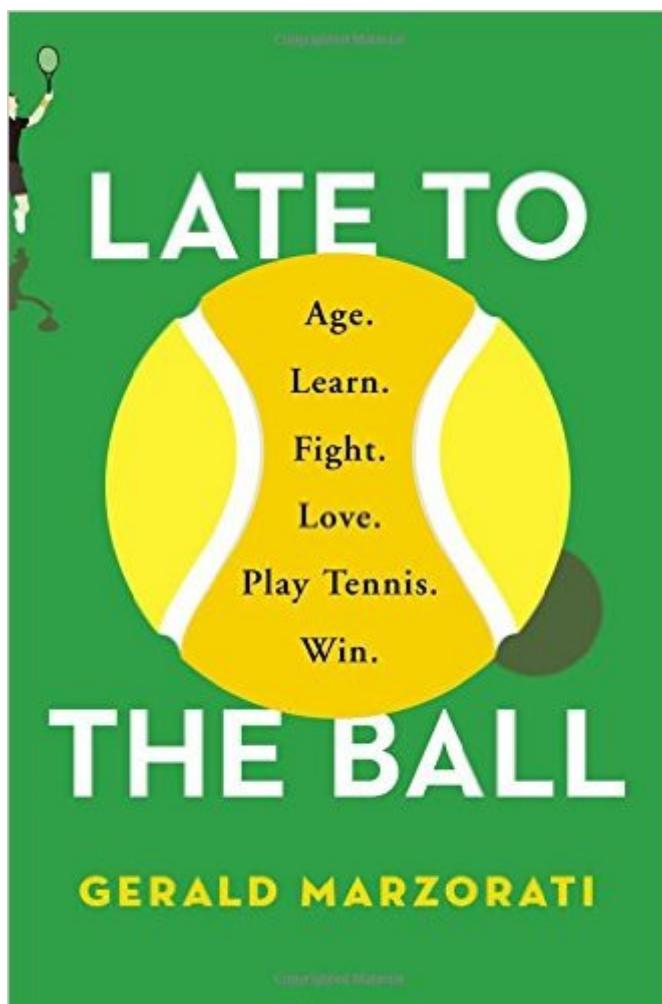


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# **Late To The Ball: Age. Learn. Fight. Love. Play Tennis. Win.**



## Synopsis

An award-winning author shares the inspiring and entertaining account of his pursuit to become a nationally competitive tennis player—at the age of sixty. Being a man or a woman in your early sixties is different than it was a generation or two ago, at least for the more fortunate of us. We aren't old yet. But we sense it coming: Careers are winding down, kids are gone, parents are dying (friends, too), and our bodies are no longer youthful or even middle-aged.

Learning to play tennis in your fifties is no small feat, but becoming a serious, competitive tennis player at the age of sixty is a whole other matter. It requires training the body to defy age, and to methodically build one's game—the strokework, footwork, strategy, and mental toughness. Gerry Mazorati started playing the game seriously in his mid-fifties. He had the strong desire to lead an examined physical life, to push his body into the “encore” of middle age. In *Late to the Ball* Mazorati writes vividly about the difficulties, frustrations, and the triumphs of his becoming a seriously good tennis player. He takes on his quest with complete vigor and absolute determination to see it through, providing a rich, vicarious experience involving the science of aging, his existential battle with time, and the beautiful, mysterious game of tennis. *Late to the Ball* is also captivating evidence that the rest of the Baby Boomer generation, now between middle age and old age, can find their own quest and do the same.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“As surprising as a well-disguised drop shot, as emphatic as a down-the-line sizzler, *Late to the Ball* is a revelatory guidebook to life and sport. In this sparkling memoir, Gerry

Marzorati's plunge into the world of tennis isn't a quixotic lark or Plimptonian stunt. It's about dedication and perseverance, second acts and third acts, and what happens when the spirit soars as the body begins to ache and hobble a little more. Marzorati is the most amiable guide and seeker I've read in years. His pursuit of meaning after sixty, delineated by the lines of a tennis court, includes intriguing science and philosophy, psychology and spiritualism, but what glimmers for this reader at the end is Marzorati's appreciation of call it awe of a game that brings with it a sense of ageless joy, mystery, and beauty. Michael Paterniti, author of *Love and Other Ways of Dying* and *The Telling Room* "Marzorati teaches us that to be a novice is a gift. This book is for anyone who'd like to improve, at anything." Leanne Shapton, author of *Swimming Studies* "Only a writer as agile and intelligent as Gerald Marzorati could pull off a book like *Late to the Ball*. Part tennis story, part memoir, part scientific inquiry into the effects of aging, this marvelous book offers pleasures on every page and moves with the energy of Roger Federer in his prime. A wonderful addition to that shelf of sports books that are about so much more than a game." Darcy Frey, author of *The Last Shot: City Streets, Basketball Dreams* "Gerry Marzorati was the Rod Laver of editors because of his rare enthusiasm, quick intelligence and shining insight. Now, in *Late to the Ball*, he brings those same qualities to his quest for mid-life self-understanding through the prism of a tennis racket. Will he defeat opponents? Himself? Time? This urgent, meticulous book hits the mortal sweet spot known as revelation." Nicholas Dawidoff, author of *The Catcher was a Spy* "Gerald Marzorati might have taken up painting at age 60. Or even guitar. Instead, he took up tennis. Competitive tennis. And I am so glad he did. His account of this surprising late middle-age journey simply took my breath away. It's filled with terrific tennis writing, sure, but more than that *Late to the Ball* is a deeply moving inspiring, really story of renewal and regrowth." Jonathan Mahler, author of *Ladies and Gentlemen, the Bronx Is Burning* "Marzorati's prose is crisp and clean and his storytelling is focused. He also demonstrates an editor's knack for capturing the intricacies of other people's lives....This enjoyable work is a study of the physicality, psychology, and biology of learning." Publishers Weekly "Late to the Ball" is a soulful meditation on aging, companionship and the power of self-improvement. I know that sounds like the kind of cheesy thing people say on the cover of book jackets. But it's really true." Jason Gay, *The Wall Street Journal* "[Marzorati] undertakes a rigorous program of improving his tennis and himself, introducing us along the way to an appealing cast. He movingly

meditates—â•at one point bringing me to tears—â•on the bond one forms with somebody whom one plays with and competes against, whom one faces across the net as if in a mirror. Reflective, wise and amiable, Marzorati is the kind of person and tennis player you’d be happy to share a game with and a beer afterward. “[Marzorati] documents his unlikely late-in-life transformation into a tennis addict in his spirited and winningly self-deprecating memoir, *Late to the Ball*. It’s a book that any reader, regardless of age, or knowledge of the sport, would devour.” San Francisco Chronicle “Marzorati’s prose is conversational, and the book encompasses more than insightful sportswriting—it is an intimate and captivating look at athleticism, competition, and aging.” The New Yorker “Late to the Ball offers a courtside seat for an affirming, against-the-odds contest.” Like Marzorati, I am also a late convert to tennis and relished his dogged quest as a consequence. Financial Times (UK) “The topic is tennis, the subject mortality. A thoughtful and poignant take on the fight to hit a few winners before the match runs out.” Sports Illustrated

Gerald Marzorati was the editor of The New York Times Magazine from 2003 until 2010. He previously worked as an editor at Harper’s magazine and The New Yorker. He is the author of *Late to the Ball* and *A Painter of Darkness*, which won the PEN/Martha Albrand Award for a first book of nonfiction. His writing about tennis has appeared in The New York Times and on NewYorker.com.

About a week ago, I read an article in the Wall Street Journal about Mr. Marzorati’s new book about his journey to become a seriously good tennis player despite his age (late 50s/early 60s). After reading that WSJ article, and as a 63-year old who many years ago had a decent club-level game, I knew I had to buy this book. I started reading the book this morning, and I quickly read the first 74 pages. Here is the impact the book has already had on me: I went out to my garage and found my old tennis bag. Then I went to my local sporting goods store and bought a tennis ball machine and a box of balls (as I know no one with whom to play). In the late afternoon, I went to my local public courts, set-up the ball machine, and in the process of doing so I noticed a father going through drills with his daughter on the next court while his wife looked on. I made a comment to him that his daughter had a beautiful backhand. That started a 45-minute conversation about tennis, our tennis backgrounds, tennis injuries, the joy of being on the court, etc. I had yet to hit my first ball, and I had already met a very nice tennis family. I hit cross court forehands and backhands, volleys, and ended

the session with some serves. It was a beautiful late afternoon/early evening, and it felt wonderful to be back on a tennis court. Before heading home I stopped at the grocery store to pick up a few items. The clerk asked me if I had been swimming; that's how much I had perspired during my session. I ordered three books on by David Foster Wallace after reading about him in Chapter 11 of Mr. Marzorati's book. On eBay I found an old hardcover first edition of *Levels of the Game*, and I bought it. This evening I already feel the soreness starting, and that feels good. Tomorrow morning I will be back on the court, practicing my strokes using the ball machine. All this, and I have only read the first 74 pages of *Late to the Ball*. I enjoy reading good writing, and Mr. Marzorati's writing (he is a former editor of the New York Times Magazine) is very good, indeed. Needless to say (but said anyway), I highly recommend *Late to the Ball*.

This is an excellent, enjoyable, and deeply intriguing book. It's not just a "how older folks can play tennis" book, though there is excellent technical information sprinkled throughout. Rather it's a journey of self-improvement in a demanding, challenging environment. Tennis is the vehicle Marzorati chooses to ride as he stubbornly rebels against his own mortality. The increasingly tough terrain he travels is liberally populated with friendly monsters and instructive dangers. The ultimate destination is inevitable, making the journey all the more precious. He vividly communicates the thrill of battling yet one more step forward when said "progress" is often punctuated by two mandatory steps backward (yes, you fellow tennis players know exactly what I'm saying). Most impressive in the book is the network of vivid characters he encounters along the way, each of them fighting the same battle: a hook-armed tennis player, deeply experienced well-mellowed foes, tough but insightful mentors, and faithful ladies to name but a few. Although this book is particularly valuable for other folks "late to the ball" (I myself took up serious tennis in my mid 60's) any tennis player would enjoy this book. Also, any aspiring athlete would benefit. For that matter, any human looking to fight back against subtle handicaps (particularly aging bodies) will find this account inspirational. Marzorati has a deep perspective, sneaking into his compelling action-sequences potent physiology flavored with unexpected psychology: engendering profound and helpful conclusions. Particularly interesting is his depiction of the multidimensional aspects of tennis: from rank beginner to national competitor, from desk worker to dedicated athlete, from self-sufficiency to grateful team player. It took me a while to finish reading his book because I deliberately savored each chapter. I wanted to let the events simmer in my brain before moving onward, helping me puzzle-out my own tough tennis challenges. Reading this book, though, will not automatically make the reader a better tennis player. But it will make a tennis player a better person. And, as with tennis overall, the ending of the

book isn't a satisfying "victory" winning a big trophy at an international tournament as a crowd of thousand cheers, but rather an elevated perspective...far more valuable. Thanks, Gerald, for a truly brilliant book. Much appreciated!

A wonderfully researched and clearly written exploration into the nature of aging and what some of us are doing in an attempt to delay that inevitable process. My best praise of this book is that I have added it to my very short list of "must read and re-read" books, which is now three books long: A Handful of Summers, Too Soon to Panic, and, now, Late to the Ball. Anyone of a certain age who is not happy with the prospect of becoming inactive should read this book, whether or not tennis is an interest.

As an older tennis player myself late to the game, I found the story irresistible and certainly understand his fascination with the game. I'm glad a tennis enthusiast with the literary chops to give some insight to the rest of us (especially the aging cadre, of which there are tens of thousands) under the game's spell took the time to add to the bibliography of this amazing sport. I'll probably read it again and am glad it's in my Audible library. I bought the Kindle version and sometimes read it visually too. How amazing is it that they were always synched whether I started listening on my iPhone or Echo, or read it visually on my iPad. Honestly, I'm not sure why I rate it only 4 stars other than I think the 5th star should be reserved for monumentally outstanding works. I reserve that for Vladimir Nabakov, also a tennis aficionado, for his better literary works.

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