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Book Review

Tennis from the Heart: Pursuing the Dream
Ted Murray
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We all have dreams. Every one of us. Some fulfilled. Some are left wanting. Ted Murray's novel, *Tennis from the Heart*, explores one young man's dreams of becoming a professional tennis player. Along the way, he finds not only fame and money, but something much more. Murray describes a journey through which many young men have to face growing up – learning to respect parents, facing fears, approaching the opposite sex, questioning religion, to name just a few.

Our protagonist in the story, Sam, has extraordinary talents. That much is clear to his parents early on. However, it was Aunt Harriet, a very keen and observant woman, who steadily guided Sam towards adulthood and achieving his dream. Harriet acts as a benevolent teacher, something all good rise-to-the-occasion-hero stories need. She teaches Sam how to play with integrity and sportsmanship during a time in his life when Sam's greed for winning outweighed his moral compass. Even behind the scenes, Aunt Harriet persuades Sam's father to stop his wild sideline antics and abrasive coaching philosophy and replace it with simply being a supportive and loving parent, regardless of the outcome of the match.

Entering into an adolescent, Sam's talents grow and develop to the point when more advanced coaching is necessary. He enters an academy on full-scholarship with the highest of hopes. Once enrolled, reality sets in. The pressure to win is too great, especially from an

overbearing coach who places winning above everything. There is no family atmosphere at the school, and Sam is left with few friends. It is only upon competing against a rival academy does Sam come in contact with Joe and his coach, Andy. The differences between the two schools could not be more distinct. Coach Andy directs an academy that places respect, family, and a good education above everything. Sam immediately switches schools and his studies and tennis game flourish.

It is during his time at the new academy when Sam starts to reach outside his comfort zone. Lana, a fellow student at the school, attracts his attention. Sam and Lana become fast friends, and soon Sam develops real feelings for her. But as fate would have it, Sam's tennis career would take off, forcing him to leave the one he loves behind. He begins competing on the pro circuit, only to discover more challenges await.

When the success that Sam once thought would be automatic takes longer than expected, faithful Aunt Harriet once again enters the narrative. Returning home for a much needed break, Sam, with Aunt Harriet's assistance, begins to get back in touch with his true self. Meditating once more and entering a place mentally where he can be alone with his thoughts, Sam realizes what he must do. He returns the circuit better than ever, because now the focus is not on the prize money, promotions, sponsors, or the press. Sam is now playing for simply the love of the game, how he once used to play as a junior. Tournament wins lead to titles, followed by a remarkable run at the Wimbledon Championships.

At famed Centre Court, Sam has to gather all that he has learned over the course of his life to come back from two sets down in order to hoist the trophy. All the teachings from Aunt Harriet, coach Andy, and some last minute advice from an attending Andre Agassi, all flood back to his consciousness. In addition, it is on the good graces of Andre that Lana re-enters the

picture, being flown in by Andre to cheer on her long-time friend Sam. Lana's presence invigorates Sam and he starts to play the best tennis of his life. His victory speech after is dedicated to her, and soon turns into a proposal, to which she says yes.

Murray puts together quite a story that every young tennis player should read. He accurately depicts what many young men and women have to deal with growing up. And it is clear from his writing that he places much more emphasis on winning with integrity than anything else, a lesson that all aspiring athletes should take heed to. Additionally, parents may also profit from reading this book, learning how to raise an athlete the right way through encouragement and praise, instead of negative reinforcement and constant criticism. And while the verbal dialogue can be cheesy at times, or too verbose for little children to understand or take seriously, the morals that can be gleaned from the book are worth a reader's time.