

Someone Please Turn Down the Volume:
Grunting in Women's Tennis is out of Control

As a women and a sports writer specializing in tennis people ask me why I write mainly about men's tennis and don't write much about the women's game. There are reasons for this but one the main reasons is I find women's tennis unpleasant to watch because of the excessive grunting. It is hard to focus on the players and how they playing the game when you are forced to listen to grunting sounds every few seconds. Players claim grunting helps them to release the excretion required to hit a big shot. This may be true but the problem with this theory is not every shot that a player hits is a big shoot and the players that grunt seem to do so on every point they play.

Never was this clearer than during the first semi-final of this year's U.S. Open between Victoria Azarenka and Maria Sharapova. After watching the match for a few minutes I found myself wishing there was a mute button, not to quiet the commentators but to quiet the players themselves. The match was an excellent three set battle but what I remember from it is the two players shrieking each and every time they hit the ball. Their shrieks indicate something between sounds of pain and ecstasy and neither of these things belong on a tennis court. The question is why do the players feel make these sounds? There has been some speculation that coaches, especially Nick Bollettieri, have taught players to do this as a distraction to their opponents. I happen to think this is a valid theory. There are plenty of elite women's players like Serena Williams, whom seldom make a sound when they hit the ball; proving that is possible to play the game without grunting. Thus it stands to reason that someone has encouraged the players to grunt when they play and the people most likely to do this would be the coaches.

Although there has been a call by fans and other people in the tennis world for the WTA <http://www.wtatennis.com/page/Home>, the governing body of women's tennis, to act and ban grunting or charge the grunter with hindrance the solution the WTA has come up with is ridiculous. The organization has green lighted a plan where umpires will soon have a device to measure when a players grunting becomes excessive, if a players grunting is deemed excessive the umpire will notify the player and ask the player to lower it. There does not appear to be a penalty associated with this notification so there is nothing motivating the player to keep the noise down. Additionally this generation of players will not be affected by this rule since according the WTA grunting is already too much of an ingrained part of their game. The WTA is simply going to encourage the new generation not to grunt which is a bit unrealistic since the younger generation looks up to the older generation and wants to imitate everything they do including grunting. The only way to stop the grunting is for the WTA to penalize the current generation for doing it and that will stop the problem very quickly.

Whatever way you look at the grunting issue, excessive grunting is spoiling fans enjoyment of the game; and if it is distracting to fans imagine how distracting it must be for the grunter's opponent. During last year's U.S. Open final the umpire did not hesitate when charging Serena Williams with a hindrance penalty when she yelled "come on" before the point against her opponent Samantha Stosur was completed. I do not understand how yelling words are more of hindrance than constant shrieking.

The WTA needs to start penalizing players for shrieking now. True you may have a lot of players upset in the short term because of the penalties but in the long term it will stop the grunting. Once that happens maybe I can enjoy women's tennis again until then I will have to remain content watching and writing about men's tennis. It's a good thing I really enjoy the men's game.