

Barbara's tennis holiday

by Clive Shepherd

Barbara had been a keen tennis player when she was younger and would have kept it up if it wasn't for the all-consuming demands of family and career, particularly after the break-up of her marriage. With her children now in their teens and less dependent on her, at least in terms of her time, she resolved to dedicate more of her energy to doing things that gave her pleasure – particularly if that involved meeting other people and making some new friends, perhaps even of the male variety.



Anyway, Barbara gathered up all her resolve, picked up the phone and arranged to join her local tennis club on a low-cost 'try it and see' three months' membership. As it turned out, this proved to be a rather more costly venture than she expected, because her daughter, Penny, refused to let her go to the club in the little white dress she last wore as a teenager, complete with frilly knickers, wooden racquet and box of faded grey tennis balls.

Barbara enjoyed going to the club although she found it harder than she expected to recover her old form. What she really needed was some coaching. In a break between matches, she sat down in the club house with



a drink and started to browse through an old copy of *Ace* magazine. She turned to the classified ads near the back and within minutes had discovered not just how she could obtain all the coaching she could ever need, but also have her first real holiday in years.



With Penny's help, Barbara booked the holiday online later that day. She decided to go for the Pat Elliott Tennis Centre in the Algarve, partly because she vaguely recalled Pat's name as one of the few Brits to win through more than one round

at Wimbledon, and partly because the video on the website made it clear that she'd be doing as much sunbathing and sipping of cocktails as she would serving and sweating. Penny was also keen – she'd spotted that this particular tennis camp was up with technology and provided audio and video materials for use before and after the course. She was not slow to spot an opportunity.

A few weeks later, Barbara was unwrapping her new video iPod, with Penny looking on eagerly. Penny knew that, when her mother was not using it for her tennis stuff, which was most of the time, she could borrow it.



Barbara also knew this, but felt guilty about going on holiday on her own, and regarded the iPod as a form of compensation for Penny.



An hour or so later and Barbara had downloaded her first podcast, an audio introduction to the course by Pat Elliott himself. Barbara listened intently. She already felt she had got to know Pat personally and was really looking forward to the course.



She was not disappointed. The course was very hard work, including four or five hours on-court every day, but that still left plenty of time for socialising and relaxing. One of Pat's innovations was that each person on the course had to maintain a journal both during the course and for three months after. This journal took the form of a web log, or 'blog', which was completed by filling in a simple template on the tennis centre's website.

Barbara's Tennis Holiday


My week at the Pat Elliott Tennis Centre, Portugal. A learning journal

Monday, March 6, 2006

Just arrived

I've just arrived at the tennis centre. The weather's fantastic and so is this place. I've already learned something and that's what a blog is. Not only that but I've become a blogger myself. Now there's a thing.

Anyway, I'm going down to dinner now and that'll give me a chance to get to know the other players on the course. They seem really nice - I just hope they're not brilliant tennis players.

posted by Barbara Elphic @ 7.22 PM 0 comments  

Each bedroom had its own computer, so Barbara would complete her journal before going down to dinner or at the end of the evening. She was surprised how useful this process was. The blog gave her a chance to reflect on the day and appreciate how much she had learned. It also provided the opportunity for her to vent any frustrations she was having with skills that wouldn't quite

come. Barbara got as much out of reading the journals of her colleagues on the course. It seemed everybody had their fair share of successes and disappointments. Now and then she would add little comments to their postings, perhaps a word of encouragement or a playing tip.



The coach, who wasn't actually Pat, but by general consensus of the females on the course, much better looking, read all the blog postings before the course reconvened each morning. He added his own comments and provided links to a special section of the tennis centre's website which he called the 'wiki'. This turned out to be a mine of useful tennis information and materials, provided not only by the staff but by people who had attended the camps.

Barbara particularly liked the slow-mo video demonstrations of all the strokes. She figured out how to download these to her iPod, which she brought along with her (much to Penny's annoyance), and to play these back at court side.





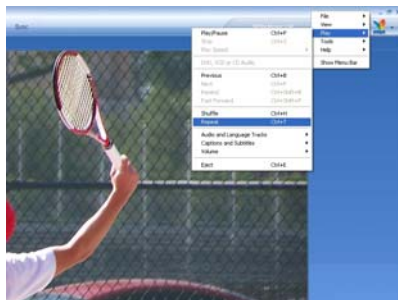
Barbara got on well with everyone on the course, but especially Trevor. They played together regularly in mixed doubles and consoled each other on their defeats through the comments they left on each others' blogs.

They had the occasional drink together but nothing more came of it and so, when the week came to an end, they said their goodbyes and went their separate ways.

Back home, Barbara maintained her journal at least once a week, usually after a session at the club. Her son Brett asked her what on earth she was doing. "Just posting to my blog," said Barbara. Brett was amazed:



"You're what? Let me have a look. You know I've had a blog for over a year now, although you're definitely not looking at that." "I already have," said his mother. "I found it using Google. You've no idea how much I know about you."



The blogging kept the course alive for Barbara months after she had returned. She loved reading about the experiences of her colleagues on the course and not just about their tennis. Several people shared photos they had taken at the camp.

Trevor went one further on his blog by incorporating a video showing off his new service action. Barbara wasn't that interested in Trevor's new serve, but found herself replaying the video over and over.



On the way to work, Barbara would play back the regular podcasts supplied by the tennis centre. She was amazed at how these were downloaded automatically by her iTunes software and copied to her iPod without

her having to do anything. The podcasts refreshed many of the skills and tactics that she had been taught on the course and encouraged her to keep trying to put them into action. They worked because Barbara was making good progress with her tennis. She had entered a club tournament (although embarrassed to find that she was now considered to be in the veteran category) and had won through to the final, against the reigning champion. In preparation, Barbara was making extensive use of the tennis centre's wiki, finding out how other players coped with the pressures of competition, sought out and exploited their opponents' weaknesses and applied their own strengths to achieve greater success.

Before the final, Barbara sat at the side of the court with her iPod, listening to a special audio programme prepared by Pat Elliott to help players relax and focus. Barbara was so focused, she was completely unaware of anything except the court and her opponent. The match seemed to whiz by, but that was as much as anything to do with the score – she was beaten 6-2, 6-2. Barbara didn't mind; she had tried her best and lost to a better player. Getting to the final was an achievement in itself.





Barbara didn't have to maintain her brave face for too long, because who should tap her on the shoulder to say hello but Trevor? He'd read about the final in Barbara's blog, travelled over to watch the match and had recorded it

all on his camcorder. He expressed his commiserations with a kiss and a long hug and suddenly tennis didn't seem so important anymore.


Barbara completed her last posting to her blog with a brief account of the final and a snapshot of her and Trevor embracing, taken by the club's photographer. With Trevor's help, she created a more permanent record of her experiences by writing an article for the tennis centre's wiki. She used Trevor's video to demonstrate all the new skills and tactics

she had been able to apply in the final and to show where she went wrong. It made great reading and earned her a £250 prize from the tennis centre for the best contribution by a player since the wiki had been set up. As Penny hadn't had a sight of the iPod for the past few weeks, Barbara knew where the money should be spent.

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My week at the Pat Elliott Tennis Centre, Portugal. A learning journal

Friday, April 21, 2006
Signing off



Yes, it's me and Trevor, just after the final of the singles tournament at my club. Would you believe I got to the final? It was the veterans' event, but so what, still quite an achievement for someone who's only been playing again for a few months.

I didn't manage to win the event unfortunately. I went down 6-2 6-2, to a much better player. Even some last minute revision with my iPod wasn't enough on this occasion. Still, Trevor, who appeared out of nowhere, was a real comfort, as you can see. Are we an item? You'll have to wait to find out.

That's my last posting. It's been a blast. Bye everyone.

posted by Barbara Elphic @ 18.40 PM **0 comments** 