



# Raise a Glass to Napa Valley Tennis

*“The hand on your racquet should be loose enough to swirl a glass of wine.”*

**I**t didn't take long for the tennis pro at Napa Valley's premier tennis resort to use a wine analogy. It would have been disappointing if he hadn't.

Doug King has been top man at Meadowood in the heart of Northern California's wine country for nearly half his life and he's in his mid-50's. He's been called innovative, insightful and overwhelmingly kind.

Doug's analogies didn't stop at wine during my lesson. He also brought out one of those exercise balls and asked me to use my racquet to push it to him from the baseline to the service line.

“Push the ball and follow through like a prize-fighter swinging an upper-cut.”

Perfect.

Some teachers stress the feet. Others stress the legs. Doug is all about the hands. He says without quick and supple hands in tennis, nothing else matters. “Hands create speed.” He says forehands and backhands are less of a swing and more of a throw—with the elbow and the shoulder finishing strong.

Here's how he explains it: “The throwing motion is what turns a ‘swing’ (bad) into a ‘stroke’ (good). Swinging leads to ‘hitting,’ much more random and uncontrolled. Tennis requires ‘stroking’ which is more precise and controlled.”

• Doug pointed out that I lean forward too early on my backhand, in effect, giving away 190 pounds of force. (OK, OK, 205.)

• Up at the net, Doug had a vivid analogy for

punching the backhand volley: Imitate an umpire giving the “safe” sign. (You can get more of Doug's innovative ideas at [www.TennisOne.com](http://www.TennisOne.com).)

• Breathe better while you play; exhale as you make contact. It will loosen up your entire body and even help you move your feet.



Ray Collins and Meadowood Tennis Pro Doug King

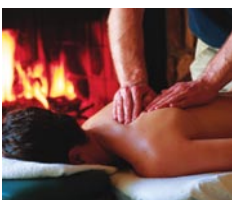
After the lesson on the most beautiful leafy tennis court I've ever seen in my life, Dana and I took a four mile hike up—and around—the 250-acre wooded resort in the mountains of St. Helena. Just when we thought we were walking in uncharted territory, we found a rack

of bottled water. I was hoping for a rack of Merlot.

After our scenic walk, we were treated to massages at The Spa. A variety of massage treatments and spa services are available at Meadowood. There are also a number of fitness classes available, complimentary for Meadowood overnight guests and members.

Besides tennis, there's also a golf course and a croquet lawn. There are two pools—a heated lap-pool and a family-friendly pool a hundred yards away.

Our room was actually a private cottage nestled up the mountainside. A front deck leads to French doors and into a beautiful little apartment. Inside, we had a



fireplace, an oversized bath and a sun-soaked window seat.

It's the little things that make a difference at re-



sorts. When we first arrived, a bell man opened my car door, introduced himself, asked our names and transmitted it to the front desk clerk—so by the time we went in the check-in area, the clerk already had our paperwork out. “Welcome, Mr. Collins.” A manager also emerged to shake hands. Nice touch. Also, every worker who passed us during our three-day stay invariably smiled and said ‘hello.’ We always felt like ‘guests,’ which is a nice thing.

“The Restaurant” at Meadowood recently earned three stars in Michelin's annual *San Francisco Bay Area & Wine Country Restaurant Guide*. If that's too formal, there's a grill in the same building with an equally beautiful view and more modest prices. There are plenty of quaint villages and wineries near Meadowood, from St. Helena, to Yountville to Sonoma.

Meadowood is also a private club in addition to a resort, and use of the spa/fitness facilities are only available for guests and members. Only The Restaurant and The Grill dining establishments

are both open to the public. So raise a glass to Meadowood in Napa Valley. It's like something out of a fairy tale.

[www.Meadowood.com](http://www.Meadowood.com)

PS: Another sign of Meadowood's class and attention to detail—I absent-mindedly left my phone charger at the resort. I called the front desk and received a FedEx package with the charger a couple days later—now THAT'S customer service!



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](http://www.RayCollinsMedia.com).