ness, but his high center of gravity when moving to the ball.”

Wright spent years watching a “huge amount of tennis on videotape” and, through study and experimentation with players, determined that this “high set” (high center of gravity) confers several major advantages. The high set results from “trying to stand as tall as possible,”

Wright says, “moving while minimizing flexion of the knees and waist.” Doing so, he says, makes players quicker to the ball, improves their stamina (as it is less fatiguing than a “low set”), and puts less overall strain on the body, making injuries, especially knee injuries, less likely. As a 66-year-old volunteer assistant coach at Harvard, he’s now working with Dave Fish, head men’s tennis coach since 1976, and assistant coach Andrew Rueb to bring this innovative concept to the Crimson varsity.

Wright’s approach is contrarian because, almost unanimously, tennis coaches advise their students to “get low to the ball,” to move toward the ball from a modified crouch. “If you have to get down to hit the ball,” Fish explains, “the assumption is that you should get down to the ball as early as possible.” But Wright distinguishes crisply between “hitting stance” (one’s stance while actually striking the ball) and “moving stance” (how one holds one’s body while moving around the court between hits). “Nobody has paid any attention to moving stance because everyone is glued to the ball,” he explains. “But the efficiency of your hitting stance is determined by the efficiency of your moving stance. If you get there later, you’ll hit it badly.” Only on the final step before hitting the ball, he advises, should one lower the body to the degree necessary. The high set enables quicker movement from the “ready” position and keeps athletes light on their feet. The result is the kind of moving stance epitomized in Muhammad Ali’s maxim, “Float like a butterfly.” Wright notes that “Ali was a high setter,” adding that the high set is effective in any sport that involves quick initiation of movement. “It’s very significant, as it affects every single contact with the ball and every recovery after a stroke,” says Fish. “When the player, after the split step [the body’s slight lift that initiates movement], returns to the higher set, that player is instantly unstable in the most desirable sense. That instability allows him to move forward, back up, or lunge out to either side more quickly. [Top professional player Roger] Federer seems to float above the court, because he maintains a high set.”

After his gymnastics career at Springfield College, where he was nationally ranked in the rings (“A physical impossibility for someone as weak as I am,” he says, grinning), Wright went on to coach gymnastics there, and then at MIT and Annapolis, and to consult with the tennis squad at West Point. He took up tennis seriously after his epiphany watching Laver, and within two years was skillful enough to have made the naval academy’s varsity, according to their coach. Using his concept of high set, Wright then worked with several pro tennis players, including Stan Smith, winner of the 1971 U.S. Open and 1972 Wimbledon.

By 1977, Wright felt that he’d introduced

Sports Wrap

Squash

The women’s team (12-0, 6-0 Ivy) had an undefeated season and captured the national championship, dispatching Williams, Yale, and Penn for the Howe Cup at the College Squash Association (CSA) national tournament. Phenomenal freshman Laura Gemmell won the national individual championship, completing an earthy 16-0 season in which she lost only three games, two of them in the CSA individual final.

The men (5-4, 4-2 Ivy) finished ranked fifth in the nation. Co-captain Colin West ’10 took the CSA national individual championship, to round out a dominant 16-1 season and end his Harvard career with a 50-9 overall record. West also won the Skillman Award for the senior squash player showing outstanding sportsmanship over his college career.

Wrestling

J.P. O’Connor ’10 claimed the NCAA 157-pound championship, defeating Chase Pami of California Polytechnic, 6-4, in the final. O’Connor’s 35-0 season was the first perfect campaign in Harvard grappling history. He is Harvard’s third national champion, joining John Harkness ’38 and Jesse Jantzen ’04. The Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association named O’Connor Wrestler of the Year.

Visit harvardmag.com/extras to view a video on the high-set concept.