

A STYLE FOR EVERYONE

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[Assignment: Because we use division or classification as a means of understanding what, at present, we don't understand or what we want someone else to understand, carefully chosen detail has obvious importance. How interesting and informative our analysis is depends, of course, on the kinds of categories we choose to engage a particular audience for a clear purpose.]

Envision a group of people engaged in a mental and physical battle, moving at different speeds, with different intentions, and exhibiting different styles. Could it be a scene at the local laundromat? Or perhaps it's an assembly line at an Isuzu plant; or is it the floor of the NYSE? No, it's a tennis game.

Tennis may not appear to be as exciting as Wall Street, but upon closer observation the differing styles of play become a kaleidoscope of patterns interacting to create some colorful combinations. These styles which emerge reflect distinct character types on the court. You may find them amusing, and with another keen glance you may recognize yourself or someone you know as one of them.

The most recognizable character is the Dinker. She appears on the court in shorts and a top that are recruited for gardening, grocery-shopping, or a run to the mall--kind of a one-outfit-for-all-occasions look. A Dinker cares nothing about looking like a bona fide tennis champion; she's convinced she's a winner if her poofed ball drops over the net. Ms. D. doesn't think in terms of defensive or offensive strategy; she simply pats the ball, tip-toes in place and waits while watching where the ball lands. If it is returned she'll attempt to repeat her former stroke if it's not too far out of her reach. Conserving energy is primary to a devoted Dinker.

Ms. D. lavishes compliments on her opponents, convinced that their shots are winners because of extraordinary skill, not that they are her gift-balls to them. Dinkers enjoy playing with or against other Dinkers--it validates their own style and speed of play.

Ms. Social Butterfly, the next type of player, cringes when she faces a Dinker across the net. Too many times they compete, and the Dinker wins merely by giving the opponent no pace, no bounce, no rhythm, and no way to gauge the oncoming blooper.

Ms. Butterfly is one rung above the Dinker. Unlike Ms. D., her outfit for the day is a primary concern and is very carefully chosen. After all, "It doesn't matter whether you win or lose; it's how you look." She comes to the court to bond. Therefore, plenty of time is allowed for her tennis rendezvous. She has a number of stories to share with her pals when they sit and chat between sets. The Butterflies pick up the pace a little, but they become testy if an opponent charges to the net and sends a snappy ball back. They don't mind running around the court a

little, but they don't expect to reach more than one-stretch worth to keep the ball in play.

Strategy flashes through the Social Butterfly's mind at this level, but it's strictly defensive. If a high floater is coming her way, Ms. Butterfly will saunter back four steps, let it bounce, and serenely return it right back into the same vicinity from which it came. A Social Butterfly never worries about heart attacks on the court. Her heart rate keeps the same pace as the ball; there may be some spark to it but not enough to ever cause damage.

Social Butterflies are fun to play against if you're a Part-Time Passionate. Ms. Butterfly's balls are slow enough so that one can gauge, adjust and practice a particular motion, yet they are fast enough to inject a little challenge into the game.

Part-Time Passionates come to the court with plans--plans to perfect a stroke, plans to have fun, plans for strategy, and plans to win. Tennis hasn't consumed them, but the will to win has become stronger than the desire simply to keep the ball in play by returning it graciously to the opponent. Now there emerges a desire to drive the ball down the opposing player's throat. The Part-Timer still smiles most of the match and compliments the person across the net for a good shot. But if that particular opponent beat her to a pulp last week, then the Part-Time Passionate will screen her accolades and only dole them out to the sap if her shot borders on sensational.

Fun is still a priority, but there's a determination evident at crucial times now to win the point or take the match. Move; counter-move--like a chess game but with people instead of pawns. Stroke production and physical agility all over the court now reach comfortable levels. Tennis skirts replace shorts for moving smoothly and quickly to all corners. Strategy evolves as an integral part of the match and offensive moves are the norm. This is a satisfying plateau for most advanced players. They're content to play for pleasure, and yet welcome the challenge of sinking their teeth into an occasional tense duel. Part-Timers especially salivate at the chance of playing against a Prima Donna and cutting her down to size.

Some Prima Donnas won't play Part-Time Passionates, contending that Part-Timers are beneath them in talent; it would be a step down even to appear on the court with them. Deep inside, perhaps, is the Prima's fear of losing to someone less skilled than she. It's palatable to lose to another Prima Donna. After all, an occasional bad stroke or off-day is normal. Even Graf and Sabatini have those kind of games. But it's embarrassing for a Prima Donna to lose to a Part-Time Passionate--anytime. Other Primas may gather behind her back and then decide that she's not Prima Donna quality--that she's a Part-Time Passionate in disguise!

Prima Donnas have allowed tennis to consume them. Eighty percent of the clothes in their closets have Head, Tail, or Ellesse on the front. The smiles evanesce; the compliments dwindle. Winning becomes everything, even when the cost is the loss of friendships. Primas rationalize the apparent coolness of their friends by boasting that their

own skills have improved so much that they've left those Part-Timers in the dust. In reality, the Part-Time Passionates have grown tired of the Prima Donna attitude. These Primas believe they're in a class all by themselves, and that's what they end up with--only themselves.

The Dinkers, the Social Butterflies of the world, the Part-Time Passionates, and our Prima Donnas--each has a style of her own. And all have their own place in the glorious game of tennis. There's room for everyone. So grab a racket, vow you'll never become a Prima Donna, and come aboard!!