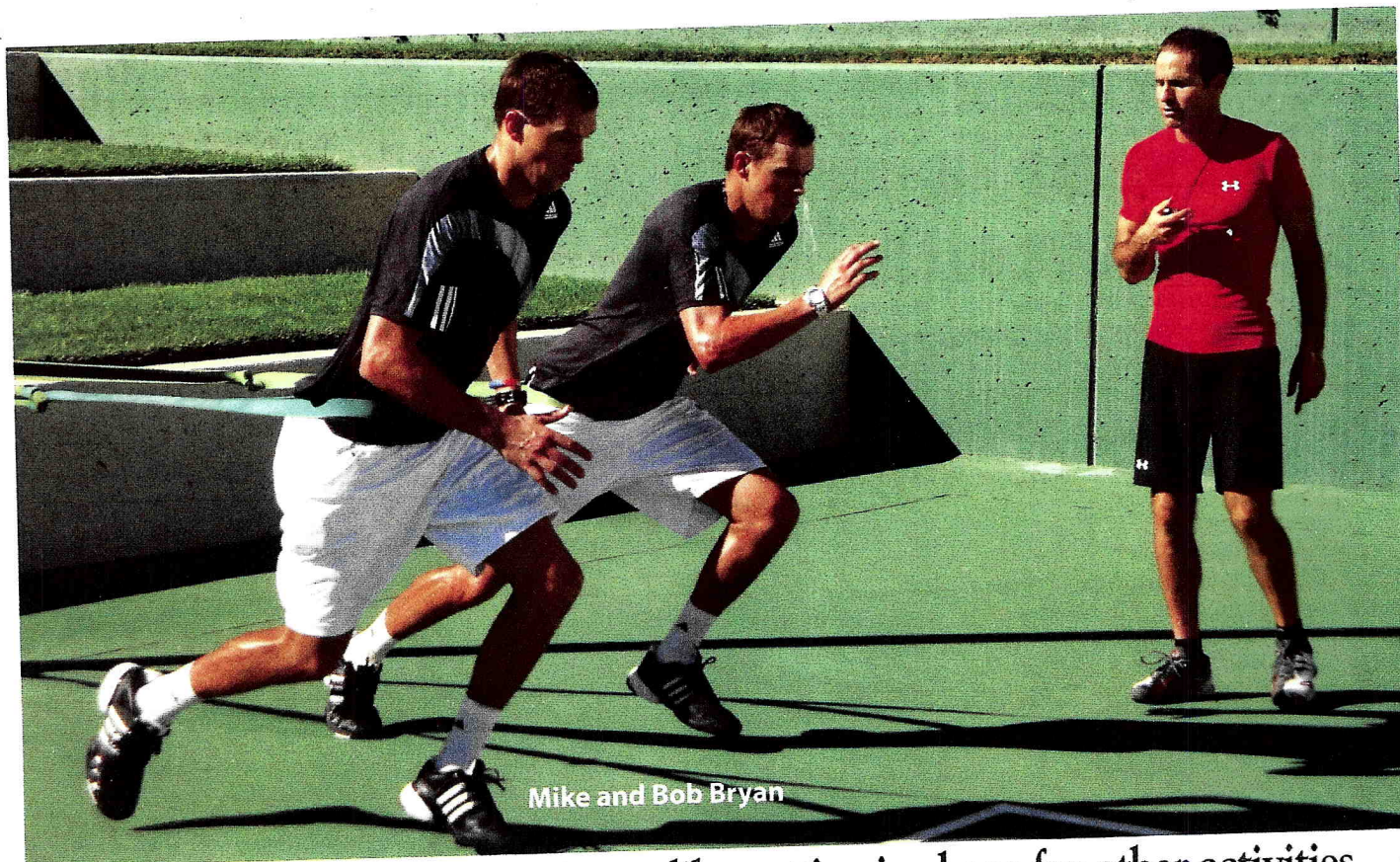


# Training Myths and Mistakes

By Howard Waldstreicher



Mike and Bob Bryan

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HOWARD WALDSTREICHER

Getting in shape for tennis is not like getting in shape for other activities. To help your game, your health and your fitness—and to ward off injuries—make sure you know what will and won't help you.

**Myth: You get tired on the court, and you think you can get in better shape on a running/jogging program.**

This could be the biggest tennis fitness mistake you ever make. Tennis is not distance running—it's a three-step game with quick changes of direction. I call it chaotic movement, as you never know which direction you will move. You don't move on the court like you run—instead, you use a shuffle, a crossover, or a three-step. Tennis is explosive movement, not the steady-state cardio exercise of running 5 miles at the same pace. Save your knees, back and hips by cutting out the distance running, and you will play tennis for a lifetime.

**Myth: You want to work your abs, so you do crunches, sit-ups and leg-raises.**

Watch someone do a crunch or a sit-up, and you'll see that all the person is doing is flexing the spine. That movement increases disc pressure, resulting in lower-back pain. It also causes hips to get tight and makes you round-shouldered, which in turn will have you looking old before your time.

The role of the abs as part of the kinetic chain is to protect the lower back from moving too far when arms and legs start flying around. Keep your center of gravity, which is your belly button, over your base of sup-

port, which is your feet. I often see players who can't control the center of gravity: When they have to make a quick change of direction, their upper-body momentum goes too far. For this kind of player, lower-back problems aren't far behind. The abs are stabilizers, not movers.

You must train your abs and core from a standing position and with movement. This is how we play and how we live.

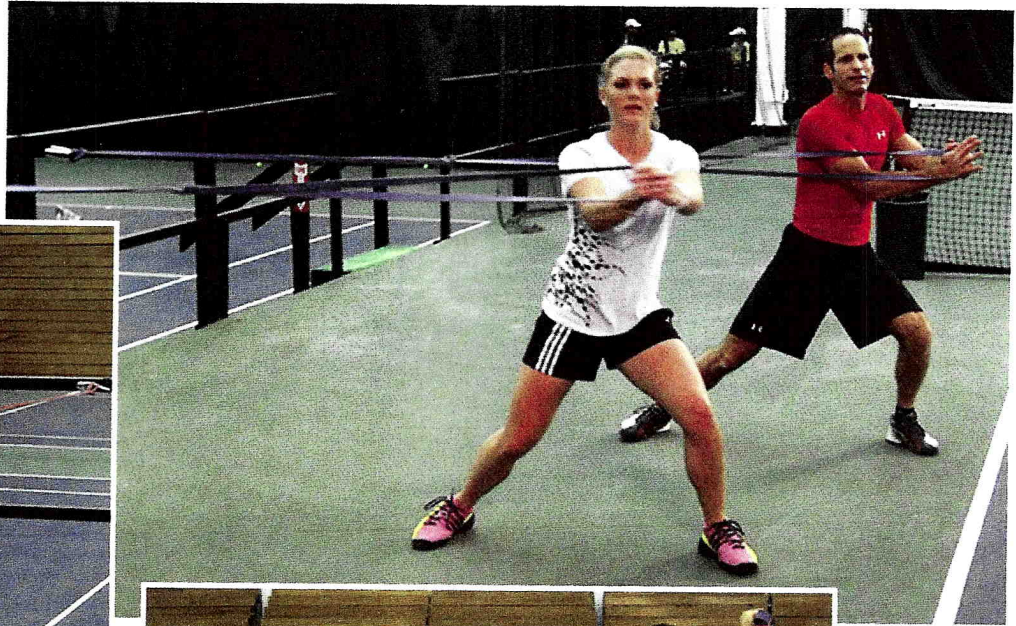
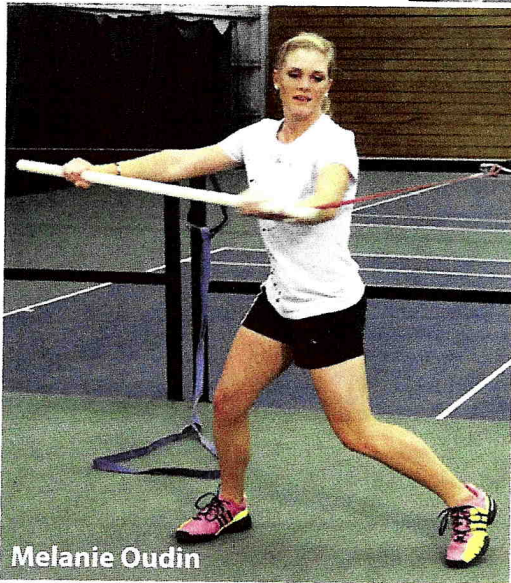
**Myth: You think you must avoid any type of rotation.**

A sport without rotation doesn't exist. Tennis is all rotation. This myth has a lot to do with the old fitness approach we learned growing up. "Keep it in a straight line to save your back." This is wrong. Our power comes from our ability to rotate. You need to work on rotational running, pulling and pushing movement.

What you should not do is twist. Twisting is rotation without using your whole body, especially your hips. Unlike rotation, twisting will crush your lower back and knees.

**Myth: You go into the gym and the first thing you do is lie or sit on a bench.**

You say to yourself, "I can get stronger if I do this." Yes, I answer, you can get stronger, but will it be gym strength or tennis strength?



**If you want to be tennis strong and injury-free, you need to train from a standing position.**

If you are a bodybuilder or just want to get a big chest, then by all means lie down and crank out those bench presses. But if you want to be tennis strong and injury-free, you need to train from a standing position. We play standing and moving, and that's how you need to train, working your trunk and other parts of your body at the same time. Think about it: when you are on the court your arms and legs are moving fast in every direction, and if your core can't handle that, an injury isn't far behind!

**Myth: You use free weights instead of elastic bands.**

With free weights, as range of motion increases, we create the greatest force production at mid-range, as if along a bell-shaped curve. But with bands, as range of motion increases, so does resistance, which changes that bell curve into a straight line.

Our body is just like a rubber band. We squat before we jump; we have to load before we can explode. We want to teach our body how to explode all the way through the range of motion—explode to the rim, explode up into the serve, finish the swing. And we need especially to be strong at end range because this is where injuries happen most. Injuries occur when our center of gravity goes outside our base of support. Make a cut and plant your left foot, and your upper-body momentum continues to go left—an injury is likely to follow.

Training our end range with maximum resistance demands that we teach our neuromuscular system how to stabilize at end ranges, thus keeping us injury-free.

**Myth: Just being strong, especially gym strong, is good enough.**

You need to be athletically strong, not just weight room strong. You must learn to apply the principles of momentum. Momentum is the No. 1 reason we get injured, fall, and are beaten on the court. And the fact is if we do not stay reactive strong, we physically age sooner than we should.

The elastic nature of training with bands speeds up momentum, which trains our body to handle faster momentum force than body weight alone. This in turn teaches our nervous system how to identify and activate the muscles needed to respond, which keeps us coordinated and in balance all the time.. ☺

*Howard Waldstreicher is the founder and creator of HalfHourPower. The HalfHourPower tennis Workout is officially licensed by the USTA. He helps train Bob and Mike Bryan and Melanie Oudin on their reactive power. For more information, visit [www.halfhourpower.com](http://www.halfhourpower.com).*