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Editorial

The platinum league (tennis players don't ever stop playing)

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It's personal!

I won my varsity letter playing for Akron Central High School. It started innocently enough. My best friend was #1 on the tennis team and to keep him company, I volunteered to be manager ... a single task. Through a series of injuries, I was needed to complete the team schedule and contributed in a small way to the city championship.

When I returned from the service, 30 months in the South-West Pacific, I enrolled at Ohio State and participated as a walk on in the tennis program. Only 1 year later, I was in medical school and my tennis career had an intermission. Let's try 20 years.

When I returned to the courts, it was 2 × a week in the early morning and soon we had a group of committed 'early birds'.

Now 20 years more have past and our summer tennis program includes gold, silver, and platinum ... ages 45, 55, and 65.

The platinum team at our club has 20 members, three-quarters of whom are 70 or over (my partner is 76; our captain is 85; I am 70). Our captain is nationally ranked in both singles and doubles in his age group. Because of summer vacations and work schedules, only about half of the team are usually available so we have difficulty fielding the required 3 teams of doubles. My contribution is the quickness and endurance of a 70-year-old who likes to play and accommodates willingly to a variety of partners both in skill level and coordination.

We practice once weekly, play one league match each week and participate in regular doubles at least one other time each week.

Some of our members appear with 2 rackets, ace bandage knee wraps, tennis elbow straps and ankle sleeves. Others begin with 400 mg of ibuprofen, a propxoxyphen capsule, or 2 enteric aspirin.

Many finish with ice massage and hot shower.

None complain, at least, verbally. Occasionally, I host a brief consultation session after the match ... generally reassuring my colleague with an empathetic 'No problem'. I may even assign a diagnosis 'gray hair of the knee, back, etc.'

Few of these 'mature,' aging, seniors with heavy 'wear and tear' bodies miss any sessions. Many, however, complain if they lose. Some agonize with classic excuses ... balls too heavy — racket strung too tight — sun too hot — too much wind, etc., etc.

So what's different about weekend athletes over 60?

Nothing.

There are national tournaments and rankings for 70's, 80's and 90's. Even the King of Sweden played a fair game of tennis in his 90's.

Serve 'em up!