



ONE TANK TRIPS

By Ray Collins



Innisbrook

You'd think the Innisbrook Resort and Golf Club north of Clearwater would just focus on golf. After all, it has four courses—including one that is used by the professional golfers tour. But good news—the tennis department isn't forgotten, and in fact it quietly does everything right.

Pro shop staff—lead by Pam Collins (no relation)—helps guests find competitive matches with other vacationers or from their roster of members who live in the sprawling 900-acre community. From clinics for kids, to mixed doubles socials on Sunday mornings—this department has it covered.

I had some good luck when we first arrived Friday afternoon. The teenage girl who works in the pro shop offered to hit with me. Turns out Becky was recently ranked in the top ten in Florida in her age group. It wasn't lost on me that she could probably beat me 6-0, 6-0 and *I played college tennis before she was born!* I have wrist bands her age.

We hit until my strings broke. She even gave me a great tip I hadn't heard before: "Set up for the ball a little farther back than you think you should and then explode into the ball at the last second."

Hmmm. Out of the mouths of babes. Thanks Becky!

Director of Tennis Will Rhame has a great way of not making players feel foolish in front of others. I saw a player getting a group lesson nearly whiff on an overhead—and Will quickly found a way to focus on something positive she had done. Nice touch.

But the department's best kept secret may be Drago Dragicevic. Drago says the recipe for a good player begins with enthusiasm and passion.



Ray Collins and Drago Dragicevic

A good game—continuing the metaphor—contains the right distribution of ingredients. In other words, sometimes you drive the ball, and sometimes you spin the ball.

Drago also had these reminders:

- Point the butt of your racquet at the net for ground strokes. It will cause you to take a fuller swing, snap your wrist more and accelerate into the ball.
- Don't wallow too much with mechanics and technique to a point where you forget to simply swing through the ball!
- Flat serves and kick serves have different grips and therefore different 'sounds.' Your first serve should 'thud' and your second serve should 'whoosh.' In order to really get a kick serve, hold the racquet with a backhand grip and toss more over your head than out in front, as with a flat serve.

He also suggested releasing the ball from your hand as high as you can for better control of your toss.

Good stuff, Drago!

Innisbrook has 11 Har-Tru courts with 7 lighted for night play. Tennis packages range from \$175 per person full-day programs that include instruction, video analysis and use of the ball machine—to \$20 dollar per hour adults clinics. They also offer holiday and summer camp programs for kids—starting as young as 3 years old.

The Indaba Spa is a short drive from the tennis courts. (Indaba translates as 'gathering place' in Zulu.) Therapists offer a "sports massage" that includes more stretching than a typical massage.

I'd be remiss not to have sampled the Copperhead Golf Course, the one used by the PGA. Beautiful, well-done and first-class.

You won't go hungry at Innisbrook with four options, from the casual 'Market Salamander Grille' to the classy 'Packard's Steak house.'

Innisbrook is a sprawling community. Nine hundred acres, 600 rooms and suites and 65,000 square feet of meeting space. With this size place, there isn't a lot of walking around. You can call for a shuttle bus—or keep your car keys handy.



The facility recently underwent \$26 million in improvements.

A few miles north on US 19 is quaint downtown Tarpon Springs. There was a weekend Farmer's Market and a fun seafood fest in a nearby park. The Historic Sponge Docks are another mile away.

Innisbrook—a great place for lots of tennis, golf, and good food—all just an hour north of Sarasota!

Innisbrook Resort and Golf Club

a Salamander Golf & Spa Resort

North of Clearwater

www.VisitInnisbrook.com

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