

## ART BUCHWALD

# Tennis, Love and Freud

WASHINGTON — A very revealing book about tennis has just crossed my desk. It's titled "Sex as a Sublimation for Tennis" (Workman Press, \$4.95) and was written by Theodor Saretsky, a Freudian specialist at Adelphi University and full-time tennis fanatic.

Saretsky told me on the phone, "It was Freud who first wrote that 'all human beings are motivated by a primal lust which translates itself into the endless and fruitless search for an unused tennis court on the weekend.'"



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Saretsky said he lucked into all of Freud's writings on the subject when he bought a trunk at a tennis memorabilia sale at Sotheby's in 1980. The trunk contained some of the master's greatest work, including "The Myth of the Sweet Spot," "Interpretation of Tennis Dreams," "The Primitive Taboo of the Foot Fault" and "The Nightmare of the Canceled Tennis Game: A Study in Obesity, Perversion and Suicide."

This year Saretsky decided to share this gold mine with the public.

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The professor said one of his most fascinating discoveries was that Freud lost interest in the sex act when he discovered that a tennis game lasted much longer.

Saretsky has found Freud's theories invaluable because more and more patients are coming to him with tennis problems rather than sexual ones. Up until recently experts in the psychoanalytical profession refused to accept tennis court mental cases because they were too difficult to cure.

"The hardest thing for a patient with a tennis neurosis or psychosis is to find an analyst who will take the time to treat him," Saretsky said. "Freud discovered the more a patient talked about his deep-seated tennis problems the more anxious the analyst was to go out on the court and hit a few balls himself. This attitude is diametrically opposed to how the analyst feels when he listens to a patient talk about sexual dysfunction."

Saretsky says, "Freud took one of the great steps in modern analysis by stating categorically, 'The only way to know one's patients is to play tennis with them.'"

I don't have the space here to reveal everything that Professor Saretsky says Freud said about tennis, but I can print a few highlights.

One is that Freud observed that individuals who immerse themselves in work and who stress family obligations and engage in extensive sexual activity, to the point where they are prevented from playing sufficient tennis, will suffer from severe tension anxiety and nosebleeds.

Another is that people who are constantly measuring the height of the net have a paranoid delusion that the net is higher on their side of the court.

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When a distinguished colleague, W. W. Wilner, after years of research, arrived at the conclusion that tennis spelled backwards was "sin-net" it confirmed Freud's scientific theory that there are murky, mysterious forces buried alive in the human psyche.

As soon as he checked it out, Freud rejected his own classical view of infant sexuality as the mainspring of the human condition and replaced it with the dictum that "tennis truths lie everywhere; they are the essence of being."

This led him to devote the remaining years of his life to studying the lingering fantasy of the empty tennis can.

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Saretsky believes that Freud's tennis writings undermined all orthodox thought in the Western world. The Viennese doctor exposed the offensive lob for what it really was, a sadistic underhanded shot of which he wrote, "The lob must be given its chance, but this is a disgusting stroke to use in mixed company if its sexual and exhibitionist roots are not honestly acknowledged and properly analyzed."

In conclusion, if you buy only one book this summer, I would recommend "Sex as a Sublimation for Tennis." If you don't play the game yourself you could save the life of someone who does.