

Hitting the Wall

It is real and will happen to you. This is not an injury that you should try to avoid but a fact of life that you should look forward to. ***Aging and Playing Handball.*** I was fifty when I hit the first wall and felt myself slowing down a step or two. Since then it has gotten progressively more pronounced but I still play and still enjoy playing and as long as the other handballers will put up with me, I will continue to play. After a rally of five or six or more, I have to take a short rest to catch my breath. The balls that look so easy to return seem to be just out of my reach. The reaction time between seeing and hitting is longer resulting in misses.

So what is there to do? I compensate by placing the shots, which I do get, more accurately. I have developed a hop serve that sometimes confuses my opponents. I think before I hit the ball. I visualize the results before I hit the ball. I try to anticipate where my opponent is hitting the ball and start to get to a better position on the court even if I guessed wrong. Standing still and doing nothing will guarantee losing the rally.

I keep quiet after a miss and think about the next rally rather than dwell on the last rally. As I tell my students, "We are playing geometry, not history." I do mention too often that "I'm old" but handball is a lifetime sport not just for the young. With the passage of years, these guys will remember that I played past eighty and they can too. I don't know how many handball players there are over seventy but I would guess hundreds. How many over eighty, I would guess dozens. Over ninety, a few.

I have been fortunate that I have not been injured on or off the court. My health is excellent even though I could afford to lose some weight. At the insistence of my doctor, a blood pressure pill, and one for cholesterol. These make my doctor feel better; I have no idea what they do for me. Playing three or four times a week insures that I take a shower periodically. Oh! After writing that I know why people avoid me on non-playing days. I eat "anything that does not eat me first" as my mother used to say. Now that she has past away at 109, this seems like good advice. Leftovers and yesterdays soup are good for breakfast. Desserts should be eaten before the meal so that there is plenty of room for the good stuff. A day without chocolate is unthinkable. My sport drinks of choice are Gatorade and Diet Dr. Pepper.

In high school I speedily climbed the Statue of Liberty. In my thirties I patriotically climbed the Washington Monument. In my fifties I climbed Mt. Fuji, step-by-step. In my seventies I climbed the Yellow Mountain in China.

I will continue to play and teach the game of handball that I love as long as I can and so should you.

Ralph Weil