

Jason Garriotte

I always wanted to be a professional tennis player. A few years ago, I finally had the opportunity to play in a Futures Tour event in an attempt to earn one sacred Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) point. Until you get that elusive point, the only way for you to get into professional tournaments is to receive a wild card or to qualify. My first Futures qualifier was in Decatur, Illinois, when I was 26 years old, pretty well past my tennis-playing prime, but my first chance at a professional-level tournament, nonetheless. The qualifier consisted of 128 players competing for eight spots in the main draw. The field was comprised of big-time college and ex-collegiate players, all trying to find their way onto the pro circuit.

In the first round, I drew an opponent who had just played No. 1 singles for Northwestern as a freshman. As I was warming up, one of the referees came out to tell me I couldn't wear the shirt I had on. Apparently, in the pro ranks, you can't wear anything that is considered a tee shirt. A shirt has to be made out of a material other than cotton or it has to have a collar. Unfortunately for me, I had never worn a collared shirt and I didn't have anything other than cotton in my car. The scene grew tense and contentious with tournament officials and I was going to be defaulted; however, my opponent went into his bag and let me borrow one of his shirts. I ended up playing the match in a shirt with sleeves that hung past my elbows, and I eventually lost 6-0, 7-5. Afterwards, I gave my opponent his sweaty shirt back, and I would have also given him the Arthur Ashe Award if I had it to give.

Even if I had won that match, I still would have had to win three more matches in the qualifier and one round in the main draw to get that coveted ATP point. Since then, I have played in 16 Futures qualifying events. And in most of them, I've been able to return the favor by loaning out shirts to my opponents. And yes, they have beaten me with my own shirts on. But at least I got my wish of competing as a pro.



#### Jason's Tip of the Week

When you are closing in on the net, it is most effective to move in and cut the ball off on a diagonal. Many times, there is an automatic reaction to move straight at the ball or move sideways and back, thinking that this will give you more time to prepare for a shot. This is actually a misconception if you are taking the ball out of the air. If you note the speed of a ball in play and then the speed at which your body is moving, as more time passes, the farther the ball travels in relation to you. You simply can't keep up. Therefore, if you move sideways and back to the ball, you are actually farther behind on your shot than if you had gone forward and cut it off on a diagonal angle. Oftentimes, your instincts compel you to move with the lines on the court, like heading for the center of the net. But this may not be the most efficient path. Remember, the lines are only there to define the physical limits of play, not to dictate how you should move about the court.

*Jason Garriotte is a Landings Club Tennis Professional.*

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