A Few Words about Tennis Tournaments
by Ken Stuart

2017 marks my 60th year in our glorious sport. Throughout these six decades I have encountered hundreds of thousands of tennis players ranging from the absolute beginners to the single best tennis player in the world. I have discovered that there is a common thread among every single one of these people, regardless of their respective levels of play. Each and every one always, always wants to improve their game and become a better tennis player. Think about it, would you like to be better in tennis yourself? There are lots and lots of ways to improve in tennis: Lessons, drilling, ball machine and social matches. But in all of my years there has been one and only one true method of determining how you measure up relative to others in the game: SINGLE ELIMINATION TENNIS TOURNAMENTS.

In the past ten years or so I have observed that this fool proof, tried and true method of self-measurement has dissipated and has begun losing its importance as the very essence of the game to a level I never thought I would see in my life time. USTA sanctioned tournaments, non-sanctioned tournaments, charity tournaments and especially for us; Club tournaments. It is my firm belief that collectively we need to stop this “slide” and do whatever we can to reinstate tournament tennis to its former status.

In early January I attended a USTA meeting in which great concern was expressed about the diminishing number of entrants in tennis tournaments throughout the United States. The reason for this is very clear: LEAGUES. While leagues provide a minimum degree of competition, leagues fall way short of measuring individuals or doubles pairs relative ranking. Here is my example:

Let’s say you play in any division of our many leagues offered here at the club. At the end of the season it is “nice” to know your results and relative standing in the league, which is based on team wins and losses and individual pairs results. But, and it is a BIG but, there isn’t a league in the world that provides the competition, and most importantly a very specific standard of measurement of how you, as an individual or as a doubles pair, actually measure up to the competition. Only a single elimination tennis tournament can do that.

As my final example let’s look at the ATP men’s and WTA women’s professional tennis tours. They only play tournament tennis, not leagues. Why? So that they can determine on a year-long basis not only the #1 player in the world, but the respective individual rankings going down into the thousands. They recognize very clearly that tournament tennis is the ONLY true measure of an individual’s standing in tennis.

All of us here at Palisades want to revive the prominence of our three annual Club Championships. We recognize that tournament tennis isn’t for everyone but for those that want to truly assess their improvement we want to make our Club Championships the most important form of that measurement. To that end we are making some changes. We are working on a system that you can sign up for club tournaments on line, all of our tournaments will now have a consolation round for more play, we are going to come up with more incentives to play the Club Tournaments and we are going to make sure that the respective levels of play are consistent with our club ratings. Look for more details in our weekly emails.

On a final note I want to address two circumstances that I have observed over the years as to why some of you don’t participate in our Club Championships, “I get so nervous.” Well, that is what is supposed to happen. In order to get better at this game you have to expose yourself to all kinds of situations. Your pro will guide you through this initial stage of nerves and you will become a better tennis player very fast – guaranteed.

Second, I have heard far too many times; “I don’t want to play in the tournaments because if I lose or have a bad loss the club will think less of me and lower my club rating.” I will assure you from the very top and give you my word that will never, ever happen at Palisades Tennis Club. In fact, the exact opposite will happen. You will be admired and highly respected for just getting out and trying.