

TALK OF THE TOWN

By Corny Galdones

Some of our brethren seem to have a constant dark cloud hanging over their heads, always finding trouble in every corner, whether it's behaving like a knucklehead, making an outrageous call, or being clueless and taking forever to sort out a routine situation such as a wrong server. Their failings are beyond frustration. We can only shake our heads or laugh them off. What are they thinking?! Maybe, just maybe, these problem children will see the light one-day and mend the error in their ways. Hopefully, it will come to pass. Time will tell.

Naming names of ones who draw attention to themselves for the wrong reasons is redundant. You know who you are. If not, don't worry. Everybody knows of you. Officials eat up your misadventures when they gather. "Hey, did you hear about so and so?" You're so infamous sometimes your first name is all it takes. "Not again." Is this chatter unprofessional? Perhaps. Except, who can resist?

This gossip is filled with praise. Ha! Don't set yourself up to be its target. Take professionalism, for instance. We preach and preach until we're blue in the face about proper conduct on and off the court. Yet, the strays from the flock don't get it or just don't care. They either sleep right through the sermon, or it's in one ear and out the other. The moral they're missing is professionalism comes from the heart. Have pride and passion, my brothers and sisters. Believe. Amen.

A low profile can't do without common sense. Some people are blessed with it. The rest of us poor souls not as gifted must work hard at it. If this critical element goes missing, tongues wag or eyes roil about our hiccups, perceived or otherwise, that I occur away from the court. On the court, we influence these reactions more. Be an official, not officious. Control without controlling. Apply the rules, procedures and protocol so no one notices or thinks we're nuts. Put everything in its place with tact and quick thinking instead of creating tension with a show of power by ordering folks around or tossing out cards left and right. Sure, there are times we must exercise our authority with no ifs, ands, or buts. For the most part, commanding with smarts, restraint and grace gets better reception. Hit them on the head and have them love it. This knack takes practice. Want it.

Stay under the radar by making the match flow. Interruptions, delays, replays and disputed calls throw a fluid rhythm out of whack. Avoid them and minimize their damage. Hurry without hurrying. Pick up the pace and waste no time before the match, between sets and between plays. Sell our calls. Say in body language, "I know what I'm doing. Don't even go there." Then prove it. Be consistent. Hackles rise and jaws drop when we make a decision out of nowhere or not in line with our previous calls. Know when to make the tough call and when to take the path of least resistance. Dodge the firing line. The last thing we want to do is to insert ourselves into the match and become a focal point.

No news is good news. This ideal seldom happens. Sooner or later, our names will be bandied about in conversations. Count on being the talk of the town someday. Let it be for doing something right and not something wrong. Let the sun shine on us.