true that my whole Midwest tennis career matured and then degenerated under the aegis of the Peter Principle. In and around my township, where the courts were rural and budgets low and conditions extreme, I was truly near great: I could Play the Whole Court; I was In My Element. But the more important tournaments, the events into which my rural excellence was an easement, were played in a real different world: The courts' surfaces were redone every spring at the Arlington Tennis Club, where the National Junior Qualifier for our Section was held; the green of these courts' fair territory was so vivid as to distract, its surface so bare of flaw, tilt, crack, or seam as to be scary and disorienting. Playing on a perfect court was for me like treading water out of sight of land: I never knew where I was out there. The 1976 Chicago Junior Invitational was held at the Lincolnshire Bath & Tennis Club, whose huge warren of courts was enclosed by these troubling green plastic tarps attached to all the fences, with little archer-slits in them at eye level to afford some parody of spectation. These tarps, developed by some windphobe in the early 1970s, cut down the worst of the unfair gusts, but they also seemed to rob the court space of new air: Competing at Lincolnshire was like playing at the bottom of a well. I just wasn't the same, somehow, without deformities to play around. I'm thinking now that the wind and bugs and chuckholes formed for me a kind of inner boundary, my own personal set of lines. Once I hit a certain level of tournament facilities, I was disabled because I was unable

to accommodate the absence of disabilities to accommodate. Puberty-angst aside, my Midwest tennis career plateaued the moment I saw my first windscreen.

Still strangely eager to speak of the weather, let me say that my township, in fact all of east-central Illinois, is a proud part of what meteorologists call Tornado Alley. I personally have seen two or three on the ground and five aloft, trying to assemble. The grotesque frequency of tornadoes around my township is, I'm told, a function of the same variables that cause our civilian winds: We are a coordinate where fronts and air masses converge. Most days between late March and June there are Tornado Watches somewhere in our TV stations' viewing area. Watches mean conditions are right and so on and so forth—big deal. It's only the rarer Tornado Warnings, which require a confirmed sighting by somebody with reliable sobriety, that make the civil defense sirens go. The siren on top of the Philo Elementary School was a different pitch and cycle from the one off in the south part of Urbana, and the two used to weave in and out of each other in a god-awful threnody. When the sirens blew, the native families went to their canning cellars or fallout shelters (no kidding); the academic families in their bright prefab houses with new lawns and foundations of flat slab went with whatever good-luck tokens they could lay hands on to the very most central point on the ground floor after opening every single window to thwart implosion from precipitous pressure drops. For my family, the very most central point was a hallway between my dad's study and a linen closet, with a reproduction of a Flemish Annunciation scene on one wall and a bronze Aztec sunburst hanging with guillotinic mass on the other; I always tried to maneuver my sister under the sunburst.

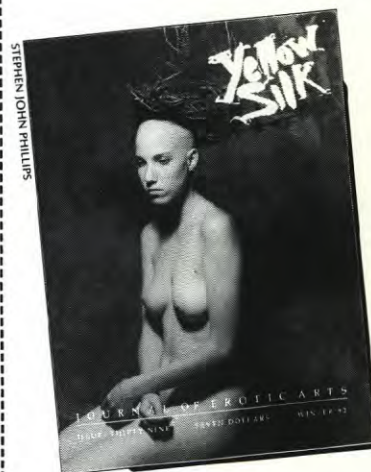
If there was an actual Warning when you were outside away from home, say at a tennis tournament in some godforsaken public park at some city fringe zoned for sprawl, you were supposed to lie prone in the deepest depression you could locate. Since the only real depressions around most tournament sites were the irrigation

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### NOTES FOR "CROSSES"

ACROSS: 1. CH-I-PP-EWA (rev.); 6. ARNICA, anagram; 11. ALONE, hidden; 13. OF-FAN-DON; 15. NIL; 16. Y-ROD reversed; 17. CLUE, odd letters; 18. PLAUSIBLY, anagram; 19. O(RIB)-I; 20. ET A(1); 21. PROM(iscuity); 23. P(I)AZZA; 24. ESSEN(c)E; 25. E(cconomic)-GEST; 26. U(...R)SA; 27. PATE(nt); 32. ERGO, two meanings; 34. (ho)TROD; 35. JOU(R...)NEYMEN, anagram; 38. SO-B, "bawl"; 39. SCRA(tch) reversed; 40. M(O)ILS; 41. UNICORN, anagram; 42. MAY-POLE. DOWN: 1. CO-NGRETE (anagram); 2. HA(IL)S; 3. ILL-USAGES, anagram; 4. Po(reversal)-ME; 5. (b)EER; 7. RADIO ASTRONOMY, anagram; 8. IDOLIZE, "idle eyes"; 9. CORYBANT(e), anagram; 10. ANYWISE, anagram; 12. NEPHROTIC, anagram; 14. FA(U...)X-PAS (reversal); 22. MURPHY, anagram; 26. UPB(anagram)-EAT(anagram); 27. POTS-TIP reversed; 28. A-FRO; 29. ENDORSE, hidden; 30. DE(JAVA)U, anagram of DUE; 31. OSMIUM, anagram of MI(as)MOUS; 33. GUCCI, "G U 2 C S I"; 36. O-RAN; 37. NO(i)NO reversed.

SOLUTION TO NOVEMBER DOUBLE ACROSTIC (NO. 107). ALMA DENNY: BUSTIN' OUT ALL RIGHT. What is so rare as a day in Joon / Wid absolutely nuttin' doon? / Nobody bein' graduated, / bon voyaged or welcome-gated? / Nobody bein' birthday-feted, testimonialized, or mated? / Joon's okay but we'd like it better / Widdout such a lot of gettin' togadder.

CONTEST RULES: Send the quotation, the name of the author, and the title of the work, together with your name and address, to Double Acrostic No. 108, *Harper's Magazine*, 666 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012. If you already subscribe to *Harper's*, please include a copy of your latest mailing label. Entries must be received by December 8. Senders of the first three correct solutions opened at random will receive one-year subscriptions to *Harper's Magazine*. The solution will be printed in the January 1992 issue. Winners of Double Acrostic No. 106 are Ralph Gerber, Miami, Florida; Linda Fink, Grand Ronde, Oregon; and Aileen Creighton, Corpus Christi, Texas.

and runoff ditches that bordered cultivated fields—ditches icky with con-ferva and mosquito spray and always heaving with what looked like conventions of copperheads and just basically places you don't want to lie prone in under any circumstances—in practice at Warned tournaments you zipped your rackets into their covers and ran to find your loved ones or even your liked ones and just milled around trying to look like you weren't terrified.

Tornadoes were a real part of my Midwest childhood, because as a little kid I was obsessed with dread over them. My earliest nightmares were about shrieking sirens and dead white skies, a slender monster on the Iowa horizon jutting less phallic than saurian from the lowering sky, whipping back and forth with such frenzy that it almost doubled on itself, trying to eat its own tail, throwing off chaff and dust and chairs. It never came any closer than the horizon; it didn't have to.

I stayed obsessed as I aged, and I know why: Tornadoes, for me, were a transfiguration. Like all serious winds, they were the z-coordinate for our little stretch of plain, a move up from the Euclidian monotone of furrow, road, axis, and grid. We studied tornadoes in junior high: A Canadian high straight-lines it southeast from the Dakotas; a moist warm mass draws on up north from Arkansas. The result was not a Greek x or even a Cartesian axis but an alchemical circling of the square. Tornadoes were, in our part of Central Illinois, the dimensionless point at which parallel lines met and whirled and blew up. They made no sense: Houses blew not out but in. Brothels were spared while orphanages next door bought it. Dead cattle were found three miles from their silage without a scratch on them.

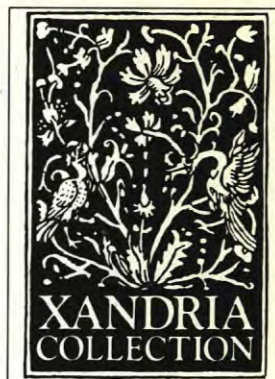
The only time I ever got caught in what might have been one was in June 1978 on a tennis court at Hessel Park in Champaign, where I was drilling one afternoon with Gil Antitoui. Though a contemptible and despised tournament opponent, I was a coveted practice partner because I could transfer balls to wherever you wanted them with the tireless consistency of a machine. This particular day it was

supposed to rain around supertime, and a couple of times we thought we'd heard the tattered edges of sirens out west toward Monticello, but Antitoi and I drilled religiously every afternoon that week on the slow clayish Har-Tru of Hessel, trying to prepare for a beastly clay invitational in Chicago. We were doing butterflies, a real unpleasant drill where his cross-courts alternated with my down-the-lines. Butterflies are primarily a conditioning drill: Both players have to get from one side of the court to the other between each stroke, and once the initial pain and wind-sucking is over, assuming you're a kid who's in absurd shape because you spend countless mindless hours jumping rope or running laps backward or doing straight sprints back and forth along the perfect furrows of bean fields each morning, once the first pain and fatigue of butterflies are got through, if both guys are good enough so that there are few unforced errors to break up the rally, a kind of fugue-state opens up inside you and your concentration telescopes toward a still point and you lose awareness of your limbs and the soft shush of your shoe's slide and whatever's outside the lines of the court, and pretty much all you know then is the bright ball and the octangled butterfly outline of its path across the court, and at Hessel Park the court was such a deep piney color that the flights of the fluorescent balls stayed on one's visual screen for a few extra seconds, leaving trails.

We had one just endless rally and I'd left the planet in a silent swoop when the court and ball and butterfly trail all seemed to surge brightly and glow as the daylight just plain went out in the sky overhead. Neither of us had noticed that there'd been no wind blowing the familiar grit into our eyes for several minutes—a bad sign. There was no siren. Later they said the civil defense alert network had been out of order. The temperature dropped so fast you could feel your hairs rise. There was no thunder; no air stirred. I could not tell you why we kept hitting. Neither of us said anything. There was no siren. It was high noon; there was nobody else on the courts. The riding mower at the softball field was still going back and forth. There

were no depressions except a saprogenic ditch along the field of new corn just west. What could we have done? I think we thought it would rain at worst and that we'd play till it rained and then go sit in Antitoi's parents' station wagon. We were both in the fugue-state that exhaustion through repetition brings on, a fugue-state I've decided that my whole time on tennis was spent chasing, a fugue-state I associate too with plowing and seeding and detasseling and spreading herbicides back and forth in sentry duty along perfect lines, up and back, or military marching on flat blacktop, hypnotic, a mental state at once flat and lush, numbing and yet exquisitely felt. We were young, we didn't know when to stop. I was mad at my body and wanted to hurt it, wear it down. Then the whole knee-high field to the west along Kirby Avenue all of a sudden flattened out in a wave coming toward us as if the field were getting steamrolled. Antitoi went wide west for a forehand cross and I saw the corn get laid down in waves and the sycamores lining the ditch point our way. There was no funnel. Either it had just materialized and come down or it wasn't a real one. The big heavy swings on the industrial swing sets took off, wrapping themselves in their chains around and around the top crossbar; the park's grass laid down the same way the field had. It all happened very fast: field, trees, swings, grass, then the feel like the lift of the world's biggest mitt, the nets suddenly and sexually up and out straight as flags, and I seem to remember whacking a ball out of my hand at Antitoi to watch its radical west-east curve, and for some reason trying to run after this ball I'd just hit, but I couldn't have tried to run after a ball I had hit, but I remember the heavy gentle lift at my thighs and the ball curving back closer and my passing the ball and beating the ball in flight over the horizontal net, my feet not once touching the ground over fifty-odd feet, and then there was chaff and crud in the air all over and both Antitoi and I were blown pinwheeling for I swear it must have been fifty feet to the fence one court over, the easternmost fence, we hit the fence so hard we knocked

*Continued on page 78*



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Continued from page 75

it halfway down, and it stuck at 45°, Antittoi detached a retina and had to wear those funky Jabbar retina-goggles for the rest of the summer, and the fence had two body-shaped indentations like in cartoons where the guy's face leaves an imprint in the skillet that hit him, two catcher's masks of fence, we both got deep quadrangular lines impressed on our faces, torsos, legs' fronts, from the fence, my sister said we looked like waffles, but neither of us got badly hurt, and no homes got whacked—either the thing just ascended again for no reason right after, they do that, they obey no rule, follow no line, hop up and down at something that might as well be will, or else it wasn't a real one. Antittoi's tennis continued to improve after that, but mine didn't. ■

### December Index Sources

1 Jerusalem Media Communications Center (Israel); 2 *Yedioth Ahronoth* (Tel Aviv); 3 U.S. Agency for International Development; 4 *Harper's* research; 5 Center for Responsive Politics (Washington); 6 U.S. Federal Reserve/New York Clearing House Association (N.Y.C.)/National Automated Clearing House Association (Alexandria, Va.); 7,8 U.S. Federal Reserve; 9 *Investment Dealers Digest* (N.Y.C.); 10 Donald Strasheim, Merrill Lynch (N.Y.C.); 11 U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis; 12 PlanEcon (Washington); 13 Institute for Economics (Cologne, Germany); 14,15 *Der Spiegel* (Hamburg, Germany); 16 Department of Peace and Conflict Research (Uppsala, Sweden)/Human Rights Watch (N.Y.C.)/U.S. Department of State; 17 Center for Defense Information (Washington); 18 U.S. Department of Defense; 19 Jean Drèze and Haris Gazdar, London School of Economics (England); 20 Pizza Hut (Wichita, Kans.)/Chinese Consulate (N.Y.C.); 21 Pizza Hut (Wichita, Kans.); 22 John Parker, *The Economist* (Moscow); 23 Catholic Information Service (Washington); 24 U.S. Bureau of the Census/Mattel (El Segundo, Calif.); 25 *Esquire* (N.Y.C.) and Beta Research Corporation (Syosset, N.Y.); 26 Media Dynamics (N.Y.C.); 27,28 Roper Organization (N.Y.C.); 29 Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (Jacksonville, Fla.); 30 Mexican Ecological Movement (Mexico City); 31 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; 32 Grizzly's Gifts (Anchorage); 33 Archaeological Resource Centre (York, England); 34 Montreal City Council; 35 Jog-A-Dog, Inc. (Genoa, Ohio); 36 *Encyclopedia of Mammals* (Facts on File, N.Y.C.); 37 Perdue Farms (Salisbury, Md.)/*Harper's* research; 38 Land O' Lakes (Arden Hills, Minn.); 39 Collin Street Bakery (Corsicana, Texas)/CRC *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics* (CRC Press, Boca Raton, Fla.).