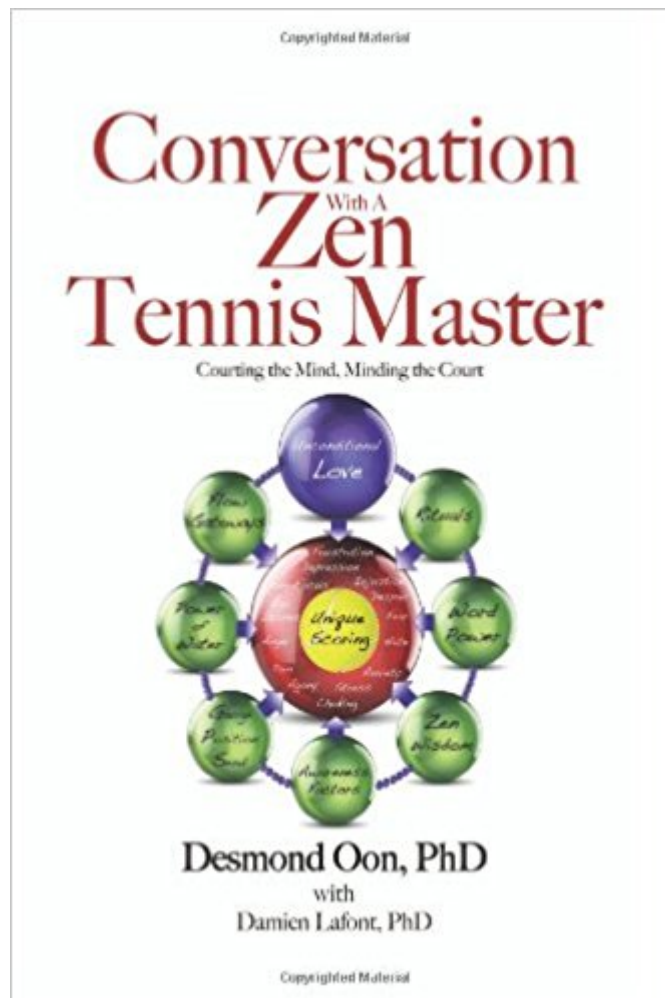




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# Conversation With A Zen Tennis Master: Courting The Mind, Minding The Court



## Synopsis

This book by renowned USPTA Master Pro, Desmond Oon, PhD, and Damien Lafont, PhD, "merges tennis and zen with one noble goal: to unlock the extraordinary power of the mind, body and spirit that will ultimately lead you to excellence."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

**DESMOND OON, PH.D.** Desmond Oon is a Master Professional of the United States Professional Tennis Association, the highest and most prestigious credential accorded to teaching professionals. He has been an international seminar leader and speaker with over 45 years of experience. He is recognized as the first tennis coach to have successfully blended Eastern and Western sport psychology. During his distinguished career, he has coached amateur, college, professional and Davis Cup players in more than ten countries. Oon specializes in the area of human potential and peak performance in the Zen tradition. He has written four books and edited a Coaches Manual, and authored numerous articles and features on tennis and coach education. Oon completed undergraduate studies at the University of Adelaide, Australia, and earned a Master's degree at the University of Oregon, US. His doctorate is from the University of Queensland in Australia. His research work in sports has taken him to a number of countries, including Canada, New Zealand, China, India, Israel, Japan, S. Korea, Indonesia, Brunei, Thailand and Singapore. In the 1990s, he served as Vice President of the International Soft Tennis Federation. He founded the Center for MindBody Tennis and currently lives in Redondo Beach, California.

I met Desmond Oon at Adelaide University in 1960, where he had come to study Physical

Education, after already being a teacher in Malaysia/Singapore, which included writing a text book. I was in my second year of teacher training, and we met in History lectures. I understood that he was a very good tennis player in the Pennant and District tennis competition in Adelaide and other parts of South Australia. My tennis was nowhere near that standard, but we did find a common interest in squash. Even though he was a much better player, Desmond and I played with gusto and enjoyment, and my game improved significantly. He could always beat me with a high lob to the back of the backhand court, where it would die, unplayable. His touch was soft and deft, and the placement always exact, and try as I might I could seldom return it. Needless to say, the more often he did it the more I fretted about it. Had I known then what Desmond has put forward in his latest book "Conversation with a Zen Tennis Master" I could well have overcome my mental difficulties in mastering that stroke. However, when I played with other friends of far less skill than Desmond, if ever they tried a high lob into the left backcourt corner I could kill it every time! His "torture" definitely improved my stroke play, and for that I have to thank him. Desmond's book is a fusion of Eastern wisdom with the physicality of the game of tennis, dominated as it has been by European competitiveness since its curious beginnings as Court Tennis around the reign of Henry VIII in England and Europe. The Eastern wisdom combines the enigmatic koans of Zen, with the aphorisms of the Tao, with its emphasis on balance and the unimpeded flow of energy. Desmond clearly illustrates how the mental approach to the game of tennis in many ways can be more important than the physical mastery of the skills of tennis and the physical fitness required to play the game, especially at elite professional level. Many are the examples of players who on past performance, physical fitness, and ambition to win could be expected to be consistent winners, but inexplicably "choke" at critical times and lose with great frustration. Sports psychologists try to help such players overcome the mental obstacles to success by concentrating on motivation and focussed intention: this can help, but it can also heighten anxiety, especially in western oriented players. This is where Desmond's approach helps players to transcend the anxiety issue by moving into a mindset which many westerners would call "spiritual", but in Eastern thinking is so very much a part of normal existence that it is taken for granted ---- finding the place of peace within the self. So, how to you bring this to the tennis court I hear you say? .... probably with some degree of scepticism, if you have been raised in the West. This is what Desmond's book is about; bringing mind and body together in harmony on the court. In Part 1 (Zen and Life) Desmond discusses how Zen and the Tao have affected his life, and what he has found, both as a player and as a coach, about the importance of the mind in playing the game of tennis. He does not speak from a theoretical or academic position but from the experience of a life spent playing the game he loves,

and fusing into it how to make body and mind work together. Having grown up in Eastern culture from his Chinese heritage it was natural for him to make the connections with both the Tao and Zen to develop his mind game, and the mind game of those he has coached all over the world. Part 2 (Problems and Solutions) is a very practical application of his insight into the mind game for players to use themselves. Chapter 5 --- Zen Tennis Toolkit brings it all together in direct plain language, spiced up with Desmond's wit for finding gentle humour and word play in what other coaching books approach with great earnestness. His tips, with what may appear to be whimsical contradictions, reflect how he has infused the Zen tradition of the koan (a sentence of apparent contradiction) into his own thinking and expression. You may not hear the sound of one hand clapping when you read Desmond's Tennis Toolkit, but you will certainly hear him chuckling in the background. Part 3 (Conversation) is unusual for a coaching book on Tennis as it is a conversation between Desmond Oon and Dr. Damien Lafont, his good friend and editorial adviser. Through this conversation the reader is able to gain insight into how Desmond has arrived at what he now brings to the Tennis world as a contribution to both improving player performance and the game itself. The inclusion of an Appendix (Zen Teaching tips) provides a whimsical yet thought provoking end to a book which I think you will find quite unlike any other you will read. Personally, it made me think of the aphorisms from Sun Tzu's "the Art of War", without the direness of what that book considered. Here are some snippets to entice you: --- "Zen is cognizant of the Tao and below are tips that will make teaching that more Zenjoyable: --- #1 Succeed with encouragement, not prohibition #2 Put things in order before disorder arises #3 Teach by example; strive in moderation #4 Never be an authoritarian; those who are flexible are superior #5 Seek simplicity and honour what is known #6 Take your time; be attentive and receptive #7 Be careful with words #8 Control input to the senses; avoid confusion and respond to inner depth #9 Obey your instincts #10 Respect tranquillity as it is more important than perfection #11 Be mindful: enlightenment comes from watching what is small #12 Excellence is its own reward; the material is fleeting, the spiritual is everlasting." It is with both pleasure and privilege that I can recommend "Conversations with a Zen Tennis Master" to you: --- the distillation of Desmond's life, career and tennis wisdom over sixty years of playing and learning. This is a book for every serious, and not-so serious, player to carry in his/her equipment bag. John Gladwell, Adelaide, South Australia

This may come across as biased because I know Desmond Oon as a tennis coach and person, but it's still a fantastic book. Like many Zen books, there are sayings, puzzles, statements, definitions and conversations, and once you spend an hour or two reading this, you will slowly unlock many of

the patterns that are holding you back. This seems especially appropriate for intermediate or advanced players who find themselves stalled by bad habits, choking under pressure, drifting or losing attention during matches, or stuck in deep ruts. Oon tells us the main thing holding us back is ourselves. Even more importantly, he offers psychological tools from the very specific to the simple, such as repeating mantras before and during a match. If you don't love tennis even more after reading his book, perhaps you should play another sport.

I am a Tennis Professional and rarely does one find a book that can connect the player to the heart of Tennis, which of course is the Mind-Body connection. This is such a book, written by a Master Coach and Teacher and life long student of Life and the game of Tennis, Dr. Desmond Oon. I feel fortunate to know Dr. Oon and consider him the most leading edge teacher in the tennis world. I encourage many of my students to read this book but with a note of caution, it is filled with so much wisdom so it needs to be read slowly and then digested bite by bite. Thereafter it becomes playing Zen! Thank you Dr. Oon for this impactful writing and message. Dale Light USPTA

I'm a typical American recreational tennis player seeking a way out from my inner demons during competition. How can I reduce my double faults during key points? How can I stay calm and confident when my partner and I are struggling to stay in the match? In this book, Dr. Oon has helped me see these challenges in a new light. And access many new tools to stay focused and centered in a peak performance state, in the midst of any situation or circumstance. For these invaluable tools that I can access at any moment, in any breath, I am forever grateful. Thank you, Dr. Oon, for writing this book. -Martha Peck, Denver, Colorado

"Conversation with a Zen Tennis Master" is a Must Read for all players who want to learn the Inner & Outer Keys to Winning in Tennis & Life! I've had the good fortune of knowing Dr. Desmond Oon for over 20 years and he truly is a Zen Tennis Master at the highest levels. His wisdom, systems and style consistently transforms players games and lives. If you wish to advance your Tennis Game to a new level, I highly recommend Dr. Oon's "Conversations with a Zen Tennis Master!" Dr. Joy Macci CEO/Joy of Sport USPTA/Author/Speaker

I just finished "Conversation With a Zen Tennis Master," by Desmond Oon, and was continuously impressed by the clarity with which Desmond uses the common sense and wisdom of Zen to deal with the complex psychological and emotional issues of

tennis. His love of the game and of life itself shines through in his words, and Damien Lafont's penetrating questions get right to the point of what concerns tennis players of all levels. Thanks so much, Desmond (and Damien) for bringing Eastern wisdom to tennis in such a functional way. Scott Ford, USPTA

I teach Tai Chi in the same Los Angeles park where Desmond Oon plays and teaches tennis. Desmond is the real thing! He is not just an armchair sports talker. His book is the result of many years of coaching and playing. His Zen insights are the results of studying with spiritual teachers and healers. Desmond gets out there with the many students who love his teaching. His wisdom is distilled from decades of patient teaching and joyful activity on the courts. It's a special book that can capture a real teacher! Very special book!

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