

# Saddlebrook . . . *It's All Right Here!*

by Ray Collins

Just beyond Sarasota is a major league tennis resort where you can play tennis, walk back to your suite overlooking a golf course and then walk a few feet to one of several fine dining restaurants. You only have to drive an hour to enjoy the Saddlebrook resort in Wesley Chapel, just northeast of Tampa.

It's like a college campus—but instead of classroom buildings, libraries and dining halls they're replaced by tennis courts, suites, restaurants, and a European-style spa. You never need your car—or even a golf cart. To steal a line from one of the TV networks, at Saddlebrook, "It's all right here!"

It's the little things that set the right tone at the Saddlebrook tennis resort. The instructors already know your name when you first arrive and greet you like an old friend. Gatorade is in the jugs and fruit is in the bowls by the courts. Even the maintenance workers greet you as they pass.

But it's not just the little things. Saddlebrook gets the big things right as well. Adult campers are evaluated quickly and assigned a court with 3-4 peers with similar abilities. The resort draws from a world-wide client base. My court-mates during my two days at Saddlebrook were from England and Greece. Interesting guys—and good players.

Part of the adult tennis camp includes video-tape review. One of the instructors will shoot a few minutes of ground strokes, volleys and overheads—and then sit you down on the sideline and go over the results on a portable monitor.

The instructor on our court, Sean McGee didn't take long to diagnose what countless teachers had missed before about my game in the past. He pointed out I wasn't stepping toward the net enough during the groundstrokes—but rather toward the side. Easy physics proves stepping too far to the side locks up the hips and puts too much emphasis on the upper body. Other helpful pointers that resonated with me:

- Treat more ground strokes like approach shots. More often than you realize, you can step in from the baseline and be aggressive.
- Close the racquet face on high forehands to stay on the offense.
- Load up the back leg on the backhand, as well as the forehand.
- Don't be afraid to stash a notepad and pen in your tennis bag. You'll get so many pointers during the daily lessons, you may otherwise forget some nuggets of wisdom you've picked up over the five hours of lessons each day.

Sessions begin at 7:50 am with a ten minute stretching class. From 8 to 11 am,



campers are assigned to one of the half-dozen courts used by the adult campers. After lunch, sessions resume at 12:50 pm with stretching and instruction resuming from 1 pm to 3 pm. Teachers encourage campers to stay after 3 pm and play pick-up matches with classmates.

The camaraderie that develops over the hours sweating it out together is priceless. Chances are you'll exchange e-mail addresses with a handful of campers that were strangers when you arrived. Tennis players are often kindred spirits.

Tennis Director Howard Moore personifies the grace and professionalism of this world-class facility. The England native lives an overhead smash from the courts, is in charge of the 40 pros on the staff, and is known to spend at least part of each day of the week greeting guests and giving instruction. He admits he loves what he does—and it shows. And Moore is no longer auditioning for the job. He has 30 years experience and trained under legendary instructor Harry Hopman. Moore oversees both the junior academy and the adult camp on the resort's 45 courts.

One of the beauties of attending the adult tennis camp at Saddlebrook is the amenities on the campus. Accommodations range from "deluxe guest rooms" to two-bedroom suites. Many of the units overlook the golf course.

You can eat at one of several restaurants within minutes from the courts and your unit. Not all tennis academies are as convenient: some require you to leave the grounds to find a good meal. Dempsey's Steak House is top-notch. An adjacent sports bar fills its own niche.

Saddlebrook is a beautiful development full of neighborhoods and fairways. It's just a mile east of Interstate 75 north of Tampa in Wesley Chapel. Some of the biggest names in tennis live and/or play here: The Bryan brothers, James Blake, Mardy Fish and Martina Hingis just to name a few.

The adult and junior programs run 365 days a year. Prices fluctuate during the year. Stay two days and pay \$195 per day. Stay five days and the daily rate goes down to \$155. Summer rates are less. Tennis guests are welcome to stay an additional night without playing in the tennis program.

Suites can cost as little as \$92 per night in the off-season with roommates, to as much as \$217 per night during the busy season (Mid-December to Mid-April). Breakfasts are included, as is access to the spa and fitness center. So, rest up, then bring your racquets, your appetite and prepare for a tennis and social experience you won't soon forget! For more information, [www.saddlebrooktennis.com](http://www.saddlebrooktennis.com)



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