

*What is the greatest thing a pro can give someone who steps on a tennis court? There may be as many answers as there are kinds of players. Some of us want to break free of the sliced backhand. Some want to develop an acceptable, and reliable, second serve. Some want to learn the technique to handle a low volley. Some of us want, just once, finally to hit an overhead that doesn't sail into the back fence. But nearly every one, on every court, wants something more fundamental: to feel the joy of playing.*

*I've yet to meet a man on a tennis court who cultivates and spreads that joy more genuinely than Pat Smith. In my 15 years as a correspondent and announcer for ESPN, I've had the chance to call matches at Wimbledon, conduct interviews on Arthur Ashe, and hand out the women's and men's trophies at the US Open. It's a fantastic gig, one that has allowed me to spend time with Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams and colleagues like John and Patrick McEnroe and Chris Evert.*

*But far from the brightest stages of the sport, on courts where the game is taught and shared by the rest of us, Pat is a pro equal in talent to the legends of the sport I've covered. In watching him teach our children over multiple summers at the Jersey shore, I see someone with boundless energy and infectious cheer, who in half an hour can turn our daughter's reluctance on the court into a budding confidence that, yes, she can hit the ball like her brother. Or better.*

*In the times when we've hit together, Pat is equal parts challenger and cheerleader-- showing me new ways to build a better backhand, and then taking me through drills that I can carry home with me after we're done. His knowledge of the game, his touch with players of all levels, and his passion to teach are all abundant.*

*But what has connected me to Pat for all these years is that first fundamental: his joy. In that, Pat has taught me much more than a western grip, or a first serve return. He'd be an asset to any club lucky enough to have him.*

*Best. Tom Rinaldi*