



All Ears English Episode 223:

Ask a Tennis Pro How to Get the Ball in Your Court with Your English Conversation Skills

Lindsay: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 223: “Ask a Tennis Pro How to Get the Ball in Your Court with Your English Conversation Skills.”

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast, where you’ll finally get real, native English conversation with your hosts, Lindsay McMahon, the ‘English Adventurer’ and Gabby Wallace, the ‘Language Angel’, from Boston, USA.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: In today’s episode, Lindsay and Kristy will talk about their careers as tennis teaching pros and you’ll find out how to be a better English conversationalist based on what we know about the game of tennis.

[Instrumental]

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[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Hey, Kristy. Good morning.

Kristy: Hey, Lindsay. What's up?

Lindsay: Excellent. I was just thinking about tennis and...

Kristy: Okay.

Lindsay: ...I heard you're a good tennis player. Actually, I know you're a good tennis player because, because I – you – the two of us have actually hit the tennis ball a couple of times together, haven't we?

Kristy: When I practice I'm not... I'm okay. I haven't practiced in a bit. (Uh), but, yeah. (Um), it's, it's a fortunate skill I have.

Lindsay: It's a fortunate skill. Have you – when was the last time you hit the tennis ball, Kristy? Has it been a while?

Kristy: Oh, god. It's been a while. I'm so embarrassed to, to admit it. (Um) but, (you know), it's one of those things I can jump back into easily just because we both have the same experience: we grew up playing tennis.

Lindsay: We grew up playing tennis.

Kristy: It's in my muscles.

Lindsay: Absolutely. So, here's a funny play on words, which is gonna (going to) be a lame joke. Kristy, it's your serve. Tell it, tell our audience how we met. [crosstalk]

Kristy: Okay. [inaudible] we met because we both started teaching at the same tennis club in New York City.



Lindsay: Yeah, that's right. We taught at Sutton Tennis, didn't we, on the upper eastside...

Kristy: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...of Manhattan. And I remember I met you and, (you know), we just hit it off.

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: And we were teaching kids, (right). So...

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: ...tennis lessons in the afternoons and teaching children, that was fun. Did you, how long did you work at Sutton Tennis, Kristy?

Kristy: Just that one season with you.

Lindsay: Oh.

Kristy: In the mornings what I would do is I'd work on building BumbleBee Tennis and then I'd come over and then we'd teach. Oh my god. The stories. I, I have to just tell you one story about it, (um)...

Lindsay: Okay.

Kristy: This quick one is this, (um), you had to teach really rich people and this...

Lindsay: Yes.

Kristy: ...one girl, I tossed her a ball – I was really like two feet from her okay 'cause (because) we're doing volleys and she was like seven or eight. And I tossed her a ball. She missed it, so it, it kind of just bounced off of the (fore-), her forehead. She goes to her mom, she tells her mom that she got hit by the ball.

Lindsay: Oh.

Kristy: She needs, (like), an ice pack and everything and I had said, "Oh, I think you're fine," and her mom turns to me and she does this (like), whole



head, head back and forth, the snake thing. I don't know how to explain that to people.

Lindsay: The snake.

Kristy: The snake with their head, it goes left to right and she goes "FYI, next time my daughter gets hit by a ball, you better put an ice pack on it." I was like...

Lindsay: Oh, my god. What is FYI? What's FYI for our listeners?

Kristy: Oh, okay. It's 'for your information'.

Lindsay: Oh, god.

Kristy: And it...

Lindsay: That sounds intimidating.

Kristy: In pop culture terms, (like), some people can use it as (sort of) a – having a lot of attitude, like "FYI", (you know), or some people can say, "Oh, FYI," like as in truly FY... for your information.

Lindsay: So it's all about your tone of voice.

Kristy: Yeah.

Lindsay: FYI.

Kristy: Right.

Lindsay: So, we – (I mean) – you're right. So these kids, (um), (you know), these are Manhattan kids, (right). I-I think, I-I – don't quote me on this, but I think I remember having a conversation with one of the other teachers there and he was saying that even (like) Woody Allen's kids played tennis at that, at that, (uh) club.

Kristy: Yeah.

Lindsay: (Um).

Kristy: I think I taught them.



Lindsay: You taught them. [crosstalk] You taught Woody Allen's kids.

Kristy: Yeah.

Lindsay: Oh, my god Kristy. That's so funny. And yeah, so we had some, some real, real stars there. And I know in your business, you also had the children of the stars in your BumbleBee Tenniss, but anyways, we're not here to talk about Hollywood stars. (Um), yeah, you definitely had a client who was really famous. Maybe we won't drop names here, but...

Kristy: We already have. Yeah, okay.

Lindsay: We already have. Okay, okay. So, Kristy, I wanna (want to) know about tennis and how it relates to English learning and also success in life. So what is the number one thing that you've learned from your tennis career?

Kristy: Yeah, I guess it's – my dad would say if I'm not hitting good, it takes thousands of balls, it takes thousands of hit and it was just (cer-), (uh), showing up, being consistent, coming to practice, and to keep trying. (Um), and that's really what got me to becoming a pretty good tennis player.

Lindsay: Yeah. I like that. So you played in high school, right?

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: Did you play in...?

Kristy: In college.

Lindsay: In college. Did you play in tournaments around Hawaii when you were a kid also? Did you do the tournament circuit?

Kristy: I did.

Lindsay: Yeah.

Kristy: It was really hard actually, but I...



Lindsay: Yeah.

Kristy: ...I did.

Lindsay: Oh my god. We have such parallel lives, it's so funny. We have so much in common, Kristy.

Kristy: It is.

Lindsay: (Um), yeah. I also did, (you know), I did the tournament stuff. I...

Kristy: Okay.

Lindsay: Every, e-every weekend my mom would drive me around to tennis tournaments around...

K: (Uhn).

Lindsay: ...New England and Boston, (uh), New York State. I mean, it was a hustle. And...

Kristy: Yeah.

Lindsay: ...at some point, it stopped being fun.

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: It just got too intense...

Kristy: (Uhn).

Lindsay: ...just too hard, (you know).

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: And, and yes, so one of the things that I learned from tennis is that consistency is it. And so that's not only consistency in getting the ball in the court every time, it's also showing up every day for your practice.

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: Right?



Kristy: Yeah.

Lindsay: And that builds mental toughness.

Kristy: (Uh-huh), (uh-huh).

Lindsay: Yeah.

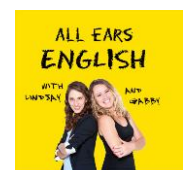
Lindsay: Hey guys, we're gonna (going to) take just a minute here to thank our sponsors.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: A few weeks ago, I went to iTalki and I found a native Spanish tutor to help me with my Spanish because I want to maintain my Spanish. I realized that spending the 30 minutes with him that I did was the best use of my time and my money. So, now, I wanna (want to) recommend this to you guys, because I know you wanna (want to) speak with natives and it's the most convenient way to do it. So go over to www.AllEarsEnglish.com/iTalki, that's i-T-a-l-k-i, and get your first lesson with a native. When you do, you get ten US dollars in free iTalki credits to take your next lesson. So go to AllEarsEnglish.com/i-T-a-l-k-i.

Lindsay: So Kristy, you said that you had an idea about how this could help our listeners in terms of learning English.

Kristy: Yeah. Well, there's two things that I can think of. (Um), one is (um), you – when we practice something, there's definitely days and points when we don't wanna (want to) do it and we don't think it matters, (um), but we go out there and we do it and we either get into it or we do it and we're like, 'Okay, it's over.' But, (um), each time it helps and it matters. (Um), and it's just, it's a muscle memory too. (Um), I think also the same thing for English. (Uh), the other thing that I noticed about tennis that's very



unique, (uh), compared to other sports is a sense of offense and defense. (Um)...

Lindsay: Ooh.

Kristy: Yeah. And, (um), in tennis it's – I feel like there's more of an – (uh) offense and defense can go back and forth between one point.

Lindsay: (Hmm). What does that mean? Can you explain that a little bit more?

Kristy: Sure. Offense means when you're – I'm gonna (going to) say on the offense – when you're – you (sort of) have the upper hand. Like in basketball, maybe you're on the side of your basket. So...

Lindsay: So you're pushing, you're being more aggressive?

Kristy: Yes, exactly. So you're more aggressive, (um), you have the upper hand. I don't – should we explain upper hand.

Lindsay: Yeah. (I mean), I think you just did. So this is an idiom that maybe our listeners wanna (want to) know, (right). To have the upper hand, kind of to be ahead, to be in control.

Kristy: (Uhn), yes.

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Kristy: So, (um), (um), and defense is when you're not. And you're not – you don't have the upper hand and you're, you're (sort of) just trying to defend, just defend from losing the point. (Um), and in basketball, you would be on – if you're in defense, you're on the side of your opponents (uh) basket. And in tennis, (um), you can be on the defense often. Often, you could be the one being pushed around the court, barely getting to the ball, (you know), just trying to not lose the point and the other person can be on the offense. And all of a sudden, it can change. (Um)...

Lindsay: (Uhn).



Kristy: ...the person could also have a high shot and now be on the offense and what's challenging about this is that there's a huge amount of mental toughness that you have where when you're up and you're on the offense, y-you just won that point, you're like, "Yeah." (You know), you see Rafael [inaudible], he's just like...

Lindsay: Rafael Nadal. Yeah [crosstalk]...

Kristy: He, he pulls in his elbow.

Lindsay: He pumps his fist.

Kristy: Pumps his fist. He's excited. He's on that offense almost mentally. (Um), but then it's so easy, you make one mistake and now you feel like you're constantly on the defense, just trying to stay into the point. And...

Lindsay: (Uhn).

Kristy: ...I think that's (sort of) the same in interactions. (Um)...

Lindsay: (Um), interesting. How so? How is it the same?

Kristy: It's the same, not in aggressiveness, but in, in that sometimes we can get caught up with a thought. (Um), like that we just said something stupid and all of a sudden, we're constantly thinking about it, and then the next thing we say, we're embarrassed. And that's when...

Lindsay: Yeah.

Kristy: And also we're stuttering...

Lindsay: (Uhn).

Kristy: And we think, 'Oh, this is...' We're terrible at this.

Lindsay: Oh, my god, you're right. I-it, it could become a downward spiral.

Kristy: Yeah.

Lindsay: Yeah.



Kristy: Exactly.

Lindsay: That's a good point, and vice versa...

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: ...on the other hand like when we see Rafael. I'm sure we have some Rafael fans here because we have a lot of listeners in Spain.

Kristy: Okay.

Lindsay: So you guys can get a shout out to Rafael Nadal here. But when we see Rafael pumping his fist, we feel that way when we say something in English and we're (a-), that's, (you know), that sounds good, it makes sense, it sounds natural, we're able to keep that conversation going with a native speaker, right Kristy?

Kristy: Yeah, they say something where they validate what we're saying or you say a funny joke; they get it.

Lindsay: Oh, that's the ultimate, the best thing in, in, in a new language...

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: ...when you can tell a joke and people laugh.

Kristy: Laugh. (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: Oh, I like it. I like it.

Both: Yeah.

Lindsay: Very cool.

Kristy: So, it's, it's interesting and I think the insight to take from this is try to be aware of it because the reality is it's just a thought process. And you can change your thought process. You can say 'Okay, take a deep breath,' and say, 'Maybe I just said something, they didn't get it, they don't, (you know), understand.' Take a deep breath and say, 'I got this. I got this.' and



that's what we see in tennis. We're, we're looking at our strings, we're breathing, (re-fo-), retraining our thoughts.

Lindsay: Absolutely. So I think this is perfect because tennis is a really good parallel to English because (ten-), mental toughness is huge in tennis.

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: (Uh), more so than other sports as we've just talked about. So guys make sure that the ball is in your court. Yeah, another idiom, right. Keep the ball in your court by telling yourself, 'Hey, I got this.'

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: 'I'm gonna (going to) get out there and speak and it's okay if I make a mistake. I'm still in the game and I'm on top. I have the upper hand.'

Kristy: Yeah, so keep it positive and then if you ever trip up, you say something that you feel embarrassed about, take a deep breath. Just like in between points in tennis, take a deep breath, remind yourself you can do this and then restart the conversation.

Lindsay: Yeah, (I mean), our tennis players, they have rituals, right?

Kristy: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: There are certain things they do. They bounce the ball two or three times before serving. There are very specific rituals...

Kristy: (Uhn).

Lindsay: ...and you guys can develop rituals of your own. Maybe...

Kristy: Oh, that's good.

Lindsay: Yeah, maybe it's what Kristy just said, taking a deep breath or maybe it's turning your head a certain way. It's something where you have a, a, a routine that's telling you to reset, okay, reset. Go back to zero, let's start again.



Kristy: And have positive thoughts.

Lindsay: Absolutely. I love it. Ooh, this is a cool analogy Kristy. I wish we could talk about this all day, but I think we're out of time for today.

Kristy: Okay. It's been fun.

Lindsay: This has been fun. Thanks Kristy.

Kristy: Thanks, Lindsay.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: If you wanna (want to) put your ears into English more often, be sure to subscribe to our podcast in iTunes on your computer or on your smartphone. Thanks so much for listening and see you next time.

