



By Ray Collins

Here's an old frustration among meeting planners that qualified guest speakers are only credible experts if they're from outside the area. I've played tennis all my life, been to some nice resorts—around the country—and wound up getting the best tip ever on my serve from a pro in my own backyard!

John Woods, Director of Tennis at the Longboat Key Club and Resort, took one look at my toss and said, "I bet there are days you serve great and can't miss, and days you can't get a serve to save your life?"

"How can you tell," I asked, a little stunned at being so easily type-cast.

He said, "Your arms are not going up in unison: your tossing arm is going up while your racquet is still down by your waist."

He showed me how to correct that, and I haven't caught many tosses since.

It's no surprise *Tennis Magazine's* latest issue ranked Woods' Longboat Key Club and Resort among the Top 50 Tennis Resorts in the U.S. With the new USTA award-winning Tennis Gardens' 20 courts and top-notch staff of tennis professionals, LBK Club has set its sights even higher in 2011.

John also passed along some other serving tips that gave me "a ha" moments:

- Your hand should be so far down the grip on your serve, your pinky should be off the grip entirely. Why? It unlocks your wrist and allows more whip.



- In order to get proper acceleration during your serve, think of the mantra, "Slow and go!"
- Make sure you toss the ball directly over your head for a kick serve—and then think of "cutting the ball in half" when you strike it.

Private lessons are available from John or any of the five pros on staff. There are clinics that offer a 4:1 student to pro ratio. One hour is \$25. There are a number of men's and women's round robin groups as well. Tennis Concierge Sue Brown will help set up matches.

A short walk from the Tennis Gardens is the Harbourside Golf Course. There are three separate nine-hole tracks bordering Sarasota Bay. Three miles south on Gulf of Mexico Drive at the Club's home base is the Islandside Course. This course features more than 5,000 palm trees and pink and white blooming oleanders. It's a beautiful course for fellow-photography buffs.

The Fitness Centre is adjacent to the course's pro shop. There's an elaborate schedule of classes and a series of high-tech machines to keep you in shape. Personal training sessions are also available.

Also in the Fitness Centre is the Island House Spa at the Longboat Key Club and Resort. Massage Therapist Tonette Mabrey offered a range of deep-tissue to

Swedish massage. I prefer the latter. The Spa has gone Organic, meaning "treatments combine the best of therapeutic massage techniques with clinical grade essential oils and plant extracts." I'm not sure what all that means, but it was worth every minute.

The Longboat Key Club & Resort has 218 rooms and suites on campus. We stayed in a "club suite" that had a nice kitchen and sitting area, all overlooking the pool area and the Gulf of Mexico.

When it's time to eat—you have half-a-dozen choices of all levels. Out of convenience, we wound up at at "Sands Pointe" in the main building. The dinner



was great, the service top-notch, but as a reviewer—it's the little things you look for: when we left a couple hours after being seated, the maître d' said, "Thank you, Mr. Collins." Nice touch.

So, just because this classy resort is nearby doesn't mean it's not worth a decadent 'stay-cation' on Longboat Key. Visit longboatkeyclub.com for details. You'd have to drive a long way to find anything better!



Ray Collins is a former TV newscaster and country club tennis pro. He now owns a Sarasota-based media company. Details at www.RayCollinsMedia.com.

