

- T – *“This is what I like!”* – My affirmation of faith stepping into the court.
 H – **H**olding the racket.
 E – Keeping my **E**ye on the ball.
 K – **K**illing the blue ball.
 N – The **n**oise of the ball crashing into the wall requires ear plugs.
 A – This skill set is like doing **A**erobatics in my Pitts – only me and the aeroplane.
 C – I do this, **C**ause I feel like I have hit something afterwards – an un-measureable feat.
 K – **K**eeping (again) my eye(s) on the ball.
 O – **O**nly me to blame when I miss my balls!
 F – Not very often do I use the **F** word; don’t make any difference, I am the only one playing!
W – **“WHACK!”** Can’t tell you how invigorating *the crack of the whack* is!
 H – **H**aving to bend over and pick my blue balls up is the most difficult maneuver of the game.
 A – Must slow down occasionally and suck **A**ir to not get dizzy.
 C – **C**ourse, being in shape would make killing my blue balls a whole lot more fun.
 K – **K**nowing there are other people in the gym but **NOT ONE** will be watching - this is good.
 A – **A**ll by myself on this court...
 B – **B**alance.
 A – left Blank as there are too many f’ing **A**’s in my title.
 L – **L**A Gym is the place with five courts – mine is Number 1.
 L – **L**eft arm every other time - or split (or maybe just my right arm).

Whack-a-ball (WAB) is the name of my game playing by myself on a racquet ball court using a small paddle and blue racquet balls. I was introduced to this in Oklahoma City flying a Learjet for an oil company and the boss, who was a tad younger than me, wore me out chasing the blue balls all over the court.

I liken this exercise (or game) to flying completion aerobatics. The contest is between me and the aeroplane. Really it is just the two of us. If I am ‘at one’ with my aeroplane then it works out to help win trophies. One might blame the wind, temperature, the judges, or something else but it is just the two of us; hence, in whack-a-ball it is just between me and the ball – can’t blame anybody but me.

I also liken the game to being in the batter’s box at a baseball game. This is where all the skill in swinging at a baseball comes together as in whack-a-ball with stance, balance, eyes, contact, arm swing, holding the racquet, gripping the racquet, and having a clean hit in the middle of the paddle.

So, little over a year ago I started at this new gym just because they had racquet ball courts. Was motivated to this new exercise when I found my old racquet and balls in the closet. I said to myself *“My, my, now I can go to the gym and hit something, kill some balls, and take out my frustration all by myself and still promote cardiovascular longevity, stay in shape, and just feel better.”* Noting it is always a good feeling at around five o’clock to say *“I went to the gym today!”*

My first session was memorable. It was a long time ago flying the Learjet and a long ago playing what we called ‘paddle ball’ as it was a faster game with the smaller racquets – sometimes use the Okie term ‘ratchet.’ I will point out during this first session the paddle worked, the blue balls worked, but my ole body was not what it used to be. For some reason or other my stamina was lacking, my mobility was lagging, and my speed laterally was noticeable slow. So, in the beginning my sessions were a tad short in duration.

I can remember that first day. Walked thru the glass court door and said *"This is the part I like!"* Put my 'ratchet' cover in the corner of the court, retied my 'tennis shoes,' put on my plastic eye protection, slipped my hand thru the safety cord to get a hand on my racquet, picked up my blue balls, and turned to address the situation...it was just me and my balls – time to **WHACK!**



Decided to begin slowly by playing some pepper, so I moved up and spent some time going thru all of the adjustments for stance, grip, swing, swearing, pinging, and playing. This took some time. I then moved back a few feet and worked on getting more solid hits on the returns. Finally got to where I could hit maybe three or four before I had to go pick up the ball I missed, or didn't hit well enough to get it to bounce back to me. Didn't take long for the frustration to build up. I have done this before and thank god no one was really watching (or listening) to me look like a crippled ole man trying to keep from whacking himself as he floundered in the court...

It didn't take long to see, determine, or comprehend, I could not move left and right very well. Will, of course, blame this on my right meniscus being worked on in 2010. So I didn't even try to race to the wall to whack it back because I knew it would hurt to move that fast although it was easier to move to the right than to the left.

Still first day, I decided to maybe see just how hard I could hit the little blue bastard so I dropped the ball to let it bounce up about two feet and went way back to get maximum leverage for a mighty swing. It was a stupendous **WACK!** God, the sound was electrifying. I had to stop and listen. I just let the ball go by. I couldn't believe it! *"Yes!"* I said *"this is it!"*

Then it got worse. Didn't take very long for my renewed learning curve to level off. As a matter of fact it started down – took a dive. I was sweating, swinging, swearing, and swatting but the balls were not coming back. Not back where I could return them as they sailed over my head, between my legs, or scudded along the wall out of

range to swing at. I got so mad and frustrated at a miss that I threw my racquet at the corner of the court where my blue ball was rolling to a stop. Pause... It was then, I had what we call a learning moment. This one well deserved: *I had forgotten the racquet cord was wrapped around my wrist.* It was not a pretty sight. I had done a real bad boo-boo (I used Hebrew words during my discovery of how to follow my racquet after I threw it...).

However, later on the whacking got better. I learned to spend less time wearing myself out on the treadmills, arm/leg machines, and hurried up to get to my court and get serious. All that gym equipment is for the annoying tattooed folks and the pretty assed women that do this for show – neither of which I pay any attention to. I have a need to whack my blue balls.

What I really need is a coach to tell me why the return blue balls end up mostly coming back hugging the right wall. How come I can't make every whack a correct whack to make the ball come back with one bounce so I can fully extend my right (or left) arm and just hit hell out it and make it sound like it smashed right through the wall? A whack deserves a WHACK! It can't be that hard.

Then I think about the baseball guys hitting maybe an eighth of the balls pitched to them...they have a box to stand in, feet and spikes placed in the dirt, eyes set, bat gripped, and bat cocked to swing at the pitch – which will come over as maybe a fast ball, slider, change-up, two-seam/four-seam, curve, or knuckle ball. Me and my blue balls do the same thing on my whack-a-ball court. I really understand why the professionals reach outside their hitting zone sometimes and take a cut at a ball dropping in the dirt. Pretty easy to do on my court too but the physics of how my returns come back to me as a slider, change-up, or a forkball is beyond my comprehension.

So I just coach myself. I know I need to have, more or less, an agile tennis stance as I must be able to move quickly and smoothly left/right, forward and backward. Must get an adjustable grip on my racquet to change the angle, angle of attack, tightness of grip, position of my thumb, and then adjust my length of back swing, length of arm (how much it is bent) for the return. Also difficult to adjust, is to measure where the ball will hit on the racquet strings. If off center or on the edge it makes a funny clunky sound and the blue ball does goofy things – damn it! I hate it when that happens; course, the issue here is keeping my eye(s) on the ball. Have been known to get set up for the ricochet return and start the movement of my eye(s) to the wall in anticipation rather than stay with the ball to contact with my racquet. Doesn't take very long to debrief this error. It sounds like “whiff” – and then the ball comes back from the glass wall and pings me in the back of my head.

One day I started off and hit seven balls straight without missing. My accuracy was doing just wonderfully. Pausing to wonder why, as I went over to pick my ball up, I realized I had started the session with my left hand. Then I thought maybe I do better with my lefty because I don't hit it as hard? Naw, that ain't right, besides hitting it with my lefty does not have the crack of the whack my righty does!

Well, it is always a good day to go play whack-a-ball but not every day is as good as the one before. Some days I can't hit sh*t – some days it just doesn't pay to go to the gym but that's ok too. I must keep playing the game. Some days I can hit seven in a row and some days my batting average is less.

“I really relish hitting them blue balls!” Coming all the way back with my right arm and giving the ball my full attention will sometimes cause my energy level to soar when it hits solidly against the front wall. I wonder why it doesn't punch a hole or cause the blue ball to explode – I mean I can really hit that ‘sum bitch’ **HARD!** These are the great days. Sweat dripping, well worked muscles, ball beat plum! I'm thinking ‘My Usual’ will really taste good as I stand under the cool air vent and put my balls back in their pocket. My ears are still ringing when I walk out through the court glass door – with my proud ‘presentation trophy’ in hand - actually just in my head.

And now all the folks and staff can take out their ear plugs.