

I have been a talented tennis player. I made a name for myself on the circuit as ruthless, with a killer instinct. I saw my opponent as simply another potential loser against whom I could demonstrate my superior skills. And I had no respect for losers. In the rare event of my losing, I could throw a tantrum worthy of my idol, McEnroe. I expected my opponents to be the same. Anything less would not be worthy of the sport - or any sport, for that matter. No room for so called 'sportsmanship' in my book- that was just a weakness to be exploited.

Then I came up against someone who seemed to epitomise all that I loathed. If I won, he would cheerfully congratulate me. If *he* won, he wouldn't leap over the net in a show of gloating bravado, but simply shake my hand and *still* still congratulate me on being a worthy opponent! No temper tantrums here - just sheer good nature. At first I sneered, but over time I developed a grudging respect for him.

He would fire a sizzling forehand at me - '*Blessed are the poor*' - which I would return - '*Bunch of losers....*' Back would come the ball - '*Blessed are the meek*' - I would return with a slamming double handed back hand - '*Weak and useless.....*' He managed a few aces - '*Love your enemiesDo good to those who hate you.....Love the Lord your God*' I told myself that. even though they were impossible to return, really it was beneath my dignity to even try.

As these games went on over time, I began to suspect that he was really a better player than it seemed. In fact, I wondered at times whether he was toying with me, allowing me to win from time to time. That should have really angered me, but he was so pleasant towards me that I couldn't help but be drawn into his 'game-within-a-game'.

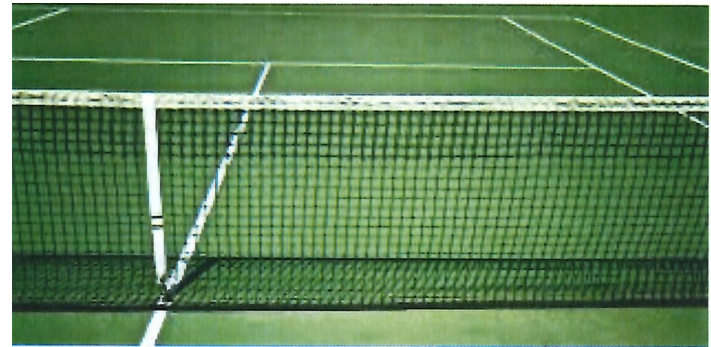
Then came the day when we were engrossed in a long, drawn out exchange of volleys. Reputations were at stake. Whoever won this won the match, and, in fact, the tournament. Wham! '*Serve one another as I have served you!*'; Whack! '*Yeah - with an ace!*' I would return, and so on, until I was faced with a high, slow lob. I was in a perfect position, poised to slam it back on the full at his feet, or, even better, directly at him. Instead I did the unthinkable - I dropped my racquet and caught the ball. I couldn't believe what I had just done. I stood, staring at the ball in my hand - '*Come, leave your nets and follow me.*' The folly of my action was beginning to dawn on me. I had not only lost the set, the match, the tournament, but I had committed tennis suicide. I would be the laughing stock of the circuit. How on earth did I let myself be drawn into this position?

Just then I felt a hand on my shoulder. He had walked around to my side of the court to stand beside me. "You have been a formidable opponent," he said, "now let me be your formidable friend."

On that day I walked away from the cut throat world that I had created. It took some getting used to. After all, I did love the game, and missed the thrill of competition. However, my new friend has shown me how to put my talents to good use, coaching young players. With his help I am also able to coach them in court etiquette - no temper tantrums; respect your opponent; value sportsmanship - attitudes that make the game enjoyable, and may even provide a competitive edge. as he himself had demonstrated.

You never know, I might get back to the circuit someday, but for the time being, I'm learning what it is to be the best person I can - the true me - from my coach and formidable friend, Jesus.

Game, set, match



©Rev'd Sr. Sandra Sears CSBC

9/10/16