Vampirecat's Baby Steps Summaries

This document contains summaries of Baby Steps RAWS from the Baby Steps RAWS spoilers thread on Mangafox, written by the amazing user Vampire Cat. Vampire Cat was one of the original translators for the Baby Steps English scans and has done an amazing job with these translations. These summaries contain the main points of the RAW chapters, which is around 150ish chapters ahead of the English scanlations at this point.

These summaries were first compiled by the users (whose names I cannot remember sorry!!) of the original Mangafox thread who like me were so appreciative of all the work Vampire Cat has put into these summaries. As a warning, you should know that these summaries contain references to other forum posts, or Vampire Cat's extremely busy life outside Baby Steps.

My aim with this document is to inform as many fans as possible of what is going on with the latest chapters of Baby Steps ahead of the scanlations, by updating this as often as possible from the latest English scanlated chapter to the latest summary by Vampire Cat.

I would like to take this chance to thank the people who first compiled these summaries on the original mangafox thread and most importantly Vampire Cat herself. You are a hero and I can't thank you enough.

Latest scanlated chapter (303) >>> Latest RAW/Vampire Cat summary (452)

(previously compiled summaries of ch. 267-302 deleted as English scans have been released)

(I'm trying to figure out how to get all the bolded chapter numbers on the outline for ease of navigation. If you know how to do it please send me a message!)

Ch. 304
According to the summary of ch.304, in Ei-chan's next service game, Asano pulls yet another different slice to get the first point. Ei-chan retains the advantage of his serve though, so after two rallies and more change of pace and Ei-chan's amazing Asano with his ball control, he manages to hold his serve. Ei-chan concludes that Asano is one or two levels better than he is in terms of technique, but when Ei-chan's serve gives him the advantage, he'll counter Asano as much as possible with technique, and when it comes to power, Ei-chan can win. During Asano's serve, he seems to flashback on his tennis career and how technique and power struggle to dominate tennis. He thinks it's long past time for power to be overtaken by technique. He thinks what will change tennis is radical technique fused with the current power. He believes that accomplishing that is his job as the one who has continued to compete for the longest time using technique. Asano holds his serve too, so the score is tied 2-2. The chapter apparently ends showing a woman's figure watching the match from a distance. It looks like Ei-chan will have to show Asano that he, not Asano, is the one who can fuse technique and power. I wonder if Ei-chan will make his breakthrough early, or if this match will go 3 sets and into tiebreak.
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I found RAWs for ch.304. Lots of text. Suffice to say the summary I posted earlier was accurate. Maybe I'll just add that while Asano believes changing tennis through radical technique fused with the current power is his job, he does acknowledge that Ei-chan seems capable of doing so too, but he believes it's too early for Ei-chan.
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Correction to ch.304. Nene wasn't watching from a distance, she was merely on her way to the court to watch Asano's match.

Ch. 305
As for ch.305, according to the spoiler site, the match continues with both sides holding their serves. The onlookers get excited and someone says Asano's in his best form. Ei-chan's having difficulty analyzing Asano's play style. Asano believes Ei-chan has the edge in physical ability, so he wants to avoid a long match. But he debates whether he should play aggressively or defensively, weighing the pros and cons of each, and is surprised that he's been driven to such a difficult choice by a high schooler. During the break before the next game, Asano notices Nene. He apparently apologizes, she waves off his apology and tells him to deal with his opponent quickly, and he faces the next game with renewed energy. The current score is 5-4 with Ei-chan in the lead, so it's now Asano's serve. Asano uses a spin serve for the first time in the match. Ei-chan manages to return it, but Asano goes to the net for serve and volley—even though he's mostly kept to the baseline before. Asano apparently does this to keep Ei-chan at the baseline. Asano's volley puts away the ball. Ei-chan thinks Asano's touch with the volley at an angle is even more delicate than Takuma's. Asano's thoughts continue to harp on the importance of technique. Ei-chan thinks he'd seen it in the videos but the reality exceeds his imagination and he wonders how to break Asano's serve. He thinks Asano's serve is good but not that powerful, and that Asano has various techniques whether at the net or the baseline. To hold back Asano's attack, Ei-chan wants to crush the start with his return, so he'll use his data more and read the course of Asano's serve like he had during his match with Pete. The breakdown of Asano's serves up to now: center, 30%; body, 10%; wide, 60%. Type of shot: frequently a slice, but the one just now was a spin serve. So Ei-chan decides to compete against Asano's serves using insight and response for his returns. Chapter ends.
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I found RAWs for ch.305 and Nene arrives in time to see Ei-chan serve when the score is tied 2-2. The match continues and both hold their serves. With all the variations of Asano's shots, Ei-chan's apparently forced to draw and count the types Asano hit. At the same time, Asano's wondering what to do in order to break Ei-chan and it's at this point—when the score is 5-4 with Ei-chan leading—that Asano finally notices Nene watching. He reads from her pose and expression: "You noticed me now, did you? Coming was painful, but you asked me to come. You didn't even notice that I who am trying to earn a salary am here. Really, you." Then after Asano's shocked and mentally apologizes, she mouthes, "Fine, so finish him off quick," and makes a thumbs-down gesture. This lights a fire in Asano. He concludes he'd just been bewildered by the options and thinks there are ways to attack and defend. He thinks that at a time like this, giving him a push in the back is the most helpful. In his mind, he thanks Nene and realizes she always pushes his back at the critical time. He thinks that breaking through
the prelims this year is an absolute requirement. If he's confident he can play either way (offensive or defensive), then he'll attack.

Ch. 306

Ei-chan thinks that Asano has hit a spin serve to the deuce court for the first time and he suddenly shifted his offensive strategy to serve and volley. Seeing that he (Ei-chan) has a hard time getting to the net... Conversely, if it becomes Asano trying to compete at the net, what can Ei-chan consider... In order to widen the open court when he came forward, a spin serve that escapes wide... But Asano has always exceeded Ei-chan's imagination, Ei-chan thinks he might have to sketch the opposite of the opposite of his prediction. He stops that line of thought, concluding that his hesitating the way he is, is itself Asano's target. In an important time, he has to believe in the strategy he developed with his own data. Asano starts his serve. Based on the toss, Ei-chan concludes it will be a spin or flat. He bets its course will be the wide that he's decided to prepare for. Ei-chan's prediction is correct and Asano comes to the net. Ei-chan thinks that a spin serve bounces high, then from a high position...he'll hit it strongly to the feet. Asano's return hits the net. 15-15. Ei-chan's elated by his success but notes that it was risky. Even though Asano hadn't been able to react completely, with just his usual skill he might have been able to counterattack. His net volley is quite good; therefore, it would be better for Ei-chan to challenge him with a return that won't give him time to get to the net. Asano, on the other hand, concludes that the course of his serve had been read and wonders if it was the notes that Ei-chan has been taking that allowed him to read the course. Insight and control...in other words, a fighting style that uses data and technique. He decides he has to make an appropriate counter to that. Ei-chan thinks he'd been able to get a point off Asano's spin serve, normally that would mean Asano would avoid the same spin on his next serve. Up to now, the course of Asano's serves have frequently been to the center; however, if Asano is making an aggressive shift, he might go for an ace with a wide. Asano starts his serve. Based on the toss, Ei-chan concludes it will be a flat or a slice. He bets on a fast slice or flat that's wide. But Asano's serve is a slice to the center. Ei-chan's able to return it, but Asano goes to the net and take the point. 30-15. Ei-chan's reaction confirms Asano's guess that Ei-chan is guarding against the wide that Asano hasn't hit much of today. Ei-chan thinks that even though Asano should know they're reading each other, he was able to serve his usual. Reading each other is a contest of strategy and Ei-chan wonders whether Asano with his long career is one step better than he is. He decides to challenge Asano again. In serves to the ad court, the most frequent one up to now is a slice wide. But if Asano is going to use serve and volley again, a spin wide that will drive Ei-chan out of the court would be an advantage. Ei-chan wonders if Asano is thinking about how Ei-chan reads his serve. But he thinks he can't lose with strategy that used data and he has to believe in fighting using data. Here he'll go with the high probability and anticipate a slice wide that levels off, rather than a spin. When Asano starts his serve, the toss appears to be a flat or spin, but as Ei-chan expected, it's a slice wide. Ei-chan makes it in time and his return is a winner. 30-30. The onlookers are amazed that a high schooler held down a pro with a strongly hit return. Asano, however, disagrees. He thinks he wasn't beaten by a strong hit. This time he'd lost in reading each other. His strategy was beaten by a high schooler's strategy. Asano remembers his past. When he was 30 and ranked 25th in Japan, the pattern of losing in power to young opponents, who are also countering technique, had started to increase. Then when he was 33 and ranked 40th in Japan, he focused on physical training and began competing with a core of power shots, but his days of not winning at all continued. That time he was invited to coach the Japanese team. He refused it because he wants to prove the Japanese, who have a physical disadvantage when compared with overseas players, can oppose them. He wants to prove there are strategies that use technique to compensate for speed and power. When he was

35 and ranked 80th in Japan, his sponsorship contract was terminated. Asano continued training, knowing what he's doing is reckless but believing that it being reckless is no reason not to do it. He could only believe in that and continue moving forward. End of flashback. Asano thinks that's why he can't fade here. Ei-chan expects Asano's next serve to be a slice since Asano ought to want to take a reliable strategy with the score at 30-30. But just Asano's knowing that Ei-chan is reading his serve makes the course hard to read. So for the course, Ei-chan decides not to gamble and distributes his awareness to 60% center, 30% wide, and 10% body. Asano makes a rare error with his first serve, but as Ei-chan expected Asano had been aiming for a slice to the center. Ei-chan wants to focus all in the second serve, but since he lacks data on Asano (probably what he prefers to use on second serves), Ei-chan doesn't know what the next one will be. He thinks it's best to prepare to be able to deal
with it, like he had with the first serve, no matter where it goes. Asano starts his serve and Ei-chan is surprised that the toss is for a flat. He thinks a normal second serve isn't a flat, so he suspects a slice or a spin. But the serve turns out to be a flat wide. Ei-chan's just able to return it and he wonders if Asano's going to use serve and volley again. Asano thinks his strategy can't be surpassed with data. End chapter.
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Slight correction for ch.306: As is logical, Asano was dropped by his sponsor when his ranking dropped to 80. It wasn't Asano who'd terminated the contract. Everything else I posted from the spoiler summary is accurate.

Ch. 307
Ei-chan takes the 1st set by hitting a slice lob! That sure surprised Asano. He managed to catch up with it, but his return goes into the net. 6-4. Asano continues pulling off difficult shots and making them look easy—and he changes his strategy again in the start of the 2nd set. Ch.307 ends with Asano getting the first point.
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LOL Ho-kay, with the second serve, Asano goes to the net. Ei-chan also goes forward and he identifies the open area if Asano leverages his technique. So Ei-chan makes for the center, so that he's ready to jump regardless of the direction of the ball, and from there he can only rely on his own reaction. He sees the angle of Asano's racket and leaps to the right. He doesn't reach the ball, but it's out: 30-40, bringing Ei-chan to set point. Asano thinks he'd been aiming too hard, guarding against the excellence of Ei-chan's reaction, but concludes it couldn't be helped because if he'd been any weaker, Ei-chan would have been able to return the ball. He thinks until he came forward on his second serve, he'd appraised Ei-chan's unpreparedness. He'd had the lead in tactics, but with Ei-chan's reaction to the angle volley, in one stroke the gap had been reduced. He concludes that Ei-chan is taking in all the factors in Asano's tactics: speed, power, reaction... [The apparent corollary to that is, he has to keep using tactics that Ei-chan has seen and is therefore unprepared for.] Ei-chan thinks he forced an error at an important point. He considers what to expect for Asano's next serve. If he thinks about it normally, the most frequently used and the one with the highest probability is a slice wide...but because Asano has been using serve
and volley in this game, there's also a spin wide that can create a more advantageous posture. Either way it's likely to be wide, but he doesn't know what Asano will do. Asano's serve is a slice wide. But this time Asano's not doing serve and volley, so Ei-chan wonders what's coming. Ei-chan first thinks Asano's return is a flat, but corrects himself: it's a slice. Asano thinks Ei-chan coped precisely with the flat-looking slice that Asano hasn't shown him

up to now, that even though Ei-chan's leading, there's no slip in his defense, so he's able to react to whatever tactic. Ei-chan's decided to set up to handle whatever comes at him since he doesn't know what's coming, and then steal the advantage at some point. Asano's return is a bouncing spin that's deep in order to make Ei-chan move back. As Ei-chan expected, Asano goes to the net. Ei-chan hits a slice lob. He thinks it will escape, but since a slice ball is slow, Asano will be able to return it. The ball lands just inside of the line. Asano catches up to it, but sees Ei-chan's now stationed at the net, a reversal of the previous situation. So Asano tries to send the ball to Ei-chan's feet, but it hits the net. Ei-chan wins the first set: 6-4. Asano concludes he was beaten...even though he'd freely developed the tactics he could do. HE realizes that the essence of Ei-chan's strength is his ability to cope. The true character of which is his instantaneous reaction and the brains to comprehend the whole match. Furthermore, his technique with his control and general mastery of all sorts of shots...and the minimum power, speed, stamina to be able to compete here (the prelims)... "New Technical Tennis" is the meaning of the tennis he'd imagined. Being in the process of gaining competitive tennis using original techniques. In addition to that, taking a high school student... [For some reason, I'm getting the feeling Asano decided to pass on the mantle for "new technical tennis" to Ei-chan at this point, and the rest will be just testing Ei-chan.] The second set starts with Ei-chan's serve. Since he hasn't dropped as serve, he decides to deploy change of pace just as powerfully. He starts attacking more quickly that Asano. He thinks there are too many variations to Asano's slices, so it's impossible to predict. Asano thinks, "If you're talking of going out into the world with that tennis, show me you'll overcome any strategy of mine!" Ei-chan thinks Asano easily hits an extremely difficult shot and it goes in reliably. After Ei-chan returns it, he's surprised to see Asano had switched around to hit it with his backhand. Asano puts away the ball with a fast spin. Ei-chan realizes it's a new attack pattern: Asano is unleashing
strategies he hasn't shown up to now as most effective response to the situation. Ei-chan wonders how much time it had taken Asano to acquire so many patterns of tactics and techniques. He reminds himself he'd taken the first set from Asano by using his own tennis. Then he thinks he'll defeat Asano by using his own tennis. End of chapter. Blurb for the next chapter: The confidence to win that has begun to sprout! Title for the next chapter: Absorption

Ch. 308

Ei-chan wins. Araya and Kanda also win. In the second set of Ei-chan's match with Asano, the score is 1-1. The current game is Ei-chan's serve and Asano takes the point with a drop shot: 40-30. Ei-chan thinks he was beaten by Asano's strategy. Up to now, he'd stolen the advantage with the course and variety of his shots, so now Ei-chan decides to go with power. He holds his game with an ace: 2-1. Asano thinks Ei-chan's set up for his serve is skillful. Even if he overcomes that, he's a long way from breaking Ei-chan's change of pace. Ei-chan thinks he's being beaten in ingenious strategy, but he's managing to hold. He's better in terms of coordination, reaction, speed, power, and coping. Miyamoto, the reporter from Tennis Times, is apparently watching the match and marvels at how strong Ei-chan has gotten. Asano feels that once a strategy is shown to Ei-chan, Ei-chan immediately comes up with a plan, so his strategy isn't getting through and he thinks he'd have to switch to different strategies in succession. Ei-chan's surprised by the numerous strategies, but he thinks that because Asano is trying various things, he (Ei-chan) has to cope with them, which increases his tactical patterns. Ei-chan uses a play that Asano had played a while ago. [LOL He's using Asano's strategies against him!] Asano senses his tactics are being absorbed by Ei-chan.

He's shocked: Wait a second! It can't be as simple as that! Impossible! Are you considering they're strategies I'd spent how much time cultivating? And with his youth, Ei-chan is doing so in such a short time—and coping and using them well against him who doesn't have speed, power, and reaction time. Ei-chan takes the point with a drop shot, bringing him to break point: 40-30. Asano is certain he's being cornered.
While playing, Ei-chan's ideal crosses his mind: [To make?] a new technical tennis that has both power and speed the top of the next world... Asano's reaction on being broken: Hey, hey! I'm not happy! Miyamoto considers how Asano's being beaten symbolic of the passing of a generation [Ei-chan's generation taking over from the old guard]. When the score is 5-2 with Ei-chan leading, Ei-chan fills out his notes as usual. He thinks he has to surpass those ahead of him. An intense rally continues... It results in Ei-chan winning the game, set, and match in straight sets. So the final score is 6-4, 6-3, and Ei-chan makes it to the final selection (actual event).
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After Ei-chan's match with Asano, he seems to be set up to defeat Nabae and Takuma. Since Nabae and Ei-chan have similar analytical styles, Ei-chan now has the option of switching to different strategies in succession, so that Nabae can't rely on Ei-chan's data. And when Asano was doing serve and volley (Takuma's style), Ei-chan noted that Asano's ball touch was even more delicate than Takuma's, and yet Ei-chan defeated him. Add that to what Ei-chan learned when he played Pete, and a match with Takuma seems even more likely, one where Natsu's prediction finally comes true. But since Takuma's JTA ranking is 9th, the earliest Ei-chan might go up against him is 2R. Ei-chan's 1R opponent is likely to be a pro—or Nabae as the All-Japan Junior champion or whoever the All-Japan Intercollegiate champion is.
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Additional notes based on raw: The reporter from Tennis Times goes to check how Asano fares and is surprised by the comment from one of the onlookers that he thinks Ei-chan still has the advantage. LOL Asano's reaction on being broken of "Hey, hey! I'm not happy!" sure doesn't match the happy flush of excitement on his face. Ei-chan thinks that the variety of Asano's attack patterns itself is Asano's long tennis history. And Ei-chan realizes even more how much he's lacking, not just physically, and believes he'll have to compete using Asano's methods if he becomes a pro. Because of that, he really has to defeat Asano and overtake those ahead of him. Kanda and Araya apparently catch the end of the match. The next chapter (ch.309) will be in issue 36-37, That numbering means the next
Weekly Shonen Magazine is a double-issue, so after that will probably be a week's break because of the Obon holiday.

Ch. 309
Ch.309 opens with Ei-chan thinking that he'd won over a pro. The reporter Miyamoto wonders about Asano's mental state right now with the appearance of a new star (face) that resembles himself a lot. After the match, Ei-chan and Asano shake hands. And as Asano leaves the court, one of Asano's supporters tell him he'll be waiting in the audience next year because Asano is our hope. Anyhow, he then goes to where Nene is. She asks him what he's depressed about when he should be used to losing to a youngster and reminds him that he'd said he's resolved to continuing to play professionally. Asano agrees with her, but adds that this time it's different. Araya and Kanda go to meet the victorious Ei-chan. Asano goes up to them and asks Ei-chan if he's considering being a pro. Ei-chan admits his current status is halfway [he's on the fence]. Asano's surprised and tells Ei-chan, "That...is

troubling." He adds that he wants to completely support Ei-chan who's the type that's similar to himself. He gives Ei-chan his contact details and tells him to consult Asano about anything essential. In addition, Asano says he has no doubt Ei-chan can play internationally. Ei-chan's happy about Asano's acknowledgment and the two shake hands again. As Asano walks with Nene, he tells her that during the match, he was happy when he imagined Ei-chan's future. And for the first time, he entertained the possibility of becoming a coach. He says it might be all right if he's not the one who actually takes the technical tennis that he's aiming for to the top of the world. Then he proposes again to Nene, and she's all "who knows?" [But at least her reply isn't a flat-out rejection.] Ei-chan calls Natsu to tell her he'd won. Then he calls his mom with the same news. She can't believe her son actually defeated a pro. Ei-chan insists it's true and suggests she come and watch. At the National Training Center, Takuma is practicing while Coach Miura is present. There, they receive the list of the draw for the final selection. Coach Miura suggests Takuma give it a special look in advance, since if Ei-chan wins once, he'll face Takuma. Coach Miura adds that his position is quite complicated, but he's really looking forward
to the first competition between the two of them in a regular match. Takuma replies that even Coach Miura should understand how difficult it is to win the first round, but if they actually face each other, it should be interesting. Ei-chan also aware of this. He wants to appeal [probably with his parents or with potential sponsors] to becoming a pro with this draw, so he has to defeat Takuma. But before that is the first round. The title for ch.310 is "The All-Japan Tennis Championship." There's no mention of who Ei-chan's 1R opponent will be. But I'm fairly sure it's not Nabae; otherwise, Ei-chan wouldn't have focused on Takuma. So it's probably someone new who hasn't been introduced yet. I also suspect Ide is a wild card in the final selection, since his name wasn't in the draw for the prelims.
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Given Coach Miura's long career as a tennis coach, he must have a very good idea of how Asano is as a player, especially since Asano is considered a hero by Coach Aoi's generation. So Coach Miura might consider Ei-chan's defeat of Asano as a big deal, and regardless of Takuma's comment about the difficulty of a first-round win in the All-Japan Tennis Championship, Coach Miura seems to expect Ei-chan will be able to get past 1R since he told Takuma to give the draw a special look.
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Okay, now that there are RAWs, I have to correct that part that I wasn't sure about. It wasn't Asano who called out that he'll be waiting in the audience next year, but one of Asano's supporters. I've edited my summary to reflect this.
LOL Kanda took Ei-chan's victory in stride, even though Araya marvelled at it. But when Araya kidded Kanda about having gotten friendly during Florida, Kanda's reaction was an immediate denial. When Asano asks whether Ei-chan's considering becoming a pro, since Ei-chan's already in his third year in high school (about to graduate), Ei-chan replies that he hasn't decided and explains it depends on whether he can find a sponsor at the tournament. He adds that he's also considering going on to university and had gotten some schools to wait on his decision, but if he does go to university, he'll give up on turning pro. Asano flat out says that is a problem from him. LOL What an expression on Asano! He
fumbles an explanation about wanting to support Ei-chan to gloss over it. The offer to consult him covers tennis matters, Ei-chan's future, essentials. When Asano says he has no doubt Ei-chan can play internationally, Araya and Kanda look impressed. And when Ei-chan steps aside to call Nat-chan and report his win, Kanda's irked as usual. Ei-chan tells Natchan they'll both be in the main tournament, and she suggests they go together the day after

tomorrow, so it looks like Ei-chan has a day to recover from the prelims before the main draw starts. I got the impression he'll be seeing Natchan "tomorrow," so they'll both probably be at STC. I hope Ei-chan takes advantage of Asano's offer then.

Ch. 310
Ei-chan goes to STC the day after the prelims. He reports his win to Coach Aoi and returns the DVDs of Asano's matches. Coach Aoi had expected Ei-chan to win, but he tells Ei-chan it's an extremely curious feeling to have his student defeat a player he admired. When Ei-chan says he'd come to practice the tactics he'd picked up during the match with Asano, Coach Aoi is surprised and tells Ei-chan, "You're a scary guy." Yukichi's in the court and he congratulates Ei-chan on making it to the tournament proper. Then they talk about the value for the Japanese of the All-Japan Championship. Apparently the All-Japan Championship is limited to Japanese players. Ei-chan says it's a marvel to see his name in the final draw among so many players whose names he recognizes. Coach Aoi says it's a title he'd also wanted; it seems Coach Aoi had gotten only as far as the Best 4 in the All-Japan Championship and no champion has emerged from the prelims. Coach Aoi adds that he has expectations—which makes Ei-chan gulp. Ei-chan remembers that if he wins 1R, he'll face Takuma. Ei-chan's 1R opponent is the 22-year old Tamakoshi, a pro JTA ranked 46th who had also qualified through the prelims. Scene shift to Tamakoshi Shinji who's playing tennis at home. He apparently does image training, visualizing himself winning in Wimbledon. Tamakoshi has been a pro for 3 years and he thinks it's about time for him to move on to the next stage; last year he lost in 2R. He's also feeling cautious about Ei-chan since Ei-chan defeated Asano. Scene shift to STC. Ei-chan practices with Yukichi and then scribbles in his notes that "this pattern will be useful..." Natsu shows up, having finished training and heard that Ei-chan had come. The expressions of Coach Aoi and Yukichi on Ei-chan's being picked up by his girlfriend are LOL. As the couple goes home, naturally their conversation is about how Ei-chan might face Takuma. Ei-chan says that if he loses to Takuma, he feels he'll be satisfied and will give up on becoming a pro and can move on. Natchan tells him he mustn't be fainthearted, then breaks into a run. She shares how she'd watched Ei-chan walling here (from here?) and thought that Ei-chan would become strong—and says she was right. Ei-chan's shocked and counters that he still has a long way to go, that he has to get stronger. She tells him she knows he'll defeat Takuma and become so much stronger that Japan will be surprised. Continues in ch.311 "The Beginning of the Dream"
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Some corrections and additions to the summary: Coach Aoi congratulates Ei-chan on his victory as soon as he sees Ei-chan, so Ei-chan didn't have to report it first. When Ei-chan returns the DVDs that Coach Aoi had lent him, Coach Aoi asks if they'd been useful. Ei-chan says they were a bit different from now but they'd been quite useful; he attributes his having been able to play better tennis than he imagined and his dealing with Asano with composure to them. Coach Aoi had expected Ei-chan to rest, not come to STC that day. Ei-chan actually came because there were some things he wanted to do: to validate the many strategies he'd picked during his match with Asano; to try out techniques that only someone at Asano's level can do; and to validate the strategies he'd come up with to cope with those strategies he was beaten with. (I just noticed that Ei-chan's now up to Tennis 72 in his notebooks.) Yukichi's enthusiastic about being Ei-chan's practice partner: anything to make his aniki the best in Japan. Ei-chan tries to downplay the possibility, but Coach Aoi tells them a high school student has won the All-Japan Championship, although it was long ago, and there's talk of Nabae contending for the championship this year. Ei-chan thinks Ike and Nabae would be

the peak of his opposition, but also that he wouldn't face them until the finals. Coach Aoi points out Ei-chan can face Monma, the 5-time champion—a prospect that Coach Aoi finds exciting. Ei-chan notes that even if he wins the championship, it won't add to his world ranking; however, Yukichi points out that it would add to Ei-chan's JTA rank and waxes eloquent about the prestige of winning the All-Japan Championship.
All-Japan Championship seeds:
1. Ike Souji
2. Monma Ayumu
3. Watanabe Takatoshi
4. Yoshimichi Daiki
5. Haketa Tatsurou
6. Arino Tadao
7. Minami Masahito
8. Egawa Takuma
9. Tsudanuma Shinobu
10. Yamaguchi Jou

Ei-chan considers the blocks of the various high schoolers. With Ike, the one mostly likely to face him immediately is Ide. Nabae's likely to face the 12th seed, Ooguro, and the 6th seed, Arino; if he faces Ike, it would be in the semifinals. Araya's in the same block as the 10th seed, Yamaguchi, and the 5th seed, Haketa. Kanda has the 15th seed, Kawagoe, and then the 2nd seed, Monma. If Ei-chan were to be able to fight Kanda or Araya, it would be in the semifinals. But before then, if Ei-chan wins one match, he'll face Takuma. Although Tamakoshi Shinji called it image training, he looked like he was just playing a video game. Ei-chan thought Natchan had practice, but it turns out she came to STC to be able to meet up with him; thus, Coach Aoi's and Yukichi's funny expressions because Ei-chan's fetched by his girlfriend. When Natchan tells Ei-chan he mustn't be fainthearted, he tells her it might sound that way but he's really not being fainthearted and he's not thinking he'll lose. She sees where they are and runs ahead to outside one of the half courts. She tells Ei-chan she remembers watching him there walling and thinking he'd become strong, then adds that Takuma hadn't believed her at all. Anyhow, given what's been shown of Tamakoshi and of Ei-chan's preparation, I suspect Ei-chan will win 1R in straight sets.

Ch. 311
Ei-chan and Natchan go to the venue. It doesn't say whether Natchan goes on her own immediately, but once Ei-chan is done reporting in at the information desk, he enters the venue and is hailed by Araya and Nabae who are there already. Then Ide comes running. He explains that on his way there, he'd helped out a girl and missed 2 trains, so he started to run. His three listeners think, "As expected." Ei-chan's impression on seeing Ide who'd gone to Spain is that Ide's body had gotten a size bigger. The 4 promise each other that they'll win [their respective matches, probably], then separate. Aki-chan comes and her eyes meet Ei-chan's; they greet each other. Tamakoshi (Ei-chan's next opponent) and other players are talking, saying that this year there seems to be a lot of high schoolers. Ei-chan's mom is going to the venue. She sees the number of people and the size of the venue and realizes the tournament is that big. When she sees the main venue, she's even more surprised. Ei-chan goes to the front entrance to meet his mom. As he tries to hail his mom, he's hailed by Miyagawa and Oobayashi. Oobayashi comments on how Ei-chan had left them behind just like that. Miyagawa agrees and adds that with that much momentum, Ei-chan should

already have the confidence to turn pro. Ei-chan replies that it depends on this tournament. After this, their conversation turns to Oobayashi's university's solicitation of Miyagawa. Miyagawa says it's hasty. Watching Miyagawa say he intends to advance at his own pace, Ei-chan gets the impression that Miyagawa is quite level-headed. When the two leave, the next to come up is Iwasa, who says he has other business at the Big Sight and had come over by chance. He adds that he'd hit a wall [in a creative sense] for the first time and is having difficulty when it comes to drawing freely. He just wanted to watch Ei-chan's match because Ei-chan's like Iwasa's hope. Seeing that scene, Ei-chan's mom concludes that various people at rooting for Ei-chan. Ei-chan sees his mom and comments on her early arrival, since his match starts at 11 a.m. at court No.8.
Then it turns 11 a.m. End of chapter. Continues in ch.312, "Necessity."
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Additional details: Araya teased Nabae for the natural way he hailed Ei-chan and Natchan. Natchan goes ahead at this point, with Ei-chan telling her to contact him when she's done. Nabae says it's great that 3 high schoolers made it through the prelims and adds that he finds it heartening that he has contemporaries in the tournament and is looking forward to facing them. Ei-chan points out that for any of the 3 of them to face Nabae, it would be in the finals; then he asks after Kanda. Nabae replies that he'd seen Kanda earlier but Kanda was fired up and had gone to practice. Ide hadn't helped a girl, rather it seems that on his way to the venue, girls were quarrelling, various things happened, and so he missed 2 trains. While in Spain, Ide apparently stayed at a training hostel and was exposed to different training styles. He says he realized the biggest difference between him and those guys he saw isn't size but training method. He adds that he ran out of money and was considering returning to Japan. Finally, he went to watch a tournament that he hadn't been able to take part in due to lack of funds and happened to meet a man of Japanese maker who decided to help him. Ide says he'd wanted to stay longer, but when he heard he might be able to play against Ike, he came back [so his wild card is definitely on the invitation of the JTA]. Araya points out that if Ide doesn't win his first match, his return would be fruitless. Ide replies that he'll definitely win. Araya notes Ide has a lot of confidence in himself, as usual. Nabae adds that first of all is today, and Ei-chan agrees. According to Ei-chan's thoughts, Aki-chan had qualified through the prelims. Oh, in the page before Tamakoshi's conversation with another player, they're shown looking at Ei-chan reading his notes in the players' lounge. That might be why Tamakoshi says the Ike Generation all seem serious. The player whom Tamakoshi is chatting with replies that compared to Tamakoshi, everyone is serious, and adds that Tamakoshi doesn't have a coach and treats [tennis?] only as a game. Tamakoshi counters that it's his own way of thinking—if he doesn't know his own ability by himself, he won't understand what he can rely on a coach for—and that a pro's knowing his own merits is one step. While Ei-chan's warming up, he receives an e-mail from his mom saying the venue is so big she doesn't know where to go, so she's waiting at the front entrance. Ei-chan goes there and she's the one who tries to hail him, only to have his attention drawn by Miyagawa and Oobayashi. Oobayashi's there as a spectator because one of his senpai at the university is participating in the tournament; he tells Ei-chan he was surprised to see in the draw that Ei-chan's also participating. Oobayashi also remembers "that Maruo-kun" (from Ei-chan's very first match). Apparently, Miyagawa is still considering going pro, but acknowledges that his growth isn't as rapid as Ei-chan's, so he seems to think maybe in 2 more years. Oobayashi boasts that he hasn't lost to Ei-chan even once. As Oobayashi and Miyagawa take their leave, they tell Ei-chan they'll go watch his match. Iwasa had been on his way to the Big Sight, but when he noticed [regained his senses], he'd gotten there. But

he thinks because his art had its starting point in tennis, going there today is necessary in the sense of returning to his origins—because of his mental block with his art. Ho! Sasaki and Kageyama come to watch—and Sasaki's wearing her hair down. Natchan's parents also arrive. In the last page, the panel with the guy looking at the draw for the men's singles...I wonder if it's significant. Might he be Asano? Hmm...since Tamakoshi has gotten this far without coaching advice, I suspect he's gifted physically. However, since he's described as a happy-go-lucky type, I don't expect much analysis from him.
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Thanks to the Baby Steps fanbook, I've identified the two girls in the last page of ch.311: Masumi Makihara (Natchan's friend) and Hana Yokoyama, both with STC. They probably came to cheer for Natchan.

Ch. 312
Ei-chan's mom meets up with Kageyama, Sasaki, and Yukichi. Ei-chan and Tamakoshi enter the court. Ei-chan's surprised when Tamakoshi starts stretching only then. When the umpire announces the start of the 5-minute warm-up, Tamakoshi cadges some grip tape off Ei-chan who wonders if it's a pre-game tactic to irritate him, but after seeing Tamakoshi's manner and actions, he concludes that Tamakoshi is just a self-paced guy, a type that Ei-chan has never played against before. The 22-year-old Tamakoshi is a 3-year pro who qualified for the final draw through the prelims just like Ei-chan. According to Yukichi, Tamakoshi had come out at the top of his generation since high school, but although he's occasionally defeated a superior opponent on turning pro, Tamakoshi gives the impression of an erratic player who hasn't been able to win beyond expectations. The match starts with Ei-chan's serve. Ei-chan thinks he's finally gotten that far, but considers it just the starting point. From there on, he'll prove that he can become a pro. His first serve is a slice that escapes outward. Tamakoshi returns it, and Ei-chan suddenly takes the point with a drop shot. Tamakoshi and all the spectators are surprised. Ei-chan thinks the pace mustn't be taken by a self-paced guy. Iwasa notices that Takuma came to watch Ei-chan's match, and starts a conversation. Ei-chan had taken the first set: 6-2. The second set stands at 3-1 with Ei-chan leading. Tamakoshi thinks his opponent still doesn't have a JTA rank, so there's no reason there can be that big a difference between them. Ei-chan gained many things in his matches with Konishi, Akimoto, and Asano in the prelims, and again he takes the game: 4-1. Tamakoshi's in disarray. He thinks, "Frankly, my condition isn't bad, and yet against a nameless high-schooler opponent...why has such a thing happened?...Someone...tell me!" [Yup, that's what he needs a coach for.] Continues in ch.313 "Supremacy" With a chapter title like that, I'd say it's a given that the match will end there. Looks like it will be 6-2, 6-1 for Ei-chan. With Tamakoshi's mental state, it's doubtful he'll be able to pull himself together enough to mount a fresh challenge for Ei-chan. Looks like the guy I was wondering about is Yukichi. He has the same scarf that Yukichi has in ch.312, so wow! he's really bulked up.
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Correction: Tamakoshi didn't mooch grip tape off Ei-chan. He just hadn't prepared his racket before going to the court. Ei-chan thinks that if Tamakoshi really intends to use the racket he'd just taped, it shows lack of planning. Tamakoshi also hit the ball to start off the warm-up practice without checking to see if Ei-chan was ready. Ei-chan hit a fast forehand slice after Takuma's arrival, so that's no longer a secret. Oh, at the end, Tamakoshi thinks he's not in perfect form, but his condition isn't back. And yet against a nameless opponent, he's... Why is such a thing happening? There isn't that much difference in their power, speed, or technique. He tells himself not to get upset, but he doesn't know what to

do...and asks for someone to tell him [what to do]. Blurb on the last page: Overwhelming superiority at the tense first match! Yup, looks like Ei-chan's likely to win 6-2, 6-1. And, boy, Takuma looks serious. By the way, I was just re-reading the early chapters of Baby Steps, so the difference in Ei-chan between then and now is stark. He looks so much more mature now.

Ch. 313

Ei-chan overwhelms Tamakoshi, who isn't able to predict where the next ball will go due to Ei-chan's diverse attack patterns. Ei-chan wins 6-2, 6-1. The onlookers are surprised that a high schooler overwhelmed a pro. Ei-chan turns to look in the direction of his mom, Kageyama, and company and makes a triumphant pose. Takuma leaves in silence. Ei-chan shakes hands with Tamakoshi, the match ends, and Ei-chan heads for his mom and the others. His mom is incredulous that he managed to beat a pro. While everyone's talking, Iwasa comes over and tells Ei-chan that Takuma had been watching until a little while ago. Ei-chan's surprised and wonders if Takuma had come to scout. The reporter Miyamoto comes over, and requests an interview. Apparently his magazine is planning to feature other players of Ike's generation and Miyamoto's trying to select who to feature. Miyagawa and Oobayashi are watching Ide's match. As usual for an Ide match, the audience gets excited because of Ide's strong plays at the last moment. Ide's opponent is Oobayashi's senpai who made it to the Best 4 in the intercollegiate, so Oobayashi's surprised by Ide's strength. Araya comes over and comments that Ide's also going full throttle. Kanda and Nabae also won theirs. It seems that when Ide went to Spain, he'd strengthened the lower half of his body considerably. Miyagawa's impressed. Miyamoto shows up and requests an interview with Araya.

At the coliseum, Tamakoshi sits with his head down. Yamashita goes over and says he lost to Kanda; he was apparently beaten by Kanda's power and stamina. Tamakoshi's teary-eyed. He swipes his arm(s) over his eyes. Then asks Yamashita to practice with him from now on. The first day of the All Japan Tennis Championship ends. All the high school students taking part won. And starting the second day the seeded players will enter. End of chapter. Title of ch.314 is "Covering an Event" and sounds like a reference to Miyamoto's activities.

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It's clear from the art that Ei-chan's picked up Asano's style of using an identical form for drop shots and slices. That's why Tamakoshi couldn't predict where the ball was going to go. In the end, Tamakoshi thinks he wasn't able to bring out his power; then he corrects himself, that he probably hadn't been allowed to bring out his power. But he doesn't quite understand beyond that. Heh. Takuma smiled! It looks like he's looking forward to his match with Ei-chan. According to Miyamoto, Ei-chan was the first of the Ike generation to finish his 1R match. Ei-chan's mom was surprised to hear that. But that's how quickly Ei-chan overwhelmed Tamakoshi—and quite a turnaround from Ei-chan's usual long matches.

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The lineup for 2R is: Ide vs Ike (JTA 1, 1st seed) Nabae vs Ooguro (JTA 14, 12th seed) Ei-chan vs Takuma (JTA 9, 8th seed) Araya vs Yamaguchi (JTA 11, 10th seed) Kanda vs Kawagoe (JTA 18, 15th seed)

Ch. 314

The reporter Miyamoto wants to put together a feature story with the caption "the activity of those from the same generation who follow Ike Souji" and has interviewed the high schoolers who appeared in the final draw.
First is the interview with Kanda. Miyamoto asks if Kanda was conscious of Ike when Kanda went to IMG where Ike is based. Kanda replies that if he says he wasn't conscious, it would be a lie, but he adds that what brought about the turning point where Kanda decided to try to raise his own level more was the semifinal match with Ei-chan during the All Japan Junior. Even in IMG, he didn't get to practice with Ike at all, just with Ei-chan. Next is the interview with Araya. He says he was impressed by Ike as a terrific guy when he appeared and went overseas just like that. Miyamoto notes that recently he got the impression that from a complete devotion to power, Araya's tennis has started to include a measure of calm and strategy. Araya says his starting to think calmly in the middle of a match was the result of playing against Ei-chan. "There was a time in the past when only my weak points were thoroughly attacked by that guy during the match..." Next is the interview with Ide. Miyamoto wonders if winning the Inter-high was Ide's motive for going abroad. Ide replies that he'd decided to go abroad because he lost to Ei-chan in the Kantou Junior and couldn't participate in the All Japan Junior. Miyamoto thinks, "Again...Maruo-kun..." Then the interview with Nabae. He says he's competing with the intention of winning everything. He wants to personally experience and understand the pro level. He adds that Ike's activity was shocking to someone of the same generation. He tells Miyamoto that he thinks there's still hope for even Japanese to be able to compete internationally. Miyamoto asks Nabae his opinion of Ei-chan. Nabae replies that the speed of Ei-chan's growth surpassed Nabae's expectations and he doesn't really know if Ei-chan is similar to himself. Then it's Ei-chan's turn. He says that of course he's happy to be able to play against Takuma and that he's also conscious of Ike. Miyamoto comments that Ei-chan's being able to come this far with 2 years of tennis experience is extremely amazing. Ei-chan attributes a big part of that to practicing with Takuma a lot, being supported by Ike in Florida, and being blessed in his coaches and environment. He adds that he's completed his preparations to compete. He intends to meet [Takuma] with everything he's got, so that he won't have any regrets. When the interview is finished, Miyamoto thinks it was interesting and decides that tomorrow he definitely wants to have a chat with Ike and Takuma before their matches.
And the 2nd day of the All Japan Championship, Miyamoto thinks Ike probably has an effect on a lot of people. He spots Ogata with his girlfriend and strikes up a conversation with him. Ogata says he doesn't have much of a chance to watch Ike live, and next year he'd like to take part. If there's time, he also wants to watch Ei-chan. He adds that everyone probably expects Takuma to win, but somehow Ogata feels a bit of hope [probably for a win by Ei-chan]. Miyamoto requests a chat with Ike. Ike says he thinks the spirit of the players of the same generation as himself is terrific but everyone still has ways to go and will get much stronger. He adds that in grade school he'd lost more often than he'd won against Ide, so today is revenge. Miyamoto is surprised when Ike says that Ei-chan's control is good, so until recently Ike's been having him serve as a hitting partner. It's thanks to him that Ike's now in somewhat good condition. Miyamoto pays renewed attention to the existence of Ei-chan whose name is spoken loudly by everyone of the same generation. The last one is the interview with Takuma... Continues in ch.315, titled "The Man Called Egawa Takuma." Incidentally, the kanji for Egawa is the same as for egawaru, which means "to act like a big-shot."
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More details on ch.314: Kanda says he'd been interested in STC's training even before, and being able to go to IMG was good luck from a connection with his parents' work. He's glad to have had the experience and mentions that Ei-chan had also gone to IMG for some reason. From Miyamoto's notes, Kanda apparently also shared that the training he did with Ei-chan included eye training and beach tennis. When Miyamoto notes that recently he got the impression that from a complete devotion to power, Araya's tennis has started to include a measure of calm and strategy, he asks if that was because Araya was conscious of Takuma; he'd wondered if Araya feels Takuma is more of a rival than Ike. Araya corrects Miyamoto that while he is conscious of Takuma, starting to think calmly during a match was the result of playing against Ei-chan.
Miyamoto asks Ide if Ide's early transfer of his training base overseas was because he's conscious of Ike. Ide agrees, adding that his dream is to become someone who plays internationally. Nabae's 1R opponent was the champion of the Intercollegiate. Miyamoto says since last year it was rumored that Nabae would turn pro. Nabae says he's competing with the intention of winning everything, but he's not conceited enough to think he'll be able to win easily. Besides wanting to personally experience and understand the pro level, Nabae wants to face various challenges in his own way even in this tournament. Miyamoto cites the "all-A tennis" that Nabae had mentioned before. Nabae says he'll change the basis of his all-A from junior level to pro level, he has a long way to go, and he has to raise the level of everything. Miyamoto asks Nabae's opinion on the main cause of the brilliant performance of those in his generation, citing Araya, Kanda, Ide, Ei-chan, besides Nabae. Nabae replies that he thinks Ike's activity might be a big one; however, for them who'd been competing with Ike since childhood, his strength was shocking but at the same time it provides hope that even Japanese can compete internationally. Miyamoto then asks Nabae's opinion of Ei-chan, describing Ei-chan as a new star that suddenly appeared from the same generation. To Miyamoto's surprise, Nabae says he doesn't quite get Ei-chan. Ei-chan has features that Nabae thinks are weaknesses but are actually strengths. Ei-chan's getting stronger faster than Nabae had predicted in his growth curve, and it seems he's similar to Nabae, and in that sense, the one who is the most unpredictable for Nabae is Ei-chan.
Ei-chan shares with Miyamoto that it was on seeing Ike's pro debut that he wanted to become a pro himself. When Miyamoto sees Ogata with his girlfriend, the girlfriend is urging Ogata to hurry up because if they don't get seats early, they won't be able to watch close up. Ogata says they still have two hours before the match and suggests they eat first. She counters that he's making light of Ike's popularity. When Miyamoto hails Ogata, he notes that Ogata came all the way from Osaka. Miyamoto's so surprised when Ogata says he also wants to watch Ei-chan if there's time that Ogata reminds him Ei-chan's match with Takuma is also today. Ogata says everyone probably expects Takuma to win, but adds that if it's Ei-chan, he might manage the overwhelming disadvantage somehow, and Ogata kind of has expectations. Miyamoto realizes Ogata's also paying attention to Ei-chan.
When Miyamoto requests a few minutes of Ike's time, Ike tells Ronnie that Miyamoto is covering the event. Ronnie suggests they do it after Ike is done at the reception desk. Miyamoto's apparently interviewed Ike before, so he tells Ike that he wants to ask about something else this time. He leads off confirming whether Ike knows about the sudden growth of the players in his generation. Ike remembers Ide well. He's more iffy about Nabae and Araya, but he's certain that he'd won the last time he played against them. He says he thinks he's never faced Kanda. Then Miyamoto asks about Ei-chan, and Ike bursts out laughing, saying "that guy is funny." Miyamoto's shocked when Ike reveals Ei-chan had been his hitting partner. Ike tells him Ei-chan controls his balls and can send them where he (Ike?)

says, and Ei-chan looks that way and aims for unwelcome places. Flashback to Ike telling Ei-chan that for the next ball, Ei-chan's to shoot it overhead when Ike goes to the net. Ike adds that Ei-chan's an ideal practice partner, and it's thanks to him that Ike's now in rather good condition. Miyamoto thinks that he'd certainly been paying attention to Ei-chan because of Ei-chan's abnormally fast growth, but an existence whose name is spoken loudly by nearly everyone in the same generation...and he was a player who has influenced even Ike Souji?

Ch. 315

Takuma sees Ike's poster and thinks Ike has an irritating expression as usual. Miyamoto, who's there to interview Takuma, asks him what he thinks of Ike. Takuma wonders if the topic is again about that guy, but he says he was surpassed by Ike in middle school and Ike has since been pulling away. Then Miyamoto asks Takuma to identify the motivation behind his recent remarkable growth. At the question, Takuma flashes back to the past. Takuma whose body had been big since childhood hadn't lost to anyone of the same year in school. He was called a prodigy by the adults around him and he himself thought it was natural that he would become a pro. But a real prodigy was soon closed in and Takuma has to put an effort every day. The conclusive one was in the third year of middle school, when he lost to Ike without taking even a single game. Takuma wondered whether he had to continue competing in the same world with this sort of guy. Then Ike tells Takuma he's going to America. Takuma didn't know his purpose for playing tennis. It appeared to him that practicing is foolish. At such a time, he received e-mail from Natsu who was worried about him. He
went to STC since she was there. He admitted to himself that was half truth and half excuse. Continuing to think that way, Takuma found only serves enjoyable. Then Ei-chan, who didn't seem suited to tennis in any way, joined. He was asked by Ei-chan whether he's aiming to be a pro, and Takuma thrust Ei-chan away. Ei-chan set a schedule, saying he'd review whether it's impossible or not after that. Takuma thinks he hadn't done anything yet and decides to do it: train, become stronger, and defeat Ike. Takuma also thinks about Natchan. He'd come across Ei-chan, who looked like he was about to confess to Natchan, and thought that this guy (Ei-chan) is an unexpectedly fast worker. Takuma had an unrequited love for 10 years and wondered if he'd again given up without doing anything. Thinking that, he sent Natchan an e-mail asking how she felt about Ei-chan. Natchan replied that she likes Ei-chan but she still can't say it, so it's a secret! A depressed Takuma dropped on his bed. However, Takuma had tennis and put all his effort into moving forward. He graduated, turned pro, and won once in the Challenger. But he didn't feel refreshed as he'd expected and wondered why he still didn't have a steadfast confidence in himself and whether it was because he still hasn't been able to defeat Ike. Takuma, who felt the gap during a long rally with Monma, asked Monma his own weaknesses. Monma told him he'll answer by he has conditions. Monma asked if Takuma can cooperate and risk everything if it has something to do with a future national team(?) competition. Takuma nodded in reply, and Monma pointed out that Takuma's weaknesses were his wavering and hesitation: since Takuma isn't clear about his objective, he wavers. Monma speculated that Takuma isn't popular and added that a guy like that isn't popular. As Takuma was leaving, Monma asked him again what his objective was. Takuma called to mind his childhood with Natchan and Ike, and said it's becoming the best in/with serve and volley. Takuma was surprisingly refreshed by the words that came out spontaneously. Takuma replies to Miyamoto that it might have been a good thing that he'd given up on planning to overtake Ike. Even in the tournament now, before Ike there's Ei-chan. Takuma says that if he wins and advances to the next round, he might also face

Monma. He adds that he was helped with these two [possible Ike and Ei-chan], and he has to win and return the favor.
Miyamoto is surprised to hear that Monma had somehow helped Takuma with Ei-chan. Takuma explains that they're in the same club, so that 100 times [not sure what this refers to] helped. Then he requests they talk off the record and tries to leave. Miyamoto asks why when it seems interesting and he might be able to put it in the article. Takuma argues that it's not at all interesting, since he might come across as lame in the story. End of chapter. It looks like the interview continues in ch.316. But at least the title promises a start to the match.
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More details and some corrections: Takuma agreed to talk to Miyamoto if it's just for a short while, and because he remembered this guy saying that because Takuma's a contracted pro, he has to keep in mind fan service. Miyamoto noted how Takuma was more composed when he answered the question about how Takuma considers Ike. After Takuma's resounding loss to Ike, Takuma felt there were lots of other things he enjoyed more than tennis and tried to find one he's more suited to than tennis. Part of his slump was because he didn't know his purpose for playing tennis, and if he can't win [by implication, against Ike] no matter how hard he tries, then training seems ridiculous. But the only thing he enjoyed was serves. When Takuma asked Monma what his weaknesses are, the "national team competition" that Monma mentioned was the Davis Cup. Takuma said that if/when he joins the national team, he'll do it [risk everything and cooperate]. Monma pointed out that though Takuma uses serve and volley boldly, Takuma hesitates in his play and probably doesn't actually have confidence in continuing to play as a pro. Monma believes Ike's objective is to beat the strongest guy. Monma's objective is to win the Davis Cup. He then asked Takuma what Takuma's objective is, whether it's defeating Ike, getting someone's acknowledgment, or winning at Wimbledon. Takuma's answer to Miyamoto about motivation is that while he was a junior, he'd thought of catching up with Ike, but recently gave it up. Miyamoto asks why Takuma's no longer focused on that. Takuma says everyone is the same in needing to defeat [Ike] in order to become the best. But before Ike, Takuma has Ei-chan and Monma, both of whom had helped Takuma, so he has to repay the favor. Miyamoto isn't that surprised that Monma had helped Takuma, but he's definitely surprised that Ei-chan had too. Takuma explains that they're in the same club, so he'd helped Ei-chan around a hundred times [and that's how Ei-chan had helped him]. It looks like Takuma's interview is done, though. So the next chapter should have more tennis.

Ch. 316
Natsu asked Takuma, "How's your condition?" To which Takuma said, "Huh? What's with you? Today you're on Maruo's side, aren't you?" She countered with "Well, the day is on Ei-chan's side, though." (She's obviously predicting Ei-chan's victory.) Takuma then said, "What, you're really annoying." (This chapter is pretty self-explanatory based on the art.)

Ch. 317
Before the start of the match, Kageyama asks Yukichi how strong Takuma is. Yukichi says Takuma is 8th in Japan. He compares Takuma and Ei-chan. Takuma: offense, 10; defense, 10; physical strength, 8. Ei-chan: offense, 6; defense, 8; physical strength, 6. But he adds that he thinks Ei-chan has an edge in mental strength. He points out that in tennis, even the world's no.1 is often defeated in the first round, which is why ranking is based on points earned during the year. However, Coach Miura attributes Takuma's recent advancement to

mental growth. During the warm-up, Takuma thinks it's been a long time since they'd played against each other, but he feels he knows Ei-chan's tennis well: Ei-chan grows abnormally during a match. Even in the 1R match that Takuma went to watch, it seems that Ei-chan had exceeded Takuma's imagination, because Takuma thinks that Ei-chan is truly a terrifying/terrific guy... and Takuma apparently decides he'll steadily pay attention to that point and crush him. Ei-chan thinks he'd been able to prepare his heart, technique, and physique, so what remains is deploying all that on court. Takuma won the coin toss so it's his serve. Serves go as soulelle said. After the first serve, Ei-chan thinks he can't imagine a strategy where Takuma continues to shoulder the risks of such a serve from the start, but it might be better to just remain prepared. Ei-chan manages to return the second serve, but it's a chance ball and Takuma puts it away. Ei-chan's surprised that Takuma's glaring at him. [Maybe Takuma hadn't expected Ei-chan to be able to return it?]
Ei-chan thinks the variety of Takuma's serves is also different so he can't match the timing easily. He remembers how in the past, he couldn't return even a single serve of Takuma's, and thinks that today, he'll return it, break it...and win! With the third serve, Takuma goes to the net. Ei-chan thinks if it's unreasonable to aim for the sides, he'll sink the ball at Takuma's feet. However, Takuma handles it easily. Ei-chan feels Takuma's coming quite aggressively, and he thinks that if he doesn't attack more intensely than now to break... The next serve is an ace. So 1-0 for Takuma, and the next game is Ei-chan's serve. Title of ch.318: Deployment
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Ch.317 is fairly straightforward. The only thing to add is that Ei-chan compares his serves with Takuma's and thinks that at full power, disregarding risk, his fastest is 195 kph.

Ch. 318
Ho-kay, ch.318 starts with Ei-chan's analysis of Takuma's serves during the first game. He thinks Takuma appears showy, but he's at a level where he's still advancing cautiously. When Ei-chan considers matters after this, he thinks Takuma will do it all the way, so Ei-chan concludes that he has to challenge Takuma at an early level. Coach Aoi says Takuma's serve is becoming top-level even internationally. But Coach Miura says the reality depends on the day, adding that when Takuma won the Challenger, the probability of his first serve was 74%. Right now, it doesn't seem bad today, but... The second game starts. Ei-chan plans to compensate for his disadvantage in power with control and tempo, in order to maintain the advantage of his serve. The first serve is wide at 170 kph. Takuma returns it. Ei-chan hits the ball at an acute angle that ought to create an open court. Surprised, Takuma returns it, but Ei-chan makes an unexpected attack [probably means not to the open court] to take the point. 15-0. The second serve is a flat at 164 kph. Ei-chan lowers the speed but goes for a tight course to the center. Takuma returns it, thinking it just barely made it in. Ei-chan returns
it deep. Again Takuma notes it just barely makes it in. He returns it with a strong blow. Ei-chan counters with a cross, but Takuma puts it away with a drop shot. 15-15. Coach Aoi notes that Takuma's strokes have been improving recently. Coach Miura agrees, adding that Takuma seems to be resolved to play as a serve and volleyer, and because of that resolve he'd made sudden progress. As Takuma prepares to receive, he thinks Ei-chan's fast serve isn't actually fast, it just seems strangely fast if you're not ready for it. If that comes...
Ei-chan's next serve is wide at 188 kph. When it came, Takuma thinks he'll hit it hard. He does and it goes out. 30-15. Takuma curses his error, especially since he'd successfully predicted the serve. Ei-chan thinks that was dangerous and that he has to hit a serve that

can slip off (Takuma's?) timing even if it's read. Takuma thinks he knows that Ei-chan's someone who plays while thinking of all sorts of details. He doesn't feel like trying to understand that at all, so he'll proceed vigorously. Since the last serve was fast, Takuma predicts the next one will be normal or slow. The serve clocks in at 146 kph, which Takuma judges as slooow. Because of Takuma's habit, Ei-chan thinks Takuma frequently uses a slice for returns on a high spot to his backhand. Since a slice is hard to sink at the back rather than at the net, Ei-chan goes forward. Yukichi's surprised that Ei-chan's doing serve and volley. Seeing Ei-chan at the net, Takuma switches techniques, but the ball goes into the net. 40-15. Ei-chan again acknowledges the danger, noting that Takuma had been able to quickly convert it to a spin. Then he corrects himself: he'd forced the error. It's also one way of his to score. The next serve is a fast (178 kph) slice that escapes outside, but it's a fault. The second serve is to the center at 161 kph, but with a faster spin than the first serve. After a rally, Ei-chan returns the ball at a cross with 1/64 precision. However, it's returned by Takuma with a backhand blow—but this also goes out. So Ei-chan holds his serve. However, he concludes that in this game he'd depended too much on Takuma's errors. Title of ch.319: Unbalanced.

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Additional details and corrections for ch.318: Ei-chan concludes from his analysis of Takuma's serves that the first serve (230 kph) probably wasn't yet full power. It was probably almost full power, but it had taken a bit of a spin and was aimed at Ei-chan's body with a course that had margin to the left and right. The second serve was also aimed at Ei-chan's body. He thinks that even though it looks like Takuma's just slamming the serves out one after another, Takuma had actually stressed putting in his first serve with a high probability. With the first serve, it isn't that Ei-chan was forced outside, but that he decided to hit the ball at an angle that should create an open court if he forces Takuma outside. Ei-chan compares his service game to Takuma's and concludes his tends to take longer while Takuma's is settled almost immediately, but he considers that to be "his tennis." Coach Miura says that though Takuma seems resolved to play as a serve and volleyer, serve and volley is a style that's only logical on the server's side; it isn't an attack pattern that can be used in a return game. If Takuma tries to compete using volleys as much as possible, he needs to somehow steal the advantage from his opponent using his strokes. And after Takuma reached his resolve, he made sudden progress in his strokes.

Ch. 319

Strangely, the chapter title according to Mangakansou is "Balance" (or Equilibrium). It uses totally different kanji from the "Unbalanced" mentioned at the end of ch.318, so it might be that the mangaka changed his mind about the title or the poster on Mangakansou mistyped the title. Anyhow, the chapter opens with Ei-chan thinking that Takuma's way of fighting in a return game had changed after he turned pro. Before, Takuma had tried to play at the net any which way, even in a return game. He didn't use his strokes too often as a means to get to the net. Right now he comes to play with the intention of settling it after his return. Because of that, Ei-chan has been helped by Takuma's errors, but when Takuma's shots start to go in, it will become very difficult for Ei-chan to hold his serve. Takuma's able to get an ace with his first serve, one to the center at 220 kph. Ei-chan thinks that if he can't return it, everything else is no use. He adds that the one hitting such a strong serve has more experience than someone like Pete. Ei-chan was able to
manage because of Pete's habit, but Takuma hits his serves with the same perfected form. The next serve is to the center at 198 kph. Ei-chan doesn't manage to touch it but it's judged

a fault. Ei-chan thinks that since the next is a second serve, he has to make the point. The second serve is a slice to the center at 184 kph. Ei-chan thinks it's fast even though it's a second serve. Since Takuma doesn't come forward, Ei-chan returns it deep. When Takuma returns that, Ei-chan returns it deep again, then goes forward. Takuma hits a cross. When Ei-chan reaches out, it's his racket frame that connects, but he succeeds in getting the point. 15-15. Since Ei-chan got the point on a second serve, he thinks it will put pressure on Takuma to get the first serve in. However, Ei-chan concludes he mustn't just wait for second serves, and moves back so that his receiving position is farther from the baseline. Kageyama and Sasaki wonder if Ei-chan will be able to get Takuma's serve with that. Coach Aoi explains that just by moving back, the speed of the ball when Ei-chan hits it will be lower, so the probability of his being able to return it increases, but there are also drawbacks to Ei-chan's move such as increasing the area he defends (see image in Mangakansou) and giving his opponent more time. Ei-chan touches the next serve, clocked at 201 kph. He floated it, but just the probability of an error is preferable to being beaten without touching the ball. Naturally, Takuma takes the point. 30-15. Ei-chan thinks it doesn't mean just returning Takuma's serve is fine. He has to return it deeper. Then he needs the flight time just to be able to reorganize his posture. Since he believes timing is important, Ei-chan watches Takuma's serve closely and somehow manages to return the serve clocked at 190 kph. Takuma thinks Ei-chan's getting accustomed (probably to his serves or the speed). Ei-chan notes one countermeasure for serve-and-volley: return it high and deep with a lob. If it goes well, he can keep Takuma at the back court. Naturally, this can bring on a strong shot from a high position—and Takuma meets Ei-chan's expectations with a strong cross. Ei-chan returns it somehow, thinking it's sink or swim. The ball hits right on the line and is in. 30-30. Ei-chan's elated, thinking that if he can get a point on Takuma's first serve even occasionally by playing this way, he's sure a chance to break will come
at some point. The next serve is clocked at 221 kph. Ei-chan isn't able to move, but it's a fault. For the second serve, Ei-chan applies pressure by assuming his receiving position in the home (original) position. He'd simulated to a certain extent whether or not Takuma dashes forward (service dash?). If Takuma doesn't dash forward, Ei-chan will return it deep like before and get to the net first. If Takuma dashes forward, Ei-chan will sink the ball at Takuma's feet with the fastest spin possible, and contest the next. The second serve goes to the center at 175 kph and Takuma to the net, so Ei-chan returns it with a fast spin to Takuma's feet as per the simulation. He waits to see where Takuma returns the ball, while guarding against the drop shot of the first game. Takuma's return is a cross and deep. Ei-chan concludes their postures are equal, in which case..."GO!" Ei-chan's return is also a cross. Takuma reaches out to return it but his return goes into the net. 30-40. And suddenly Ei-chan is at break point. End of chapter. Title for ch.320 "Character."

Ch. 320

Apparently, this is the very first time Ei-chan's gotten a chance to break Takuma's service in all the times they'd played against each other, so he tells himself to concentrate on this one point. From the toss, he judges it either a spin or a flat. Then at the moment the ball hits the racket, first the variety of shots, next the course... It's a spin that's wide. The serve clocks in at 196 kph, and it escapes outward. Ei-chan somehow touches it with the frame of his racket but doesn't manage to return it. 40-40. Ei-chan looks frustrated, but Takuma's surprised that his serve had been touched (wasn't an ace). Coach Aoi marvels at Takuma's ability to hit such a fast spin ball that escapes outward. Coach Miura says Takuma's been able to do that much even before, but he's now starting to get it in at the crucial moment. Ei-chan's mom,

Coach Aoi and the others exclaim in surprise that Takuma's been hitting that high-level serve ordinarily. The next serve touches the net, so it's a fault. Ei-chan prepares for the second serve, clinging to a sense of relief and internal amazement. He watches the toss and judges it a spin ball. However, its speed is 180 kph and his return is weak, so Takuma's able to put it away. But Ei-chan focuses on having touched Takuma's first serve. Though he continues to concentrate, the next serve is 220 kph and he isn't able to move at all. Ei-chan (?) gives a involuntary half smile. 2-1. [Drat. But I suppose with all the history between Ei-chan and Takuma, Ei-chan shouldn't be able to break him that easily.] Ei-chan starts taking notes. In this game, 5 of Takuma's 8 first serves went in, for a probability of 63% [already lower than Coach Miura's stated 74%]. Because he took break point with that, Ei-chan might say it's [apparently referring to the experience of having gotten to break point] quite good. He considers it positively as a game where he was able to visualize breaking. The onlookers pay attention to Ei-chan taking notes. Yukichi says he remembers when Ei-chan came to STC. Coach Miura joins him in turning the topic to the game back then. In the middle of that reckless match, Ei-chan had begun meeting the ball a bit, after he started writing his notes that way. Coach Miura says since that time he'd been astounded by Ei-chan's analytical ability and reactions to his excellent vision. After that, Ei-chan gained experience and focus, and probably a lot of data on Takuma as well. He adds that Ei-chan will probably assemble the conditions just to be able to attack that serve next. Therefore, it's not particularly strange that Ei-chan, among those in STC, has been able to match Takuma so much. He thinks even Takuma has understood that. Yukichi then says, "That's why please watch. Because from here on, Aniki will start adjusting to that serve little by little." The match resumes with Ei-chan's service game. Even if he's not able to get an ace, Ei-chan starts making free use of tempo, variety of shots, and mixing his shots. Takuma also starts going for a drawn-out game to decrease the errors from his strokes. Recognizing the excellence of his serving condition today, he becomes more aggressive, continuing to hit serves of around 200 kph, raises the success rate of his first serve close to 70%, and doesn't give Ei-chan a chance to break. The game continues. Both sides hold and the first set enters the 9th game [so the score apparently stands at 4-4]. Takuma takes the point with his seventh ace today. 15-0. Ei-chan remembers he mustn't play as usual today. If he really wants to win, he has to do something...If he wants to overcome Takuma... He switches to a defensive position in front after the first serve. Takuma notices this and thinks Ei-chan has guts and if he starts challenging Ei-
chan first... End of chapter. The title of ch.321 is "Aim." Well, if the score is 4-4, Ei-chan still has a chance at winning the first set 6-4. Since he's now had 8 games to adjust to Takuma's serve, maybe in the 9th game, he'll succeed in breaking it—especially since the first set seems to have zoomed by.

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Additional details and corrections: The fourth game (Ei-chan's serve) also went to deuce. In the fifth game, Takuma recognizes the excellence of his serving condition and gradually starts to shift to a more aggressive play. Though Ei-chan desperately braves the attack, he's hindered by the high wall of his return. What with increasing the probability of his first serve to close to 70% (not over 70%), Takuma doesn't give Ei-chan a chance to break. In the ninth game, after Takuma takes the first point, Ei-chan wonders if it's still hopeless. He hasn't been able to grasp even the beginning of a break. Even when he returns a serve, he's beaten by a volley. Despite there being an obstacle after that... Although he's never defeated Takuma up to now, for him (Ei-chan) to have to defeat Takuma when he (probably Takuma) is in such good condition... In addition, with his usual return and playing only defensively, driven by

what comes after the deployment of his countermeasure... That's when he realizes he mustn't play the same way today. If he really wants to win, he has to do something. If he wants to overcome Takuma... Ei-chan takes a step forward to the usual receiving position close to the baseline. Takuma sees that Ei-chan intends to return his first serve from a more forward position than what Ei-chan's been using up to now. He thinks it's gutsy and considers taking the initiative from Ei-chan. The blurb says "The one who moved first is Ei-chan...!"

Ch. 321

Huh, rather than "Aim," it seems the title of ch.321 is ""Attribute." Anyhow, the chapter seems to start with a flashback to Coach...I assume it's Aoi, though the post consistently uses "Aoki." Ei-chan looks back to Coach Aoi's lesson when Coach Aoi told him that though serve-and-volley has its advantages, it also has points to target, and that the proof of that is in the recent decline in the number of serve-and-volley players. In the past, players didn't have power and they couldn't bring out
powerful serves or returns because rackets also weren't good. However, those evolved. Now the serves of serve-and-volley players are too fast. And on top of not having enough time to move to the net, they have to receive their opponent's strong return. Furthermore, assuming they're still able to return the first volley, the position of the second volley is very dangerous. Ei-chan thinks that was already proven during his match with Pete. But trying to do that when he's farther back of the baseline is impossible. Takuma thinks he doesn't know how Ei-chan intends to challenge him, but it might be because Ei-chan concluded that he (Ei-chan) can't compete if he can't return (the serve?) from the home position. Takuma says that if he just wants to win today, he too would choose that. Ei-chan looks back to the days of study, preparing for the match with Takuma. Takuma, on the other hand, thinks that Ei-chan suddenly displays his true aggressive character when push comes to shove. That side of Ei-chan irritates Takuma and has since before. Ei-chan takes the current 4-4 tie as an example, where the score is 15-0. In such cases, Takuma often aims confidently for the center. He estimates that probability of a fast flat or slice serve to the center is 63%. If he's able to return it, he'll bet on a high return. Ei-chan's prediction is correct: a slice to the center. Takuma returns the fast ball with a volley, but because his setup was destroyed, [Ei-chan's?] next ball escapes to the side. 15-15. Takuma guesses Ei-chan predicted the serve to the center. The audience is also surprised. Takuma tells himself this isn't the time to get mad. He's had a series of victories, but he can't lose today. For that reason, he'll keep two things in mind: not getting irritated and persisting in serve and volley. He remembers that "fight" with Ei-chan when he agreed to serve 50 balls so Ei-chan could improve his return—he'd always regretted that last slice serve, that he hadn't stuck with a flat serve, just because he hadn't wanted Ei-chan to return a serve. Coach Aoi asks why Takuma's fixated on serve and volley. Coach Miura replies that since losing to Ike, Takuma had been idle and had probably been troubled, but in the end, there's only serve and volley for that guy. He explains that Takuma's innate physical mainspring is strong and his body is made for serves.

Then he starts talking about Takuma. In addition to his mainspring, everything from the first joints of his fingers to his fingertips is flexible, and yet they're sensitive. Moreover, even though his body is huge, he moves explosively. Personality-wise, sensitivity and tactlessness coexist. In serve and volley, instantaneous reactions demand highly strung sensitivity and tactless boldness, rather than a strategic mindset. The match continues at the same time. Ei-chan continues to predict where the serve with go and hits it back. However, he doesn't readily draw out Takuma's side. 30-15. Ei-chan wonders what to do, then decides that in this

case, a full-power body shot. The grounds are in an uproar over Takuma's masterful drop shot [see image in mangakansou]. 40-15. Ei-chan's shocked by the drop shot. The velocity hadn't been sufficient [probably it wasn't faster than Takuma could react]. Coach Aoi's all "well, crap...he's amazing..." Coach Miura smirks. He explains that the main point is that for Takuma, who's high strung and tactless, who's big and can move, however the times were going to move, serve and volley was probably the only [play style?] for Takuma. End of chapter. The title of ch.322 is "Enhancement" (or "Reinforcement"), unless of course the mangaka changes the title again.
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Some corrections: What Takuma regretted was that "fight" with Ei-chan when he agreed to serve 50 balls so Ei-chan could improve his return—he'd always regretted that last slice serve, that he hadn't stuck with a flat serve, just because he hadn't wanted Ei-chan to return a serve. And the main point of Coach Miura's explanation that is that for Takuma, who's high strung and tactless, who's big and can move, however the times [trend in play styles?] were going to move, serve and volley was probably the only [play style?] for Takuma. Takuma realizes that even if he escapes Ei-chan, if he does so by altering his play style, he won't be satisfied—meaning, he'll regret it the way he had that first "fight." So even if Ei-chan can predict Takuma's serves, Takuma doesn't intend to change anything. He'll just use enough power that Ei-chan can't return it, and suppress Ei-chan that way. But if Ei-chan manages to return his serve, Takuma intends to take the point with a volley.

Ch. 322
Current score is 5-4 with Takuma in the lead. So a 4-6 win in the first set by Ei-chan is out of the question now. However, Takuma's awakening to the realization of Ei-chan's fantastic stroke. Then flashback to Takuma's practice with Monma.
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Ei-chan thinks that though he'd struck with a body shot with quite a lot of power, he'd been beaten with a drop shot. Takuma's reaction is also amazing, but more than that, what technique! Ei-chan wonders whether he should have aimed for the side or body with a faster ball. Takuma thinks this way is fine. Serve and volley uses sensitivity rather than strokes: no more than 1cm of the toss, only once of the racket face, just a momentary slip in timing influences the outcome. Based on Takuma's toss, Ei-chan concludes the serve will be either a flat or spin...with the probability of a center (53%). Wide was 43% and body 4%. Takuma thinks he doesn't have time to be puzzled by this and that of Ei-chan's tactics. His serve clocks at 225kph, but Ei-chan manages to touch it. 5-4 with Takuma in the lead. The audience marvels over Takuma's serve. Someone speculates he's the best in Japan, if judging only by serves. Others think Ei-chan's technique is quite good, but he can't do anything against that serve. Coach Aoi thinks it doesn't mean Ei-chan didn't do anything. Ei-chan thinks he hadn't been able to return the serve even though he'd predicted correctly, so what to do? He wonders whether he can only move earlier/faster despite the higher risk. Even though he's correctly predicted the course of 3 out of 4 of the first serves...even though it isn't bad numerically, he's a long way from breaking. But because he took a chance, Takuma didn't manage an ace. Being able to predict like this is because Takuma is hitting his serves "as usual." Ei-chan concludes that he's starting to match the timing. If he returns the serve even a bit more, no doubt Takuma will try to hit an even better serve. If Ei-chan can put pressure doing it that way even slightly, there's a point in nibbling at Takuma. If he puts more pressure than usual, the likelihood of Takuma's making an error will increase with just that. At least it should. He decides to continue putting a bit of pressure on that extravagant

serve. Ei-chan thinks he can only believe that he'll be able to break through with just that at some point. Ei-chan's service game starts. With the score at 5-4, he reminds himself that he'll be a set down if his serve is broken. It will be hard if he's a set down first with Takuma as his
opponent. In which case, Takuma will definitely start to attack immediately and raise the gear several notches... If that happens, Ei-chan will fall behind even more. That's why the initiative is essential right now. He corrects himself: he mustn't just beat Takuma to the punch, he must continue beating him to the punch. Takuma's surprised by Ei-chan's quick serve and his return hits the net. 15-0. Ei-chan notes that Takuma had started a return dash. This confirmed his suspicion that Takuma intended to play at the net, which would give Takuma the advantage of deciding a ball right away. Ei-chan's next serve is slow at 149kph and apparently took Takuma by surprise. Ei-chan wonders if the timing had slipped away (probably from Takuma) and notes that Takuma doesn't go to the net and that Takuma is a step slow in returning to the middle of the baseline. So Takuma's making an open court. Ei-chan's next shot is deep. Takuma returns it. Ei-chan thinks that in going deep, he was able to move Takuma back. So he hits a drop shot. 30-0. The audience notes that Ei-chan's somehow continuing to hold his game. It's a narrow margin, but he's not giving up his advantage. Ei-chan thinks that if he lets Takuma do what he (Takuma) wants to do, even once, it will be the end. Takuma can take the net, which is his specialty, and take the upper hand with one ball. Ei-chan decides to forestall him and seal him before that happens. Takuma wonders how many times he'll be beaten by that slow ball before Ei-chan's satisfied. He notes that Ei-chan's next serve again isn't fast, but the course is good. He thinks Ei-chan's power and stroke are average, but Ei-chan can't be deal with by ordinary means. All courses, all ball types, timing...they've been going in without error to bad spots for Takuma. That accuracy makes Ei-chan a totally different person from before. Takuma remembers that Ei-chan defeated Asano and dominated the first round of the actual tournament. If he's gotten to the point where Takuma also isn't able to break, then Takuma can't not acknowledge it. This guy's (EI-chan's) stroke is quite something. Takuma concludes that he has to deal with that suitably. Flashback to Takuma's practice with Monma. Takuma's shot goes out. Monma asks what's with that stroke; isn't Takuma in the mood to play? When Takuma replies that he's doing it properly, Monma criticizes Takuma's stroke as sloppy. He points out that no matter how much of a pure serve-and-volleyer Takuma is, strengthening his stroke is indispensable to go forward in a return game. Takuma counters that strengthening it will
result in errors. Monma asks rhetorically if Takuma thinks doing it stronger will strengthen his strokes, then calls him optimistic. He speculates that the truth is that Takuma had simply wanted to put away the ball quickly, so he did it a bit stronger. Which means Takuma lacks endurance/perseverance/patience. He adds that Takuma won't make it in the world like that. Monma cites Ike as a demon in his strokes. Takuma counters that he's not worrying about Ike anymore. Monma argues that Ike's stroke is top class even in the world, that it's prodigious. It's natural that Takuma can't try to ignore Ike if he really wants to go international and play against that guy. Takuma then asks how Monma would play if he intends to counter Ike's stroke. Monma replies that he honestly doesn't want to play against Ike. Takuma sweatdrops, asking if Monma's turned fainthearted after saying that much. Monma tells him that's the reason for waiting for the bait. Takuma parrots, "Bait?" So Monma orders Takuma to partner him today in his Ike countermeasure. End of chapter. Title for ch.323 is "Losing the Initiative."

Ch. 323
The chapter title remains "Losing the Initiative," which doesn't bode well for Ei-chan. Anyhow, it apparently picks up where ch.322 left off with Takuma's flashback. Takuma and Monma begin the Ike-stroke countermeasure. Monma tells Takuma that "wait for the bait" is one way to counter Ike and orders him to try doing it first. He explains that initially it's an ordinary stroke from the baseline. Absolutely no errors. Since the course doesn't matter, make sure it goes in within 3m of his (Monma's) baseline using a stable, natural spin. He then tells Takuma he (Monma) is going to go hard. And the two start a rally. For the time being, Takuma tries to do what he was told, but he's told he mustn't use arching shots or slow balls. Monma orders him to return with more than regular power, no matter what type of ball. Because if he doesn't, he'll be pummeled from above like just now [I suspect Monma smashed it]. Takuma thinks, "I see. So it's that sort of thing?" He continues to return the ball in the same way, without being a slave to Monma's tempo. He continues to return Monma's fast balls fast even the slow balls; he gets going, continuing to run and return the balls. But Monma orders him to return even the balls that go out. He points out that they can continue a rapid barrage of strong hits that easily. Takuma protests, but Monma replies
that the top guys in the world would have gotten the shot in. Monma explains that making the stroke demons think "no matter how I'm driven, I'll return this the same way" is the first step. It's a ball that's not too fast so they can take time to return to the center, but not too slow that it give the opponent an opportunity to attack. The ball Takuma hits with a stable spin feels stable and is unexpectedly hard for an opponent to attack. And just matching his opponent means the risk to Takuma is low. [This feels like one of the strategies that Ei-chan had identified.] And the risk of being attacked by his opponent is high using regular power to put the ball deep as it is. Monma explains that matching the opponent's ball doesn't require imagination; however, it requires patience/perseverance and stamina in order to control one's own will over a long period. Takuma wonders how long they're going to continue this [apparently a rally]. He continues returning the ball with regular power, without exception. They continue without a break. Different ranges and speeds and repetitive stop-and-dashes take their toll. Monma orders Takuma to put up with the pain, pointing out that Takuma, who had dropped out of tennis once, basically lacks staying power as a tennis player, the most essential power when competing while taking responsibility for the country [apparently a reference to the Davis Cup]. Takuma gets pissed, but tries to continue doing what Monma says; Monma has suffered a full set against the world's No.3 [maybe a one-set match in some tournament]. Monma tells Takuma that when he can do this, even Ike can't attack him easily. Monma says that when it comes to putting up with everything and continuing to wait, not being settled with a powerful ball, the guys confident in their strokes will definitely start to attack using tempo, because that's the only thing they can do if fast, strong hits are useless. He explains that the "slow" in that tempo is the "bait." When that comes, it's all right to put it away. Takuma goes to put away a slow ball. However, that ball is out. Monma points out that if Takuma gets impatient, everything will come to nothing. That's also perseverance, but that's also unexpectedly difficult to break your own tempo. Monma adds that they can only do it repeatedly in order to be able to settle it with a blow. While saying that, he continues their practice. Next they exchange shots over 50 times in a rally before Monma tells Takuma to hit a slow one. Takuma, who's dripping in sweat, notes he's hit 50 strong shots and concludes that practice with Monma is hell. The flashback ends and the scene switches back to the match.
Ei-chan notices that Takuma doesn't go to the net. He decides that if Takuma doesn't force his way to the net... His choice is a slow ball with a course that stresses nailing Takuma to

the baseline, and he drives it deep as intended. Takuma notes the slow ball [in other words, "bait"] and wham! Ei-chan's taken by surprise and misses [or maybe makes an error]. 30-15. Ei-chan wonders if instead of Takuma's timing not having been broken by the slow ball...if Takuma had been aiming to hit one. Takuma thinks that if Ei-chan's stroke can't be destroyed, he'll play using this style, it's the only way he'll finally get to the net. But he also adds that it was a countermeasure that he'd also intended for Ike [meaning, he hadn't intended to use it sooner]. Ei-chan's next serve clocks at 177kph. Takuma again doesn't go forward immediately. Coach Aoi notes this and thinks Takuma's becoming tenacious in his return game is scary. Ei-chan keeps in mind not relaxing his advantage and not letting Takuma hit in good form. Takuma thinks that as a pro, his physical strength and fortitude have always been lacking. But now, he'll go along with Ei-chan's tennis, no matter how long. Ei-chan aims for a tight course. Takuma thinks, "This is also within the range of 3m." But Takuma keeps it stable and returns the ball remembering to keep it within 3m [probably of the baseline]. Ei-chan thinks that the one Takuma had aimed for a little while ago was a slow spin. For the time being, it's better to be careful with that. Therefore... he tries to hit a slice. Takuma is following those movements steadily with his eyes. End of chapter. The title of ch.324 is "Pride."

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Corrections and additions: When Monma ordered Takuma to return with more than regular power, no matter what type of ball, his explanation was that if Takuma doesn't, he'll be pummeled first, not from above. He criticized Takuma's return as being too slow and having too much of an arc. After Monma ordered Takuma to return even his outs, Takuma's protest was only mental. And Monma's comment that the top guys in the world would have gotten the shot in seemed to strike a nerve with Takuma. When Takuma wondered how long they're going to continue this [rally], he thinks he can't buy time with a slow ball. And since he can't go forward [probably to play at the net], he doesn't feel relieved. When Monma hit a slow ball to Takuma and Takuma's return went out, that was Takuma's turn. Then Monma simply told Takuma that the next was his (Monma's) turn, so after 50 balls, Takuma was to hit a slow ball to Monma. Meaning it wasn't shown. Takuma was dubious at the prospect of him hitting 50 strong shots [and this would be consecutively, just for Monma's turn]. This is the part where Takuma concludes that practice with Monma is hell. Since Ei-chan concluded that it's better to be careful about a slow spin and he hits a slice, I suspect he's going for his fastest spin next. If Takuma sees Ei-chan form and expects another slow spin, he's bound to be surprised. So long as Ei-chan's shot doesn't go out, the odds of that slice bringing the score to 40-15 are good.

Ch. 324

Anyhow, ch.324 opens with Ei-chan thinking that if Takuma is starting to target the slow balls, then this should be effective. Takuma notes Ei-chan's form is for a slice. Ei-chan hits a fast slice but is shocked by Takuma's steady response. The spectators are also surprised by the fast slice. However, having expected it from Ei-chan's form, Takuma is composed and again returns the ball without attacking or defending. Ei-chan notes Takuma's return is just one type of ball that he sends deep, and Takuma has time to return to the center. But because it's the first fast slice that Ei-chan has hit today, he absolutely wants this point. Ei-chan attacks sharply; unfortunately, his shot goes out. 30-30. Ei-chan thinks on rallying like this with Takuma at the baseline... As expected, Ei-chan's also surprised that Takuma's way of fighting is starting to change. On the other hand, Takuma is aware that the fast slice Ei-chan had hit just now will become a dangerous weapon because of when it's used. He

wonders if it means his unusual reconnaissance had been worth it. If he takes the next, it's set point. Naturally, it's a turning point. Even tennis that's unlike him is effective. In addition, right now this is essential in the state of the game. Ei-chan faces the next serve. He couldn't take the point with a fast slice, but it also depends on how he uses it. His posture shows he believes in himself even in critical moments, even if the slow balls are being targeted. He lets loose a serve clocked at 180
kph. Takuma returns what he calls an "only-looks-fast serve" without any difficulty. Ei-chan reminds himself to believe in himself so that he won't yield the advantage. The spectators are surprised by the slow slice. However, Takuma returns it with a strong blow, as he'd aimed. The ball hits the net and turns into a cord ball that jumps high. Ei-chan thinks Takuma was going for the slow ball again, but this time he made an error. So the fast slice a little while ago had an effect. Go! Ei-chan hits the chance ball. However, though Takuma's posture was off, he returns it desperately with a strong shot. Ei-chan swears because he can't return this with a fast ball. Takuma thinks that was dangerous...but the situation reversed and another slow ball has come. And Takuma puts it away. 30-40. Ei-chan acknowledges Takuma had gotten him. However, he now clearly understands that Takuma is going for the slow balls. At the same time, he understands all the same that it doesn't mean he should not hit slow balls. Simply the one just now that Takuma had settled desperately... If there's a way to do something, Ei-chan once again pulls himself together. When Takuma hits a deep ball, he limits the spin. In which case, Ei-chan prepares steadily. He puts together a plan to choose and throw in a "bouncing spin ball" that's most likely to be targeted. He's again also wary that Takuma has begun taking risks to take the set. Ei-chan thinks that he'll definitely choose a ball that can be targeted and definitely take it down without rushing, no matter how much time it takes... On the other hand, Takuma thinks it's a rule of thumb, but he'll start analyzing Ei-chan's next serve in his [Takuma's] own special way. It's sketchy data but...he can bet...it's wide. That's not proof, but just here, he'll abandon his pointless pride and imitate Ei-chan. [I'm reminded of when Coach Miura told Takuma and Natsu that Ei-chan's copying opponents is the way to defeat stronger opponents.] Ei-chan thinks he absolutely wants his first serve to go in. But the state of the game is one where he can't concede power, therefore... what he can rely on the most today is...a spin wide! Takuma thinks he got it right, and he returns it with a strong shot. Ei-chan manages to return it even though is posture is off. He realizes Takuma had predicted it, and oh no!
his return is a slow ball, but luckily it's to a high point on Takuma's backhand... Takuma returns it with a powerful one-handed jackknife to Ei-chan who had momentarily relaxed. Ei-chan returns it again with his posture off, but he floated the ball and Takuma gets to the net to put it away. Takuma takes the first set. End of chapter. Title of ch.325 is "Resonance." Maybe this means Ei-chan's reminded of a similar situation in the past. Well, with the first set over, the next chapter is bound to focus on Ei-chan's thoughts, what he's learned from the first set and how he plans to counter Takuma. I wonder if some players will show up already. I mean, Ike's match started 2 hours earlier than Ei-chan's, and Nabae, Araya, and Kanda weren't shown watching Ike's match, so their matches could have started earlier too.
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Just a correction to the ch.324 spoiler: Takuma didn't think Ei-chan's fast slice "will become" a dangerous weapon; he acknowledged that it was quite a dangerous weapon and that he only managed to return it "somehow" because he was on the lookout for it.

Ch. 325

For ch.325, after Takuma takes the first set 6-4 with a high volley after a one-handed jackknife, Ei-chan requests a toilet break. And as he leaves the court, he thinks the timing is just right because he also wants time to regain some composure. He'd felt that he'd known Takuma quite well, but thinks it would have been impossible for the Takuma-before-going-pro to have waited and targeted the slow balls. Takuma wouldn't have predicted his serves and taken risks the way Ei-chan does. Ei-chan thinks he hadn't realized that his image had been limited to their competitions up to now, and that he hadn't understood how fearsome Takuma is in a regular match. Ei-chan's mom watches Ei-chan leave the court, then confirms with Coach Aoi that it's against the rules to talk to Ei-chan during this time. He agrees that it would be a violation. On his way to the toilet, Ei-chan notices Ike. Ike also sees him, but Ei-chan turns away without saying anything. Ei-chan concludes that Ike's match with Ide is over. Ike guesses Ei-chan is still in the middle of his match and is taking a toilet break. So Ike joins the STC contingent. Some spectators notice Ike's arrival. Coach Miura asks how Ike's match was, and Ike replies that he's a bit annoyed.
Flashback to 30 minutes earlier. The scoreboard shows Ike took the first set 6-1, and the second set is in tiebreak: 9-8 in Ike's favor. Ike serves. At Ide's return, Ike thinks Ide's response is rapidly improving. Ike's return is a cord ball, and he thinks he was aiming too hard. Ide makes a big return, and Ike wonders if Ide can play indefinitely. Ike goes for a passing shot, and Ide has to dive to volley. But Ike goes forward and puts away the ball. So the final score is 6-1, 7-6. End flashback. Ike tells Coach Miura that he'd almost been caught up in Ide's pace again and that Ide is still an unpleasant guy who hasn't changed from when they were kids. Yukichi wishes he had one more body so he could have watched Ike's match. Kageyama notices that the number of spectators is increasing and wonders if they came from center court. Takuma notices Ike chatting with Coach Miura. Ike asks about the status of the match. Yukichi replies that Takuma's serve is in excellent form. His rough count is that over 70% of Takuma's first serves in the first set have gone in. The odds of a point from Takuma's first serve is over 80%. Yukichi's notes show 1st success rate: Takuma, 71%; Aniki, 83%; 1st return rate: Takuma, 85%; Aniki, 62%; 2nd return rate: Takuma, 63%; Aniki, 43%. (Kageyama hadn't realized Yukichi had done such calculations and compares him to Ei-chan.) Ike notes Ei-chan had also worked hard and asks how it had been settled. Yukichi explains that Ei-chan had tried all sorts of tactics, but Takuma persisted and ended it with a play that applied Takuma's tennis. Ike turns thoughtful about Takuma also doing that sort of tennis, and wonders if it will have a good result. He adds that it seems Ei-chan will have difficulty, but Ei-chan just has to do something about Takuma's first serve. Yukichi says it would help Ei-chan if the success rate of Takuma's first serve dropped to 60%. Himeko asks why 60%. Yukichi explains that 60% isn't exact, but gives a rough example that if the first serve goes in, you make a point, but if it doesn't, you lose a point. A player can take a game in 4 points, but in reality, a game usually takes 6 points. So a player wants 4 out of 6 balls to go in, which is 66.7%. Even if a player misses 2 balls, he can take the game. But if only 3 out of 6 balls go in, that's 50%. Both sides will have equal points, and since tennis requires a difference of 2 points to take a game, the server won't be able to hold. Just because a first serve goes in, it doesn't mean the server will definitely take the point. Kageyama asks if this means Yukichi wants Takuma to miss 3 first serves in a game. Yukichi says that's what would happen in theory, but Ei-chan might not discover something that will let him return Takuma's first serve better.
Himeko concludes that Ei-chan is in a worse position than she'd thought. Ei-chan's mom adds that it seems hopeless that Ei-chan will win on his own power. Coach Aoi tries to encourage them, saying the slightest thing will put off a serve because it's a sensitive thing,

but he thinks today's Takuma is a bit dangerous. Then Ike notices that Ei-chan's returned. Ei-chan's expression looks resolute. Coach Aoi wonders if Ei-chan returned renewed. In his thoughts, he orders Ei-chan to do what Ei-chan's resolved to do if Ei-chan has decided on what to do. End chapter. Blurb for the next chapter: The do-or-die second set opens! If it's taken, the match is over! Title of ch.326 is "Much Less the Match." Ch.325 was in a double issue, so ch.326 should be out just before Christmas, but that's in another double issue, so ch.327 should be after New Year.

Ch. 326

Ch.236 opens with Ei-chan informing the chair umpire of his return from the toilet. Takuma notes that Ei-chan has recovered well. Ei-chan gets his racket and thinks that he's glad he'd taken a bit of time and that he'd also been able to sort out not just his motivation but also what he has to do. With the second set, he doesn't have any more. Conversely, since Takuma is taking risks, there's no doubt he'll attack aggressively. Ei-chan notes he has to break in that sort of situation—in which case, he can't do the same things he's done up to now. He's played a close game up to now, and he has to manage a return. He thinks if he increases the pressure (on Takuma) even slightly, something will happen, but that's not enough. He'll add stronger pressure than before, and even take risks. Yukichi notes Ei-chan changed his return position again. Kageyama adds that it's slightly forward of the very back position of before. Coach Aoi wonders to himself if Ei-chan's being aggressive to the bitter end. The second set is announced. Ei-chan thinks that even if he simply returns the ball, if he's beaten by the next shot, then it won't turn into pressure. So his return has to be on a level that will apply pressure to the shot following the serve. With data, he can determine the course to a certain degree. Even the toss will determine it. He'll pick up his weigh with 3 steps until the impact [probably so that he's already in motion and can react faster]. Takuma serves
and Ei-chan's able to get to it. Ei-chan reminds himself to make his swing compact, but Takuma's serve is so fast (clocked at 229 kph) that Ei-chan isn't able to control it, and his return goes into the stands. An onlooker says Ei-chan's return was awful. But someone else points out it was terribly fast, so there's no control. Another adds that just touching it is already amazing; if it had been successful, that sort of power would have produced. Takuma was reminded of two years earlier [when Ei-chan went up against Takuma to practice his return]; he thinks it was this sort of feeling. Ei-chan thinks the serve just now was just too good. But if his return had gone in, it would have applied quite a lot of pressure. The ball's power increases when he uses a compact swing with the power from the 3 steps going forward. His defensive range to the side contracts, but he'll cover as much as power with his estimates. Coach Aoi judges it to be a high-risk strategy believing in estimates based on data. He considers it a choice typical of Ei-chan, but in this set Takuma is also switching to a first serve that settles a point [going for an ace?] from a first serve that goes inside. Takuma's next serve faults. Ei-chan expects the second serve to be a chance. He plans that to sink the ball with a fast spin if Takuma comes forward, and to aim deep with a flat if Takuma stays back. Either way, he'll make it stronger or apply a tighter course than in the first set. Takuma's second serve is clocked at 190 kph; Ei-chan's surprised by the speed since it's a second serve. Ei-chan sees Takuma head for the net, so he does as he planned and Takuma's return hits the net. 15-15. Ei-chan thinks he'll definitely get a point on the second serve. By doing so, he'll steadily apply pressure on the first serve. Takuma's next serve is an ace, clocked at 215 kph. Ei-chan tells himself he mustn't determine the course too tightly. 30-15. The next serve goes into the net. Ei-chan acknowledges the danger but thinks that

this power and course would result in errors. The second serve is clocked at 195 kph; Ei-chan notes it's gotten faster again. Takuma volleys, and Ei-chan thinks Takuma's focus forward in proportion with the recent error in his volley. Because of that, Ei-chan hits a lob. 30-30. Takuma acknowledges that Ei-chan got him. Ei-chan, on the other hand, recognizes that Takuma's second serve was great and wonders if he can add a bit of pressure. Takuma's next serve is clocked at 232 kph, the fastest for the day. Ei-chan's able to meet it but fails to control it. So 40-30. Then Ei-chan wonders whether, on the contrary, it's a chance. Coach Aoi thinks that if Ei-chan can break first, then the odds of his being able to take the second set increases, and if he can take the second set, then he can bring that momentum into the final set. Ei-chan thinks that Takuma's starting to increase his risk is certain...and this is the turning point of the match. Blurb: The germ for a turn-around in Takuma's serve, which can continue to speed up...!? The title of ch.327 can be translated as "panic" or "horror" or "dismay" or "dread"—whichever it is, I hope it's on Takuma's part.

Ch. 327

Okay, ch.327 opens with the score for Takuma's service game at 40-30. His hitting his fastest serve for the day (232 kph) makes the venue seethe [bubble with excitement?]. Ei-chan had also responded, but he couldn't return it. He thinks that it's as he'd expected: Takuma's starting to attack nonstop, capitalizing on his lead. Takuma's playing his riskiest tennis up to now. Ei-chan believes that at a time like this, there ought to be an opening he can take advantage of. Ei-chan's impression is that even though he's correctly predicted the course of Takuma's serves, Takuma disregarded this and chose his usual course—that's how much confidence Takuma has in his serve. Believing in his eyes and data, Ei-chan plans to go for a turn-around with a return that will steal the advantage with one stroke. Ei-chan correctly predicts that the next serve will be to the center, but when he thought he'd gotten a powerful winner...the serve was judged a fault. Ei-chan had suspected it might have been out, and he regrets the outcome since he'd returned it to a really good spot, but he also notes that his return is starting come together and resolves to attack the next more. Takuma's second serve clocks at 200 kph, and he concludes that today his second serve is also good. Ei-chan feels Takuma's second serves are steadily getting faster and he returns this one with a slice with all his might. Takuma goes to the net and returns the shot with a drop shot. Ei-chan starts to go after it, but he's too late, so Takuma holds his serve. Ei-chan thinks he'd gotten to a good spot, but didn't manage to break. He feels the latest second serve had exceeded 200 kph and wonders how much risk Takuma's going to take before it's too much. He can't imagine the high probability of such a serve going in will continue forever. In this game, only 3 out of 6 first serves went in, so the odds are 50%. He thinks that if this continues, a chance to break will definitely turn up. He plans to at least hold his serve and not drop a game. Takuma thinks his shoulders were warmed up enough. Ei-chan's service game starts. He hits a serve that can't be attacked, then returns Takuma's return. However, Takuma hits a forcibly strong shot next. Ei-chan thinks that even though he has the advantage, he's suddenly being targeted. In addition, Takuma goes to the net. Ei-chan thinks their postures are more than equal and he can't let Takuma come forward so easily. But Ei-chan's return hits the net, so Takuma gets a point first. Ei-chan thinks that if it had gone in, he could have gotten away. Because the ball flattened slightly, his timing with his usual skill was off. He wonders if Takuma's playing super offensively in both service and return games. Ei-chan's next serve is to the center, clocking at 173 kph. Starting with the return, Takuma suddenly hits a strong blow. He quits trying to go to the net, thinking he might be overdoing it. Ei-chan saw that and the ball he's trying to return deep flattens and ends up

short by mistake. Takuma puts it away with a jackknife. 0-30. Yukichi concludes Ei-chan hasn't been able to deal with Takuma's aggressive approach. Ei-chan thinks Takuma's starting to aiming for a deep spot with a tendency toward a flat regardless of Ei-chan's advantage. It's much more of a worry than an ordinary strong approach shot: even though Takuma's turned pro, he's been able to forge an approach shot that takes into account his continuing to play at the net. Ei-chan tells himself to get a grip, that if he pays proper attention and deals with it, something will turn up. If he loses this one, it's 0-40. He absolutely can't lose it. He takes a deep breath. If that happens, he'll set up one beat faster, and just swing. This way, he can only grasp the rhythm physically. He expects that in leaning forward, Takuma naturally will counterattack easily. In addition, he had expected a fight with Takuma forcibly coming to the net in the first place. If Takuma can return even that flattened shot from there, various countermeasures are considered... Ei-chan thinks that so long as he doesn't hand over the advantage of his serve, there's no need to fear, that even Takuma who came to the net isn't scary.
Ike thinks that Takuma's predominance is unchallenged but not as much as it looks, and that Takuma probably realizes it himself, but Ei-chan is simply not able to corner him. [I guess he means Ei-chan isn't able to convert his chances into a break, but he's on the brink of it.] End chapter. Title for ch.328 is "Tendency." I have to say that Ike's observation is encouraging. It gives me hope that Ei-chan will turn things around—or at least start to—in the next chapter.
EDIT: As my brother puts it, in boxing terms, Ei-chan's an in-fighter and Takuma's an out-fighter (the type that's fast and maneuverable). Ei-chan just needs to get Takuma into a corner and cut off his maneuverability.
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Ooh! Found RAWs for WSM. Based on Ike's smirk, he's expecting something from Ei-chan. And based on Ike's thoughts, Ei-chan is gradually closing in on Takuma. In the part where Ike thinks that Takuma probably realizes that his predominance isn't as unchallenged as it looks, the panel shows Takuma's tense face. So it looks like Ei-chan's succeeding in putting pressure on Takuma. More details: when Ei-chan notes that only 3 out of 6 of Takuma's first serves in the second set went in, for a probability of 50%, he adds that Takuma's second serves are also strong, but Ei-chan's able to attack by sinking the ball with his return and raising it with a lob. If he can continue this, then a chance to break is sure to come. After Takuma forcibly rushed the net for the first point in Ei-chan's service game, Ei-chan thinks that's Takuma's original tennis and wonders if Takuma had given up his previous tactic of returning the ball deep and aiming for a slow ball. In addition to thinking there's no need to fear, Ei-chan believes he should be able to make a point somewhere: both sides, at the feet, overhead, body...

Ch. 328
The first game of the second set was held by Takuma. Now in Ei-chan's first service game, the score is 0-30. Yukichi says that if Ei-chan's serve is broken in this game, there could be a strong possibility of a defeat with one blow. Kageyama tells him not to say unpleasant things. The face of Ei-chan's mom also stiffens. Yukichi adds that the side that tries to settle things with one blow by becoming aggressive is sure to make an opening. That's not limited to tennis and is common knowledge in all competitions. Ei-chan's next serve is an ace to the center, clocked at 180 kph. Now that Takuma's trying to return and get to the net as much as possible, Ei-chan's able to get an ace. Ei-chan thinks that considering the situation, timing, and course, even his power can get an ace. Takuma thinks playing defensively is also an option, but he currently is in the lead and it's faster to hold Ei-chan

down with power. Ei-chan, who's played many times with an attacking Takuma, thinks it's easier to fight him that way. Ei-chan's next serve is a spin ball escaping outside, clocked at 161 kph. Takuma returns it, thinking its course prevents him from going to the net. He takes a posture of hitting the ball forcibly and going to the net. Ei-chan notes the forcible approach and how it flattens the ball. Takuma doesn't present any opening, so Ei-chan sinks the ball at Takuma's feet, thinking he has to move one step faster. Ei-chan had gotten the timing well, so his next shot is a lob to the right. Yukichi considers Ei-chan's shot skillful since even if it doesn't get through, Takuma can't smash it with his backhand. Ei-chan predicts based on Takuma's posture that the return will be a high back volley across that lacks power. However, Takuma pulls back and smashes, bringing the score to 15-40. The venue is in an uproar. Takuma's dismissive: Can a guy play serve-and-volley in this age if he can't move up at the net with his backhand? Ei-chan fully realizes Takuma exceeds his expectations. He tells himself not to fret, to update his data each time his assumptions are exceeded, and to keep firmly it mind it was beyond his assumptions up to now. When Takuma targets slow balls, a countermeasure using change of pace that reduced slow balls... Because Takuma's forcible approach flattens the ball, Ei-chan moves one step faster. Slow balls to Takuma's backhand have a high impact point, so Ei-chan will keep an eye out for them being hit with a jackknife. Even if he launches a lob to Takuma's backhand, if Takuma reaches it, it can be smashed. Ei-chan concentrates on Takuma in front of him while keeping all that in mind.
Ei-chan aims his next serve at Takuma's body and Takuma's return is weak. Unfortunately, it's ruled a fault. He makes the second serve also a body shot, but Takuma moves his body well and his return is a drop shot. Ei-chan couldn't move at all. His serve was broken. End of chapter. The title of the next one is "Growth."
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Corrections and additional details. After Kageyama tells Yukichi not to say unpleasant things, Kageyama agrees that if the aggressive Takuma encourages the flow even more, it would feel dangerous. It wasn't Yukichi who adds that the side that tries to settle things with one blow by becoming aggressive is sure to make an opening; that was Coach Aoi's thought. The explanation for Ei-chan's ace is that Takuma's position for his return is a bit more forward, so Takuma's defensive range is narrower and Ei-chan's aim got his serve beyond the edge of Takuma's defensive range. Takuma's return of Ei-chan's lob was a high volley that had the same power as a smash—and even Ike was shocked. The blurb says "After losing the first set, a fatal break at the top of the second set!"

Ch. 329
All I can say so far is, Takuma is a monster of a server! He's been banging them out and his last serve in the chapter clocked at 236 kph. Score so far is 3-1, with the chapter ending on the first serve of Takuma's service. Details to follow.
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Okay, ch.329 opens with the announcement "Game, Egawa. 2-0. Second set." The audience is fired up. With this, if Takuma holds his service games, it's his win. Ei-chan's shocked by yet another shot that exceeded his expectations, and one at the most important point, at the top of the second set. He thinks that it's too aggressive whatever the circumstances. Even though he's doing the things he has to do, he's being beaten. Then he sees Takuma looking at him and throws off that mindset; he tells himself it wasn't a shot that he could have done anything about. He shifts to thinking about breaking back and not losing his concentration. As Takuma tosses, Ei-chan dashes forward and manages to return the serve, which is

clocked at 211 kph. Takuma's intent on rising to complete dominance from thereon. He thinks that the unbelievable situation of that guy from 2 years earlier competing against him here and now is already happening. So when he's gotten absolute advantage is when he'll focus his energy and go forward. Takuma puts away the ball. 15-0. Ei-chan thinks he doesn't get the impression that he can't break at all, and he's able to predict the course of Takuma's first serve quite often. After the serve is how to steal the advantage. Takuma rushes the net, so Ei-chan sinks the ball at Takuma's feet. Takuma's return again has Ei-chan at a disadvantage. Ei-chan considers his options, then decides to go for a sudden shift from defensive to offensive. The ball gets past Takuma, but it's out. 30-0. Takuma's next serve is an ace clocked at 226 kph. 40-0. Ei-chan's prediction for that serve was off and he reminds himself that his predictions aren't always correct. After that, Takuma's serve goes into the net. Ei-chan expects it would put pressure on the second serve, but Takuma pulls off an ace at 221 kph. Game, Egawa. 3-0. Second set. The crowd erupts: Takuma held overwhelmingly; 221 kph on a second serve is unreasonable; he's too strong, so strong Ei-chan can't do anything about it. Ei-chan's mom is all tense and worried. As Ei-chan writes in his notebook, he tells himself not to fret. Nothing could be done about that game, either. He focuses on analysis: at the start of the second set, the probability for Takuma's first serve was 60%; with just this game, it was 75% and serves exceeding 200 kph have continued going in. He thinks Takuma's in his best condition. Ei-chan doesn't think Takuma's condition will continue all through the match, but also concludes that he's out of time. Ei-chan's surprised by the call of "Time." Ei-chan's first serve is clocked at 154 kph, but the course is wide enough that Takuma's off balance though he manages a strong return. Ei-chan sends the ball down the line, thinking that if Takuma doesn't go to the net, he (Ei-chan) has the advantage. Takuma uses his forcible approach shot that flattens and rushes the net. Ei-chan sees this and sets up one step faster, then sends the ball deep on the opposite side of the court, and Takuma can't even touch it. 15-0. Takuma's play confirms for Ei-chan that Takuma is aiming for another break. Ei-chan thinks that he won't let Takuma do things the same as earlier, and that with this game, he's grasped the technique for breaking. When Takuma's flattening forcible approach shot goes in, it was powerful; however, the forcibleness also results in errors, and it isn't easily used against E-chan who's started to grasp its timing. Moreover, Ei-chan
consistently controls the ball front and back, left and right, above and below, so that Takuma doesn't go to the net. Even when Takuma is able to go to the net, Ei-chan deploys a thorough change of pace so that Takuma doesn't turn it to his advantage. No matter how much time it took, Ei-chan continued to attack and somehow pulls off a decisive shot. Game, Maruo. Count: 3-1, Second set. Yukichi, Kageyama, and Himeko look relieved. Ike's expression is more on the level of "Not bad!" Ei-chan looks at the scoreboard and thinks he won't be broken more than this. But he also tells himself he needs to break more than once to win. He focuses on Takuma's serve and manages to send it in the right direction even though it's clocked at 230 kph; unfortunately his return goes into the net. 15-0. Despite this, Ei-chan looks elated. He thinks, "5 more centimeters." The audience is shocked by yet another 230 kph serve and notes that Takuma's serves are steadily getting faster, but also that Ei-chan is steadily starting to match the timing. Takuma sets up for his next serve, thinking that today he doesn't feel like he'll be off. The serve is wide and is clocked at 236 kph. Even though Ei-chan managed to lunge for it, he doesn't touch it. The crowd erupts: 236 kph; an improvement on the fastest today; seriously?!; does he intend to win with just serves? Ei-chan is also shocked. End of chapter.

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In ch.329, Ei-chan thinks Takuma is in his best condition and Takuma himself doesn't feel like his serves will be off today. So Takuma isn't forcing himself to hit these faster serves; he's just fired up. In the summary for ch.330, Coach Miura is apparently grateful to Ei-chan for turning Takuma's diamond in the rough into a polished gem, so he doesn't seem concerned that Takuma's pushing himself too much.

Ch. 330

Okay, Takuma's 236 kph serve gets the spectators talking. Ike says it's finally become a weapon that would be noticed internationally. Coach Miura agrees. He remembers the first time he met Takuma, when Takuma was a kid. From the first time they met, Takuma, blessed with ball sense and a physique that he'd gotten from both parents, had possessed a talent that set him apart from other kids. Everyone expected him to eventually become a player who would represent Japan; Coach Miura as Takuma's coach did too. He'd taken charge of many talented kids over long years in STC, but even among them Takuma had glittered noticeably.

The role of a coach is to aid the kids aiming to move up, if they want to become stronger. Therefore, he draws them into discussions about things, and occasionally there are scoldings. But often, with kids who'd given up on moving up, there's practically nothing he could do. On top of understanding that, he felt he'd done what he could do. However, he'd been helpless. He understands wanting to give up so well it hurts, because he's in a position of seeing most of the kids who come to STC give up. It's better to choose and decide early. It's that sort of world, and even talented kids worry about the decision. That's why he wanted to do something for the Takuma who hadn't yet given up seriously. When he made Ei-chan play against Takuma, Takuma tried to refuse and go home. [Rehash of the conversation that ends with Ei-chan saying he'll first try to do things with his critical schedule, then reappraise whether it's impossible or not.] Coach Miura mentally thanks Ei-chan; he's certain that what Takuma has now is due to Ei-chan. Takuma's next serve is wide, clocked at 239 kph. Though Ei-chan lunges for it, he doesn't touch it, and the ace brings the score to 40-0. Coach Aoi thinks that Takuma took the first set while stabilizing the form that improves reliability in the opening of the match, and that Takuma's excess strength then comes out and finally reaches the stage of perfection in the second set...even so...is it this great? The onlookers get excited: it's almost 240 kph; it's gotten even faster. Kageyama wonders what Ei-chan should do against that sort of thing. Yukichi concludes that if that one goes in, it's over. Ei-chan realizes he's about to be overwhelmed by the atmosphere, and take a deep breath. He tells himself that's no good; even if he loses for some reason, he mustn't be inferior when it comes to motivation at least. He reminds himself that the next ball might be one he can take. Ei-chan will meet the increase in Takuma's power with even stronger motivation. However, the next serve, to the center, clocked at 241 kph, is again an ace, bringing the score for the second set to 4-1. Once again the crowd erupts. The cheers are audible to people walking outside the court. Ide suspects it's the match between Takuma and Ei-chan. Okada doesn't say anything. The reporter Miyamoto is holding his breath in silence. Monma sees everyone clamoring about Takuma's serve, and smiles. Ike says, "How amazing."

Yukichi wonders if that speed was a personal best for Takuma, and suspects it's Takuma's best serve today. Then he's startled to see a teary-eyed Coach Miura who agrees he might be correct. Coach Miura remembers when he was asked by Takuma to be his coach. That time, Takuma had come to his vision of winning internationally using serve and volley. Takuma thinks he's able to do everything he imagined. In this game, not only the speed of the ball but even the probability and course were flawless. Ei-chan thinks Takuma wouldn't

let him do anything. He'd faced Takuma with strong motivation and any amount of data, but when Takuma was able to get in 100% of those first serves...it doesn't mean there are things he can do... From the day he was first knocked down by Takuma 2 years ago...he'd intended to do the things he could do, but won't he reach Takuma in the end? Right now is the time for his reappraisal...and yet...nothing can be done anymore... End chapter. The title of the next chapter is "The Finishing Blow" or "The Clincher." At least the "Tears" of the title of ch.330 were Coach Miura's, not Ei-chan's. But it's hard to imagine that the title of the next chapter will apply to someone other than Ei-chan. However, if Ei-chan loses this match, I'm going to lose my motivation to translate the chapters.

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Additional details and corrections because I found RAWs: the chapter itself is 22 pages. The color pages are an announcement that the second season starts April 5 (Sunday) at 5:30 pm and a promo with Katsuki-sensei interviewing the former tennis pro Matsuoka Shuuzou. The announcement includes Alex and Marcia in the art and introduces their voice actors (Kamiya Hiroshi and Han Megumi, respectively). In Coach Miura's thoughts about Takuma, it wasn't that "But often, with kids who'd given up on moving up, there's practically nothing he could do." It was but with kids who'd given up on moving up, he mostly didn't do anything and there are many things he couldn't do. The art at this part shows Takuma skipping out of practice early, implying that Takuma had given up. But in a later scene, Coach Miura discovers Takuma practicing serves on his own, so he realizes that Takuma hadn't seriously given up yet. The 239 kph serve wide that took the score to 40-0 landed at the very corner of the service box, kind of like a copy of Ei-chan's tight course, so even though Ei-chan managed to lunge for it, it was beyond Ei-chan's defensive range. Ike's expression after the speed was posted is so funny. Among the reactions to that serve, Coach Aoi thinks that if Takuma continues, he can defeat the world's top players. The last serve, clocked at 241 kph, landed right on the line and even Takuma was surprised; Ei-chan barely got to move, he was that far from the ball. It had everyone holding their breaths, waiting to see if it would be called a fault. Among the reactions to that were from people watching the game on a TV screen, someone suggests the speed could be a Japanese record. In a locker room, Kanda overhears two guys talking, one telling the other that he'd heard that Takuma had produced a 241 kph serve. In the players' lounge, Monma overhears one guy telling another that if it's Takuma, it might be possible. Both Yukichi and Ike noticed Coach Miura turn teary-eyed. In the flashback to when he was asked by Takuma to be his coach, Coach Miura had initially refused since he's an STC coach. Takuma told him he understands it's impossible for Coach Miura to be his exclusive coach, but he politely requested that Coach Miura come and watch occasionally if only for Takuma's first year [of going pro]. When Takuma explained that serve and volley is his specialty, Coach Miura asked Takuma didn't have anyone else that could be relied upon. Takuma replied that in the crucial first year, he wanted to rely on someone who understands him [this seems to be an acknowledgment of how Coach Miura had turned Takuma around during his slump with that match against Ei-chan]. Because of that, Coach Miura decided to discuss it with STC. Continuing the flashback, Takuma asked Coach Miura how he could improve his serve. Coach Miura replied that if he had to say anything, he feels it would be better if Takuma's toss was a bit more forward than currently. Takuma added that Coach Miura's suggestion would make it easier to jump and he might be able to hit the ball at a higher point. Coach Muira asked why Takuma suddenly asked since Takuma was confident in his serve and hadn't Takuma wanted to stick to his original form? Takuma replied that if he was going to become the best using serve and volley, his current form is insufficient. Takuma went on to explain that in world-class competitions, it isn't as easy to win

using serve and volley as in the past. But for Takuma, there's only serve and volley, and he can't do anything but that. Anyhow, my only hope is that Ei-chan realizes the difference in Takuma's serve and
finally manages to break—three times. For the 241 kph serve, Ei-chan clearly saw the stages of Takuma's serve, so maybe noticing that Takuma tosses the ball a bit more forward will change things.

Ch. 331
Ei-chan decides to go all out so that he won't have any regrets. He holds his service game, giving up only one shot to Takuma. He even managed to anticipate Takuma's drop shot and win that point. Ei-chan's mom remembers a conversation with her husband about how they can only support Ei-chan if Ei-chan does go pro. Ei-chan's dad agrees but points out that the bigger problem isn't their objection but that Ei-chan's playing for himself without relying on his parents, believing in his own possibilities—meaning if Ei-chan can't defeat Takuma, he'll conclude he really doesn't have what it takes to be a pro. End of chapter. More details later. The title of the next chapter is "Relying on Oneself and Relying on Others."
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Found RAWs and, man, Ei-chan looked like he was in the zone! He was really landing his shots beyond Takuma's defensive range. The balls that Ei-chan put away were all winners.
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Okay, ch.331 opens with Ei-chan remembering Takuma's last service game. He thinks that although he'd felt he'd been starting to match Takuma's serve, it's come to this level where nothing can be done, that he'd been pushed back even more in the second set. If his serve is broken, the match will be over after two games, and if Takuma holds twice, Ei-chan will lose. He tries to focus on his notes, but his hand is shaking badly. He looks up at Coach Aoi, who's surprised since it's the first time for Ei-chan to look at him in the middle of a match. Then Ei-chan looks around for Natchan. Ei-chan wonders what he's doing when neither of the two can do anything for him now. He tells himself not to turn timid: if he turns timid, he won't be able to think aggressively even though there might be a hint on how to recover somewhere (in his notes). He reviews the shots in the last game and concludes that what he has to do remains the same: it's just how to handle this serve and the next volley. It's predicting the return based on data and attacking the second serve. It's pulling down Takuma's serve little by little with all the attacks he can think of. Ei-chan concludes that he's doing everything he
can. From here on, it's not an area where he'll be able to manage somehow with a plan. He accepts this and remembers that he'd given up once and had thoroughly considered what's next. To begin with, competing here [in the tournament] is like a miracle. Because [he'd taken up] the challenge too late, no matter how much he practiced, he lacked time, but he'd scheduled as much as he could. He reminds himself that he'd done his best so far. The chair umpire calls time. As Ei-chan returns to the court, he tells himself that when he thinks that way, if this will turn out to be his last challenge, if he gives up at the very end, having done just this so far, it's too wasteful. Being prepared for a loss because he couldn't discover a chance to succeed doesn't mean he has to give up. He'll do everything he's been doing so that he won't have any regrets at the end. Ei-chan's first serve is wide, at the edge of Takuma's defensive range. Takuma forcibly does a return dash. Seeing this, Ei-chan returns the ball cross-court at a sharp angle. Takuma throws himself forward but doesn't touch it. 15-0. Takuma wonders if Ei-chan has turned defiant / gotten serious. Play continues. Ei-chan goes for a drop shot. Takuma gets to the net in time to float it. Ei-chan lobs deep; this time

it's more overhead than the previous time that wasn't able to get past Takuma. Takuma catches up to the ball and hits it after the bounce. Ei-chan puts it away with a volley. 30-0. Play continues with Ei-chan getting the next point with a cross-court shot deep to the corner, and again Takuma doesn't get to touch it. 40-0. Ei-chan thinks that this time he blocked / sealed Takuma's defensive attack. But play continues and Takuma takes the next point with a volley. 40-15. Ei-chan's next serve is wide. As Takuma pulls back to return it, Ei-chan notices how Takuma's wrist is angled and he dashes to the net. He recognized the setup for the drop-shot return that had beaten him before. Takuma sees Ei-chan's approach as rushes to the middle of the baseline—then Ei-chan pulls a drop shot of his own. The audience is shocked, first that Ei-chan reached Takuma's drop shot, then returned it with a drop shot. So the second set is 4-2 with Takuma at the lead. Ei-chan's elated. He was able to do all the countermeasures for the attacks that had beaten him when his serve was broken earlier. He was able to do everything he tried to do. With this, he can play one more game.
Ei-chan's mom sees him and remembers her conversation with her husband. She told him she feels that if Ei-chan turns pro, they now can only support him. He agreed, but pointed out that before "that," their opposition might no longer be the big problem for Ei-chan who has come this far, because Ei-chan is now playing for himself and practically not relying on them [his parents] anymore—in order to believe in his own possibilities. Ei-chan sets up to receive Takuma's serve. Takuma prepares. The audience wonders what Ei-chan will do now that it's Takuma's serve. Among the people coming to watch are Ide and his friends. The reporter Miyamoto looks like he's watching the match from a monitor.
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The title is usually translated as "The Finishing Blow" or "The Clincher." It served to build up tension; even the poster at mangakansou seemed to take it that way. However, in light of what happens in the chapter, a better translation could be "There's Nothing Like It" or "There's Nothing as Good"—a reference to Ei-chan's cognizance that Coach Aoi and Natchan can't do anything for him right then, that he's playing for himself and he'd better not give up at the last moment after everything he's done. Of course, the title could still mean Ei-chan's determination was the clincher to his parents' opposition to his turning pro, as MiauMiaut said.

Ch. 332
So people are noticing Takuma's serve. Ei-chan thinks that his situation is desperate, but he'd blocked the threat of Takuma's return game and held his (Ei-chan's) service game just now. He had feedback that he'll tie to his next service game. In which case, even if he loses, he wants to actually feel he'd reached that (Takuma's) serve: the feeling that even if he doesn't win, he could have won. Just that sort of outcome for his reappraisal is fine.
Takuma's fast first serve goes into the net: fault. Ei-chan thinks that even if the second serve is over 200 kph, he ought to be able to deal with it since his eyes have gotten use to it. According to Ei-chan's data, the first point on second serves when Takuma is leading is split roughly fifty-fifty between wide and center, but many times, he'd aimed confidently for the corner. Watching Takuma's motions closely, Ei-chan thinks he'll carefully ascertain the course, and if he can predict it, move as fast as possible. Ei-chan responds to a tight serve to the center. When he sees Takuma had come forward, he sends the ball to Takuma's feet. Takuma returns it deep, thinking that Ei-chan's guarding against a drop shot. Ei-chan thinks he's still at a disadvantage, but if he
doesn't contest it here, it will only become difficult, so he'll see how far he can control the ball. He slips the ball past Takuma's side and lands it right on the line, so it's Ei-chan's point

(see pic on mangakansou). Ei-chan thinks that he wants to get a point on Takuma's best first serve using his own tennis if he can. If he can do that, he won't have any regrets. But Takuma's first serve goes into the net again: fault. Ei-chan notes the consecutive errors and decides to aim for a consecutive point. He'll be proactive while giving his data serious consideration. The second serve, clocked at 209 kph, goes to the center and Ei-chan doesn't touch it. Ei-chan thinks it's nearly as powerful as a first serve. However, it hadn't made it in, so it's the day's first double fault. 0-30. Ei-chan thinks that for the first time it looks like he has a chance. However, Takuma's next serve is an ace to the center, clocked at 220 kph. 15-30. The audience gets excited over the strong serve. Ei-chan thinks this is it, that he wants to manage this somehow. Takuma thinks that when he put in a bit of strength, the power of the ball dropped. He's searching for the feeling he had when he'd produced his fastest serve a little while ago. He tells himself not to think of unnecessary things. The next first serve is wide and tight and is ruled a fault. Takuma tells himself to focus on how he'd gotten his first serves in 100% rather than the 240 kph serve. He's capable of a surge in the rhythm of how he had done those serves. Since he's using his serves as a weapon, he can't avoid this. What's important is to correct it in a short time without getting thrown into major confusion and losing his usual self. For a serve-and-volleyer, a serve that gives him the upper hand is fine. Ei-chan thinks Takuma had been trying too hard the last time. He wonders if the average is this sort of thing. He wants to somehow capitalize on this chance. Based on his data, Ei-chan predicts Takuma will aim for the center, which can easily settle the point in one blow, because Takuma is aggressive. Ei-chan's correct and he returns the serve. At the net, Takuma tsks when he realizes Ei-chan had predicted correctly. Ei-chan applies control again, but Takuma dives for the ball and takes the point. 30-30. Ei-chan acknowledges Takuma's reach and ball touch and thinks that's why Takuma
came to the net even though it's a second serve and Ei-chan was going to predict it. But he concludes that his own shot wasn't bad. It's expected to be a close one since he's up against Takuma. Since he's prepared for a loss, he can play boldly. He hopes the next serve is the best first serve because he intends to return at least one such ball. The next first serve is wide and Ei-chan returns it somehow, but he concludes he's still at a complete disadvantage and sinks the ball. Takuma thinks "You bastard..." (probably as he returns it). Ei-chan thinks it's still difficult, but he hits a lob—all or nothing—with good timing. Unfortunately, it's just out. 40-30. Kageyama's disappointed. So is Ei-chan, but even though there's just one ball left (maybe to the game) Ei-chan consoles himself that he was able to return one of Takuma's first serves and attack. Then Ei-chan checks the clock and sees this last serve was only 211 kph. He's surprised that the speed of the first serve is dropping. He'd thought it was a bit slow but he wonders if the slowing down was to get it in—not the second serve but the first. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter can be translated as "Daze" or "Trance" or "Absorption" or "Enthusiasm" or "Complete Attention." Well, it looks like Ei-chan's hold managed to throw Takuma off his stride a bit. Of course, all those errors could be due to Takuma's getting distracted by hitting such a fast serve and wanting to do it again.
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Additional details: Takuma's first serve, the first one that goes into the net, was "outrageously" fast, according to Ei-chan, like the last two balls he'd been beaten with. Ei-chan was a bit disappointed when he realized Takuma's first serve that he was able to return was "slow" ("only" 211 kph)—this, even though he considered the 209 kph second serve (when Takuma double-faulted) to be fast and nearly as powerful as a first serve. Whoa! Ei-chan's mom is also getting into the game. The expression she had when Ei-chan's lob went out was awesome. Ei-chan seems to have realized something about the slowing

down of Takuma's first serve. The blurb for the next chapter says "Is there an opening that will take advantage of Takuma's serve?"

Ch. 333
Heh, Ei-chan doesn't manage to break because Takuma starts switching up his serves instead of sticking to his usual. 5-2. But Ei-chan manages to hold his service game with his best performance yet. So the chapter ends with the second set at 5-3. And the next chapter starts with Takuma serving for the match. Details later.
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Ch.333 opens with Ei-chan contemplating reasons for the lowered speed of Takuma's first serve: was it definitely lowered, or was Takuma's rhythm off? He decides that either way, he was able to produce a nice pattern from Takuma's first serve. Not just that. He's also starting to improve his odds of getting a point off Takuma's most recent second serves. Thinking that way, maybe Takuma doesn't want to hit a second serve, so he's putting in his first serve? If that's correct, that's the result of Ei-chan's continuing to nibble at Takuma's first serves and continuing to attack his second serves. Meaning it [Ei-chan's strategy] was effective! At least little by little he's closing in on Takuma's serves. However, Ei-chan reminds himself that his desperate situation is unchanged. Even if [his strategy] is effective, if he can't get a point, it's entirely meaningless. Since the score is 40-30, he'll first focus on one point. Takuma thinks that when Ei-chan plays decisively at the critical moment, he's someone who's able to play aggressively. The guy who's originally troublesome is becoming more and more troublesome. Takuma's next serve is a slice clocked at 172 kph. [This tactic is similar to that first face-off when Takuma hit 50 serves for Ei-chan's return practice.] Ei-chan returns it, but his timing is off. He notes, however, the switch from the series of superfast flat serves to a slow one, and this convinces him that something has changed. Takuma goes to the net to return the ball. Ei-chan watches Takuma's arm closely, but Takuma's able to put the ball away with a drop shot. The smoothness [of the shot?] also takes the audience by surprise. Game 5-2 with Takuma leading. Coach Aoi notes that Takuma's serve has slowed, but it hasn't crumbled. He wonders if the critical moment is here. Coach Miura concludes that the current Takuma is performing well. He thinks that when Takuma's rhythm has improved to that point, no matter what his body does, he'll try to regain it. He believes it was the result of Takuma's settling down because he'd realized there's only serve-and-volley for him. Ei-chan immediately starts writing vigorously in his notebook (see pic 1 on mangakansou). If next he somehow gets to crumble Takuma's first serve, for sure he'll
be able to do a bit more. The spectators are noisy [no idea if this means they're reacting to the sight of Ei-chan]. But if his next service is broken, then it's over. Even if Takuma doesn't force things, if Takuma holds his next game, he can win. But knowing Takuma's personality, Ei-chan believes Takuma will play to crush him here [probably during Ei-chan's service game]. He notes that in his last service game, he was able to hold by clearing away all the uneasy factors. This next service game is one he can face with the most confidence. He hasn't given up, but he feels ready to face a loss. He has nothing to be scared of, so he'll go full power. Ei-chan's first serve is to the center, clocked at 175 kph. Takuma returns the ball with his backhand and his volley[!?] goes into the net. 15-0. Ei-chan thinks that even though his serve is 175 kph and it's his opponent's error, it's still a point from a serve, the same one point as an ace. The audience comments on how Ei-chan serves well, figuring out tempo, the variety of shots, and course. Ei-chan's next serve is a spin wide. Takuma returns it, thinking "This time it's a spin?" A rally ensues. Ei-chan hits a reverse cross deep with an arching spin, then a forehand slice tight to the side of the cross [not sure what that means],

and then he goes to the net with a shallow spin at an acute angle. Ei-chan takes the point with a volley. 30-0. In the next one, the ball that was returned goes into the net, so it's Takuma's point. 30-15. Ei-chan hits the next one with tight 1/64 control. Takuma thinks that even if he forces his way to the net, what he can do is limited. He acknowledges that there are ways to fight defensively, but decides that considering the flow [of the game?], it's better to attack. Ei-chan thinks that even though Takuma's at the baseline, his defensive range is broad. Ei-chan attacks with 1/81 control, and Takuma's thrown a bit off. Ei-chan seizes the advantage and aims for the open court. 40-15. The next serve is a fault. Ei-chan predicts that in this situation (a second serve), if he hits a slice wide and it goes in, Takuma will go to the net after a forehand cross. Takuma goes forward as predicted. Ei-chan hits the ball down the line, thinking that with all the balls, if he can control them, theoretically he can't lose. His ball lands right on the line, so Ei-chan holds his serve. So game 5-3. Delighted, Ei-chan raises both arms in triumph (see pic 2 on mangakansou). His best hold against Takuma! Audience comments: Ei-chan can compete with Takuma even with that sort of tennis; far from being able to compete, Takuma is standing out, but it's
turning into a fine match; the no-seed is putting up a good fight! Ei-chan considers what's next. If he can't break here, it's over...It will be the end. Chapter ends. The title of ch.334 is "Threat."
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Found RAWs. So additional details: When Takuma hit that drop shot, the audience thinks that it felt sinfully smooth (or so smooth it was evil). After that, Kageyama points out that until this game Takuma's serve had been the best up to now. Yukichi adds that he'd wanted Ei-chan to reach deuce. Random audience thoughts: the 230 kph serves can't continue going in, after all; it felt like Takuma's win, right; but not crumbling there is as expected of the 8th seed who's a top pro. At that point, Ike's surprised to see Ei-chan rush to the bench. When Ei-chan starts writing furiously, Himeko and Kageyama look surprised, Yukichi seems suddenly hopeful, and Coach Miura is also surprised. Correction to the summary. It's not "If next he somehow gets to crumble Takuma's first serve, for sure he'll be able to do a bit more." It's "If next he somehow comes to be able to touch Takuma's first serve, for sure he'll be able to do a bit more." Re the spectators being noisy at this point, one notes that Ei-chan seems to be writing something vigorously. Another wonders if Ei-chan had thought of something. Takuma also notes Ei-chan's behavior and as they pass each other for the change in court, Takuma looks wary of Ei-chan; this is when Ei-chan thinks that knowing Takuma's personality, Takuma will play to crush him here. Takuma's return of Ei-chan's first serve wasn't a volley, but it did go into the net. The serve looked like a flat, because Takuma seemed to bend down awkwardly to hit it. Re the rally, the forehand slice was cross court. During the rally, Ei-chan was working Takuma from one side of the court to the other. Ei-chan thinks that the one just now [probably the progress of the rally and how he got the point] is also his development. The audience comments that since Ei-chan's service games take time for him to hold, it doesn't make as much of an impression as Takuma's service games, but aren't the odds of Ei-chan making a point gradually improving?
After Ei-chan holds, among the reactions are Coach Miura and Ike looking like they're both reassessing Ei-chan, and Ide says [if I'm reading this right] he's also come to feel that Ei-chan can do it. Ch.334 will have a color opening page and an increase in pages. The blurb says "Can he destroy it!? The barrier of the serve!!"

Ch. 334

Baby Steps (Ei-chan and Natchan) is on the cover of the magazine. There are 3 color pages: an article comparing Ei-chan (1700th in the world) vs. Kei Nishikori (5th in the world) takes up 2 pages; the last is a poster illustration with Takuma serving and announces the second season of the anime starting April 5. The chapter itself opens with Ei-chan thinking this game might be the last and considering what to do. He thinks he'll try to do what he can and shifts his position slightly. The breakdown for Takuma's very first serve of a game is: center, 41%; wide, 50%; body, 9%. He choose to believe in his data and not change his prediction. Since the odds are high that the serve will come as usual, from the start he'll depend on one step—and he takes one step closer to wide. Takuma notices the shift in Ei-chan's home position. He wonders whether it's yet another trick. Then he tells himself that rather than that sort of thing, if he can get a point while correcting his serve, he'll start getting results. As Takuma tosses the ball, Ei-chan rushes forward 3 steps, paying attention to the converse (not wide). Takuma's serve is to the center (converse). Ei-chan just manages to touch the ball, but it's called a fault. Takuma concludes the timing for his flat serve is a bit off. Ei-chan notes that the speed had been lowered again and wonders if Takuma is correcting his serve. In which case, it's a chance. The breakdown for Takuma's second serve when the score is 0-0 is: center, 43%; wide, 45%; body, 12%. So Ei-chan resumes his original home position and plans to play more assertively. Takuma hits a spin serve wide, clocked at 167 kph. The spin apparently makes it curve to the edge of Ei-chan's defensive range. Ei-chan manages to return it, but it's a cord ball and lands in Ei-chan's side. 15-0. Ei-chan wonders if it's no good. Even though the serve was slower, it was good: it had a fast rotation and felt stable. However, the odds of Takuma's first serve are dropping, so
Ei-chan has a chance. The breakdown for Takuma's first serve when the score is 15-0 is: center, 39%; wide, 54%; body, 7%. Ei-chan chooses a home position that's a step closer to wide. By doing so, he intends to put a bit of pressure on a wide serve. Takuma notices that Ei-chan has again changed his home position. He tells himself to focus on the correction to his serve rather than that. He'll completely validate the variety of his serves using 80% power, from an easy-to-put-in slice, to a spin, then a flat. But so he won't be defensive, he'll be consistent with an aggressive slice to the center. Ei-chan is forced to reach low to return it. Then he sees Takuma at the net and Takuma volleys, putting away the ball. 30-0. The crowd erupts: There it is! The precious weapon of a trump card: serve and volley! Two more points! Himeko and Ei-chan's mom are tense; Kageyama shouts encouragement. Ei-chan takes a home position that's one step wide. He thinks that in this game, the first serves up to now have been going to the open court. In other words, will the next one be to the center? Takuma does aim for the center, but the ball goes into the net. Takuma realizes he's applying too much rotation on a first serve that's a spin. Without trying too hard to get the serve in, he has to correct his swing by making it a bit bigger. Just a bit of a gap, a minute adjustment without trying too hard to get it in or hit a winner. A second serve with the spin set a little while ago. Ei-chan remembers that the one a little while ago was wide, then the next was to the center. This time the serve is wide again with a strong spin, clocked at 175 kph—and it's escaping outward. Ei-chan manages to touch it, so he puts all his strength into his return. The lob goes deep, past Takuma, and lands right on the sideline. 30-15. Takuma takes it in stride, dismissing it as "can't be helped." The onlookers don't know what to make of it. Some say Ei-chan's skillful, others say he was lucky. Ei-chan thinks it might have been lucky, but when the power of Takuma's serves is weaker, that's the result. Yukichi asks Coach Aoi what's with Ei-chan's shift in his home position for his return. Coach Aoi guesses that
Ei-chan is shifting based a bit on how Takuma usually hits, so it's probably somewhat effective. He can also say that Takuma is more aware of how he

hits his serves, which is the opposite of his habitual style. Yukichi marvels at the significance in Ei-chan's home position. Coach Aoi points out that the risk is high and it doesn't appear to have a relatively quick effect, but Ei-chan probably doesn't have another plan. Ei-chan, however, thinks that two consecutive first serves failed to go in, so his way of playing has an effect. Takuma aims wide for his next serve, but it touches the net. Let! Yukichi comments that Takuma's serve isn't going in even though he seems to be adjusting it. He adds that Takuma could play safe and leave taking risks to Ei-chan, but he's attacking. However, Coach Aoi counters that it's not a situation where Takuma can play that safe. He points out that Ei-chan couldn't return Takuma's serves at the start of the first set, but he could continue to react and touch them. So that's been putting the pressure "If it's just slightly weak, he'll return it." He can say that pressure also had an effect on Takuma's fastest serve a little while ago. Maybe the fine balance between the pressure and Takuma's excellent condition influenced Takuma. Then he went past his peak of excellence. Even more, Ei-chan's continuing to apply strong pressure there. Considering it this way, though a hold is a win, it's not a situation where Takuma can play safe. Takuma's next serve is to the center, clocked at 182 kph. Ei-chan notes that the first serve went in with a spin. But if it's this serve, he can return it. Both players rush to the net. Takuma checks Ei-chan's position and volleys. Ei-chan dives to countervolley. And Takuma's volley goes into the net. 30-30. Ide exclaims that it's as he expected of Ei-chan's tenacity. Coach Aoi, however, thinks the situation is unchanged: it's still a critical point. Ei-chan thinks that in this situation the breakdown for Takuma's first serve when the score is 30-30 is: center, 47%; wide, 33%; body, 20%. So being one step closer to wide... Takuma thinks a slice with a so-so spin is fine...meaning what's crumbled is just his flat serve. Even so, he can't play against Ei-chan with just spin. He decides to correct his flat here. His serve is wide, clocked at 220 kph, and Takuma's surprised to see Ei-chan ready for it. He notes that Ei-chan returned his flat squarely as he bends down to return the ball crosscourt. Ei-chan hits it down the line. Takuma volleys, thinking "so what?" Ei-chan goes for a power shot. Takuma dives to volley. The angle is so sharp Ei-chan gets nowhere near the ball. Takuma clenches his fist in a triumphant pose. 40-30. End of chapter. Blurb for the next chapter: Finally, match point. The title for ch.335: Limit.

Ch. 335

So the score is 40-30 and Ei-chan's been driven to match point. Yukichi is mentally asking Ei-chan to pull through. Ei-chan reminds himself that just now he'd finally grasped that serve of Takuma's directly...nevertheless, Takuma had deployed a superior volley. In the end, Ei-chan had been beaten, but even Takuma had barely gotten the tip of his racket to the ball. Ei-chan actually felt sure he could counter that serve and volley. He'd done everything he could do...but... As Ei-chan gets into position to receive, he acknowledges it's match point and thinks all he can do now is just believe in himself and apply a little pressure by planning to be one step closer to the center. Takuma thinks that because he's defeated this guy crushingly several times, he understands...that he has to beat him here. And it would be better not to take time doing so...but he mustn't rush. He mustn't be more afraid than necessary nor should he make light of Ei-chan. He'll look accurately and calmly at his current self, without being swayed by this guy...and hit the serve he has to hit now. Ei-chan's prediction of a serve to the center, based on the probabilities, is correct. However, the serve is fast at 222 kph. Ei-chan returns it, thinking he'll just sink it, he can't aim. This is the limit...where will it go!? Takuma returns it from the middle of the court. Ei-chan debates dispensing with a shot toward Takuma's feet or whether to sink the ball again. Watching his opponent, he decides on overhead. He hits a lob and judges his timing and aim to be good,

but wonders if Takuma will hit it. Takuma goes all out to return it. Ei-chan refuses to allow Takuma to put the ball away and somehow manages to return Takuma's smash. Takuma attacks, thinking he still has the upper hand. Ei-chan chases the ball to the end of the court. His high-speed slice ends it with deuce (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose. The audience erupts over Ei-chan's narrow escape, speculating on whether that slice was a desperate move and the speed was because of his desperation. Ei-chan exults over his survival, that it wasn't over yet. After a great deal of effort, he's come this far against Takuma. He wants to play against Takuma a little more, even one point. Takuma remembers that when hitting from a high impact point, there's also that (the high-speed slice?) and furthermore, Ei-chan's reaction has been good from the start, so Takuma concludes his thinking was correct and he has to settle things certainly here. He takes the next point with an ace; the serve is wide and clocked at 231 kph. Advantage Takuma. The onlookers erupt again at the high-speed serve. Takuma thinks that even though he'd intended to hold it down, it ended up fast. The result was good, but this is a time when he has to be able to control himself. Ei-chan dismisses that sort of ace as inevitable and remembers that on a match point on an ad court, Takuma's serves are frequently to the center. The earlier match-point serve was also to the center. He applies pressure on a center. Takuma's first serve goes into the net. He concludes he'd held it down too much. At a crucial moment, he's missing power and putting in too much...his revision is really half-hearted. He decides that on the second serve, he'll reset. It's likely to be predicted by Ei-chan, but he'll overcome the opposition. Ei-chan thinks a wide is probabilistic and Takuma turns aggressive at a time like this. Takuma's second serve is a strong slice wide. But Ei-chan concludes it's too aggressive, the rotation is becoming stronger, and the serve is turning shallow (short?), so he decides "Go!" Ei-chan emerges with a return dash. Acknowledging Ei-chan's guts, Takuma hits the ball to the open court, shooting past the side of Ei-chan, who had gone forward (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Since the ball is barely out, it's deuce again. Ei-chan is relieved. Yukichi says that was lucky because he'd thought it was over. Kageyama adds that as expected of Ei-chan, he's sticking it out. Himeko asks that if Ei-chan can get the next two points, whether he can break. Coach Aoi confirms this and thinks to himself that Ei-chan's condition isn't bad, so there's one way he can break here. Coach Miura mentally reminds Takuma that this is no time to be impatient. Takuma thinks his serve wasn't good, but if he can't make the point in that sort of situation, he can't compete using serve and volley. He affirms he's a serve-and-volleyer...no matter what sort of time, he has prepared serves he can use. Ei-chan thinks he's survived again. He can compete for two more points. Again, he doesn't want to let it end.
End of chapter. The title for ch.336 is "Desperate Desire" or "Yearning."
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Correction to the summary: Coach Aoi doesn't think "there's one way he can break here" when he thinks to himself that Ei-chan's condition isn't bad. He thinks that if Ei-chan can break here, there's a rare possibility (probably referring to Ei-chan's winning the set and maybe the match). More corrections might follow. I found RAWs but I'll be busy for the next so many hours.
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More corrections: Yukichi didn't mentally ask Ei-chan to pull through; he said it aloud, asking Ei-chan to survive match point. When Ei-chan was reviewing the last rally that led to the first match point, it wasn't "nevertheless, Takuma had deployed a superior volley" but "moreover, he gained ground even on Takuma's volley. The audience speculation about Ei-chan's high-speed slice wasn't that the speed was because of his desperation, but that it was

awfully fast for a slice in desperation. More detail: The second time the score went to deuce, someone in the audience opined that Takuma's error was borne of Ei-chan's assertiveness—so basically a forced error. (So nice that others are recognizing Ei-chan's ability.) The blurb for the next chapter is "The unfinished pinch, can he survive this predicament!?"

Ch. 336
Details to follow since I have work, but EI-CHAN BROKE TAKUMA'S SERVE! Moreover, he did it with a solid "return ace" on a 230 kph serve! (see pics on mangakansou) Chapter ends with Natchan's arrival.
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So ch.336 opens with Ei-chan, who's survived two match points, thinking that if he just doesn't give up two consecutive points, it will end without him losing forever. Then he comes to his senses and wonders what he's saying. He orders himself not to escape in such a foolish fantasy. That would be Hell, then! He reminds himself that even though he's in a pinch, it's a chance to break. He thinks that based on his notes, when in deuce, the odds of Takuma aiming his serve wide is somewhat high. Takuma thinks serve and volley is more disruptive than other shots. If it's powerful, it's
natural that it's hard to stabilize. If it's a pro, that sort of countermeasure is something he'd keep doing twice or thrice. Takuma's next serve is a slice wide. Ei-chan notes the rotation is stronger than ever before. He'd predicted the course, but the angle is sharper than he'd imagined. Moreover, Ei-chan doesn't match the timing. Since it's come to this, the impact point is late, so he can only hit down the line...but...here...at the risk of his life, he hits it crosscourt. Takuma is taken by surprise, but Ei-chan's return means he also can't get back. Takuma extends his arm and returns the ball, but it goes into the net. Advantage, Maruo. Kageyama et al. cheer. The audience erupts: It's a chance to break! Maruo, pull through here with one point now! Egawa, let's tie it here! When Ei-chan realizes he's gotten to break point, his heart pounds, which shocks him. He thinks, "...I mean...Eh!? What's this? Ho... Hold on. My body is suddenly kinda...wa...wait just a sec... What is it? My limbs are shaking, and my pulse is getting fast...This...don't tell me I've suddenly gotten nervous? Because I'll break after one point...no...that's why the pressure is starting to affect me. I couldn't resign myself to a loss. My absolutely not wanting to lose is natural! I've decided I want to win! I want to win over Takuma-san!...If I can use the pressure well, it will become power... But whatever the circumstances may be, it's too severe. My pulse is intense...I'm shaking. My mouth is dry. I'm sweating tremendously. My body is stiff... This is bad...I can't cope with it in 20 seconds." Takuma thinks his last serve took away Ei-chan's timing and wasn't bad. He'd certainly driven Ei-chan to a point where Ei-chan could only return the ball down the line. And yet by throwing away the next shot, Ei-chan returned with an impossible cross, forced Takuma to commit an error, and made the point. He concludes that this guy (Ei-chan) is calmly pulling off his best play—like himself (Takuma)—at the last moment, and it's no time to be saying it won't be bad with this sort of serve. The umpire calls the 15 second warning. Ei-chan's still trying to calm himself and trying to remember how he's supposed to handle this sort of strong pressure. He's fumbling with the method he'd worked out against Ide: identifying the real sources of the pressure before erasing them. The
causes he identifies are: if he loses, he can't become a pro; he might not be able to defeat Takuma later, for the rest of his life— (So Ei-chan definitely has to defeat Takuma to turn pro.) He concludes he doesn't have time to be doing such a thing! (The thing is apparently identifying all the causes of the pressure.) Takuma apparently notices Ei-chan's condition.

He wonders what's the matter with Ei-chan, is Ei-chan nervous at the thought of being able to win? That's nothing. Takuma has also completed the work on his corrections. Ei-chan's shaking. He thinks he'll do what he can up to the very end. If he clearly images the true sources of the pressure just within the time he can...what's left is concentrating on his return somehow! With his return, the most...important thing is... the words Natchan had said to him before: Ei-chan! The ball isn't your enemy! You don't turn away from it. You have to go forward and meet it! Ei-chan returns the flat serve wide with a straight that just catches the corner of the court. He breaks with a return ace. Takuma is all "Huh?" Moreover, this serve is clocked at 230 kph. The audience erupts again: No way! On a 230 kph flat... A return ace? F-finally Maruo broke Egawa!? Kageyama sees Ei-chan in a daze and wonders what's wrong. Ei-chan exhales, thinking "What...what was that just now? I did what I could until the end... When I simplified my thinking at the very end, my body moved spontaneously... The zone... I don't quite understand but...it's like the greatest pressure up to now became an ally so that all my strength was transmitted to the ball... I broke Takuma-san's serve! I caught up with him!" At that point, Natchan shows up at the venue. End of chapter. No mention of the title of the next chapter. Here's hoping Ei-chan maintains his presence of mind and holds his service game. YAY, Ei-chan! This should shake Takuma. Ei-chan's gotten a handle on both Takuma's slice and flat serves.

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Okay, corrections and additions to the summary. When the crowd first erupted after Ei-chan gets to break point, what was shouted to Takuma was "Egawa, let's tie it here!" I've corrected the summary to reflect this. When Ei-chan was identifying the reasons for
the sudden pressure he felt and thought that he doesn't have time to being doing such a thing, the thing he didn't have time to do was apparently the complete identification of all the sources of the pressure, so he just did what he could and was still under more pressure than he'd thought optimal by the time Takuma served.

Oh, man! The dumbfounded expressions on everyone's faces at Ei-chan's return ace and the announcement of "Game, Maruo. 5-4. Second set"! Even Ike was wide-eyed. Oh, and Natchan didn't arrive in time to witness the return ace. As she nears Ei-chan's court, two players (they're toting tennis racket bags) are talking about how he'd returned 230 kph with that sort of blow. One says he can't call the game anymore; the other points out that Takuma's still leading by a set to which the first replies that the odds of Takuma's serve are deteriorating. Then Natchan sees the scoreboard: 6-4; 5-4. No Baby Steps next week.

Volume 35 Extra: Marcia side story

The story takes place just before the All Japan Championship. Atsushi sees Marcia and is about to suggest they eat breakfast together. Alex pulls him aside so they can watch her. According to Alex, Marcia has been weird lately, hiding from Alex, sneaking glances at her cell phone and fidgeting. Atsushi says they're the only ones fidgeting now. They see Marcia take a deep breath to brace herself, which surprises Atsushi. Alex says it doesn't mean it's unexpected, but... Marcia calls Ei-chan. Ei-chan's phone identifies the caller as Marcia; apparently they'd exchanged contact details, so his app recognized her. As he wonders why she called, he answers the phone. She greets him by name, which confirms Alex's suspicions. She asks if he's training; of course he is. He asks how everyone's doing. Marcia says Alex nags her as always and she's fine. She reports that she won a big competition in her hometown yesterday. He's amazed. She tells him that if he's slow, she'll make her pro debut before he does and orders him to work hard. Then she notes that he isn't able to speak English all that well and adds that even if he wins, he can't handle an interview. He

mentally concedes she has a point. She tells him she'll call him once in a while to check, as a favor for him, so next time (he should speak) properly. He thanks her and promises to study. She ends the call. Ei-chan thinks that in the end, she hadn't had a reason for calling. After the call, Marcia strikes a triumphant pose—which Alex notes is something she doesn't do even in the middle of a match. Atsushi tries to reassure Alex by pointing out Ei-chan is supposed to have a girlfriend he's lovey-dovey with. Alex replies that according to the person herself (Marcia), it seems she doesn't care about that (Ei-chan's having a girlfriend is irrelevant). Alex adds that if a beauty like Marcia makes a serious play for Ei-chan, even he would fall for her. Alex is torn between Marcia's happiness and whether Ei-chan's really acceptable and his (Alex's) taking responsibility for her from his parents and his duty as a big brother to keep weird pests away from her...and being occupied with love now... Then Alex turns to Atsushi and orders him to teach Alex Japanese. One minute later, Ei-chan gets a call from Alex. When Ei-chan answers, he tells Alex that just now Marcia... Alex apparently interrupts him, asking him if he's fine. Then Alex switches to Japanese: Over my dead body! And he hangs up. First Ei-chan's shocked by Alex's use of Japanese, then he corrects himself, focusing on what Alex had said just now. Before he can take that thought any further, his phone rings again. Ei-chan answers, telling Atsushi that just now Alex... Atsushi laughs it off, apologizes, and explains it's some Japanese he taught Alex. He adds that Ei-chan shouldn't worry about the details; he'd just taught Alex an irresponsible phrase that came to mind. Ei-chan says it seems Atsushi's side is as fun as always. Atsushi turns the conversation to the All Japan Championship and confirms that Ei-chan's participating in the final draw starting tomorrow. Ei-chan says yes; he's in the middle of preparations right now. Atsushi looks elated that Ei-chan made it through the prelims. He apologizes for making a weird call at an important time. Ei-chan waves off Atsushi's apology, saying he can sleep easily because of it. Atsushi is glad to hear that and adds that they're all rooting for him even from so far away. Good luck! Ei-chan thanks him.

Ch. 337

Ei-chan held his serve without giving up a single point. And he put away all those balls decisively. His first serve of the game was an ace clocked at 190 kph, his fastest for the day. Before the start of Ei-chan's service game, Coach Miura remembered that Ei-chan's very first weapon was his return and thinks that if Takuma is the best big server in Japan, then Ei-chan, who helped Takuma get to where he is, is the best returner in Japan thanks to Takuma.

I just skimmed it so far, but if I understood correctly, the chapter ends with the second set at 6-5, Ei-chan leading. Ei-chan broke Takuma's serve a second time—overwhelmingly. The summary said that after the return ace, Ei-chan continued to take the subsequent points and broke. Yup, the onlookers are shocked by the consecutive breaks and Ei-chan's streak of points. Takuma also seems to be losing his cool; he nearly threw down his racket. Title of the next chapter is either "Surprise" or "Fright" or "Shock." Since the next game is Ei-chan's serve and he's in great condition, it looks like he'll take the second set 5-7. Oh, yeah, the title of ch.337 is "The Course (or Direction) of Strong Pressure." Details to follow much later, probably when I already have RAWs.

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Ho-kay, details for ch.337:

The chapter opens with Ike on the title page: the final stage of the second set of Takuma's match, now's the time that distinguishes victory or defeat. Hmm...that's very promising for Ei-chan, considering how the chapter ends. So the audience reacts: Second set, 5-4! Maruo

has finally caught up in this set. Ike wonders how many guys are there in the current Japan who can return that serve of Takuma's that way (seems to be more of a rhetorical question with an implicit answer of "not many"). Coach Miura agrees and remembers that the weapon Ei-chan used at the very start was his return. He points out that both movement and eyes that can capture the ball accurately are the most important when it comes to returns, and Ei-chan had been especially trained by playing against Takuma (the accompanying art indicates he means practice games). He thinks that for there to be the current Takuma, thanks to Ei-chan, the current Ei-chan has also grown because of Takuma. He speculates that the best big server in Japan might be on the point of raising one of the best returners. Natsu checks the score and notes that Ei-chan is a set down, but she sees him writing in his notebook and concludes he's okay. Ei-chan's still shaking. However, he remembers that he was able to channel the pressure in a good direction and that he'd tried to define the excessive pressure but he'd run out of time, so in the end he'd relied on the most important words and channeled all that pressure into the ball. He thinks that sensation was close to the zone. He doesn't quite understand the zone, but he's certain it's related to pressure. So he decides to write down all the known pressures:

- If he loses this match, he can't turn pro
- If he loses, then for the rest of his life, he can't defeat Takuma
- If the next game is taken from him, he'll lose
- In the current situation, he has the momentum, but Takuma still has the upper hand score-wise
- The feeling that he might be able to win is starting to rise and he feels an excessive desire to win, which is turning into pressure
- His current vigor won't necessarily continue until he takes this set, much less until the final set

(Ei-chan's handwriting definitely reflects his shaking.) Then he wonders if there's also the pressure from being on the verge of winning. He adds that there are other pressures. So the current pressure is definitely stronger than usual and there are more sources. Thinking of it that way, the more and stronger pressure might have been stronger when he converted that into strength. Time is called. As Ei-chan returns to the court, he remembers that when he'd started playing, his mind had gone blank and he'd simply thought of the most important thing. So now what's the most important thing? Believe in himself? He questions whether that's too vague. Increasing the odds of his first serve? That one strikes him as maybe too detailed. He remembers that because he'd been prepared for a loss, he'd been able to hold his service game with his own tennis. He identifies what was good then as his having turned defiant, playing aggressively. So if he thinks of only one thing, it's "aggressively"! His first serve is an ace clocked at 190 kph, his fastest for the day. 15-0. The audience notes his serve has sped up and while he's not Takuma, the course was good. Ei-chan decides to go that way. Takuma manages to return the next serve, but Ei-chan continues "aggressively" and Takuma doesn't even touch the ball. 30-0. The audience notes that the ball was put away very simply and that it had gone to a good spot, but someone wonders whether it was luck or if Ei-chan had aimed for it. Ike says this might be something rather terrific. Ei-chan thinks he might also be in his best condition. He realizes Takuma is trying to reorganize his stance and he understands what Takuma is contemplating in order to take it in hand: changing the tempo by using an arching ball. So if Takuma intends to gain time, Ei-chan decides not to give him time by using a rising shot. Ei-chan thinks that with this, he has the upper hand, that he can do everything he wants to do, and that

with Takuma as his opponent, he can do amazing things using control and enough power so even if the ball is returned, it won't be taken. He hits another winner. 40-0. The audience notices he's starting to put away the balls easily. Ike wonders if this has entered the state of perfection. Coach Aoi thinks things have gotten interesting and that Ei-chan had coped well with the ultimate pressure at the critical moment, as well as the sense of achievement at breaking Takuma's serve and the continuing pressure—and he'd fit all that in the interval (between games). Ei-chan continues to focus on playing aggressively. When he hits to where and how, he'll just image whether it's aggressive tennis. If he can do only that, with that power and control, it will be settled. Yet another winner. And the score is tied 5-5 in the second set. The onlookers are shocked. Himeko says he's somewhat possessed. Yukichi cheers encouragement. Coach Miura wonders whether Takuma can only endure it, but he also thinks Takuma will start to change after this, because of how Takuma endures it. Takuma's service game starts. Ei-chan decides to aggressively take a step to the center here. When the first serve goes into the net, Ike thinks it's because Ei-chan had gambled on time and demolished the barrier of Takuma's serve little by little from its foundation. He concludes that if Takuma doesn't make corrections from the root, it will become something serious/difficult. Ei-chan pulls off a return ace on Takuma's second serve. Yukichi can't believe it: Ei-chan's overwhelming Takuma! Play continues. After a fault is called, Yukichi calculates that although the condition of Takuma's serve has dropped, he's never seen a unilateral development until now. For the 11th game, he has the success rate of the first serves at 33.3%, the acquisition rate of the first serves at 50%, and nothing written for the acquisition rate of the second serves. Ei-chan hits another winner to overtake Takuma in the second set: 6-5. The audience marvels at Ei-chan's two consecutive breaks and the reversal in this set. Someone couldn't believe that from match point until now it's mostly been Ei-chan making points. They wonder what's wrong with Takuma and if he's all right. Someone speculates that the problem of his condition extended from his serve to his whole (game). Himeko and Kageyama cheer loudly for Ei-chan. Ei-chan's satisfied with how he's playing, then he notices Takuma making to throw down his racket. Takuma hyperventilates, apparently trying to control himself. Lots of crowd noise as Ei-chan and Coach Miura look on in silence. Chapter ends.
The next issue just before the broadcast of the anime will have a "center color" (color spread, I think) and an increase in pages. Well, that last entry in Ei-chan's list seems to be foreshadowing a tough final set. As others have said, Ei-chan can't keep playing at his current level indefinitely. However, Takuma's control is already flagging, so it's unlikely he'll resume dishing out superfast serves one after another.

Ch. 338
With things going badly, Takuma looks mad and brandishes his racket as if he's going to throw it to the ground. The onlookers watch his every action, commenting "Egawa lost his temper!?" and "No...it seems he endured it." Takuma sits on the bench and lets out a big sigh. He thinks he can't forgive himself. He'd intended to be wary and challenge perfectly, but if it had really been perfect, then his various serves being returned, his being broken...Ei-chan shouldn't have equaled him this much. It's probably proof he'd made light of Ei-chan somewhere. He orders himself to quit doing that and recognize it, that this guy has come this far faster than Ike... Takuma concludes, "Now he's on the verge of overtaking me!" Ei-chan thinks he's maintaining his best condition...and Takuma's is completely out of gear. Takuma's tennis has completely collapsed because of the collapse of his serve, which is the core of his offense. Until just a little earlier, the flow was really difficult, yet in the last

moment, the flow changed at once. Then he corrects himself: he succeeded in changing the flow. He realizes that even though he'd been shaking like that a while ago, now he's surprisingly calm. It's unbelievable, but both are the same self; he decides to remember it well. He notes that the flow of a match can change like this in an instant; he decides to be ready for that too (sounds like more foreshadowing of a tough final set!), but one way or another, he wants to take the set with the flow as it is. The umpire calls "Time!" They return to the court. Ei-chan goes into the pose to toss the ball for the serve, and it seems to Takuma the form of Ike is superimposed on Ei-chan. The end is Ei-chan's point because he watches Takuma's movements closely and hit a ground stroke to the opposite side that was freed up. Ei-chan is relieved that he's still good.
Since the dramatic reversal from match point, the eyes of the audience have started to turn to Ei-chan. Ei-chan thinks he's able to see his opponent better than usual and he has confidence in himself that he can do everything. The condition of being able to continue concentrating just on defeating his opponent...is the zone. Takuma reminds himself that he was a kid when he lost to Ike, that both his efforts and his thinking were lacking, that he hadn't done the things he should have done in order to win. He tells himself it's different now. He'd tried to rectify what was lacking then, and he'd gotten this far, intending to bring down that guy (probably Ike)... So he can't lose to Ei-chan who's neither Ike nor a pro... He concludes that if such stupid pride (referring to can't lose to Ei-chan) binds him, he'll demolish it now! Play continues with Takuma returning Ei-chan's serve. For the return ball, Ei-chan calmly considers 5 options to make aggressive use of his advantage.

1. a super aggressive short cross
2. an aggressive flat cross + going to the net
3. stealing Takuma's timing with the another top spin down the line while Takuma is starting in the opposite direction
4. stealing Takuma's timing with a forehand slice to the center
5. challenging with a drop shot

Ei-chan's analysis: his opponent is getting used to 1 and 2; he'd used 3 just now, so Takuma would be on the lookout for it; the risk for 5 is high; so here where he's not in a hurry, it's the one Takuma would least be on the lookout for and also has low risk...4! Takuma's timing and posture are thrown off by the forehand slice to the center. Ei-chan thinks if he can use a rising shot and control it down the line... The shot goes as he hopes. 30-0. Ei-chan thinks that if he can continue concentrating on just his opponent's movements...this situation is sure to continue... On the other hand, Takuma orders himself to calm down. He's not good, and now his opponent is too good... Takuma tries to calm down, but Natchan's words cross his mind: Ei-chan will surely become strong! At that moment, Ei-chan hits a 178 kph serve wide and it's an ace. Natchan, who's watching the match, thinks "Takuma..." Takuma is shocked and wonders why such a trivial matter from long ago...? Ei-chan's next serve is a fault. Ide notes the next will be a second serve...and that it doesn't mean Ei-chan doesn't have any openings at all to take advantage off, but Takuma's pace/legs has/have stopped. Coach Miura notes that in tennis, during a match, fighting, getting hurt, and even healing, whatever you're doing, you do it alone. He mentally urges Takuma to remember something that sustains Takuma. On the next point, Ei-chan retains the advantage of his serve. From a rally, he wins the point with a ground stroke crosscourt. Ei-chan takes back the second set and strikes a heartfelt triumphant pose. He makes an face that says he himself couldn't believe he'd taken the second set. The grounds erupt: no way!; to think Egawa was so overwhelming until midway...!; even though there were a number of match points...!; a high

schooler who qualified through the prelims recovered...from the 240+ kph serve of the No.9 in Japan! Okada is in disbelief, saying it's impossible. Ide disagrees, countering that even at match point there's a chance for a reversal, which is why tennis is so interesting. The audience gets excited since they can't tell anymore who'll win. End chapter. The title of ch.339 is "The Tide of Battle." Looks like Takuma's on shaky ground, what with Natchan's words distracting him and undermining his confidence. It might mean Ei-chan will break him again in the first game of the final set. However, Coach Miura's thoughts suggest Takuma will recover and try to get back in the game. So whether the final set will be long or short is still up in the air.
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Corrections and additions to the spoilers: Takuma doesn't think that Ei-chan shouldn't have equaled him this much, but that Ei-chan shouldn't have shaken him this much. Ooh, the mangaka made an error in the scoreboard: 6-4; 6-5 with Takuma leading in both sets. The reactions of the audience after the first point during Ei-chan's service game: haven't their positions gotten reversed?; no, it's because it's Maruo's service game; Maruo's movements are efficient, and his control is good; to think Egawa has more power; Maruo Eiichirou, is it? (the last sounds like Ei-chan's picking up fans) Among the 5 options that Ei-chan was considering, No.3 is supposed to be "stealing Takuma's timing with the another top spin down the line while Takuma is starting in the opposite direction." Before Natchan's words cross Takuma's mind, he was telling himself that while it seems he would be at a disadvantage several times in this set, he's taken the first set and his superiority (or superior power) is unchanged. It isn't Ide who notes the serve after the fault will be a second serve, but Coach Aoi. And I didn't phrase the continuation of the thought properly: it should be "it doesn't mean there are no openings at all for Takuma to take advantage with Ei-chan. Ooh! The bleachers are packed on the side of Ei-chan and Takuma's court, unlike the court beyond it. The blurb says "To the final set, which will determine everything!" I wonder if the next chapter will be packed with audience reactions. I really want to see Monma's and Araya's in particular, Nabae's too. And I'd like to see Ogata in the audience since he hoped to catch Ei-chan's match; I haven't seen him in any of the crowd scenes.

Ch. 339
Update from spoilers for ch.339: Araya lost: 3-6,7-5, 6-4; Nabae won: 7-5, 6-4. The final set of Ei-chan vs Takuma starts in the next chapter, titled "Final Set."
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Ch.339 starts with Ei-chan noticing Natchan in the bleachers. He remembers her prediction that he'll defeat Takuma and his heart pounds. He thinks that if he's come this far, he should be able to win...he'll maintain his current excellent tempo—he corrects that thought: he wants to improve on it from here on! Takuma also notices Natchan and sighs. He wonders if she really disliked him, because otherwise that weird thought wouldn't have occurred to him at set point. Then he
corrects himself, telling himself that she couldn't be that tricky, then corrects himself again that it had nothing to do with earlier. His thoughts continue to whirl and he gets even more pissed off at Ei-chan—and at himself. Because his incomplete serve was good, he'd wanted to hold down his maximum power...he would have been fine winning even if he hadn't done that much. If he could think that way, he would have felt at ease without being so confused. He concludes he's lame (uncool), the lamest. When he lost to Ike, he'd be extremely lame, but...no, when he skipped out (on training, probably) after that might have been the lamest. Then he wonders if in general he was lame all his life. The umpire calls time and the two

stand up. Takuma slaps his own cheek, thinking "Give me a break! Is the middle of a match the time to get depressed?" Ei-chan thinks that he'll break first while he has the momentum from taking the second set. At the same time, Monma's playing in center court. It's just the first set with a score of 3-0 in Monma's favor. Monma eats a banana, attributing his early hunger and the feeling he can't lose here to getting revved up by Takuma (probably Takuma's 241 kph serve). In court 7, Nabae (JTA 83) is playing Ooguro (JTA 14). Nabae won the first set, 7-5, and he's also leading the second set, 5-4. The onlookers are clamoring about the high school student who's on the verge of defeating the JTA 14-ranked player. Ooguro thinks that Nabae's victory over Takuma last year hadn't been a fluke. He sees Nabae take out a racket and wonders why Nabae would change rackets at such a time. Nabae wants to proceed carefully in the next game, and wants more of a sensation of being able to grasp the ball firmly. He apparently remembers the words of the Wilson racket rep suggesting it might be better to choose with a slightly looser tension when playing for a long time—in other words, a drawn-out stroke (ground stroke?) contest. Now with a hard-won break and having the upper hand, if he wants to continue with this rhythm, an ordinary player wouldn't change rackets. Being able to sketch a clear vision of attack, he'll use (the racket?) properly in order to execute that (probably his vision). The rep had pointed out that Nabae uses diverse ways of playing, at both offense and defense, depending on the situation, so for a guy with a delicate touch, a racket that satisfied that (touch?) is probably necessary, one that's an extension of the body. As Nabae prepares to serve, he thinks that because he's certainly gotten the upper hand today, he's made more points when he attacked. Even if it takes a bit of time, he'll
connect how he finished this set with the next (3R). Ooguro thinks that if Nabae intends to change something, it can make an opening that Ooguro can take advantage of, and he orders himself not to miss it (probably the opening). In court 4, Araya (JTA 130) is in the middle of his match with Yamaguchi (JTA 11). He hits a power shot, which Yamaguchi returns with a supple movement. Araya runs after and catches up with the ball that was hit to the open court, and he returns it with a strong shot to the side. The ball just barely misses going in. Match over: 3-6, 7-5, 6-4. The two shake hands. Yamaguchi thinks Araya shouldn't make such a scary face, because he can sympathize with the other party. Araya is grinding his teeth, thinking that the score is competitive, but Yamaguchi still has some composure/ something extra left. Araya concludes that there are still a lot more above him and that he wants to turn pro soon. The scene returns to Nabae vs Ooguro. Nabae serves for his 4th break point and has gotten to match point for the second time. Ooguro thinks that today Nabae hasn't attacked much from a backhand, so he returns the ball to Nabae's backhand. But Nabae puts it away with a backhand stroke, shocking Ooguro since it's the first time in the entire set that Nabae hit a powerful straight with his backhand. Ooguro wonders whether Nabae had the composure to deliberately refrain from using that one shot; he thinks if that's the case, then Nabae is extremely deep. Final score is 7-5, 6-4. The grounds are in an uproar over the high school student who defeated a pro. The two shake hands. Nabae thinks he was able to win but he'd had considerable difficulty, and he concludes he still has a lot of problems. Then distant excited cheers reach Nabae's ears. End of chapter. I suspect those distant excited cheers are coming from Ei-chan's court, and Nabae will show up to watch. However, that cheek slap is reminiscent of the time Araya punched himself. Would that be enough to get Takuma's mind back in the game? Anyhow, for Baby Steps to continue, Ei-chan has to win, so it looks like Monma will just have to be shocked when he finds out Takuma lost.

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Okay, correction to the spoiler summary: The Wilson racket rep (Honma Shigeki) is watching Nabae's match and he wonders whether Nabae chose a racket with a slightly looser tension for playing for a long time—in other words, whether Nabae plans a drawn-out stroke (ground stroke?) contest. Honma thinks that Nabae uses diverse ways of playing, at both offense and defense, depending on the situation, so for a guy with a delicate touch, a racket that satisfied that (touch?) is probably necessary, one that's an extension of the body. Addition: Monma's getting some build-up, what with the audience of his match talking about his "iron wall defense and swift attack combination," his "inexhaustible stamina," and at 29 his probably being at his peak physically and mentally. So I'm getting the feeling Ei-chan will go up against him too. And since Takuma used Monma's secret weapon against Ei-chan already, a match between Ei-chan and Monma should be very interesting.

Ch. 340

So Ei-chan and Takuma's final set starts. Both of them serve and hold with a game count of 1-1. Audience reactions: both players held, but in the second set, Maruo was kinda superior; sure Maruo takes more time, but he might many points; Egawa's in a difficult current.
Ei-chan feel he's somehow maintained the zone, but he might no longer be at his best. He vows to keep aiming for the top until the match is over, remembering that the situation had suddenly reversed when he'd thought it was already impossible. Regardless of advantage, no one know how it will turn out. The set continues with Takuma's service. In a corner of his mind, Takuma's aware of Ike and Natchan watching. He doesn't want to show a lame side of himself, even if there's no point in looking cool at this late a time. Takuma's serve to the center is clocked at 178 kph. Ei-chan returns it, noting the slower speed, which he considers a chance. Takuma believes his fast serves are still lacking and even if they go in, his opponent is already used to the speed. Because of the slow pace, Ei-chan hits a ball that sinks fast to the feet of Takuma, who's trying to get to the net. Takuma's return goes into the net. 0-15. Takuma wonders if his serve had been weak. The audience comments on Ei-chan's control and how he'd hit the ball pinpoint to a hard-to-hit spot on (Takuma's?) dominant side.
Play continues with a rally and Ei-chan goes for a precision shot at an acute angle. Takuma dives for the ball and somehow reaches it. 15-15. (See pic 1 in mangakansou.) The audience erupts over both Ei-chan's shot and Takuma's dive. Ei-chan notes that Takuma's movement is improving a bit, that even though his serve isn't (yet) normal, the suppleness of Takuma's movement has returned. Since that delicate touch is one of Takuma's strong weapons, Ei-chan tells himself to pay special attention to it. Takuma thinks he'd made a commotion (probably referring to his dive) but thinks his movement isn't bad and he's able to move easily in this game. He adds that nothing has changed but... Then he corrects himself: he realized he's lame (uncool). He thinks that if his improvement is due to that, he'll say any number of times: I'm not cool! (or "I'm cool...Not!") Takuma's next serve is a flat wide, clocked at 195 kph. Ei-chan's return goes into the net. 30-15. Ei-chan notes that the serve was good and that as the set has gone on, Takuma's condition has been steadily improving. Takuma realizes that until just a while ago, even if Ei-chan simply touched his serve, Takuma would get irritated (apparently his pride was touched); now he's stopped worrying about it and apparently has lowered his expectations for himself. He wonders if it's the result of "I'm lame." He counts it as good, not getting unnecessarily irritated. So Takuma tosses the ball and hits his serve to the rhythm of "I'm not cool!" The serve to the center, clocked at 201 kph, is an ace. 40-15.

Takuma thinks it's crude (unsophisticated), but the somewhat unusual rhythm is good. Ei-chan thinks the ace Takuma finally got wasn't as fast as those during the second set, but the rhythm is different: by appearance, it has a sense of stability; it's starting to go in in all actual conditions; it's not a return to his perfect form; he'd fixed it from the foundation with a different serve. The next serve is a fault. Though it went out, Ei-chan thinks it was a good serve. The second serve is wide. Ei-chan thinks he has to attack the second serve and sink it strongly. Takuma goes forward and returns the ball. Ei-chan hits it down the line and gets it past Takuma's side. (See pic 2 in mangakansou.) 40-30. The point reaffirms for Ei-chan that his condition is also good. Takuma shrugs it off with the thought that it's inevitable because he's uncool. Play continues with Ei-chan's return. Takuma comes forward and puts the ball away with a volley, so he holds. Takuma thinks it doesn't make sense, but if his condition is improving, anything is fine. Ei-chan thinks that with just this much improvement in Takuma's condition, he (Ei-chan) couldn't break, that the gears that should have gone off completely had been fixed in just two service games. He concludes that this is Takuma, then corrects himself: it's better to think that the restored Takuma is better than he was before. Even then, Ei-chan intends to win. End of chapter. Ch.341 is titled ... "Fatal" or "Mortal" or "Deadly." Eek! I don't like the sound of it! Well, the final set is at 2-1 and Takuma has recovered. Dang. Looks like it will be another epic final set to the first to lead by two games. More time to draw a crowd, then. EDIT: On the other hand, according to the mangakansou poster, the teaser for ch.341 is "In the next issue, the final set will already (head) for the climax!" So the mangaka might skip the play-by-play art for a summary instead. Or maybe the chapter will end just before the climax?

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Additional details: The chapter opens with Kanda in the players' lounge, using one of the laptops there to check up on the status of the others. He's surprised to learn that Ei-chan's match is still in progress and that it's entered the final set. Oh, and according to the page Kanda checked, Monma was currently leading 5-1 in the first set. The score for Ei-chan's match was 6-4, 5-7, 1-0 at the time. Ei-chan's shot that sank quickly was aimed at Takuma's body and at that time Takuma's movement was still rather stiff. That was during the first serve of Takuma's second service game in the final set and Takuma was still thinking he didn't want to show Ike and Natchan his lame side.

Ch. 341

Since Takuma held his serve, the chapter starts with score for the final set at 2-1 with Takuma leading. The audience believe that the momentum is still with Ei-chan, but that Takuma is also starting to recover his original form. Ei-chan realizes that Takuma has basically changed his serve, beginning with the most important rhythm and that Takuma has calmed down. He cautions himself that he should think of it as Takuma's having recovered in the true sense. Ei-chan's service game starts. After Takuma's return, he aggressively goes to the net. Seeing that, Ei-chan hits a fast ball that sinks. Takuma's return ball is side out. 15-0. Ei-chan recognizes his danger: with the improvement in Takuma's serve rhythm, the rhythm has emerged in his volley and everything. Takuma also notices his own improvement and is able to shrug off the error. Play continues and Takuma hits a strong shot in return. Ei-chan returns it, thinking Takuma's getting excessive. Takuma puts away the ball with a backhand jackknife (see pic 1 on mangakansou). 15-15. The jackknife gets the audience excited. Ei-chan notes that with the improvement of Takuma's condition, he's pulling off his strong patterns. However, Ei-chan has memorized Takuma's aggressive patterns as much as possible, so what's left is watching Takuma and judging the moment. Play continues with a

rally that Ei-chan decides with a drop shot. 30-15. Ei-chan feels his sensitivity has been sharpened and he's maintaining his state when concentrating, and he's steadily/rapidly improving—so much that it's scary. He takes the point with a ground stroke to a deep spot. 40-15. In the next rally, Takuma goes to the net and his volley goes out, bringing the score for the final set to 2-2. In Takuma's service, he continues using the "I'm not cool" rhythm when serving. He acknowledges it might be foolish, but that's his current rhythm and if it works, it's fine. After the serve, Takuma volleys and takes the point. 15-0. Takuma thinks that this degree of foolishness might be just right for dumping his ingrained, worthless pride. Ei-chan returns the next serve, noting that it's steadily improving but not to the extent that he doesn't touch it like earlier. Ei-chan closely watches the racket and the hand/arm motion of Takuma, who'd gone to the net, and concludes he'll touch this one too. He thinks that regardless of the pinch (tight spot), if he can touch the ball, he can compete and aim to turn the tables using control. He gets the ball past Takuma. 15-15. The reporter Miyamoto is impressed by the match. Takuma wonders if his serve had been weak or if his volleys lacked variety. Then he concludes it was neither: Ei-chan is skillful. He remembers that even the coach(es) thought well of Ei-chan's strategy and technique. So to overcome the genuine threat before him, Takuma decides to attack! The next serve judged a fault. Ei-chan thinks this sort of desperate Takuma who disregards appearances is a first. One break will be deadly. (Okay, there's the title of the chapter.) Ei-chan's return goes into the net. 30-15. Ei-chan reminds himself he has to pay attention to this sort of thing. Takuma puts away the next ball with a volley. 40-15. Then Takuma hits the ball into the net. 40-30. Play continues with a rally. Takuma's at the net and Ei-chan sends the ball to Takuma's side. Takuma extends his arm and volleys. Ei-chan hits a lob to Takuma's backhand. Takuma smashes. Ei-chan manages to touch the ball (see pic 2 on mangakansou), but it's out. End of chapter, so the score is 3-2. The title of the next chapter is "Famous Match." In other words, an epic match?

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Correction to the summary of ch.341, it's not that Takuma remembers that even the coach(es) thought well of Ei-chan's strategy and technique. Takuma actually tells himself he should consider Ei-chan's strategy and technique as if he's the coach (the art shows Coach Miura)—in other words, he acknowledges Ei-chan's strategy and technique as being that good. I forgot that the second to the last page had the announcement of the score: 3-2. The teaser blurb for the next chapter is "Both players deploy their best tennis." Incidentally, ch.341 came out in issue 21/22, which counts as a double issue. Ch.342 will be in issue 23, which goes on sale May 1.

Ch. 342

So ch.342 starts with Takuma's taking the point with a high backhand volley off Ei-chan's lob. Game count: 3-2, Takuma leads. The crowd goes wild: this match is the absolute best in the competition, isn't it?; it's only the second round, though; Egawa's serve-and-volley is too cool!; Maruo's change of pace is more elegant!; if the two follow Ike, Japanese tennis is bound to change!; Egawa, charge ahead in the world and clear the path for serve-and-volley!; if it's Maruo, he can pull off a giant killing! People start applauding. Ei-chan's amazed, comparing the audience response to when he went up against Ide. But because he's had a similar experience, he'll leverage it by turning great pressure into great strength. Takuma acknowledges that his opponent isn't just scraping by. Whether or not he's capable of Takuma's tennis, Ei-chan...isn't bad. He thinks that his tennis will become more of getting to the net quickly just when he can in return games (I guess he won't go to the net

forcibly) and that it will also be easier to deploy power to decide the contest. Play continues with Ei-chan's service game. Ei-chan's pulse pounds. He thinks the pressure is beyond what he's accustomed to, but he should be fine. He reminds himself that in the final set, one break will decide the outcome, because it's a close fight that he's staking his life (future) on. He gets a straight past Takuma's side. 15-0. Play continues. The previous loss to Takuma crosses Ei-chan's mind and he affirms that he's definitely shortened the distance to Takuma now. Ei-chan holds his service. Game count: 3-3. During Takuma's next service game, Takuma thinks that nonetheless, of course he'll turn stiff, because he's being chased (or cornered) by a kouhai with 3 years of tennis experience. And such an uncool self also agrees. And he decides to go to the net. Takuma's 209 kph serve to the center is returned by Ei-chan, but Takuma takes the point with a volley (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Everyone thinks Takuma's made a perfect recovery. Takuma holds. Ei-chan writes in his notebook that he's had continuous losses to Araya and Nabae who will become pros. He wasn't able to win the All-Japan Junior, which was his objective. That's why he had no confidence in just winning and making a living in the pro world. Ei-
chan's service game starts. His train of thought continues "but even so when I advanced, there were things I was able to do. I absorbed all sorts of things from lots of people and got one level stronger! In this tournament too, from the prelims to here, I competed against people who make a living as pros because I was able to absorb techniques to make a living as a pro from those people. What's more, I've gotten a bit stronger. That's why I'm here now!" He holds his serve. Game count: 4-4. In Takuma's service game, Ei-chan thinks that for the strongest serve in Japan, he'll counter it with his situational awareness, reactions, and insight based on his data; for the physical ability and power, he'll counter them with control. He's applying his tennis and he isn't losing to the JTA ranked 9. The two display fierce offense and defense. Ei-chan thinks that if he's capable of this sort of match, he may turn pro (see pic 2 on mangakansou), then he corrects himself, wondering what he's saying. Takuma's next serve, clocked at 222 kph, is an ace (see pic 3 on mangakansou). Game count: 5-4 with Takuma leading. Ei-chan shrugs off the ace as "it can't be helped," but he thinks he has grasped Takuma's revised serve rhythm considerably. Next is a hold while somehow making sure not to allow Takuma to go to the net, and after that a break. If Takuma breaks him in the next, then it's Takuma's win (looks like Ei-chan's experience in the first set comes into play here). He expects that Takuma will naturally start attacking at top gear. It's exactly at such a time that the current Takuma's true nature ought to be visible. Ei-chan decides to watch Takuma closely and win with that data. Chapter end. The title of the next chapter is "Boundary Line." The blurb says "Victory, defeat, both are imminent!"

Ch. 343

Ch.343 opens with the score for the final set at 5-4. If Takuma breaks Ei-chan, it will be his win. If Ei-chan has frequent errors or bad luck, the match is over. No matter how good one's condition is, continuing to focus on the opponent's movements while calmly understanding one's own situation amidst this much tension is hard. Ei-chan faults on his first serve. Ei-chan takes a deep breath, then calls to mind the contents he'd written in his notebook: the main causes of much of the pressure and the numerous occasions he'd turned those to his advantage. From his personal experience, he images a specific major success that depended on great pressure. He'll bend like a whip, relaxing moderately, rather than that image of the body stiffening due to pressure. By doing so,
he will shift the pressure in order to gain control of the distribution of power...and magnify the impact of his power. Ei-chan sends the second serve wide. He set up an ideal situation to be

able to force Takuma along; however, being able to hold his current state of concentration was something that depends on experience and the definite data he's been able to get up to now. Takuma returns. As far as the opposing Takuma is concerned, this game is his biggest chance of being able to win if he breaks. At the same time, if he passes it up, a major pinch awaits him. Ei-chan sends the ball to the right side. When Takuma returns it, he goes to the net. He naturally increases his offense by another gear. He gets to the net first to play using his edge in weapons (a volley). Ei-chan notices Takuma's position and sinks the ball at Takuma's feet. A volley is an extremely delicate shot where reflexive motions due to only a minor stimulation of sensitivity lead to immediate errors. Takuma isn't able to use the center of his racket and his ball is just barely out (see pic 1 on mangakansou). 15-0. On the other hand, if the conditions are satisfied, it's more overwhelmingly decisive than a ground stroke. Takuma takes the next point with a volley. 15-15. Takuma thinks he should go to the net faster...if possible, since it's a return game. The sharpness of the volley of Takuma who escaped from spinning his wheels emotionally has obviously continued to improve. Takuma steadily goes to the net to play. However, the ball slips by him on the side (see pic 2 on mangakansou). Takuma chides himself for insufficient effort, telling himself he should go to the net more forcibly. The match continues. While Takuma's also aware he's being too pushy...the attack with its fast level that gives no time to change the pace was a quite a threat to Ei-chan. Takuma goes to the net, planing to compete with a first volley. Ei-chan thinks above is impossible, but if he can control a strong blow at 1/64, he can get the ball past Takuma. Ei-chan succeeds and holds his service. 5-5. Ei-chan welcomes the win but acknowledges the danger in continuing to get pulled into Takuma's pace. In Takuma's service game, he also faults on his first serve. Ei-chan's strongly aware that in 40% of Takuma's second serves, Takuma goes forward with a service dash, but also that there are times when Takuma doesn't go forward. Ei-chan thinks that in serve and volley, deciding in advance whether or not to go to the net should also be decided
based on something in the second time. For Ei-chan, not wanting Takuma to go to the net...if Takuma goes to the net on the second serve...he has to give Takuma the impression it's better not to go to the net. Therefore, even if he's taking a big risk... Ei-chan pulls off a return ace on Takuma who'd made a service dash. 0-15. However, Takuma's thinking is different from the second set. The stability of his serve has started to turn the gears of his entire tennis. He takes the next point with an ace wide clocked at 218 kph. 15-15. Ei-chan shrugs it off since Takuma converts around 10% of his serves to aces. Of the 50% of the first serves Ei-chan somehow touches, he wants to get a point on around 40% of them. Then from the remaining 40% of Takuma's second serves, he'll manage to get a point with over 80% probability. If he can do this, theoretically he can get points on over 50%, so he calculates that he can take a game at some point. Ei-chan admits it won't go according to his calculations, but it will result in his not hesitating about how he set his goal. Because of that, he can concentrate on his opponent's movements and his tennis will improve further. Ei-chan uses the data he's gathered to predict Takuma's second serve and attacks it thoroughly because the power is slightly less, so the probability of getting a point on Takuma's second serves is higher than on his first serves. And when he returns Takuma's first serve, Takuma can put the ball away with a volley. The match continues and Takuma holds. 6-5.
Excessively strong pressure often serves to hamper the normal movement of players. However, the two make it their strength rather than resisting it. They were presenting a threat to their opponent's serve and holding their own service. In this state of extreme tension, devoting the best in both players accumulated all sorts of mutual conditions because the balance was preserved. There was the aspect of opponent's play supporting one's self.

Important factors, such as physical and mental fatigue along with the passage of time to that point, start to take their toll. The game count is 9-9 (see pics 3 and 4 on mangakansou). This score, which displayed an eerie balance, was indicating the immediate collapse of this balance, which had remained in this match until the very end, with just a few things. End of chapter.
The title of ch.344 is "Spirituality" or "Mentality." Well, there's the long epic slog. And it looks like sudden death in the next chapter. Right now Ei-chan seems more tired than Takuma; however, he still looks focused and he's had the stamina training in Florida. And if the title of the next chapter is "mentality," I'd bet on Ei-chan having more mental strength than Takuma.

Ch. 344
So ch.344 opens with both sides having held their service for 9 games each. It's now Takuma's service. Takuma acknowledges that Ei-chan is strong; he had expected this, but that Ei-chan would be strong enough to go that far and hang in there so persistently as usual. He thinks that if Ei-chan aspires to become a pro, without satisfactory results, Ei-chan can only play there, but ordinarily Ei-chan wouldn't get that far. Then Takuma corrects himself: Ei-chan persistence has been unusual since long ago. Ei-chan thinks Takuma's personality is a more whimsical by nature. Even though it wouldn't be strange for him to display waves of good and bad condition if the match is drawn out, for Takuma to be able to sustain his good condition for so long and not crumble...Ei-chan wonders if that is the barrier for top pros. Takuma thinks that Ei-chan is amazing to have gotten that far through compiling his notes, that Ei-chan had done what Takuma had considered absolutely impossible, that Ei-chan had completely overturned common sense. He thinks that the biggest threat at the last moment is that persistence. He decides to face Ei-chan so that he won't be misread (or be mistaken for someone else) again. Ei-chan mentally asks someone to stop it already and please let Ei-chan win. Takuma sends his first serve wide: How's that? (see pic 1 on mangakansou) Ei-chan had predicted it correctly. He returns it deep to the side with a winner...or so it seemed. However, the umpire judged the serve a fault. Ei-chan though it had been in, so he queries the umpire who confirms it was a fault and calls for a second serve. Some of the audience thinks it had been in, but of course their opinions don't count. Even Takuma believes it had been in, but since Ei-chan had predicted it and returned it with a winner, Takuma is grateful for the umpire's misjudgment. Ei-chan regrets the decision since he'd hit a winner, but he takes a deep breath and concentrates on the second serve since it's a chance. Takuma notices Ei-chan's display of persistence. Both nervousness and fatigue at the peak of the most important point... he faces up in order to make those (nervousness and fatigue?) provisions even if the umpire makes an erroneous call here. Ei-chan continues to focus purely on his objective only, nothing else. Takuma believes this is Ei-chan's true strength, especially now in the endless hell of the serve-hold, that particularly works to Ei-chan advantage (so Takuma continues to learn from Ei-chan here!). As Takuma wonders how to handle that, the umpire calls the 15 seconds warning. Takuma chides himself for overthinking, then tells himself to focus on recovering in the disadvantageous second serve. He aims wide, but his serve is faults. Double fault: 0-15. Ei-chan exults. This time it wasn't simply luck but the effect of his continuous attacks on Takuma's second serves up to now (so Ei-chan apparently considers it a forced error) and the product of not exhausting his concentration, no matter what happens. He thinks he'll leverage this and break. Takuma had put in (more? too much?) strength to try to counter his disadvantage. So he reminds himself not to think negatively since the score isn't unfavorable. The situation isn't like a little while ago where he could settle it foolishly with a

strong fast ball, but if he preserves the rhythm of his current serve, he can hold his serve even if its decisiveness is insufficient. Then he can break at some point without rushing. He may bet on his timing and end the match before it turns into the survival of a dire situation. Takuma also faults on the next serve. Takuma thinks two balls isn't bad, but he won't double (fault?) again. Ei-chan notes it will be another second serve and that the outcome had started to depend on it since the game 5-4, so an obvious trend has emerged in Takuma's strokes: the chances of Takuma's hitting a forehand is increasing. Takuma's backhand is a strong point that's also decisive, but at a critical moment, Takuma relies on his forehand. Ei-chan decides to leverage this data. Takuma's next serve is to the center, clocked at 170 kph. When Ei-chan sees that Takuma didn't go to the net, he returns the ball with a strong blow using 1/81 control to a tricky spot where Takuma might be able to go around and cut in with his forehand (see pic 2 on mangakansou).
Takuma returns it with his forehand. Ei-chan puts the ball away with a strong blow using his backhand. Wait, that isn't logical, given the context, so maybe it's a strong blow to Takuma's backhand? Anyhow, the score is 0-30. Takuma notes his danger. Since the umpire's mistake, his tendency is self-destructive. His timidity over making errors is being attacked. The main point is that Takuma is afraid of Ei-chan's persistence. If he compares their perseverance, he doesn't feel he can defeat Ei-chan. The actual problem is that he can't increase the risk on his first serve and he can't reduce the risk on his second serve. Even before, he has difficulty going to the net, and if he stays at the baseline, Ei-chan sends the ball to a nasty spot. "Give me a break! Geez! It's not like I'm an idiot or soft in the head that I'd follow the lead of such a troublesome guy..." Takuma concludes he doesn't need to trump Ei-chan's ability to concentrate. If the match drags on, Ei-chan would have the advantage while Takuma would have the advantage in in short decisive battle. He decides to risk everything on these two games; beyond that he doesn't know. He'll compete with his explosive power. Takuma's next serve wide, clocked at 230 kph, is judged a fault. Ei-chan had touched it with his racket and it had taken all he had. The second serve is to the center, and it's also out. Double fault: 0-40. The onlookers wonder what's wrong, whether Takuma snapped (or maybe is worn out). Someone comments that this is Ei-chan's triple break point (Ei-chan has three chances to break Takuma's service). Ike thinks Takuma's pushing his serve really close, but he hasn't snapped (isn't worn out?). Ike also thinks Ei-chan has the advantage, but it would be better if Ei-chan were cautious at this point. Takuma thinks it's the worst but within his expectations; he hopes to recover. Ei-chan thinks he has three points where he has chance to break but he can decide it with one point. Takuma's intense serve is clocked at 233 kph. It flies off Ei-chan's racket (see pic 3 on mangakansou). The audience cheer the appearance of Takuma's strong fast ball. They say that when it begins to go in, Takuma can turn the tables on Ei-chan immediately. Ei-chan marvels at the serve's stability in form at that speed. He thinks, "This is it. I have to break here." End of chapter. The title of ch.345 is "Tendency." I wonder if that refers to Takuma's tendency to rely on
his forehand at critical moments, which Ei-chan identified in this chapter. Anyhow, Takuma's back to hitting super-fast serves and Ei-chan's able to meet them, at least. From pic 3, it looks like he's just a bit behind in the timing. If he's able to break Takuma at this point, when Takuma is hitting his superfast serves, no one can argue that Ei-chan's win is a fluke. Maybe Ei-chan will establish a rep as one of the best returners in Japan.
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Corrections to the spoiler summary: Ei-chan thinks he can't break down Takuma even though Ei-chan has been able to maintain his good condition for so long, and he wonders if that is the wall of top pros. So it turns out that to get to 0-30, Ei-chan does put the ball away

with a strong blow using his backhand. It seems that his tactic was to use a strong blow and invite Takuma to add to the force by allowing Takuma to return it with a forehand shot, then Ei-chan adds even more momentum to the ball with a jump shot, so the ball ends up too fast for Takuma to react to. The "Give me a break! Geez!" happens just before Takuma bounces the ball high, then snatches it out of the air on its way down. Whoa! That 233 kph serve of Takuma's was so strong Ei-chan lost his grip on his racket. Looks like Ei-chan will need a two-handed grip to deal with those serves. The teaser blurb for the next chapter is "Accelerating toward the Conclusion!"

Ch. 345

So it's the final set with the game count tied 9-9. In Takuma's service, there have been two double faults, and with an intense serve, Takuma has recovered from one break point, bringing the score to 15-40. Himeko shouts for Ei-chan to break here with one point. Yukichi adds that special care is needed; he feels Takuma's serve is still making a come-back. Kageyama cheers Ei-chan on. Holding her breath, Ei-chan's mom watches attentively. Ike thinks that in the middle of the game, Takuma's appearance made a complete turnaround. He believes it's likely Takuma doesn't want a drawn-out game and is aiming for a short decisive battle. He notes that Takuma's first serve even repels Ei-chan's racket. A smile floats on Ike's lips. He apparently concludes this (game) is the final contest (see pic 1 on mangakansou). [This implies that whoever wins this game will win the match.] Takuma thinks that whether it's a break point or he's in a pinch is irrelevant. He'll focus all his nerves on just the serve before him, then if it goes in, on just the first volley. Normally, he allows himself to focus all his nerves on just the ball before him. In the end, he'll put it away at the net. He decides that the balance up to now has been Ei-chan's evolution, but from here on it will be his evolution. He'll completely release all his limiters—all balls at full power until he uses up everything he has! [For some reason, I got a flash to an anime where someone shouts "Release all safety locks!"] Ei-chan seems to sense Takuma's determination because a chill runs through Ei-chan. Whatever the circumstances, a 230+ kph serve being stable is unthinkable. But he thinks they'll all start to go in. So he'll read his data...watch Takuma's movements, and decide at the end. He watches Takuma's serve closely. He manages to react to the 200 kph serve to the center and return it, aiming for a good spot. However, Takuma goes to the net and puts the ball away with a volley. So the score should be 30-40. Takuma strikes a triumphant pose. The audience marvels at his lightning speed. Takuma thinks that good or bad is for later. He'll focus on the next one hit. Ei-chan's analysis: From a 230 kph flat, it's a 200 kph spin...that superb course in addition the 30 kph difference in superfast balls...then a volley without hesitation...This is bad...He's a Takuma-san I haven't experienced up to now...if he holds with this flow, the next will be dangerous. If I enter my service game with this (game) taken from me...I'm not confident I can continue concentrating on just Takuma-san's movements. If that happens, my performance will drop immediately. This is it. I don't current have the upper hand; rather, this is the critical moment. If I let this get away, I won't have any more break points. I can only play now! Takuma tosses the ball. At that moment, Ei-chan moves back slightly; even Takuma is surprised. Then Ei-chan rushes to the center. However, Takuma's serve is wide (see pic 2 on mangakansou), but it's judged a fault. Ei-chan's relieved since his prediction was off. The crowd is in an uproar because Ei-chan had gone in the wrong direction; someone thinks Ei-chan had gambled; someone else says (Takuma?) is playing well at this last moment. Ike laughs but notes that Ei-chan had used a forehand slice grip.

Takuma mentally cusses Ei-chan. He thinks that in this situation, Ei-chan had staked the match on Takuma's first serve, using that fast forehand slice of Ei-chan's. He'd never imagined that just before the impact, he would notice a strange motion. He hadn't anticipated such a development. Even so, what! Ei-chan's damn guts [to pull such a move?]...is somehow already...starting to be laughable...[!] Ei-chan sets up to challenge the second serve. Takuma thinks that sure enough, Ei-chan pisses him off. Takuma sends the serve to the center and goes to the net, thinking that he'll put away the ball there. Ei-chan returns the ball, noting that the serve is fast and the course is also good. Takuma returns the ball.
Ei-chan plans: Takuma was fast in getting to the net. Both sides are narrow...Above is also a high risk...But he can only aim unreasonably...He'll control the ball and try to get it through the eye of a needle. He hits an angle shot to the corner (see pic 3 on mangakansou). Takuma extends his arm and returns the ball. The crowd marvels that Takuma reached it and that [Ei-chan's ball?] was going to a good spot. Ei-chan runs. Takuma is defiant: Next! If it's coming, come on! Ei-chan extends his arm. Seeing the racket face, Takuma concludes the next can only be a slice. However, Ei-chan hits a lob [Hah! Asano's slice lob!], ordering it to go over. Takuma's surprised. End of chapter. The title for ch.346 is "Decisive Blow."
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I found Japanese RAWs, so a few corrections to the spoiler summary: When Ike thinks Takuma is aiming for a short decisive battle, he thinks that Takuma's first serve goes so far as to repel Ei-chan's racket; it's not that Takuma flicks his racket. When Ei-chan's prediction was off, Ike laughed but noticed Ei-chan's grip was for a forehand slice. Takuma noted the same thing. He thinks Ei-chan had staked the match on Takuma's first serve, using that fast forehand slice of Ei-chan's. I've updated the summary to reflect these. Oh, and the teaser blurb for the next chapter is "Will it result in a break!?" I just checked ch.303 where Asano first hit a slice lob. According to Ei-chan, a slice lob bounces less than the usual lob. So if Ei-chan's slice lob is too high for Takuma to reach, assuming the lob is in and Takuma catches up with it, Takuma probably won't be able to
smash it the way he'd smashed Ei-chan's usual lobs. Since the bounce is lower, Takuma's return risks going into the net, unless he floats the ball. And since Takuma will be at the baseline, Ei-chan has a chance of putting the ball away with a volley. Of course, it would be kinda funny if Takuma catches up with the ball, swings expecting it to bounce high, and totally misses it.

Volume 36 Extra: Takuma Graduation
Okay, in the extra of vol.36, it's the day of Takuma's graduation and the ceremony is over. Takuma is approached by the PE teacher Sugisaki who congratulates him on his graduation. Clapping Takuma's shoulder, he notes that Takuma's become a sportsman completely, even his hair is neatly trimmed. Takuma doesn't say much, just stands awkwardly. Sugisaki says he's glad Takuma's a tennis pro. As Sugisaki leaves, he adds that he was bothered by Takuma several times, but he expects Takuma won't be quarreling or smoking again because he's rooting for Takuma. Takuma looks uncomfortable and doesn't say anything, but then bows to Sugisaki who has already turned away. Then two guys kick Takuma's legs in greeting and accuse him of acting like a good kid. Takuma catches one in a choke hold and grabs the collar of the second guy. A third guy takes a picture of them. The picture-taker comments that Takuma is an unexpectedly good kid, given his appearance and adds that he'd never seen Takuma smoking. Smirking, the first two chime in, in agreement. Takuma tells them to shut up, that Sugisaki was probably referring to the two of them. The three conclude that if Takuma hadn't been truant, they wouldn't have become such good friends.

They remember how Takuma was lousy at compromising at games, he'd get pissed off right away, and they'd even get into fights with other schools at game centers. One adds that he's bored by Takuma's love for games. Takuma gets irked, pointing out that it's like he's the principal offender. The three sober up, saying Takuma has to live seriously from now on, delinquent behavior by a professional athlete would be bad, and reminding him he's the tennis player Egawa Takuma. Takuma asks about them. The first says he's going on to university, the second to a vocational school for social service, and the third to a Kansai university. Takuma's surprised and comments that they'd chosen their careers properly. They counter that they don't want to hear that from him, that they'd been worried about him. Takuma laughs.
Then the freckled guy (Mikkun) is hailed by a girl, so he takes his leave. One of the remaining two notes they're flirting, so the girl is apparently Mikkun's girlfriend. Someone tells Mikkun he'll "Line" (yes, it said "Line," not Vine) him later. Then the other two take their leave, one suggesting that they play once in a while even if they're busy. The last one orders Takuma to tell him when Takuma will appear on TV. Takuma says to himself that by "TV," isn't that playing on a Grand Slam level? He thinks there's absolutely no way to know (by implication whether Takuma would get that far). Takuma's phone rings. It's Monma calling. He says his practice partner suddenly couldn't come, so he asks whether Takuma is free today. Takuma says he'll go. They arrange to meet at the National Training Center at 1800H (6 p.m.). Takuma looks back, then thinks he'll go as far as he can go. The end.

Ch. 346
So Ei-chan hits the lob with Takuma at the net. Takuma thinks Ei-chan's got guts. Ei-chan thinks Takuma's coming forward more than usual and he orders the ball to pass over Takuma. Takuma concludes that if he tries to jump, he won't reach the ball, so he tsks and rushes to the baseline. Ei-chan thinks it worked and he now has the advantage; he anticipates the return and intends to put the ball away with one blow. While thinking that, he rushes to the net. Takuma returns the ball with his backhand coming down. Takuma thinks he'll strike first to be able to checkmate Ei-chan first (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan's surprised by the fast timing. He extends his arm and returns the ball with a successful volley on the tip of his racket (not sure if that means he hit the ball with the frame). Then the ball strikes the white band of the net, then floats... The ball lands on Takuma's side (see pic 2 on mangakansou). Game, Maruo, 10-9, final set. The audience erupts. Kageyama cheers. Yukichi says that if Ei-chan hold his service, he'll win. Coach Aoi thinks that it was risky and that Takuma might have one point late in becoming serious. He also concludes that no matter what Ei-chan decides, his stopping Takuma's vigorous momentum here is big. Takuma doesn't say anything. Ei-chan acknowledges he's finally broken Takuma, but it still doesn't mean he's won. He expects Takuma to be a threat in the next game. Ei-chan's being able to break now isn't just because he made the pressure into a weapon
but because he deliberately challenged Takuma's serves and smashes. Ei-chan can't keep saying he wants to overcome that serve-and-volley. What's important now is the courage to completely drown out the anxiety toward Takuma that's at his core. The umpire calls time. As Ei-chan takes his position to serve, he thinks it's not that he'll get Takuma to let him (Ei-chan) win, he'll do it intending to knock Takuma down (see pic 3 on mangakansou). Takuma thinks he'll take the next three games and turn the tables. So the 20th game in the final set starts. First, Takuma goes to the net and puts away the ball with a volley. 0-15. Ei-chan faces Takuma with an attitude he hasn't had up to now: the desire of "I want to surpass him" changes to "I will defeat him." Ei-chan takes the next point with a drop shot. 15-15. Takuma

takes the next with a ground stroke deep to the side. 15-30. That was something big due to the confidence Ei-chan gained while playing in this match. Ei-chan puts away the next with a volley. 30-30. He gets the ball past the side of Takuma who had tried to go to the net. 40-30. In the first set, he had continued to apply pressure even though it was taken from him. In the second set, he'd struggled to the very end even though he was on the brink of being cornered and was resigned to a loss. Then in the final set, he'd continued to hold, relying on his concentration... Takuma returns the ball. Ei-chan takes a forehand pose. Watching that closely, Takuma predicts a down-the-line shot, but Ei-chan hits a cross (see pic 4 on mangakansou). From beginning to end, the strong motivation of wanting to become a pro had continued to support Ei-chan. It's been over 3 hours since the start...Finally, Ei-chan accomplished the game that disproves this big difference in ability. Game, set, and match won by Maruo. Count: 4-6, 7-5, 11-9. End of chapter. The title for ch.347 is "Response."

Ch. 347

So at the end of a fierce fight, Ei-chan defeats Takuma. Yukichi's exultant that Ei-chan finally won over Takuma. The crowd erupts over how a high school student who'd come up through the qualifiers had come from behind to defeat Takuma who had been favored to win: amazing...I saw an amazing match!; this match was absolutely the best match in the tournament now!; Egawa was also good!

Smiling, Coach Aoi marvels that that guy seriously did it! Okada: "Unbelievable..." Ei-chan's mom has an expression of disbelief. Yukichi's screaming with excitement. Kageyama's kind of in shock; he'd believed that Ei-chan would eventually do amazing things but... Himeko is moved to tears. When she describes Ei-chan as "cool," Kageyama gasps. Natchan shouts "Ei-chan!" Ei-chan himself looks surprised and disbelieving. He notices that Takuma had approached the net for the post-match handshake. He immediately tries to run but collapses completely. The audience suddenly bursts out in laughter at his condition. Ei-chan thinks his powers of concentration had run out; his legs are at their very limit. Takuma extends his hand for the handshake, wondering that he'd lost to this guy. Taking Takuma's hand, Ei-chan apologizes and thanks Takuma for everything, and then he bows very deeply to him (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Takuma gives a sigh, flicks the hand that was held (can't tell if he flicks his hand or Ei-chan's), then says he'll crush Ei-chan next time. Ei-chan raises his head. "Next time..." Takuma replies, "You're going pro, aren't you?" Takuma jerks his chin as if saying "Look at the audience." The words of praise and applause from the audience resounds non-stop: Maruo! Nice fight! It was interesting!; win the championship the same way!; Maruo-kun, look over here!; you took down Egawa well with that physique!; I'll root for you next time too!; I'll follow you from now on!; your play was also riveting, it was the best! Ei-chan replies forcefully: "...Right!" (see pic 2 on mangakansou) Takuma tells Ei-chan that if he's coming, it'd better be soon. Takuma doesn't want Ei-chan quitting while he's ahead, so Takuma expects Ei-chan to say it. (I think Takuma is talking about Ei-chan's decision to go pro.) Ei-chan agrees. The reporter Miyamoto thinks this event might possibly stir the Japanese tennis world a bit. Coach Miura gives a big sigh and acknowledges it was Ei-chan's fierce tenacity. Ike points out that Ei-chan had taken years to study Takuma; however, he also notes that the way Ei-chan had thoroughly read that serve of Takuma's was brilliant. Coach Miura thinks that Takuma who's rising rapidly in world ranking will be thoroughly marked even internationally, and that this loss will undoubtedly turn into a big source of encouragement (probably for Takuma's opponents), so Coach Miura concludes a post-match review is necessary. Ike excuses himself, saying he has one more job to do. Coach Miura

acknowledges his departure. Everyone goes to meet Ei-chan as he leaves the court. Kageyama tells him he'd thought his heart would jump. Himeko congratulates Ei-chan. Yukichi's all "Aniki!" While crying, Yukichi relates how he'd seen the fight between the beginner Ei-chan and the scary Takuma, and halfway through, he'd wondered if it's impossible since Takuma's monstrously strong...however, Ei-chan had fought on without giving up and even won... Ei-chan thanks Yukichi for his support. Natchan chuckles and says it turned out as she'd predicted (see pic 3 on mangakansou). Apparently because she's elated, Ei-chan deduces and she confirms that she'd won her match too. Ei-chan congratulates her, and then he notices his mom who's still in shock: "Unbelievable...You're this...Really..." After Ei-chan confirms this, she asks if he's now No.8 since he'd defeated the No.9 in Japan, and he might be able to make it as a pro. Ei-chan says it's not that simple and explains how ranking is based on winning matches within a year. He adds that this match is his best result. Coach Aoi points out that Ei-chan had guided his best result himself and had defeated Takuma with just his own power. Ei-chan turns to Coach Aoi, saying there's something he wanted to consult Coach Aoi about: he'd wondered whether there are more things he can do in order to turn pro. Scene switch. Takuma returns to the players lounge. A clerk goes up to him there. Apparently the clerk had made a request of Takuma before the match and felt awkward because of Takuma's loss; he asks Takuma if Takuma is still fine with going through with the request. Takuma says he's fine with it but wonders if it's all right to go through with something like that when he'd lost. He's told that it's work. So what will be held next is a signing session with Ike and Takuma. The two enter the venue to shrill cheering for Ike. Takuma's gets glum that he's with this guy of all people. Ike tells Takuma his expression is scary. Takuma reminds himself that this is also his job. The signing session starts. Guy after guy line up for Takuma: I was moved! I also intend to pursue a career with serve-and-volley; you were cool! I want to become player
Egawa too!; the 241 kph serve was amazing! As another Japanese, it was like a dream! Through all this, Takuma's response is all "Yes...Thanks..." The reaction to Takuma's form even from people passing by: It's the player Egawa who'd been in the match a little while ago; he seems gentler than during the match. The guy in front of Takuma: It had a big impact! The girl in front of Ike: I'm happy to be able to meet you! Ike comments that Takuma's popular, especially with guys. Takuma's dismissive: I wouldn't know, that sort of thing. Ike continues, "But I understand it too." Takuma: Huh? Ike explains that Takuma's tennis is cool, even from the perspective of Ike, who's also a tennis player (see pic 4 on mangakansou). Takuma replies that even if he's told by Ike, it doesn't ring any bells. Ike's at a loss for words. Scene switch. Ei-chan goes home. His dad gets home and sees Ei-chan at the computer. His dad compliments him with "Aren't you amazing!" then asks what Ei-chan is looking at. Ei-chan explains he's not looking at it but making it. When his dad asks what Ei-chan is making, Ei-chan is kind of hesitant but says it's a resume for turning pro. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Progress." Drat. The reactions I most wanted to see weren't included. EDIT: I think Ike's comment about Ei-chan's having taken years to study Takuma might be foreshadowing that Ei-chan won't have an easy time with his next opponent.

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Found RAWs, so Ei-chan does call the document he's making a "resume." The first page, the one with Ei-chan's picture," the title says "The Challenge for Pros: And in order to respond to sponsorship" and below that "Maruo Eiichirou." The second page is the table of contents:

1. profile

2. competition results (not sure about this because the kanji is blurry)
3. manufacturers currently meeting with as a consumer who comments on products
    - ellesse
    - Prince

According to the thumbnails on the side of the screen, there should be a 4 and 5 after 3. So it looks like Ei-chan's preparing the resume to present to potential sponsors, or it might be his plan on the steps he needs to take to gain sponsorship. More details: Additional audience reaction to Ei-chan's win: it's a stunning upset! Also, Ide gave a loud whistle. Yukichi was screaming "As expected, Aniki's a genius!" When Ei-chan's dad gets home, he asks whether Ei-chan's mom had said that Ei-chan had also won today. She confirms this and adds that Ei-chan came from behind at the last moment. The teaser for the next chapter says "The Serious Start in Preparation for Being a Pro!?"

Ch. 348
After the match with Takuma, Ei-chan thinks there are still things he can do in order to turn pro, and he starts making his resume. His dad asks about it, so Ei-chan points out that even when getting a job with a regular company, a resume is necessary, and a lot of people connected to tennis are coming to the All Japan Championship. So if someone comes who's interested in Ei-chan, Ei-chan can hand it out; conversely, if there's someone Ei-chan's interested in, Ei-chan can immediately hand it over. In order to become a pro, sponsors are necessary. Ei-chan thinks it would be good to have something that provides an overview of Ei-chan when he can meet such people. When he won today, it occurred to him that he shouldn't wait, that he should summon his courage and do something. His dad compares it to Ei-chan's getting a job as a tennis pro. Ei-chan agrees firmly, without hesitation. The two discuss how to make it and put it together. Ei-chan's mom watches them and smiles. The next day is the third day of the All Japan Championship. Ei-chan greets Sudou, the ellesse rep. Sudou gushes about Ei-chan's match with Takuma and says he'd yelled spontaneously when Ei-chan pulled off the upset. Ei-chan immediately hands over his resume, explaining somewhat falteringly that he'd tried to make something like it. Sudou: "What, what? Ho ho...I see...This is good, you know. Actually I was asked by some people yesterday 'What sort of guy is Maruo-kun?' If I had this then, it would have
been simple." Ei-chan's surprised and asks who. Sudou says a guy from a food supplement company and a guy from a gut manufacturer. He asks Ei-chan to leave several copies with him so he can pass them on. Ei-chan's delighted and hands over so many copies. Sudou tells Ei-chan to do his best in today's match as well. Ei-chan leaves happy, thinking that it's amazing, that there really are people interested in him. He plans on handing some copies to Onozawa of Prince too. Ei-chan enters the players lounge and greets Kanda, who's in front of him. Ei-chan says that it seems yesterday's match was amazing. Kanda plays it low-key; he won with a score of 6-4, 4-6, 7-5, and as expected from playing a full set, he got tired. Then Kanda counters with a irritated expression that Ei-chan's match was more amazing. He expects that Ei-chan is the one who will now receive the most attention. Ei-chan: "Eh..." Even the players around them are sneaking peeks at Ei-chan and murmuring: the one who knocked down Egawa is that guy?; I hadn't seen him in the juniors, though. Nabae approaches the two and greets them. He compliments Ei-chan over his win, and asks if Ei-chan's opponent today is Tanemura. Ei-chan confirms this. The 21-year-old Tanemura Minechika is JTA ranked 22nd, and he defeated the 9th seed, Tsudanuma. Ei-chan says he'd investigated Tanemura but doesn't have much data; he asks whether Nabae knows him.

Nabae replies that there aren't many people who know Tanemura, apparently because Tanemura is based in America and hasn't participated much in Japanese tournaments, and it seems Tanemura started participating only recently. Ei-chan thanks Nabae for the info. Kanda points out that even though there's no data on Tanemura, if he's JTA 22, it's all good—since Kanda's opponent is Monma (JTA 2). Then Kanda shrugs it off because he's happy since Monma's the one Kanda wanted the most to try playing against. Ei-chan thinks Monma and Kanda are both the type to play with spirit, so he expects it will turn into a fierce match. Kanda asks whether Nabae's opponent is Arino. Nabae confirms this and adds that Arino is the opponent he'd wanted to play against. He notes that if they advance from 3R, they'll enter the Best 8. "Let's do our best." The three get fired up.
A short distance away at the information desk are Watanabe (3rd seed), Haketa (5th seed), and Arino (6th seed) (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Arino apparently overheard Nabae because he says, "He said 'let's do our best.'" Watanabe's just "so?" But Arino points out that doing one's best is obvious, so do you normally say that? Haketa replies that they're still high school students and not even pros, so it's fine, nothing remarkable. Arino argues that for 3 high school students to make it to Best 16 is an extraordinary situation. Haketa notes that it's said the Ike generation is a golden age, and he adds that it's starting to feel more and more true. Arino says his next opponent is Nabae who's the first in the list, so he'll be able to experience it one step ahead, then there's Kanda, who he's heard of, but who's Maruo? Haketa replies that he (Ei-chan) is said to be a supernova, and adds, "if you're wondering what sort of guy defeated Egawa, he's cute (or charming or adorable)." Arino counters that a guy who can return Egawa's serves to that extent isn't cute. Watanabe says he (probably meaning Haketa) is happy-go-lucky; Watanabe points out that while the emergence of strong guys is a good thing for the tennis world, shouldn't they (the three of them) have a sense of danger? There are several years between Ike and Monma, but soon more than half of the A Team of the national team, within the framework of 7, will be of the Ike generation. If the 3 high school students in this round make it to the Best 8 or beyond, they can be expected to join the B Team of alternates. If they're (probably Watanabe et al.) proud of being on the national team, it's a position they absolutely can't hand over. Arino replies that he knows that. Haketa adds that it goes without saying. Emerging from the toilet, Ei-chan comes upon a man stretching in the locker room. He apparently hears the guy speaking to himself (because there's no mention of anyone else), "even though you're chubby, you're flexible" and then "don't say chubby." The guy does a split (see pic 2 on mangakansou). On seeing that, Ei-chan thinks the guy really is flexible. The chubby guy says it's because the food portions over there (probably meaning in the States) aren't piecemeal, and adds that to a certain extent, having more body weight produces more power. Ei-chan's amazed and marvels that someone with such a physique is a player; for him to remain in the tournament, he must be strong. Then Ei-chan remembers he also has to prepare. And then at 10 o'clock, Ei-chan enters the court. His mom, Kageyama, and Yukichi come running to root for him. Besides them, there are other spectators who are there for Ei-chan. Ei-chan feels the number of people who have come especially to watch him is increasing. He realizes that for him, the place where he can call attention to himself the most is on court. He goes to the middle of the court and exchanges a handshake and
greetings with his opponent (see pic 3 on mangakansou). Then Ei-chan recognizes his opponent's voice and physique as those of the guy who was in the locker room. Tanemura rolls his shoulders. Ei-chan thinks Tanemura's motions seem sluggish, but remembers that Tanemura's body is flexible: he's a type that Ei-chan hasn't seen before... End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Each Battle." Looks like this will be another long match,

though probably not as long as Takuma's, since Tanemura is a type Ei-chan hasn't gone up against before. Tanemura might be a power hitter, what with his comment about more body weight producing more power; however, his flexibility might also mean a wider reach and/or zone of defense. So it seems likely we'll get more than two chapters of 3R, especially since it sounds like Nabae's and Kanda's matches will also be shown—if the title of ch.349 is anything to go by.
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Corrections and additions: Ei-chan's opponent isn't Tanemura Houshuu but Tanemura Minechika. Also, the reading provided for "Japan's representatives" is "national team." It turns out Tanemura was talking to someone, and when he attributes his chubbiness to the food portions over there, the guy he's talking to counters that Tanemura just lacks self-control. The 3rd page of Ei-chan's resume is his profile, which lists his name, origin (Kanagawa), height (175cm), weight (68kg), blood type (A), tennis history (2 years and 6 months), and international experience (IMG Tennis Academy: Florida, 2 times). He explains #4 to his dad: tennis style features (change of pace, information gathering using notes). And then adds that he plans to change #5 (thoughts of what Ei-chan can do for "your" company) depending on the person he's giving the resume to. This is the result of his consultation with Coach Aoi, who's a former pro. Ei-chan's dad says it's quite good—for a high school student. So Ei-chan asks if it's no good from the perspective of a company man. His dad explains that what Ei-chan can do as a pro is still hypothetical, so rather than putting such a concrete scenario, it's better to list lots of ideas; later on, once Ei-chan has achieved more, he can go into detail about concrete scenarios. Ei-chan apparently went to Onozawa of Prince too, before he went to the players lounge.
Incidentally, the way Ei-chan was running around, he doesn't seem tired. When Ei-chan went on court, he heard some spectators: we're in time of Player Maruo's match!; yesterday was something amazing; I wanted to watch too. The teaser blurb for the next chapter is "What Kind of Person Is Tanemura Minechika!?" That seems to be another hint that 3R won't be a short match.
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The A team has:

1. Ike Souji
2. Monma Ayumu
3. Kouno (or Kawano) Junpei
4. Watanabe Takatoshi
5. Yoshimichi Daiki
6. Haketa Tatsurou
7. Arino Tadao

There's no mention of why Kouno/Kawano isn't participating in the All Japan Championship. Also, the other player in the B team besides Takuma (8th seed, JTA 9) isn't Minami Masahito (7th seed, JTA 8). It's apparently a Takeshita Ryouta, who also isn't participating in the All Japan Championship.

Ch. 349
Araya goes to the tournament venue. He hears Miyagawa's voice coming from behind him. Araya's surprised to see Miyagawa because it's a school day. Miyagawa explains he took the day off because when he heard that Ei-chan had defeated Takuma, he felt he had to come and watch; he's incredulous and asks whether Araya had seen the match. Araya replies that

he hadn't. Because he'd lost, he went home immediately, which he now regrets. He wonders how Ei-chan had defeated Takuma whom he (Araya) had never defeated. Miyagawa notes that Araya had never lost to Ei-chan; he asks when Araya was going to turn pro. Araya says that if he does well, he'll probably turn pro soon after graduating from high school, so around April at the earliest. Miyagawa estimates around 5 months, finally. Araya cautions him that it's still in the future. He has a lot to do until then, including needing to garner actual results in an overseas campaign.
Scene switch to the exchange of shots prior to the match of Ei-chan and Tanemura. Tanemura had defeated Tsudanuma, the 9th seed, and advanced. He'd turned pro at age 19 and went immediately to America. Until he returned at age 21, he hasn't had any notable results. However, right after he returned, he won in Futures tournaments and has done well even in Challenger...rising to JTA 22. Ei-chan notes that Tanemura showed results as soon as he'd returned. However, Ei-chan still doesn't know Tanemura's play style. He speculates that a jump swing might leverage Tanemura's flexible body, and that once Tanemura's apparently heavy body gets moving, his balls would be heavy. Nevertheless, this body type appears to be running counter to the emphasis on speed in modern tennis. But Ei-chan thinks it's impossible for Tanemura to have won until here (3R?) if his footwork was defective. He tells himself not to form preconceived notions as much as possible; he intends to watch and decide. Then he'll gather data while playing. He'll aim for victory steadily, one step at a time. Scene switch to Monma and Kanda heading to their match. Monma notes that they'd met several times since Kanda's childhood. Kanda confirms this and adds that he's honored Monma remembers. Monma asks if Kanda is chummy with Ei-chan. With a somewhat irritated expression, Kanda replies that Ei-chan is an acquaintance, and asks whether even the top guys are worried about Ei-chan. Monma apologizes for asking about a trivial matter, then surprises Kanda by admitting that he'd always had his eye on Kanda since before. Scene switch to Nabae and Arino exchanging shots prior to their match. Arino Tadao is 25 years old, the 6th seed (JTA 7), an all-rounder with absolute confidence in his forehand. Nabae thinks Arino's expected rating when Nabae made the highest level within Japan an "A"—in other words, assuming Ike's offensive ability is "A," then Arino's "A"; assuming Monma's defensive ability is "A," then Arino's a "B." His style relies on his forehand in extremes. In tennis, every shot has differences in the ability to score. A well-balanced player is stronger, so Nabae concludes Arino is just the right opponent to prove his all-A theory. Nabae and Arino's match begins with Nabae's serve. Nabae hits a serve to the center. Arino returns it with his backhand, but it goes into the net. 15-0. Nabae thinks he'll naturally aim his serve at the basic backhand side. Even when play continues, he serves to Arino's backhand side, but Arino runs around and cuts in to return the ball with his forehand for a winner (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Nabae notes that Arino's running around and cutting in is fast (or early). Arino wonders how Nabae will approach. Scene switch to Kanda and Monma's match. The onlookers marvel at exchange of shots in the rally. Kanda thinks Monma has reach, rather...no matter how much he swings, the center doesn't deviate. Kanda's prepared for the lengthening...he probes during the stalemate...then strikes first (see pic 2 on mangakansou). He hits a good ball deep down the line, but Monma catches up with it and returns it. Kanda tsks. Monma thinks that while he was ready for mortal combat, it's a preemptive strike. He thinks that because of Kanda's youth, this tennis is a big deal—it's what he expected of Kabai (Kanda's former high school in Japan). A style that displays more power in a team competition would be effective in the Davis Cup...where that's concerned...he'll use body and soul to crush Kanda, for the sake of Japan. Scene switch. Araya and Miyagawa arrive safely before Ei-chan's match begins. Ei-chan thinks he'll break

from the start: one point! Tanemura tosses the ball, then leans his body back tremendously and his arm is also flexible (see pic 3 on mangakansou). He hits a fast serve to the center. Ei-chan touches the ball, but it's out. He notes that the ball is also fast, that every part of Tanemura's body is flexible, so his power is amplified. Possibly due to that, the impact is later than it appears and the ball is flattened quickly. He gets the timing into his head. The next serve is wide. Ei-chan returns it. Tanemura's surprised that it was already returned normally. Ei-chan judges the return as good and in the first return game, he'll continue to attack aggressively while watching his opponent. First he hits a strong blow to the open court. Tanemura immediately gave up chasing the good ball (see pic 4 on mangakansou), surprising Ei-chan who thinks Tanemura might have been hasty in giving up. What Ei-chan wanted to know is Tanemura's unknown footwork with his body type. Tanemura serves. He's surprised that Ei-chan has matched his timing so quickly, but he concludes it's only to be expected of the return that defeated Takuma. For his next return, Ei-chan hits a good ball at an angle. Tanemura marvels at Ei-chan's control of his strokes; he returns the ball. Ei-chan thinks that normally, he'd throw off his opponent's stance; however, Tanemura easily hits a strong ball with a distant impact
point. Tanemura wonders if it's true that Ei-chan's tennis history is (only) 3 years. End of chapter. The title for the next chapter is "Specialization."
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Clarification: Ei-chan thinks that normally, he'd throw off his opponent's stance; however, Tanemura easily hits a strong ball with a distant impact point. Ei-chan had hit a shot close to the edge of the baseline, which should have been at the edge of Tanemura's defensive range. However, Tanemura didn't lunge but somehow caught up with it (his last stride looks unusually long, almost like he's about to do a split) and returned it with a flawless strong blow while maintaining a good stance. Last month, the teaser blurb asked "What kind of person is Tanemura Minechika!?" This month, the teaser blurb says "He's not an ordinary person after all!?"

Ch. 350
So Ei-chan's match with Tanemura starts with Tanemura's service. Tanemura returns Ei-chan's good return with an extremely light aspect. Ei-chan manages to return it, noting Tanemura's footwork has amazing body balance and skill. When Ei-chan thought he'd hit the ball to an advantageous spot, the situation was suddenly reversed with a single shot. Tanemura sends the ball to the side. Ei-chan thinks it might be too weak for a winner; however, he's one step short and just barely misses catching up with it. Ei-chan concludes that all things considered, Tanemura's prior forehand was an unthinkable shot. Normally, if a player had run that far, his impact point, form, and stance would be off somehow. With such a big step, Tanemura had caught the highest impact point reliably and controlled the blow naturally. 30-15. Tanemura speculates Ei-chan is the type who absolutely won't give up until 2 bounds (I guess the amount of effort needed to reach a ball). He feels he can't lose focus against this type of opponent. His next first serve (to the center) is a fault. Ei-chan notes Tanemura's first serve is getting faster. He plans on attacking the second serve. He has little data so far, but he'll gamble a bit (make an educated guess). He predicts it will be wide, and is correct. Unfortunately, his return deep to the side is out. 40-15.
Ei-chan regrets losing the point, but he notes that Tanemura hadn't taken a single step to chase the ball. On the other hand, Tanemura thinks that whether the ball had been out or not, he couldn't have caught up with it. Ei-chan thinks that if Tanemura gives up this quickly, he (Ei-chan) can slightly reduce the risk on his finishing shots. So he decides to go with

control again, one more time. Ei-chan returns a serve to the center with his backhand and sends it to the side. This time Tanemura gives chase. Ei-chan notes this. While Tanemura's stance is off, he returns the ball with a strong blow (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan apparently notices Tanemura took a big step again. He thinks that even though Tanemura's stance is off, Tanemura had hit a strong shot. Tanemura somehow returns it the best he can, Ei-chan concludes it's again too weak for a winner. However, Ei-chan is again one step short and doesn't reach the ball, so Tanemura holds his serve. Ei-chan's analysis is that he was wrong. Tanemura's winners are the safest balls Tanemura can hit without going out or into the net—and Ei-chan can't reach. In other words, Tanemura's winners are the most efficient balls. Maybe even his decision whether to chase a ball or not might be decided based on efficiency. Kageyama comments that Tanemura had held easily. Miyagawa and Araya converge on Yukichi's location. Yukichi greets them and asks if they're there to root for Ei-chan. Miyagawa says Ei-chan's opponent plays a kind of strange tennis. Tanemura judges the situation extremely quickly and accurately. It looks like he's covering perfectly the hole in his footwork with maximum good use of mind and technique. Miyagawa's impression is one of super-efficient tennis. Time is called. Yukichi agrees since he feels that Tanemura is taking the shortest distance even during court change (see pic 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan takes time to organize his thoughts. The characteristics of Tanemura's tennis are:

1. a powerful serve that can decide the game with one shot
2. shot techniques and body balance that can turn the tables with one shot, even if his stance is off
3. situational awareness that can instantly select a shot and course to put away the ball with one shot

Overall, his decision to give up is quick, and there's an impression that he's trying to speed up the match efficiently with short rallies. So Ei-chan thinks he can say that Tanemura is simply trying to avoid a drawn-out match and long rallies. After all, there's a weakness in Tanemura's physique, so he might be covering it with technique and tactics. Even so, he's making a magnificent display of his weak points. If he lost weight, he'd be stronger...Ei-chan reminds himself that's not something to consider right now. His conclusion is that Tanemura's a type he's never competed against up to now. He has to hold his serve while gathering data...then breakwhere! Ei-chan's first serve is wide. Tanemura returns it aggressively, surprising Ei-chan who returns it to the side. Ei-chan suspects Tanemura's going for a short point. Chasing the ball, Tanemura notes Ei-chan's response and control are considerable. Then Tanemura hits a drop shot (see pic 3 on mangakansou). Ei-chan's shocked that Tanemura hit a drop shot with that stance. 0-15. Tanemura exhales. Ei-chan thinks Tanemura's really amazing. He wonders if Tanemura can hit any shot with any stance. With this, Ei-chan can't predict the shot based on Tanemura's appearance. However, if Tanemura is avoiding a drawn-out match, Ei-chan might also have a plan to bring that off. However, Ei-chan wants to make one point with his serve if possible. Ei-chan again serves wide. Tanemura returns it. Ei-chan thinks if that (probably making a point with the serve) isn't possible, then he'll prepare for a drawn-out fight. He'll maintain the upper hand with a ball that Tanemura can't turn into an attack. An intense rally continues, but... (see pic 4 on mangakansou). 0-30. Ei-chan thinks it's no good. Tanemura also has deciding power. He'll somehow put the ball away, even forcibly, before a rally is prolonged, and he'll get it in. Doing that much means he probably does have difficulty with endurance. When Ei-chan tried to attack that weak point just now, the painful experience was turned on him. It might be better not to pay too much attention on the weak point. Ei-chan exhales deeply. Miyagawa

notes that Ei-chan looks bewildered. Tanemura believes Ei-chan is thinking furiously about a lot of things and might be similar to him in a certain sense. In Tanemura's match yesterday, the 9th seed, Tsudanuma, was basically the type that's loyal to power, so he'd been easy to play, but
even though today's match is against a no-seeder, he (Ei-chan) might be a difficult opponent. Ei-chan hits his serve wide. He tells himself to get it into his head that no matter what shot with whatever timing comes, it's not unusual. At that moment, Tanemura comes forward. Ei-chan is surprised Tanemura returns that forward. The angle shot is a winner (see pic 5 on mangakansou). 0-40. Miyagawa says: Uwa...Never mind a rising shot, it's a a fast return where he faces the ball with his body before it rises completely...This might be the first time I've seen such a way of using the body, or should I say a person this skillful with shots. Tanemura exhales. End of chapter. The title for the next chapter is "Landing" or "Touchdown" or "Destination." Okay. Tanemura's a great player. However, if Ei-chan doesn't lose the first set, I'd still expect him to win in straight sets. The repeated mentions of Tanemura's exhalations gave me the impression he's hoarding his energy. So far he's taken Ei-chan by surprise, but once Ei-chan adjusts to his baseline performance and defensive range, he should be able to prolong the rallies. If Ei-chan loses the first set, then this match should reach the final set.
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Seeing the dialogue flow and art now, I think it isn't that "if Tanemura is avoiding a drawn-out match, Tanemura might also have a plan to bring that off." Rather, if Tanemura is avoiding a drawn-out match, Ei-chan might also have a plan to bring that (a drawn-out match) off, since Ei-chan proceeded to try to hit shots that Tanemura couldn't turn into an attack. The teaser blurb says "A Pinch at the Start! Can He Bounce Back!?"

Ch. 351
Okay, so Ei-chan's first service stands at 0-40, putting Tanemura at break point. Ei-chan grapples with the situation, surprised that Tanemura had managed a winner using a short bound. He wonders if Tanemura can go for a winner on all the balls he touches with his racket. Ei-chan thinks it's impossible but Tanemura's so good he gives Ei-chan that impression. Then Ei-chan corrects himself, what's good is just how Tanemura responded to the shot that Ei-chan had aimed. But because of that, Ei-chan concludes
he mustn't stop aiming as he had. The 15 seconds warning is called. Ei-chan thinks his opponent is going for a quick attack, so Ei-chan won't allow that. He reliably hits his first serve wide. Tanemura attacks with his backhand, sending the ball deep to the side and pulling off a second winner (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Tanemura thinks that if he has a triple break point, he can also be a bit reckless. Miyagawa's surprised that Ei-chan was broken so suddenly and wonders if Ei-chan's okay. Araya admits that Tanemura's highly skilled but adds that the break is probably also Ei-chan's fault. He points out that even though Tanemura is an opponent Ei-chan isn't familiar with and doesn't have much data on, Ei-chan is too conscious of his opponent and can't play his own tennis with all his strength. Araya doesn't know what Ei-chan is flustered about, but Ei-chan appears to be more agitated than usual. He wonders how Ei-chan defeated Takuma when he's playing like this. Araya's obviously irked (see pic 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan thinks he's understood how Tanemura defeated the 7th seed Tsudanuma, who's the type to go for a barrage of aggressive strokes; because of that, Tsudanuma was beaten by the application of one-shot kills. Ei-chan realizes he'd been playing this way too much, aiming monotonously for winners, because Tanemura seems to have difficulty with footwork, based on appearances. That means Ei-chan was

looking down on Tanemura. Ei-chan blushes at this conclusion (see pic 3 on mangakansou), thinking he's gotten cocky because he defeated Takuma and he mustn't be like this. No matter whom he's defeated, he's a challenger who isn't even a pro. The third game starts. Ei-chan returns Tanemura's serve deep with a steady spin. Tanemura cuts around and returns it with a cross using his forehand. Ei-chan also returns it with a cross. Next Tanemura hits a straight with his backhand. Ei-chan think that if Tanemura is going for a quick winner, he (Ei-chan) will take the advantage. He hits a shot to the open court, but regrettably, it's also out. 15-0. Ei-chan is vexed. Tanemura watches in silence. Miyagawa sympathizes and wonders if Ei-chan has improved somewhat. Araya counters that Ei-chan's still stiff and he's rushing his attack; Araya wonders what Ei-chan's nervous about. Ei-chan thinks he now understands fully: his opponent is good, but there's also something wrong with himself. This is the first match after he'd defeated Takuma and decided he will go pro. That's
why he's caught by the pressure of "I have to be a player who deserves anticipation." So first, he attacked without a plan to watch his opponent carefully...he was counterattacked, and as things got more and more difficult, he'd started to stiffen up. When he has sufficient data, he should watch his opponent rather than himself; however, when that's not the case, he should first play his own tennis firmly. While doing so, he'll gradually accumulate data. This aforementioned pressure of definitely turning pro is unavoidable. Play continues with Tanemura serving to the center. Though Ei-chan reacts, he doesn't touch it, so it's an ace. 30-0. Ei-chan notes his reaction was late/slow, so he's still stiff. Tanemura's next serve is again to the center. Ei-chan returns it, but Tanemura goes to the net, and puts the ball away with a volley. 40-0. Ei-chan was shocked by Tanemura's use of serve and volley. He notes that Tanemura's volley was also flexible and skillful. In addition, he realizes that his field of vision had narrowed so much that he couldn't notice Tanemura's going to the net. He takes this as proof he's still being impatient. He's losing sight of himself because he's trying to show himself as more than himself even though he can't do more than himself, no matter what he does. He exhales deeply. Play continues with Tanemura serving wide. Ei-chan returns it down the line with his backhand. He's surprised he'd managed a good return. However, Tanemura's next shot is a drop shot. Game, Tanemura. 3-0. The onlookers chatter again about the sudden break and yet another love game. Tanemura thinks he's gotten his way this far. He wants the tempo to go well as much as possible. Ei-chan marvels at Tanemura's pulling off a superb drop shot on the run while his posture is off. But Ei-chan also concludes that just now he'd done what he could do himself. What's important now is playing his own tennis. His opponent is also strong, but that's what comes next. Ei-chan plans to turn his having defeated Takuma into a positive. He tells himself not to feel nervous nor to get cocky: play with confidence! Time is called. The 4th game starts. Ei-chan thinks that based on Tanemura's data so far, the change of pace that appears to be the best is a serve stressing control so that
he won't receive a one-shot kill; he'll aim as aggressively wide as he can (see pic 4 on mangakansou). His first serve goes in where he'd aimed. Tanemura returns with a cross. Ei-chan thinks he's kept his advantage, so the next he sends deep to the center, using a strong spin and a 20 to 30 percent slower speed than usual, making it difficult for his opponent to hit a one-shot kill. Tanemura thinks, "It's come to that?" He hits a heavy forehand shot deep to the side. Ei-chan manages to return it, thinking that even though he's been careful so far, Tanemura has this decisive power. So Ei-chan moves back. Tanemura suspects Ei-chan moved back for defense. He returns the ball short, down the line. Ei-chan is surprised by this; as he goes for the ball, he thinks it will go well, but then reminds himself that if he's careless, the tables will be reversed in one blow. He decides to throw Tanemura's

timing off once with a forehand slice at an angle. As Ei-chan planned, Tanemura's return ball is a bit weak. Ei-chan thinks that one-shot kills are for one-shot kills. If he isn't shot down, he can do it. He decides to do it boldly enough that Tanemura gives up (probably on chasing the shot). Ei-chan hits the ball deep and really close to the edge of the open-court side. Chapter ends. There's no indication whether the shot is in or out. The title of the next chapter is "Ambition." Well, the psychological development is credible. In hindsight, the pressure to perform was foreshadowed by Ei-chan's wanting to draw the attention of possible sponsors and fans by playing well. At least he seems to have pinpointed the cause of his slump, so things should improve from this point.
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The blurb for the next chapter says "Will It Turn into a Counterattack!?" Ei-chan's last shot in the chapter is aimed at the baseline, right at the very corner of the open court.

Ch. 352
Ei-chan's last shot in the previous chapter goes in. 15-0. He plans on keeping in mind the power just now and the sense of distance from Tanemura. He assumes Tanemura is avoiding long rallies, aiming to conserve his physical strength...which means if Ei-chan's serve is even a bit weak, Tanemura will settle the ball right away. To prevent that, Ei-chan hit a course with a spin serve (?) and sends it wide. Tanemura returns it with his backhand. Ei-chan decides to return it even lower, thinking that if he hits it deep to the center, it can't be put away easily. He deploys the next one the same way as the one just now. Tanemura thinks the ball is slow but the aggressive depth is disagreeable, so he hits a strong shot. Ei-chan returns it deep again. Tanemura notes that Ei-chan is returning the ball well. Ei-chan then returns the ball deep crosscourt. Tanemura's shot goes into the net (see pic 1 on mangakansou). 30-0. Ei-chan thinks that to prevent a one-shot kill by his opponent, he'll aim for a one-shot kill. It would probably turn into a long rally, but that means he'll get data, and he can draw Tanemura into a drawn-out match. Again Ei-chan sends his serve wide. He also returns Tanemura's relentless return. Kageyama thinks that Ei-chan has started his persistence. Yukichi says it's as expected of Kanagawa's pusher king. Miyagawa's surprised that Ei-chan has such a nickname. Araya notes that Ei-chan is aiming aggressively for the center. Ei-chan thinks that if it's his service, a chance will come. He takes the game with an acute angle cross to hold his serve (see pic 2 on mangakansou). Faced with an acute angle ball, Tanemura refrained from chasing it. Game: 3-1, Tanemura leading. Ei-chan reminds himself not to be nervous or cocky. He'll challenge Tanemura for a break. Tanemura thinks that's the reason Ei-chan is able to get to 3R with his physique. Tanemura uses his body's flexibility to serve well. Ei-chan notes the power of Tanemura's serve has increased again, but he doesn't intend to let Tanemura put the ball away with one blow. His strategy remains the same: returning the ball deep to the center. Then he hits an acute angle shot again as a winner, thinking that he'll take risks in a return game. However, when he does so, this time Tanemura breaks into a run and chases it with his eyes wide open (see pic 3 on mangakansou). Ei-chan's surprised by Tanemura's speed. Tanemura returns the ball with a powerful shot crosscourt and put it away. 15-0. The audience erupts: he's fairly fast. Yukichi is speechless. Miyagawa marvels that the chubby guy can move. Araya thinks that Tanemura is fast but he also broke into a run early; if he (Ei-chan?) doesn't appreciate it, he's being careless.
Ei-chan notes that he'd taken quite a risk and it had been going well, and yet Tanemura's movements have changed completely in his service game recently. Tanemura is short of breath, and Ei-chan notices, surprised that Tanemura is already sweating and out of breath.

He concludes that Tanemura is efficiently making the best use of his one break. He suspects Tanemura intends to give up the return games and just hold his serves at any cost. Tanemura tells himself he may run when he has to run and compete when he has to compete; he doesn't like running but he's fast. Tanemura's flashback (see pic 4 on mangakansou). At age 19, he turned pro and went to the US alone. He'd always thought that in tennis, if you didn't go abroad, you wouldn't be able to advance, so while he's young, he headed overseas. Since he didn't have much of a track record, he relied on just prize money and a bit of money from contracts with businesses. He barely got by with the California Tennis Academy as his base. Desperate for the necessities of life, he realized he had to be at the very front. He didn't have a coach nor trainer nor friends, so first he needed a practice partner to get stronger. He had difficulties, but due to that, his English improved and he made friends around the world. But for a pro who doesn't have results, the cost of an international tour starts to become heavy. There were times when he had to make the hotel breakfast last him for the day. When his friends who couldn't just watch would tell him they'd treat him to a meal, he became miserable since he couldn't refuse and would cry. Tanemura, whose mouth was stuffed with a hamburger, thought that while he can eat, he'd cram anything into his stomach. He didn't fuss if cheap food was high calorie and low in nutritional value. He was also stressed. When he noticed, he was clearly overweight as a tennis player. He's often told he has no self-control and no will power, but for the him then, it was also a relief. When he got stout, he came to dislike running. He desperately covered that part by refining his technique. He couldn't win, but he'd gotten steadily stronger. At that time, he'd reached his financial limits. Everyone who saw him on his return to Japan said his tour was a failure, but he got a lot from it. More than anything, he'd lost weight since his return and finally has also been showing results. The result of his tour has yet to manifest. It depends on his results in the All Japan Championship. Back to the game. Tanemura serves to the center and Ei-chan returns it. Ei-chan concludes that Tanemura is using all his strength to hold his serve. He has to overcome this Tanemura, noting that Tanemura's defensive range is quite broad. Tanemura returns the ball. Ei-chan's next return is a drop shot (see pic 5 on mangakansou). Tanemura doesn't chase it—or maybe couldn't chase it. 15-15. Ei-chan thinks he'll
make sure. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Boundary."

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Corrections and additions to the summary: It's not "Desperate for the necessities of life, he realized he had to be at the very front," but what the desperate Tanemura had to do first for the necessities of life was communicate. Also, it's not "When his friends who couldn't just watch would tell him they'd treat him to a meal, he became miserable since he couldn't refuse and would cry. Tanemura, whose mouth was stuffed with a hamburger, thought that while he can eat, he'd cram anything into his stomach." Rather, when his friends who couldn't just watch would tell him they'd treat him to a meal, he became miserable since he couldn't refuse and would cry, and the art has Tanemura with his mouth stuffed with a hamburger and teary-eyed. When he could eat, he'd cram anything into his stomach. I think GentleVan was right in that Ei-chan's using the strategy Monma taught Takuma. The twist is that Ei-chan keeps sending his shots to the center, which is around the distance to the sideline that would make Tanemura give up chasing the ball—apparently based on the distance to Tanemura of the successful shot at the start of the chapter. Oh! I also noticed that when Ei-chan hit the drop shot, his form wasn't the usual for a drop shot! His form was similar to Tanemura's form when Tanemura surprised Ei-chan with a drop shot (ch.351) to hold his serve: 3-0. So Ei-chan's already starting to use Tanemura's techniques against him.

Ch. 353
Wah! Ei-chan wants to ramp up his change of pace and decides to try including Asano's tactics! And the title for the next chapter is "The Clincher." Since the break during change court has Tanemura out of breath while Ei-chan is writing his notes as usual, I'm feeling more certain of an Ei-chan win in straight sets. Details to follow because my head is fuzzy from pulling an all-nighter for work.
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Okay, the details. The fifth game is Tanemura's service. Ei-chan puts away the ball with a drop shot. 15-15. Ei-chan thinks he'd attempted the impossible, but he'd pulled it off. He was able to show
that it's not just left and right but also front—which is major. Tanemura thinks that even though he'd intended to go after that last one, he hadn't been able to move. Ei-chan intends to break back here and catch up with Tanemura, not letting Tanemura conserve his strength. On the other hand, Tanemura plans to go full power here in order to avoid a drawn-out match. Tanemura hits a strong serve wide. Ei-chan returns it deep to the center as per his strategy, thinking that he'll do so even if it's difficult, then he'll fall back and prepare for a one-shot kill. But until a chance comes, he'll use change of pace to the center of the court. Again Ei-chan returns a strong shot to the center, thinking he'll throw off Tanemura's timing by focusing on slow top spins and slices and the occasional fast ball. Tanemura's ball weakens just a bit. Ei-chan thinks that at the critical moment, he'll go for a a one-shot kill from a step forward. He goes for a winner crosscourt, aiming for the very edge. Tanemura gives chase, but doesn't touch it. Unfortunately, the ball is out. 30-15. Ei-chan regrets the error, believing he'd aimed unrealistically. Tanemura recognizes his risk and acknowledges that in this serve game, he can't pass up balls that are being aimed at the very edge. Tanemura's next serve is to the center. Ei-chan returns it, noting that it's again a good serve. Tanemura attacks with a strong shot. Ei-chan sees that Tanemura's attacking already, but from the baseline Ei-chan's change-of-pace patterns to the center are limited. Given the situation, he can be manipulated and the ball can be put away at the end. He wonders if there's any way for him to resist, using his tennis, before that happens. Tanemura hits the ball deep to the side. Ei-chan concludes that if the patterns are limited and can be beaten, he can only increase them—so he positions himself 3 steps forward in his usual position. From behind the baseline, Ei-chan resumes his usual position and returns the ball to Tanemura's backhand. Tanemura notes that Ei-chan has come forward and his tempo has sped up. He returns with a cross. Ei-chan thinks it's dangerous, but from there it's easier to aim an angle shot. He again returns the ball to Tanemura's backhand. Tanemura goes for a winner with a straight. Ei-chan expected this, and from his position, both sides have open courts that are about equal. Tanemura runs to the center to cover the open court. Ei-chan takes the initiative and aims for Tanemura's backhand a third time, then goes to the net. This attack is to the opposite of Tanemura and it takes Tanemura's best effort to return it. At the net, Ei-chan puts away the ball with a volley (see pic 1 on mangakansou). 30-30. Miyagawa: "He's skillful."
Ei-chan's analysis: I did it! If I mix net volleys and my usual position with deployments from the baseline, the extent that I can aim broadens considerably (see pic 2 on mangakansou)... Of course, it's my opponent's serve, and it's not easy. However, with this, Tanemura-san also shouldn't be able to attack easily. In theory, I increased the patterns considerably. Tanemura thinks that it's easier to put away the ball when playing at the net, but if Ei-chan suddenly changes tempo this way...even if Tanemura responds with full power in his serve game...he'd

have to raise the gear even more... Tanemura sends his next serve wide. Ei-chan returns it to the center and moves back. Tanemura notes that this time Ei-chan is again at the baseline. He returns the ball a bit short. Ei-chan wonders what to do, and then decides to go for it. He attacks Tanemura's backhand. Tanemura catches up with the ball and manages to return it with a strong shot that's a winner (see pic 3 on mangakansou). 40-30. Tanemura exults, "Yeah!" Ei-chan marvels that Tanemura can hit that sort of shot with such a stance. Tanemura goes into position to serve, thinking that if he holds, he can recover his strength in the next game. Ei-chan tells himself not to hesitate when it's time to attack, that his opponent is going for the moment when Ei-chan challenged him. Tanemura's serve to the center is judged a fault. His second serve is again to the center. Ei-chan does a return dash, surprising Tanemura by suddenly going forward this time. Tanemura's ball is a straight and gets past Ei-chan (see pic 4 on mangakansou), but it's just out. Deuce. Ei-chan sighs in relief. By displaying one more new development, he made a point. However, he acknowledges the danger. As much as possible, he has to put away the ball without allowing Tanemura to touch it. For that purpose, Ei-chan wants to play in a way that won't allow Tanemura to focus on the target, by using change of pace at a much higher level than before. Ei-chan has an epiphany: the change of pace of Asano whom he played against in the prelims... What if he first tries to copy all those skillful patterns that could be described as infinite...? How far can he with his limited experience use the experienced Asano's tennis in an actual match? Tanemura's next serve is to the center. Ei-chan returns it, thinking that when he lacks power and height, it's necessary to intentionally control each and every ball. He persistently returns the balls using a variety of shots.
The spectators' reactions: What an amazing rally; It's an intense scramble for the lead; And a long one at that. Ei-chan thinks that even if he's not able to put the ball away, he makes the power, type of shot, and development change more extremely, so that it becomes a setup for the next one after it, and can make Tanemura hesitate. However, Tanemura's able to decide this point. Advantage, Tanemura. The game continues with a rally. Ei-chan thinks that using the extent of what he can of the change of pace he'd recorded in his notes...he puts away the ball, and it's again deuce. The game continues and Ei-chan hits a drop shot. Tanemura gets to the net, so Ei-chan goes over his position with a lob. Advantage, Maruo. When the game continues again, Ei-chan hits a drop shot. Tanemura's shocked that the shot is again by the net. He chases and returns the ball. However, Ei-chan had moved closer to the net, and he decides the point. Having broken back, Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose: "Yeah!" Miyagawa: "Ma-Maruo-kun's strong, isn't he...? To think the power and technique of the guy called Tanemura-san are impressive..." Araya: "I don't know how much he has, but because his defensive range now is normally broad, oh...but it looks like it's been decided with the game just now." During change court, the two players are seated on their benches. Tanemura is short of breath. On the other hand, Ei-chan is filling out his notebook as usual (see pic 5 on mangakansou). The next game starts. Watching Ei-chan's form playing tennis, Miyagawa thinks, "Yeah...Maruo-kun...really will turn pro, I guess..."
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During the break for change court, what Ei-chan was muttering while scribbling in his notebook is: Somewhat more serves are wide. The timing for aiming at the open court with a ground stroke...
The blurb says: The Flow Changed!

Ch. 354

Ch.354 starts with a scene shift to the players' lounge where Kanda is brooding over his loss. He remembers the match and how Monma kept returning whatever ball Kanda hit (see pic 1 on mangakansou). He wonders what he should do when he's forced squarely to surrender his advantage. Kanda thinks that this is the one ranked 54th in the world; then Kanda corrects himself: because of this, Monma is ranked 54th in the world. Kanda wanted to see the world (maybe he means pitting himself against Monma as a world standard), but he realizes the world is broader than he'd imagined. He concludes he has to reevaluate the basics (not sure if he means his assumptions about playing internationally or his tennis basics). Then Nabae comes in, finished with his match. Kanda: "Nabae-kun...you won...right?" Nabae: "I have to admit." But having made that reply, Nabae looks depressed. He also remembers his match and thinks that he just managed to hold on after an Ike Souji-class forehand (see pic 2 on mangakansou). But he anticipates that in the next match, the one who challenged will be cornered in the reverse, and he was resigned to losing for the time being. He believes his shots here are still a long way from all-A... He thinks he managed to pick up a win by avoiding the forehand because his opponent might have been under pressure in an match with him (a high schooler). Though he was able to verify the rightness of his all-A theory to a certain extent...he has a pile of problems... He doesn't stand a chance of winning a rematch, much less the quarterfinals... It seems the final score for Nabae's match was 7-5; 4-6; 6-4. Seeing Nabae's brooding expression, Kanda wonders if it means Nabae can't be satisfied with Best 8. Scene switch to Ei-chan's match. Ei-chan won the first set: 6-3. The second set stands at 6-6, and Ei-chan is currently at match point with the score for the tiebreak at 6-3. Miyagawa says he'd expected it to end swiftly after the first set, but Ei-chan's opponent is extremely persistent. He adds that being able to compensate for inferior footwork with willpower is what's expected of a pro.
During a fierce rally between the two, Ei-chan thinks after being trained to aim for the "slow" of Ei-chan's tempo, it's a stalemate, but here he'll take a risk and overcome his opposition. He attacks with a deep ball tight to the sideline. Tanemura goes all out to chase it and manages to return it, but the ball hits the net (see pic 3 on mangakansou), and the match is decided. Ei-chan: "Yeah!!" The audience erupts: Maruo, a high school student, advances to the Best 8! Ei-chan exults over winning his first match since deciding to turn pro, and over overcoming his difficulties by taking up the tennis of the change-of-pace pioneer Asano. "I can do it!" Sudou of ellesse shouts congratulations to Ei-chan on making it to the Best 8, and then he notices Ei-chan's mom next to him and greets her. The audience is still in an uproar: A no-seed who came up through the prelims is in the All Japan Best 8!; how cool...plus he's probably still 18 years old; how far might he use this tennis? Miyagawa: "He'll do it, right?" Araya: Yeah. After the match, Ei-chan and Tanemura shake hands. Tanemura gives a big sigh and says that he lost but...in today's match...he might have lost...around 3 kilograms... He adds that all things considered, it's interesting tennis...and he's looking forward to...how Ei-chan uses it overseas. As he leaves, Tanemura thinks the next time they meet might be at a Challenger overseas...they might be able to become friends, then. Kageyama and Yukichi congratulate Ei-chan. Then Ei-chan takes his leave to go watch his next opponent, leaving Yukichi and Kageyama behind. Kageyama compares his departure to a bird taking flight, then speculates on how far Ei-chan will go, since if he wins his next match, he'll make it to Best 4. Ei-chan hurried, but the match that would decide his next opponent was already over. His next opponent will be the No.4 seed, Yoshimichi. Yoshimichi (JTA 5) apparently defeated his opponent, Aizawa (JTA 31) in straight sets: 6-2; 6-2. Aizawa had apparently defeated Shimura (JTA 15) in 2R to advance to 3R. Kanda happens to pass by. Ei-chan sees him. Kanda notes that Ei-chan had won again and acknowledges that Ei-chan

is really awesome. Ei-chan replies that it was difficult but he managed, and then he asks about Kanda's match. Kanda points at the tournament chart, saying Ei-chan can tell by looking. Ei-chan absorbs the info, unable to say much. But Kanda changes topics, telling Ei-chan that in center court, Ei-chan's girlfriend was trying hard, but she seems to be in considerable difficulty. Shocked, Ei-chan rushes off. Kanda repeats that it's center court, and thinks that Ei-chan is also in the Best 8. Natchan is sitting in center court. Her opponent is the world's Yazawa Miki (Okada's idol and the 1st seed), who the audience is calling the strongest in the history of women's tennis. It's currently the second set, Yazawa, 4; Natchan, 1. Natchan is sitting on the bench during court change. She drinks water and gives a big sigh, and she looks troubled. Seeing that, Ei-chan shouts, "Natchan, you can do it!" Natchan notices that voice (see pic 4 on mangakansou). End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Unexpected" or "Unplanned." This week's WSM counts as a double issue because of the Obon holiday, so the next issue will probably be out August 19. Well, there you have it! To the naysayers, Ei-chan won in straight sets: 6-3; 7-6. And he's apparently managed to apply some of Asano's tactics in a real match, so there's hope he'll make it to Best 4 and Monma.
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Additional details and corrections: The "next" that Nabae refers to, where the one who challenged might be cornered in the reverse, is the quarterfinals. However, he also thinks he was forced to be resigned to losing temporarily—not that he's resigned to losing—so that resignation might have been during the match with Arino. Nabae thinks his shots "here" (apparently the ones he'd hit during the match) were a long way from all-A. But, yes, he thinks he doesn't stand a chance in a rematch with Arino, much less in the quarterfinals. After Kanda wonders if Nabae can't be satisfied with Best 8 (quarterfinals), Nabae wonders if Ei-chan's match isn't over yet. Then the scene shift. Oh, the "reduced leg strength" that Miyagawa mentioned is actually "inferior footwork." The bit about the next time Tanemura meets Ei-chan being overseas and so on, after Ei-chan's handshake with Tanemura, was just Tanemura's thought; he hadn't actually said it. And after Yukichi and Kageyama approach Ei-chan with "Good job" and "As expected of Aniki," Ei-chan announces he'd made it to the Best 8—prompting Yukichi to point out that they'd watched the whole thing. The score for Kanda's match seems to have been 6-4, 6-3. Natchan's match is currently 6-2, 4-1. The audience for Natsu's match also say Natchan might not be able to compete with Yazawa. Natchan's dad shouts, "Natsu, first of all, one point!" The blurb for the next chapter is "Get Through... Natsu's Defiance!" ("Get Through" can also be translated as "Pay attention." "Defiance" can also be translated as "challenge" or "attempt.")

Ch. 355
Natchan got to tiebreak in the second set but lost. Yoshimichi hurt his leg, so Ei-chan's automatically in the semifinals. Details to follow.
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So ch.355 starts with Natchan trailing in the second set: 4-1. The next game is Natchan's service. Yazawa notes Natchan's serve has smoothed. After Natchan puts away the ball down the line, she pulls a triumphant pose. The audience notes that her mood suddenly changed. The game continues with a rally. Natchan comes to grips with Yazawa's strokes. Yazawa's surprised that a ball that had been a winner up to a little while ago...was returned by Natchan somehow. However, Yazawa then puts it away with a straight. Ei-chan thinks that if Natchan loses this, she'll lose the second set. He notes that Natchan boldly took three consecutive games, including one break of Yazawa who's the strongest player in Japanese women's tennis. And that was the way Natchan entered tiebreak. The veteran Yazawa

consolidated her defense somewhat against the attacks unleashed with Natchan's instantaneous insight. Offense and defense ebbed and flowed with set point and match point being repeated. Yazawa took risks, ready to lose the set at the very end, and shook off Natchan.
The audience reaction: The exchange of attacks at the end was amazing; Takasaki Natsu was more overwhelming; though she's cute, she's daring; awesome; Takasaki-saaan, I'm rooting for you! Natchan waves an arm in response to the cheering (see pic 1 on p.1 of mangakansou). Ei-chan thinks the result is unfortunate, but believes everyone watching became Natchan's fan. A little while later, the two meet up. He congratulates her for her hard work. She apologizes for keeping him waiting and thanks him for his support. Because of him, she feels she was able to put in full effort. But she was still no good, so she believes she still has a long way to go. She says this while smiling. Ei-chan argues that she was able to match the world-class Yazawa to that extent, so it's impossible she's no good. He adds that she'd proven she's already world-class without a doubt. Natchan thanks him and agrees it might have become a match that will be connected to the next one, but she'd felt she can actually do more (see pic 2 on p.1 of mangakansou). Then she tells him she'd wanted to make it to the Best 8 with him, so she'll vent her frustration by cheering for him tomorrow. He thanks her, and then she suggests they head home. When they stand up, an official hails Ei-chan. He informs them a tournament referee had been trying to contact Ei-chan just now. Ei-chan asks what the referee wanted to talk about. The official replies that Ei-chan is expected to face Yoshimichi in the quarterfinals tomorrow, but just now Yoshimichi decided not to take part. It seems his leg injury has worsened quite a bit, so Ei-chan will advance to the Best 4 without playing tomorrow's match. Natchan's excited by the news while Ei-chan is disbelieving. Scene switch to the press room where the reporter Miyamoto is also excited, having heard the facts. He thinks it's a totally unexpected event, but nevertheless, it's good luck. Only 4 high schoolers in history have made it to the Best 4. And one that qualified through the prelims is unprecedented and a spectacular feat. Both Ike and Nabae are 18...it had turned into a great event. Yamaguchi (the 10th seed who defeated Araya and was with Asano when Asano first met Ei-chan during Ei-chan's date with Natchan) sends an e-mail to Asano with the facts.
Scene switch back to the couple who are on their way back. Natchan's still excited about it, but Ei-chan tells her it doesn't quite feel real. Natchan reminds him of what she'd said before: luck is also part of real ability. Ei-chan argues that there's no real ability in his making it to the Best 4; in addition, he's in good shape now, but he doesn't know whether having one day free is good or not. Natchan insists it's good because he's been playing consecutive matches since the prelims, and he can rest tomorrow. Ei-chan agrees and add that he plans to get a bit of practice after watching the match of the opponent he'll face next. Natchan then proposes she go with him. He's surprised she'll accompany him. She explains it will be their first date in a long time. He tells her he'll look forward to it. Ei-chan waves his hand, about to go home. Natchan grabs his sleeve (see pic 1 on p.2 of mangakansou). She points out that he doesn't have a match tomorrow and suggests they spend a little more time together today (see pic 2 on p.2 of mangakansou). Blushing, Ei-chan accedes. He proposes they go somewhere they can sit down, since it's cold outside, or maybe somewhere they can have a meal. Natchan adds that they can't stay out late, so some place nearby would be good. Ei-chan starts considering a place in the neighborhood where they can take their time... Then Natchan suggests "our place" (see pic 3 on p.2 of mangakansou). Ei-chan clarifies that by "our place," she meant her home? End of chapter. The title of ch.356 is "Natchan's Home." So it looks like we'll have a break from tennis and finally see Natchan's home and

Ei-chan interacting with Natchan's parents. After that, Ei-chan will probably get to watch Monma's match, and Asano just might show up to give Ei-chan some tips.
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Corrections to the summary: Miyamoto wasn't in the players lounge but the press room. My mistake. Also, it looks like it was Natchan who suggested going to some place where they can eat. I have to say that emoticon Yamaguchi used in his e-mail to Asano informing him of the breaking news was cute. Additions: in QF it's Yamaguchi vs Monma; Nabae vs Watanabe; and Ike vs the 11th
seed (Kitahata? Kitahatake?). The blurb for the next chapter is "What does "that" mean!?"
Volume 37 Extras: Ogata
Vol.37 is out and it includes a 3-page bonus that explains Ogata's absence during Ei-chan's match with Takuma. Ogata had gotten fired up from watching Ike's match, thinking that next year he'd participate in the All Japan too, so Ogata's girlfriend suggested they return to Osaka early because he probably wanted to practice. Ogata got all warm fuzzy that she understood him so well, so when she said she wanted to buy souvenirs for his mom first before leaving, he went along with her. Then during practice, he heard that Ei-chan defeated Takuma—and remembered he'd wanted to watch that match too.

Ch. 356
So Ei-chan and Natchan go to her home. Ei-chan's nervous and his heart is pounding. He's shocked that he'd actually come and wonders if it's okay and whether he should have brought a gift (as a visitor). As it is, the only people whose homes he's visited are Kageyama and Ike, so he wonders what's the best thing to do when it's a girl's home. Natchan announces her arrival (Tadaima!), Ei-chan excuses his (O...ojama-shimasu). Then Natchan pauses and repeats her announcement. However, there's no reply. Natchan says that even though her parents had gone to cheer for her and went home ahead, they're not around. She adds that it's fine and asks Ei-chan to wait while she changes clothes. Ei-chan realizes it might mean there's only the two of them in the house. Natchan returns in fresh clothes, apologizing for making him wait (see pic 1, page 1, on mangakansou). She notes it's Ei-chan's first time to visit. Ei-chan agrees and adds that it feels rather strange. Natchan leads him to her room (see pic 2, page 1, on mangakansou). As Ei-chan takes it in, Natchan urges him to sit wherever he thinks is suitable while she goes to get them something to drink. Ei-chan's heart is still pounding. He wonders where it would be suitable for him to sit in a girl's room. Moreover, it's the room Natchan spends every day in, so he tells himself to stop scrutinizing it too much. Then he sees a study-aid book on top of her desk and wonders what it could be.
Natchan comes back, asking if black tea is okay. Surprised, Ei-chan exclaims it is. She asks him what's wrong. He says it's okay and thanks her. She apparently notices his interest in the study-aid book because she explains it's an English textbook. She's studying for the test, which is the minimum required test for being admitted into an American university. He realizes that even if she's strong in tennis, it doesn't mean she'll get in. She confirms this and adds that she has to pass it before admission in September, so she's working hard. The two drink tea, then sigh. Ei-chan asks if that means she'll be in Japan until August next year. Natchan says she's received invitations from 5 schools now and she's planning on going to visit all the schools by then. So every day she's studying tennis and English. Ei-chan notes that Natchan's good at English. She says it's not a hardship because it's fun. Ei-chan wonders aloud what an American university is like. Natchan tells him the scale is larger and facilities more substantial than IMG, which Ei-chan went to before. He exclaims in surprise

that it's that amazing. She says it is, but she can go with a stipend; the university will cover coaching, facilities, tuition fees, living expenses, and medical expenses. She'll be able to devote herself to tennis and studying. It's like the university has become her sponsor.
Ei-chan replies that it's completely different from Japan (Japanese universities). Natchan says the scale of everything over there is big. The more talk she hears, the more excited she gets. She can train daily with high-level players from around the world whom she absolutely can't play against in Japan. Even if she can't accept prize money and contract money, she can participate in pro competitions. It feels like she'll finally start. Ei-chan thinks she's gained an environment where she can take part in pro competitions while studying. It's the result of her hard work all this time. He tells her it's awesome and it seems like she'll be busy. Natchan agrees. Then Ei-chan adds, "But sure enough...not being able to meet easily is kind of lonesome, you know." Natchan agrees that doing so as they have up to now would be impossible, but there's also vacation, so she'll come back to Japan. Ei-chan adds that they can now chat while seeing each other's faces (video chat). And Natchan adds that when he turns pro, there'll be times when he participates in American tournaments. She'll absolutely go to cheer him on then.
Ei-chan's struck by the realization that he can be the one to go meet her. Natchan's eyes round. He explains that when he turns pro, the more he wins, the broader his options of which competitions he'll take part in. This problem will be steadily resolved by his winning in competitions. And there are many more tournaments in America than Japan, meaning no matter where it is in the world, if they participate in the same tournament, they'll be able to meet. Natchan leans into Ei-chan who turns red (see pic 1, page 2, on mangakansou). Natchan says she thinks that way too. She's trying her best, thinking that the more she wins, the closer she gets to Ei-chan. She holds his hand. He wonders aloud if her parents will be returning soon. She tells him it's okay. He explains that as expected, he's also feeling strange, so he's worried/embarrassed. She asks him why he's worried/embarrassed (see pic 2, page 2, on mangakansou). Ei-chan's all "Eeeeeeeh?" and shouts "'Why?' Natchan!" The faces of the two gradually get closer. And then... (see pic 3, page 2, on mangakansou) At that time, a clatter comes from outside the room. Ei-chan's startled. Natchan stands up and opens the door. There the figure of her older sister appears, apparently in pain from stubbing her foot against the stair. The older sister also enters the room; she greets Ei-chan (hajimemashite, which is used for a first meeting) and introduces herself as Natchan's older sister, Mika (see pic 3, page 2, on mangakansou). Ei-chan responds with his own introduction, wondering to himself since when had Mika been there. Mika notes that he's the Ei-chan she's heard so much about. He replies he is and that he's been allowed to date Natchan. Mika looks fixedly at his face and says he might be as she expected, the cute style ♡. Natchan tells Mika to leave because Mika is intruding. Natchan pushes Mika out while Mika protests that she wants to talk further with Ei-chan. Natchan reminds Mika that Mika had mentioned a drinking party. Mika replies that it was postponed because of a mistake of the organizer, and then asks if they preferred that she go out. The faces of the couple turn red. Mika reminds the two just to refrain from anything that would seriously anger their dad. Speaking in a monotone, Natchan points out it's almost 7 o'clock and Ei-chan says he has to go home soon. The two head for the foyer. As Ei-chan takes his leave of Natchan, Mika tells him to come again. Natchan tells her that's
enough. Ei-chan apologizes for his intrusion, then reminds Natchan about tomorrow. Natchan stops him and whispers in his ear that next time she'll go with him to his place. Ei-chan stammers agreement. Giggling, Natchan says his room is likely kept extremely tidy and in order with a world map put up. It's something she looks forward to. Ei-chan wonders

to himself why she knows. Natchan agrees about tomorrow. Ei-chan tells her he'll e-mail her. As he heads home, the pounding of his heart doesn't lessen. End of chapter. The title for the next chapter is "Training Environment." So we get a break from Ei-chan's official matches and the promise of more Ei-chan and Natchan. I'm looking forward to how Ei-chan's mom interacts with Natchan. That gradual buildup to the kiss sounds really nice too! Of course, it's Natchan who took the lead, but Ei-chan seems to have been a participant rather than just the recipient of an ambush.
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Thanks for the link. Whoa, despite what the summary said, Ei-chan was the one who leaned toward Natchan and initiated the kiss! Oh, and when Natchan asked him why he's worried, only his "Eeeeeeh?" was mental; the "'Why?' Natchan!" was spoken. And Ei-chan didn't ask why Natchan knows what his room looks like; he merely silently wondered that to himself. There's no teaser blurb for the next chapter. What's usually a teaser just says "A throbbing that doesn't let up," referring to the pounding of Ei-chan's heart.

Ch. 357
Oh, it's out already?! Ike and Nabae won their respective quarterfinals. Nabae apparently did so by continuous switching play styles. Monma wins his, and Natchan provides Ei-chan with some insight into Monma's play style. Details to follow...in the morning.
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Huh. It looks like the title of ch.357 is now "Best 4"; it's ch.358 that will have "Training Environment" as a title. Sounds more reasonable, given how this chapter ends. Anyhow, it's the 4th day of the All Japan Championship, and the various quarterfinals will be held. Since Ei-chan's opponent, Yoshimichi, defaulted due to injury, Ei-chan doesn't have a match, so he goes to watch the matches of the other players with
Natchan. They first go to Ike's match. Ike's opponent is Kitahata/Kitahatake (JTA 12). Ike is overwhelming from the start (see pic 1, p.1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan comments that Ike's condition has been steadily improving and that he'll be bringing his peak to the finals.
Ei-chan watches the match with a serious expression. Natchan points out that her first date with Ei-chan was Sou-chan's match. Ei-chan agrees that it was Ike's pro debut. Natchan adds that it was in the center court of this Ariake (the coliseum where the tournament is being held). Ei-chan remembers that was the day he decided to aim for pro. Then Natchan says that if Ei-chan wins tomorrow, he'll play the finals of the All Japan Championship here against Sou-chan. He agrees that's possible. Ike conquers Kitahata/Kitahatake with a straight. Natchan then suggests Ei-chan's next opponent. Ei-chan say Monma vs. Yamaguchi is in court No.1. He asks if there isn't a match that Natchan has to watch. She tells him Aki-chan lost yesterday, and Natchan wants to watch the recorded video of Yazawa's match, so what's left of today is a day with Ei-chan! That makes Ei-chan happy. The couple is noticed by the people around them: Oh, that's the tennis player Takasaki; She looks nice in plain clothes too; The one with her is the tennis player Maruo?; Eh!? The one in the Top 4?; The one people are talking about...? The two exchange looks, Natchan with a radiant smile, Ei-chan with a slightly embarrassed expression. They arrive at No.1, but the match that's their goal hasn't started yet. Ei-chan wonders about the nearby court No.2. The one playing a match there is Nabae. His opponent is Watanabe (JTA 4). Ei-chan is surprised to see the score because Nabae is leading against the 3rd seed, plus he's already at match point! Watanabe swears silently. When he thinks he'd somehow caught the flow...the play style is changed before he realizes it. He's being beaten while he thinks he can't grab the tail...No joke...Sure Nabae doesn't have any weak points, but Nabae's shots aren't a big

deal, either... Watanabe orders himself to calm down. Nabae attacks using the advantage of his serve. He thinks that he can only compensate for his inferiority in power, footwork, career with strategy. If victory can't be found by the current him...except by managing to get away while continuing to change strategies... He concludes that pattern is also reaching its limits and he can only decide the match with this game. He hits a quick serve. Ei-chan and Watanabe are "A quick serve!?"
Watanabe's return lacks power (see pic 2, p.1 on mangakansou). Nabae puts away that ball neatly. The audience erupts: No way! The high-school champion defeated the 3rd seed, Watanabe!; Plus he won on strategy!; Even though Nabae appeared inferior in strength...in the end, he secured one chance and won!; Wait a second! That means 3 in the Best 4 are 18-year-olds...that's unprecedented!; Japanese tennis will change! Watanabe's expression is quite frustrated. Ei-chan is amazed that Nabae advanced to the Best 4 with his own ability, and realizes that semifinals will be between Nabae and Ike. Right then, the announcement of the start of Monma and Yamaguchi's match is broadcast in the grounds. Ei-chan thinks that the match that will decide his opponent has also begun. He takes out his notebook. Natchan says that as she expected, he has prepared perfectly for a lesson. Ei-chan explains that both have left quite a lot of footage. (It sounds like Natchan saw that Ei-chan has already made a lot of notes on both Monma and Yamaguchi.) The match starts with Yamaguchi's service. Ei-chan thinks Monma has more power, but Yamaguchi's technique is better. He notes that Yamaguchi challenges first with high-skill shots, like sharp slices and high-and-low-speed differentials. In order to take those full on, Monma continues to return the topspin balls strong and deep with stable flats, not giving Yamaguchi an opening. Yamaguchi goes to the net. Monma reacts to that with a twitch. He puts away the ball with a straight that gets past Yamaguchi's side. Ei-chan's amazed by Monma's impregnable defense. Natchan comments that Monma somehow looks like he mad—which surprises Ei-chan. She compares him to a stubborn father (pig-headed old man) saying "Hey! That's still insufficient!" and whatnot. Ei-chan takes that in, thinking that while Yamaguch appeared to challenge first, he might actually have been made to attack first because he was having more and more difficulty since there was no opening with Monma. Because of that, an opening with Yamaguchi appeared and the tables were turned on him. Ei-chan remembers that this Monma is the tennis player who was Japan's No.1 for 6 years until he lost the lead to Ike, then after that continued as No.2. He's more proactive than anyone in competing overseas as his main battlefield. He's a man who has also concentrated his energies in nurturing younger members with that experience, practically the backbone of the Japanese tennis world. In the end game of the second set, if Yamaguchi is broken in this game, it's over for him. Yamaguchi thinks that young guys have been showing up steadily and asks (himself? Monma?) if it isn't okay to give his seat to another guy (see pic 1, p.2 on mangakansou). He sends his shot to the very edge. Monma desperately chases that ball and hits it back while diving for it (see pic 2, p.2 on mangakansou). That shot is a winner and concludes the match. Ei-chan marvels at Monma's drive/vigor and thinks that this man, Monma Ayumu, will be his next opponent. The two men shake hands after the end of the match. Monma glances in Ei-chan's direction, making Ei-chan's heart pound. Then Monma starts walking to Ei-chan. "You're Maruo-kun, right? Do you have a minute?" End of chapter. With an end like that, I can imagine why the next chapter would be called "Training Environment." I mean, Ike, Takuma, and Ei-chan are all products of STC, so Monma would probably be very interested in the secrets behind STC's success. Also, with Nabae's win, Ei-chan really needs to defeat Monma, to prove he deserved to get to the Best 4 in the first place. EDIT: Incidentally, the

poster said the scores for the quarterfinals were: Ike: 6-1, 6-0 Nabae: 4-6, 7-5, 6-4 Monma: 7-5, 6-4
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Corrections and additions to the summary: It looks like it was Ei-chan, not Natchan, who said that Ike will be bringing his peak to the finals. Ei-chan didn't say that Monma vs. Yamaguchi is first, but in court No.1. In Ei-chan's notes, he wrote that Yamaguchi's control for his backhand slice is good. I think Yamaguchi's question about giving his seat to another guy was addressed at Monma, like isn't it about time for Monma to let someone else win. Wow, it looks like after Monma dived, he skidded and bounced on landing. The teaser blurb for the next chapter is "What does he want to say...the day before their match...?" EDIT: According to the draw in ch.355, Yamaguchi defeated Haketa (5th seed) 7-6, 6-4
to reach the quarterfinals. So of Team A in the national team, Arino and Watanabe were defeated by Nabae, and Haketa by Yamaguchi, Yoshimichi defaulted. Only Monma and Ike are undefeated; Kono/Kawano didn't participate.

Ch. 358
Have a deadline at work, so I'll just hit the highlights for now: Monma asks Ei-chan's plans, like where Ei-chan's base of operations will be, since there's no one in STC who can present a challenge to Ei-chan. Ei-chan hasn't thought about that because it was only the other day that he decided to go pro. Natchan thinks Monma's question was because Monma is eyeing Ei-chan for the B Team of the national team. At STC for a short practice, Ei-chan and Coach Aoi watch DVDs of Monma's matches. So no Asano, unfortunately. The next day Ike's in the players' lounge watching a martial arts match, apparently as image training for his match with Nabae.
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So Monma addresses Ei-chan, who's in the bleachers with Natchan: "You're Maruo-kun, right?" Ei-chan's surprised that Monma, Japan's No.2, who is his next opponent wants to talk to him about something, but more than that, he's surprised Monma recognizes him. Monma asks if Ei-chan has a minute and points outside. Ei-chan with Natchan meet Monma outside the court. Ei-chan fumbles for words, then settles on "Hello, I look forward to the next match." Monma replies, "Yeah...Aside from that sort of thing..."—which surprises Ei-chan again. Monma confirms that Ei-chan is a affiliated with STC and asks what Ei-chan plans to do from now on. When Ei-chan doesn't follow what Monma meant by "from now on," Monma explains that he'd heard from Takuma that Ei-chan aspires to become a pro, but Monma believes when Ei-chan turns pro, Ei-chan will no longer have a practice partner (someone who can keep up with him in training) at STC. Monma also points out that in addition to that, Ei-chan's girlfriend is looking for an American university. Ei-chan notes that Monma knows all sorts of things about him. Monma concludes: "The main point is, when you work as a pro, where will you be based? The question apparently hadn't occurred to Ei-chan before. He tells Monma he hasn't thought that far yet. He'd just decided to go pro just the other day. He has his hands full with the tournament and searching for a sponsor. Monma understands, but points out that for now, it's a choice of whether he'll be based in Japan or overseas. He adds that he thinks for overseas discussions, it would be better to consult the worldly-wise Tanemura rather than Ike; however, he feels that in Ei-chan's case, there still seems to be a lot of good practice partners in Japan. Then Monma takes his leave with the promise of "tomorrow"—Ei-chan and Natchan are shocked that it's over. Ei-chan thanks Monma and says he'll trying to consider everything. Ei-chan mentally agrees that there's the question of where he'll be based for practice. No matter how much means and money he has, if he

doesn't have a practice partner, it's hopeless. He wonders why Monma brought such a matter to Ei-chan's attention now. Natchan speculates that it's the B Team of the national team. She points out that youngsters of whom great things are expected are chosen as the national team's B Team by the JTA—as resources who will be representative in the next generation's national team. Behind her, the table shows the national team as composed of the A Team (7 people among tennis players with a world rank of 200 and above) and the B Team (a few 18–23 year old tennis players with potential). The order in team competitions is decided from among both A and B Teams. She points out that if that's the case, Ei-chan would be able to train with the NTC (National Training Center) as his base, always practicing with the national team. She adds that Takuma is already a member of that B Team. Ei-chan flounders at the implication. Natchan concludes that Ei-chan will be able to practice as much as he wants everyday with people who are at a level to represent Japan. Ei-chan's amazed at the prospect: for him it's an environment where he'd be more blessed than if he goes overseas imprudently. Then he comes back to earth, saying he thinks he wouldn't be chosen for that. Natchan agrees that his past results might not be enough, but Ei-chan's now in the All Japan semifinals. He argues that it's just by default, that he's luckier than the other players. She counters that that might be the very reason why Monma wanted to learn about Ei-chan's situation. Because of that, tomorrow Monma will want to probe whether Ei-chan is appropriate for the B Team. That Monma is said to be a man who pours everything into his national team activities. Natchan believes Monma definitely has influence in the personnel selection for the B Team. So if Ei-chan wins, he'll enter the B Team. Then his base is the NTC. Ei-chan wonders whether it's true. They go to STC. Ei-chan gets some practice in, with some STC players sneaking peeks. He, Coach Aoi, and Natchan watch DVDs, probably of Monma's matches. Then Ei-chan and Natchan head home. That night Ei-chan reviews his notes on Monma, who's definitely Ei-chan's strongest opponent in a regular match. Monma ranked is 54th in the
world, which Ei-chan thinks isn't quite different from Ike who's 41st. According to Ei-chan's notes, Monma has a one-handed forehand and a two-handed backhand. His basic strokes are forehand and backhand flats. His backhand slices have strong rotations, frequently used in defense rather than offense. He has varied defenses against the blow of opponents who suddenly shift to an attack. A baseliner. He often goes on the attack after reliably stealing the upper hand. After he has the advantage, his ability to make the point is high. He has few tricky attacks. His serves are also powerful with a straight topspin. Ei-chan reminds himself he's experienced that level, serving as Ike's hitting partner. And thanks to Natchan, he's gotten a one-day breather in the middle of this (indirect reference to a date). He has enough data and his condition is perfect. Having come this far, he'll just look forward to how far he can go. The next day, Ike's in the players' lounge, watching a mixed martial arts fight on his smart phone. One of his coaching staff (?) comments that Ike likes watching those before a match. Ike replies that it's something he had sent to him especially for today. It's the comeback fight of Fabio Marques, who was called Bou-kun (Wild Boy?), after a major injury during a fight. That passionate (doesn't disguise his feelings) Wild Boy used his injury a turning point and made a fresh start as a calm and clever fighter. The coach comments that if a ferocious guy is able to control those emotions, he'll be strong. Ike says that in this fight, however, Marques is beaten—which surprises the coach. Ike explains that the one he's watching is Renardo, the current champion who defeated that calm Wild Boy. Wild Boy challenged calmly, using tactics that leveraged his experience, but the champion persisted in his own attack style to the bitter end. And the champion who won in this fight becomes a fabulous champion who establishes a myth of invincibility. Ike calls it regular image

training—although he is interested in it (mixed martial arts). The coach asks if Nabae is a former wild boy who managed to achieve mental control. He adds that Nabae doesn't appear so at first glance. Ike replies that that's what's scary about Nabae. Then Monma arrives. Ike greets him and Monma acknowledges the greeting. Scene switch to Nabae warming up. He thinks his opponent is the type who's super offense. At minimum, he wants to prepare a posture that's capable of the best response to any attack. And most importantly... Nabae has a flashback to his throwing down his
racket when he was losing during a match with Ike. Nabae thinks he's gotten to the semifinals, but his matches up to now have been far from ideal. His assumptions have been too optimistic. He still hasn't completely organized all the data up to now. In addition to that, he's strongly aware they're the same year in school. In a match again Ike...how much can he (Nabae) control his own mentality when he can't avoid various psychological factors influencing the match? Nabae finishes his warmup and meets Ei-chan on his way to the players' lounge. They exchange greetings. Nabae confirms that he's in the first match and Ei-chan in the second, and Ei-chan agrees. The two see Ike and Monma. Scene switch to the grounds. Lots of people coming. Someone comments that the number of spectators is an all-time high because of Ike's popularity and the rise of youngsters. People speculate that the finals will be a playoff with Ike vs. Monma. Someone counters that the media has considerable expectations of Nabae's performance. The schedule has the first men's semifinals (Ike vs. Nabae) in the coliseum and the first women's semifinals in Court No.1, both starting at 11. The second men's semifinals (Ei-chan vs. Monma) will be held in Court No.1, after the first women's semifinals ends, while the second women's semifinals will be held in the coliseum, after the first men's semifinals ends. Someone says that the later one with the high schooler who qualified through the prelims is interesting. Someone else comments that it's a first in the history, and it seem he's inferior in strength, but the one speaking wants to see it. The first speaker agrees and suggests they go to Court No.1 afterward to watch. In the audience are Ronnie and that coach Ike chatted with, Takagi (of the underhanded tricks), Takuma (judging by the hairstyle), and probably Ei-chan. The bleachers of the coliseum are packed. Ike and Nabae emerge. The teaser blurb says "The Clash of the Strongest Junior and Japan's Strongest!" The title for the next chapter is "Two of the Most Powerful of the Generation"

Ch. 359

Okay, so ch.359 starts with Ike and Nabae entering the court for their semifinals. They exchange shots to warm up. Audience commentary: They say Nabae's the high-school champion in the same school year as Ike, you know; Really...that means it's the top match between a pro and an amateur of the same generation; Ike will finally clash with the chief of the Ike generation. Ei-chan wonders how Nabae will play against Ike.

The match starts with Nabae's service. He sends his serve wide. Ike's blow goes into the net. 15-0. Ei-chan thinks he (probably Ike) had completely gone for a winner with one shot. Nabae notes the danger; he thinks that Ike is basically attacking from beginning to end and even the one just now might have been achievable. Nabae's next serve goes into the net. Ei-chan has no doubt Ike will attack the second serve, so he wonders how Nabae will counter it. Nabae's second serve is a spin ball that bounces high. Ike returns it. Ei-chan thinks Nabae has temporarily excluded Ike's attack by using a strong spin and a difference in speed. Watching Ike's movements closely, Nabae puts away the ball in the opposite direction. 30-0. Ei-chan feels that was quite excessive, but he wonders if Nabae intends to attack from now on. Play continues with Nabae's serve to the center clocked at 190 kph. It's

an ace. 40-0. Ei-chan's certain now that Nabae is attacking one step ahead of the aggressive Ike. And in addition to that, Nabae's probably doing it efficiently, with the minimum risk. The next rally turns into an exchange of shots. Ike keeps on hitting strong blows; Nabae is a bit slow, but he ramps down the pace with deep balls. However, Ike steps up the pace by using a rising shot even on a deep ball, and he goes forward. Ei-chan notes it's a form that responded to Nabae's attack. Though Ike is at the net, Nabae puts the ball away with a sharp angle shot and takes the game. Nabae exhales, thinking it's okay...maybe. Ike thinks Nabae's quite amazing...precisely refined attacks, coming in a variety. He concludes Nabae is the type Ike can't meet much overseas. He thinks Nabae resembles Ei-chan somewhat. Ei-chan's impressed that Nabae compares quite favorably with Ike, though it was Nabae's service. He tells himself to pay attention to how Nabae engages Ike's service. Ike's service starts. He sends his serve to the center. Nabae returns it. Ei-chan considers it a nice return that's slow and deep and won't turn into the fast deployment that Ike likes. However, Ike makes a small jump (see pic 1 on mangakansou) and hits a strong forehand blow (see pic 2 on mangakansou) that puts away the ball. 15-0. The crowd erupts: There it is! This is it! This!; The forehand that has been knocking out the world! Ei-chan marvels: Unbelievable...It wasn't a bad return...but with just two steps, moreover, jumping and twisting his body...an accurate single blow from a perfect impact point! And that power and control! Was Ike-kun this awesome? Coach Aoi asks Ei-chan if he's gotten scared. Ei-chan's apparently surprised to see him. Coach Aoi tells Ei-chan that it's a matter of various things having become obvious to Ei-chan—which is proof he's gotten stronger. Nabae thinks this is it. When they were kids, he had been overwhelmed by this astounding tennis and lost himself. Since then, he'd trained his fighting ability with rational thinking that as much as possible excluded emotions in court. He'll just work out as much as he can the tactics of how he'll defeat this opponent using only what he has now from the options that he's added. Nabae returns the ball, thinking that in a return game, he'll vary his offense and defense. Ike thinks alternately pushing and pulling is difficult, but if it's his service, he might be able to play his tennis. Ike holds his serve, concluding that in which case, he'll probably be able to manage somehow in some respects. The match continues and both hold 3 games each. It's now the 7th game. Nabae thinks that up to now Ike has covered 65% of the court using his forehand (see pic 3 on mangakansou); if he considers this to be Ike's standard...an attack at that junction will be effective. Ike overtakes and cuts in on that ball. Nabae's surprised that Ike's persisting in using his forehand. Ike hits a strong shot crosscourt. Nabae doesn't catch up to it, but it's just barely out. 30-15. Nabae thinks the flow from this astoundingly smooth footwork up to the shot...it would be a lie if he says he's not shaken and emotionally flustered, but...he's able to maintain his composure with just having accurately executed the strategy he devised. Ike thinks he's going for a spot in an area that's hard to do while putting a lot of thought about a tricky spot. Even he won't catch fire because he's being made to use his mind unexpectedly. He tells himself Nabae is a guy who'd gotten stronger since Ike went to America, so Ike doesn't have much of an impression of him. Nabae's existence isn't one that has stood out since they were kids, unlike Takuma and Ogata, at least. Even at the
present time, it's likely his power, footwork, and other physical aspects are still developing...which is to say he can still become stronger than this...but that means Ike also has the potential for much more... Ike hits another strong shot, thinking he's gotten a bit of energy (see pic 4 on mangakansou)—or maybe he's gotten a bit pissed off. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Motivation."
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Additions and correction: After the shot that brings the score in the first game to 30-0, the crowd commentary is: If there's an opening, he'll deal a blow...Nabae's good; He's already as much as said to be top level in Japan. After the ace for 40-0, the comment is "An amazing course! And it's also powerful, you know." In the end, when Ike hits another strong shot, he thinks he's gotten a bit of energy—or maybe he's gotten a bit pissed off.

Ch. 360
Nabae gets broken, so the score should be 4-3. In the next game, Nabae gets the first point with a lob. Looks like we'll get one or two more chapters of the match with Coach Aoi providing analysis and insight to Ei-chan before Ei-chan's match. But Ei-chan's getting antsy about playing his own match. Details to follow.
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It's now the 7th game (Nabae's service) with both players having held their serves, 3 games each. Ike looks like he's started to catch fire a bit. He returns the serve. Nabae thinks Ike's suddenly gotten pushy, and decides not to draw back here. He returns the ball with a strong blow. Ike returns that with a drop shot (see pic 1 on page 1). Nabae practically couldn't move from his spot. 30-30. Cheers erupt: Awesome! He turned a fast ball into a drop!; He's really pushing it! Ei-chan thinks Ike forcibly attacked Nabae's slow ball with power...when Nabae responded to that power shot with power...this time it was a drop shot that's made to decelerate right away. He wonders if Ike is aiming for a slow ball with a fast ball, and for a fast ball with a slow ball, using deliberately difficult (shot) choices. Coach Aoi comments that this is Ike's gear change. (Nabae shrugs off the point as he couldn't have done anything about the one just now.) When Ei-chan doesn't get what
Coach Aoi meant by gear change, Coach Aoi explains that if it will be an important point, everybody tries to raise the gear of their concentration by one step. He guesses that even Ei-chan has experienced that. Ei-chan confirms this. So Coach Aoi continues his explanation, saying that if Ei-chan becomes a top-notch player, he'll come to be able to raise that gear intentionally. However, Coach Aoi points out that in Ike's case, Ike can't raise his gear voluntarily because he usually enters the match in top gear. Ei-chan's surprised and asks what Ike does. Coach Aoi replies that according to the person himself, when it comes to that point, he'll arbitrarily catch fire. Ei-chan questions the "arbitrarily." Coach Aoi explains that it seems to be dependent upon the opponent and the situation, but when it comes to the critical moment, it seems Ike raises what should have been the top gear even further. Even now he's been applying tempo. He's found even more speed differential playing against Nabae and took the point. Ike, who raised his gear as far as Coach Aoi could see, improved his nose for detecting the spot that his opponent dislikes the most. Since Ike was a kid, his ability to judge how he should fight against what sort of opponent in what sort of situation has been the best by far. That judgement is intuitive and instantaneous, plus it's growing accurate. What makes Ike's super-aggressive tennis possible is probably the speed of his judgment and his motor skills. Because he simply decides fast and can move fast, he's able to take his opponent's time. The match continues with a rather long rally. Ike hits a short ball that's somewhat a drop shot. Nabae catches up with the ball and returns it, but Ike predicted that and he puts it away with a volley. 30-40. Ike's break point. Coach Aoi points out that he thinks the really scary feature of that guy (Ike) is how he can wholeheartedly enjoy the maneuvering of this sort of fight. Ei-chan thinks of the Ike he's sensed/experienced up to now and gulps. Coach Aoi speculates that Ike absolutely likes fighting (see pic 2 on page 1), that he's the type who'd become strong in anything, even if it's not tennis, so long as it's a contest. Nabae thinks this is the critical moment and it's sooner than he expected. Ike thinks

it's an extremely precise tennis of a degree of perfection that's seldom overseas...It's a typically Japanese strength that he didn't have when he left Japan at 13. It's a strength that's necessary even for him. Nabae decides that therefore...he hits a super slice serve. Ike returns it, noting that it's
slow. Nabae goes to the net; Ei-chan's surprised that Nabae's using serve & volley. Nabae volleys. As Ike pulls his racket back, the eyes of the two meet. Nabae suspects that if Ike will come back with a speed differential, it might be a lob. However, Ike hits a straight that gets past Nabae on the side (see pic 3 on page 1). Nabae couldn't touch it and his serve is broken. The crowd erupts: As expected, the one who broke first is Ike! Ei-chan thinks that the one now, Ike produced a stance that can get past Nabae no matter where, plus the ball went past with more power than necessary. He concludes that the damage to Nabae is big. Takagi is shocked that Nabae was broken first, moreover that he was broken perfectly. He says Ike is truly a guy with monstrous talent. Nabae's coach replies that if Ike goes on like this, the accepted practice of the Japanese will change in the future—Ike is that singular an existence. Takagi recalls that when they were kids, after Nabae lost to Ike...Nabae had said that if it's tortoise and hare, Ike is the hare while Naba might be the tortoise. Takagi remembers it because Nabae had been unusually timid. The Nabae then was certain it's not just Ike; he thought the pro world is composed of prepared hares. Then to win, maybe he can just continue looking at the goal and running without watching the hares. If he looks only at the goal without wavering...Takagi wondered what the goal is and Nabae wondered as well. End of flashback. Tagaki isn't certain if Nabae started talking about All-A after that. Then he wonders, if Nabae is a tortoise, then what is he (Takagi)? Nabae exhales deeply. He tells himself it couldn't be helped. Impatience and a sense of inferiority are unnecessary feelings in a match. The one he's fighting now is an opponent who had made him believe that. During Ike's service game, Ike goes to the net. Nabae returns the ball to Ike's feet. Ei-chan considers it a skillful return. He thinks that if it's just this slow and it sinks, Ike can't use a strong blow. Ike returns the ball. Nabae passes that above Ike with a lob and takes the point (see pic on page 2). Ike clicks his tongue. 0-15. The audience is in an uproar: Amazing...He was broken and he converts this lob into the first point; He's composed; The quantity of tactics is certainly top class in Japan.
Even Ei-chan is amazed. Nabae thinks it's one break. He expects his opponent to keep challenging him nonstop. In which case, he concludes that here too he can only pull in a win by sidestepping his opponent. If he gets close to winning, he's not afraid of running away. Being capable of any way of fighting is his ideal tennis. Ike thinks it's not just Nabae's numerous strategies; Nabae's choice, which matched the situation, is also skillful. He decides that Nabae is even more amazing than he'd heard. Ike hits a serve; Nabae returns. Ei-chan is antsy, thinking he also has begun to want to play his match soon.
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The teaser for the next chapter: Ei-chan's match is also imminent! And I forgot to mention that the title for ch.361 is "Calm and Passion." Addition: the flashback that made Ei-chan gulp was his discussion with Natchan during Ike's pro debut. He'd asked Natchan what she meant by "dangerous person," and the bottom line of her explanation is that Ike really seems to enjoy attacking/beating his opponent. This flashback was apparently triggered by Coach Aoi's comment that Ike "can wholeheartedly enjoy the maneuvering of this sort of fight." So Natchan's opinion supports Coach Aoi's.

Ch. 361

So Nabae had gotten the first point in Ike's service with a lob. 0-15. Play continues with a rally. Watching Ike closely, Nabae thinks this footwork is an A...If it's from a B-grade backhand spin, an opening... He catches up with Ike's return ball and takes back his racket. Ike judges Nabae's pose to be one for a slice that will float and he goes to the net. Nabae sees that (see pic 1 on mangakansou) and takes the point with a straight. 0-30. Ike notes it was a spin and that he'd been tricked. He thinks that Nabae is skillful, but that he (Ike) is also unsatisfactory/naive. Ei-chan wonders if Nabae's pose for a slice was an invitation/temptation, and he thinks Nabae is calm. Nabae wants to attack before Ike does, but when he can't do that, he'll trick Ike using effective tactics he'd thought of, escape, defend, and evade.

Ike sends his serve wide, and Nabae returns. Ike returns that with a strong crosscourt shot. Nabae returns that. Ike again returns it at a sharp angle with a strong shot, and it's a winner (see pic 2 on mangakansou). 15-30. Ike: Yeah! Ei-chan notes that Ike had kept driving his shots at a sharp angle and had taken the point with yet another angle shot. He wonders how far Ike will take his bold attacks. Nabae believes the problem isn't his not being able to surpass Ike's nonstandard offensive ability; the problem is how to surpass this tennis using strategy. Ike notes he's starting to sizzle (catch fire), but his level of fire is insufficient. His next serve is to the center. Nabae returns it again to the border with a forehand cross. Ike reminds himself that his opponent is a wild boy who has gained composure, and that if he (Nabae?) bears it in such a way that he doesn't extinguish his fire, he'll become mighty. Ike goes around and cuts in on the ball; using his forehand, he hits a cross in the opposite direction. Nabae notes that Ike had properly fixed the ball he'd missed a little while earlier (probably referring to ch.359 where Ike persisted in using his forehand beyond 65% of the forehand side of court). He believes Ike is temporarily lowering his offensive ability and is waiting for a chance to attack. Nabae returns it with a backhand cross. Ike returns it with a backhand straight: "How's that?" Nabae starts to run early. Ei-chan concludes Nabae had predicted what Ike did. Nabae goes for a winner, but to his regret, the ball goes into the net. 30-30. Nabae wonders if he'd tried too hard. Ike notes the danger and thinks his playing is half-baked. Nabae concludes that he wasn't, that if his attacks lets up for even an instant, Ike won't let him get away. Continuing to apply this steady pressure is his greatest defense. Ike thinks Nabae doesn't want to let Ike catch fire so easily. Ei-chan's heart is pounding. He marvels that it's such a furious scramble for the lead. Coach Aoi points out that it should soon be time for Ei-chan's match. Ei-chan gasps and agrees. Coach Aoi tells Ei-chan to go and warm up at a convenient point (in the match). Ei-chan says yes. He thinks that the 8th game had taken a different turn from before. Even though it's Ike's serve, he'd been compelled to resist desperately because the techniques that Nabae unleashed one after another were quite varied. Nabae takes the next point with a drop shot. 30-40. Nabae strikes a triumphant pose. Ei-chan thinks that Nabae was focusing 120% power in order to break this game, that even Ike seemed to be at a loss how to continue, and that several times the advantage of the serve was about to go from Ike to Nabae, but Ike didn't completely surrender it.

Ike takes the point with a backhand straight. Deuce. Nabae thinks that even if Ike's offensive ability drops, his posture of constant offense is unchanged. Finally, after deuce repeated 4 times, in the end, Ike decides it with an ace to the center and holds his serve (see pics 3 and 4 on mangakansou). Ike's coaches: We can say that the one just now is the result of the strengthening of his serve, can't we?; He shouldn't get to the point of being about to be broken! Takagi comments that losing this chance must hurt. But Nabae's coach disagrees, saying that this sort of game will be linked to the next one. Then the 9th game, where Nabae

has his back to the wall (probably because the score for the 1st set should be 5-3), starts. Maintaining the upper hand, Nabae securely held his serve. Coach Aoi tells Ei-chan they should get going. They depart from the court. At that time, cheers go up, coming from the court. Ei-chan: Eh? End of chapter. The title for the next chapter is "Catching Fire." What a cliffhanger. But given the title for ch.362, I think it's safe to say that Ike will step up his game.
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Corrections to the summary: Nabae thinks that if his attacks let up for even an instant, Ike won't let him get away. Coach Aoi tells Ei-chan to go and warm up at a convenient point (in the match). Ronnie's reply to Ike's other coach is that Ike shouldn't get to the point of being about to be broken! Coach Aoi prompts Ei-chan to leave at the end of the 9th game, and they leave together. Additions: When Nabae's shot went into the net and the score tied at 30-30, the crowd response is "Almost but not quite!" and "But it's a good attack on Nabae's part." The teaser blurb says "The 10th game...!? What's happening?!!"

Ch. 362
Ike took the first set. And Asano shows up with a bit of advice for Ei-chan! Wahoo! And it seems Asano had never lost to Monma. And Asano tells Ei-chan that he'd accepted the offer to coach the national team because he'd lost to Ei-chan, and that if Ei-chan defeats Monma, it might influence the decision to appoint Ei-chan to the B Team. Details to follow.
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Okay, so on hearing the cheering from center court, Ei-chan hesitates and turns to Coach Aoi, who then agrees "just for a short while." And they go back inside. Ei-chan thinks that cheer just now was Ike's point...which means the one just now was probably an Ike super shot. Ike's at the net. Nabae hits a tight shot aimed at the line. Ike returns it with a cross, and Nabae also returns with a cross. With his arm extended, Ike pulls off a drop volley (see pic 1 on mangakansou). 30-0. Again the audience cheers: Unbelievable!; What was that just now...? Even Ei-chan's surprised, thinking that a drop shot at an acute angle with that posture is impossible, when Nabae had twice hit a path that normally would have escaped Ike. He thinks even just touching the ball is amazing; hitting a ball to the opposite of his opponent, plus doing it so "it's only here" (I think he means the ball lands close, so Ike controlled the power) is... Ike serves. Nabae returns it down the line. Ike gets around the ball, surprising Nabae and Ei-chan. Ei-chan thinks that even though up to now Ike returned balls over there with his backhand, Ike cut in with his forehand...so Nabae can't go back to the center because he has to watch out for Ike's strong straight (see pic 2 on mangakansou). Ike clinches it with a crosscourt shot. 40-0. Coach Aoi comments that with this, he thinks Ike has totally caught fire. Ei-chan wonders what triggered it. Coach Aoi replies that even Ike thinks he'd actually done all sorts of things; after always going on the offense, he endures and fights his opponent...Ike relies on his intuition in order to "catch fire" at a suitable time. Ei-chan asks if that means Ike can voluntarily ignite his fire. Coach Aoi speculates that since it's intuition, it probably doesn't mean Ike can do it any time. But Ei-chan is still in awe. Coach Aoi adds that he thinks the condition Ike calls "catching fire" might be the "zone," that it's said there are players who can enter the zone on their own when they reach top rank, but Ike might also be trying to get to that stage. Coach Aoi concludes that at any rate, Ike's mental strength is special. Ike wins the first set with a powerful backhand. Nabae thinks he had a chance in the first set...but he's back to square one. Coach Aoi suggests that's enough. Ei-chan agrees and adds that he's glad to have seen Ike fired up. Ei-chan goes outside and warms up. Then Coach Aoi tells him the previous match (the

first women's semifinals) is over and suggests they get moving. There, they're hailed by Asano who congratulates Ei-chan for making it to the Top 4 from the prelims. He comments that Ei-chan is flourishing and adds that he'd spontaneously come to root for Ei-chan. Surprised, Ei-chan acknowledges Asano, while Coach Aoi greets him. Asano comments that it will soon be the match with Monma. Ei-chan confirms this and explains that they were about to head over. Asano notes they don't have much time. He explains there's something he wants to tell Ei-chan beforehand—frankly it's just two things...so he'll do it while they move (head over to Court 1). The first is advice for Ei-chan from he (Asano) who has never lost to Monma. He asks permission to do so from Aoi. Coach Aoi replies what he wants to hear it. Asano says Monma is strongest when he's fortifying his defense for that instant of attack. If he (Asano) has to say more, it's a matter of varying between defense and offense extremely distinctly. Ei-chan echoes, "it's a matter of...?" Asano explains it's a short time, but Ei-chan's chance is when Monma releases his "iron shield" defense and switches to offense. Ei-chan admits that's something he and Coach Aoi had considered yesterday, and they're wondering if that's the only thing there is. Asano replies that it's difficult to plainly say "it's this and that"...but the cornerstone of Monma's tennis is defense, so it's easier to break it down in a situation that doesn't require defense. However, he mustn't simply provide Monma with a situation where Monma can attack. Ei-chan puzzles over that: where defense isn't necessary but it's hard to attack? He asks, "What sort of situation is that, specifically?" Asano replies that that's why he'd said he can't plainly say it, and orders Ei-chan to think about it. Ei-chan's all "R-Right!" The second thing Asano wants to tell Ei-chan is that because he lost to Ei-chan...he's taken over as coach of the national team. Ei-chan marvels that it's because Asano lost to him. Coach Aoi welcomes the news Asano will take up coaching. Asano continues, saying that if Ei-chan defeats Monma, it might have an influence on Ei-chan, who's still young, being on the national B Team, so then, he'll rely on Ei-chan. Ei-chan remembers Natchan had mentioned the B Team, and tells Asano he'll do his best. As Asano takes his leave, Ei-chan says he (Ei-chan) also has something he wanted to tell Asano: his being able to make it to the Top 4 is due to Asano. Then he thanks Asano. For a moment, Asano looked blank, then he replies that he'd wondered if that was the case (see pic 3 on mangakansou). He adds that he'd said it before, but he has
hopes for Ei-chan's tennis, and then he orders Ei-chan to do his best (as a favor to Asano). Ei-chan agrees. Right then, Monma happens to pass between them and excuses himself. Eating a banana (see pic 4 on mangakansou), Monma heads for the venue. Then Coach Aoi says, "Well, let's go!" End of chapter. No title for the next chapter mentioned. So now there's a logical reason for Asano to coach Ei-chan while Ei-chan is still starting out on his pro career and not yet pulling in big bucks. In other words, Ei-chan really needs to defeat Monma now!

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Man, the imagery Asano uses for Monma is just so funny! I guess instead of "iron wall" (the standard translation of the kanji), "iron shield" would be more appropriate. Oh, that spoiler post was incomplete. The second thing Asano wanted to tell Ei-chan was if Ei-chan defeats Monma, it might have an influence on Ei-chan, who's still young, being on the national B Team, so then, he'll rely on Ei-chan. (In other words, as a coach relies on a player in his charge to win.) And Monma doesn't just pass by, he passes between them. The blurb says "The reigning 4-time champion of the All Japan, Monma! At last, the decisive battle...!" The next chapter announcement says Baby Steps has been allowed not to appear in the next issue (#46). The next chapter will be in issue #47, the 8th anniversary of Baby Steps' serialization, and will have a color page.

Ch. 363
Just a few details first, because I have Skip Beat! and that has priority. When one of Ei-chan's returns goes into the net, Monma actually shouts "Oi!" (Hey!) (see pic 1 on page 2) apparently at Ei-chan, and then he apologizes. Asano and Coach Aoi take it that Monma has high expectations of Ei-chan, because Ei-chan's errors are apparently pissing off Monma. It turns out that Monma had called Asano "yesterday" and asked for info on Ei-chan. And Asano—of course—told him, including the countermeasures Asano was able to devise; makes sense since Asano is already the national team's coach. He tells Coach Aoi (see pic 2 on page 2) that he'd done so for Ei-chan's sake!
Details to follow.
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The title of ch.363 is "Pressure." So Ei-chan had headed for the venue (Court 1). When he'd spoken with Asano who was waiting for him there, Monma also starts heading for the venue, while eating a banana. Coach Aoi notes that Japan's strongest baseliner has appeared. Taking his leave of Coach Aoi and Asano, Ei-chan wonders why Monma is eating a banana before the match, when he usually eats it during the match to replenish his sugar levels. The two enter the venue. Audience reactions: Ah, there he is!; It's Monma Ayumu!; Monma-san is cool!; Oh, behind him is Maruo, the finalist who's the first in history to come from the prelims?; He's young and has a small build, doesn't he?; Isn't that because he's still a high schooler? Ei-chan realizes he's also being noticed. Monma stops at the court entrance, swallows his banana, and bows to the court, saying "Yoroshiku onegaishimasu" (basically "Please treat me well" but has other translations depending on the situation). Audience: Monma!; Two more until your 5th consecutive championship!; Do your best! Ei-chan thinks Monma's bow was kinda cool, like Monma was getting the court to allow him to use it from here on, so Ei-chan also bows to the court, then enters it. Kageyama marvels at the audience, commenting that among Ei-chan's matches to date, it has the most number of visitors. Yukichi explains the match is being carried even online, so it would be watched all the more live. Ei-chan and Monma go to the middle of the court. Monma chooses to serve. Then the 5-minute warm-up before the match starts. Ei-chan thinks he'd watched a lot of videos of Monma's matches. He believes he has sufficient info (see pic 1 on p.1 of mangakansou; the image is too small, so I won't even try to translate it). He and Coach Aoi had also thought up various countermeasures. And he'd gotten an unexpected hint from Asano. Plus, because he didn't have a match yesterday, he was able to conserve his physical strength and to watch in person the best match right before (probably referring to Ike vs Nabae). He can face a match with his strongest opponent yet in his best condition after the best image training (possibly also referring to Ike vs Nabae). Then the 3-set match starts with Monma's serve. Ei-chan sets up, thinking Monma's serves are fast ball, mainly flats and spins. Monma's serve is a flat to the center. He's able to get an ace since Ei-chan doesn't touch it. But Ei-chan classifies the serve as a flat, fast ball. He looks toward the speed indicator, which reads 190 kph. He concludes that while it's fast from the start, it's not as fast as Takuma's. Asano comments that Monma is quite fired up from the start (which is supported by Monma's very early banana consumption). The next serve is a fast slice, again to the center. Ei-chan returns it. Then Monma returns it. As Ei-chan returns it, he plans to send it deep and flat, lowering the pace once with a curving spin. When Monma returns it, he looks momentarily angry. The next Ei-chan plans is a slice with a long flight and doesn't bound...to somehow restore the disadvantage (?). Monma cuts in on that ball with his forehand. Ei-chan wonders if Monma will attack immediately here and that therefore this is

the point where Monma shifts to offense. Monma pulls off a shot crosscourt (see pic 2 on p.1 of mangakansou). 30-0. Ei-chan thinks he wants to do something...here...but... (Apparently he doesn't yet know what to do.) Monma stares in Ei-chan's direction without saying anything—which catches Ei-chan's attention and makes him wonder what that's about. Ei-chan feels a weird pressure, like he's being scolded. He questions whether it's a tactic to shake him mentally, similar to Takagi's. But he thinks it's not that sort of weird feeling. Then Ei-chan reminds himself it's not something to worry about; in the first place, there's no reason for him to be scolded during a match. He thinks that Monma is quite relentless, as expected, but there's also the guts of his (Ei-chan's) tennis to date; varying his tempo and types of shots isn't very effective. Though it's his opponent's serve, he (Ei-chan) hasn't seen a single opening so far. But still he returned the first serve. He has also felt for himself the stroke that boasts of an iron-shield defense. He's also seen the point when Monma switches from defense to offense, which he has to do something about. He was defeated in one blow, but...he'll manage to return it...prior to that, he'll play in such a way that won't allow Monma to easily hit it. For that purpose, he'll do everything he can, one at a time, from here on.
He returns Monma's serve and a rally commences. Ei-chan tries hitting a forehand slice, wondering if it will result in an opening. Monma returns it calmly and goes to the net. Ei-chan notes that Monma's timing is completely unshaken, and that he'd aimed at a tough spot and come forward. Ei-chan reminds himself it's his return game and decides to play boldly: Go! However, the backhand that he'd hit boldly goes into the net. Monma shouts, "Oi!" (see pic 1 on p.2 of mangakansou). Both the umpire and the audience are surprised. Monma apologizes, "Ah...No. Excuse me..." Ei-chan thinks "Eh...Huh? Just a...What was that just now...? Saying 'Oi,' don't tell me he's really mad? At whom...? At me...?" Play continues. Monma's serve is a flat wide. He's able to get another ace, so he holds his first game. Smiling slightly, Asano comments that this might be Monma's having considerable expectations of Ei-chan. Coach Aoi agrees. Asano adds that it's something he'd somewhat realized because of yesterday. Coach Aoi asks what. Asano explains he'd gotten a call from Monma, saying he wants to learn about Ei-chan, and had been questioned thoroughly. Coach Aoi assumes Asano had told Monma as usual. Asano confirms this with a big smile: "Of course. I also included the countermeasures I've been able to think of. Everything, you see. Because this is also for Maruo-kun's sake." Ei-chan is certain Monma is an amazing guy, but Ei-chan totally can't tell what Monma is thinking... End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Aim." So it sounds like Asano went to give Ei-chan pointers to level the playing field, since Monma had Ei-chan's info—and more—from Asano.
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So Ei-chan's notes on Monma: Height: 180 cm Affiliation: Kantou Bank Current ATP ranking: 54th / JTA ranking: 2nd One-handed forehand / Two-handed backhand
Characteristics of play:

- Standard strokes are short for flats for both forehand and backhand; top spins are stable with strong power.
- Backhand slices have strong rotation, and are more frequently used in defense than offense.
- Defense is varied for the one blow where he switches to attack his opponent. His ability to defend at the baseline is at the level of the best in Japan.
- He often goes on the offense after he has surely stolen the advantage.
- Decisive ability is high after he's gotten the upper hand.
- He doesn't have many tricky attacks.

- His serves are also straight balls with spin and power. The probability of his first serves is high.

Corrections to the summary. After the second serve (the one after the ace that brought the score to 15-0), it was Monma's return that was deep and flat. Ei-chan returned that with a curving spin to lower the pace once. That lowering of pace seems to be what prompted Monma's momentarily angry look. Monma's return was again deep and flat. Ei-chan returned that with a slice with a long flight that didn't bound...apparently to buy himself time to somehow recover from the disadvantage. The teaser blurb says "As expected, an expert! Monma! The reason for that anger...!?"

Ch. 364
Ei-chan thinks that although Monma held his serve smoothly, Ei-chan has the impression that there's something that doesn't sit well with Monma. Since anger basically lowers performance, Ei-chan believes it should be an advantage for him. Anyway, it doesn't change what Ei-chan will do: first, he'll hold his serve using his own tennis. He serves to the center, and Monma returns it with a backhand. Ei-chan notes that his fast spin serve on a good course was easily returned and that Monma's play is composed. Monma scolds himself: when I hear he's a young man of whom much is expected...blood unconsciously rushes to my head. And what would happen because of that? Ei-chan returns with a slice, because it would be a better follow-up to his spin serve
rather than an exchange of strong shots with an opponent who's a power hitter. Monma notes that Ei-chan's shot is again not a power shot...a change of pace to run away from power. Monma's return takes Ei-chan by surprise. Even though it's Ei-chan's service, his changes in tempo and ball types aren't effective at all...on the contrary, he's being cornered. This is the iron-shield defense!? In which case, he decides to compete: after the slice, his next shot will be a strong flat that leverages this power. Monma reacts so quickly to Ei-chan's ball that Ei-chan realizes Monma is switching to offense. Monma thinks that a change of pace while being cornered can't be called strategy...it's just "a gamble" (see pic 1 on p.1 of mangakansou). He puts away the ball with a forehand straight. 0-15. Audience response: There it is! Monma's swift attack!; Don't lose! High schooler who came up through the prelims! Ei-chan reminds himself that Monma is ranked 54th in the world...the use of ordinary change of pace is out of the question. It's still the initial phase, but he can only go before it's too late. (Sounds like Ei-chan is applying the lesson he learned during the 2R of the Bradenton.) He recalls the final phase of the match with Tanemura: tempo, rotation, course, he'd upped the quality of all those...a high-risk change of pace that used Asano as a reference... Ei-chan sends his serve wide, and Monma returns it with a backhand. Ei-chan thinks that when his fast flat serve goes in...he'll go for a sharp angle with all his strength. He hits that with his backhand, and Monma returns it. The shot had created an open court, so Ei-chan goes for a swift attack. Monma catches up with the ball with uncanny speed—which startles Ei-chan. Monma's racket just barely fails to touch the ball (see pic 2 on p.1 of mangakansou), but Ei-chan's shot is out by a narrow margin. 0-30. Ei-chan thinks that even though he's aiming excessively enough to make errors, with half a step...then he corrects himself...no, Monma might have deliberately shown that to him. Monma is the exact opposite of Tanemura...no matter what the ball, he'll chase it to the end without giving up. Ei-chan is sure of that. He gulps. Play continues and a rally starts. Monma's movements suddenly speed up. Ei-chan wonders whether Monma will attack when he's been pushed into a pitched battle (in

other words, they're on an even footing). Ei-chan thinks that if this is the point when Monma switches to offense, it's worth aiming for. Monma's backhand goes crosscourt—as Ei-chan predicted, but Ei-chan thinks that with this power and depth, a halfhearted change of pace will be useless. Therefore, he decides to leverage this power with a blow that's a sudden turn-around! He hits it down the line with a backhand (see pic 3 on p.1 of mangakansou). Monma gives chase, thinking it's this again! This time it's settled right on the line. 15-30. Ei-chan exhales, relieved he's managed to get one point. However, Monma thinks it's the same as in the earlier game: because Ei-chan's being driven, he hit an excessively aimed shot, only this time, it went in by chance. Coach Aoi then asks Asano what sort of things he told Monma about Ei-chan. Asano replies that he'd said Ei-chan is similar to him (Asano) whom Monma had difficulty with, and that Monma had then gotten mad, claiming it's impossible for there to be a high schooler who's similar to Asano. Coach Aoi notes that in the use of change of pace to counter power, Ei-chan is similar to Asano. Asano agrees, but adds that Monma's perspective is different: Asano's style is something that had been able to survive the periods where technique and power appeared alternately in the tennis world, so it can't be learned in a short time. Coach Aoi says Monma has a point there: Ei-chan went through a lot of trouble to rebuild his body, but he hasn't tried to counter the (abovementioned) period of power with power. Asano, however, argues that's just because he wasn't as smart as Ei-chan. Coach Aoi laughs, then asks what advice Asano gave Monma. Asano replies that in reality, Monma's true strength is superior, so he'd told Monma frankly "It's better if you played your own tennis." Nevertheless, those notes...in other words, he'd also suggested "You shouldn't take his info and tactics lightly." That's new tennis, even for Monma...meaning "You should clinch it before your own tennis is thoroughly analyzed unnoticed and the situation changes." Play continues with a rally. Monma returns a shot and goes to the net. Ei-chan notes that even though a good serve went in, he's thwarted by Monma's iron-shield defense, and when he's at a loss about how to continue, he suddenly receives a counterattack.

He decides that if he's taking on risks...he'll hit a controlled shot when Monma switches from defense to offense. He hits a straight with his forehand; however, it's just barely out (see pic 1 on p.2 of mangakansou). 15-40. Yukichi notes Ei-chan is already in a pinch, a double break point. Ei-chan concludes it's useless. Despite his opponent being fundamentally defensive, no matter what he does, he's cornered first, and he always ends up responding too late. In which case, he has to play in such a way that he won't be cornered...For that...he'll increase the risk even more, and increase the power and accuracy of his balls...!... Then he reconsiders: Enough of that already. That's just a reckless vicious circle. He has to do something before he's broken at the start and can't recover. If he uses "a situation where Monma has difficulty attacking but doesn't need to defend," which Asano had mentioned...if he loosens the defense of Monma who attacks while defending, he might also be able to throw off the rhythm of Monma's attack at the same time...it's passive rather than a breakthrough, but he needs a change now. Monma attributes thoughts like "If things go well, the flow will come to me" and "If I get one, the situation will change" to Ei-chan's tennis. He thinks can't allow a tennis that relies on such unreliable results to carry Japan. He mentally tells Ei-chan: The break point that will influence this match, how you choose will influence your life in a major way. Come at me with that conviction! End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Responsibility." Man, Monma is totally focused on Japan's chances in the Davis Cup, it seems. Now that Asano has pointed out that Ei-chan's smarter than he is, I really want Ei-chan to show Monma what he can do!

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A couple of corrections to the spoiler summary: After Ei-chan got a point, Monma compared it to the earlier game, not earlier in the game. The "If things go well, the flow will come to me" and "If I get one, the situation will change" were actually thoughts that Monma used as examples of Ei-chan's tennis. The teaser blurb says "A Pinch Already! Will He Be Able to Pull Through!?" So apparently Monma doesn't consider Ei-chan to be proactive and he seems to think Ei-chan relies on luck, not trial-and-error. Now I really want Ei-chan to show Monma the
error of his thinking! If Monma falls back on long rallies because Ei-chan isn't attacking, it should give Ei-chan time to thoroughly analyze Monma's tennis. Then we shall see!

Ch. 365

So in the second game, the first of Ei-chan's service, the score stands at 15-40. Yukichi comments that Ei-chan is suddenly at risk of being broken in his first service. Ei-chan thinks his errors are the result of his going for high-risk counterattacks while he was being cornered...and the counterattack he received is the result of his carelessly attempting a power contest while he was being cornered...Generally speaking, the main point is to play in such a way that he isn't cornered first. He remembers Asano's words: A situation where Monma-kun doesn't need to defend but can't easily attack... He thinks, "A situation where he doesn't need to defend...and yet is hard to attack...how's this!?" He hits a slow spin serve to the center. Monma returns it, noting that its rotation is strong but not enough to throw off his timing. Ei-chan thinks Monma returned it calmly, so here he sends it strong and deep. Monma again notes the strong spin (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan thinks that since this ball is slow, Monma won't be particularly wary about having to defend; however, because the spin is strong and the ball is deep, it's a situation that's hard to attack. Monma returns it down the line. Ei-chan realizes his change of pace, which isn't producing an effect, is temporarily sealed. But first of all, he'll desperately defend the advantage of his serve with this ball. Returning the ball, he thinks Monma is awaiting a moment to attack while defending. Ei-chan thinks he isn't just not allowing Monma to bring in that pattern, but that with the ball's spread and depth, he isn't allowing him to attack. The rally continues. Ei-chan thinks that both the type of ball and its course are limited, so it becomes monotonous, but...he's able to avoid the initiative being stolen. However...this is where the problem starts... Coach Aoi comments that the pace slowed down. Asano t that this is also one correct solution. (I guess he was referring to when he told Ei-chan to think for himself situation of "no need for defense but hard to attack.") Monma wonders if Ei-chan is copying Asano. Then he mentally tells Ei-chan: "Don't
think you can play like Asano-san from hereon." He hits the ball straight with his backhand. Ei-chan continues to return the ball deep with a spin. Because the chances of a fast ball receiving a counterattack are high, he can't use it... He contemplates what sort of attack among them he'll integrate with this flat of Monma's... He notes that this flat is powerful but stable, so he can't hope for an error...and yet...if he waits for the moment when Monma switches to offense—and he doesn't know when it will come—he'll make no progress! Instead, the one who continues to be troubled by the physical stalemate is him. Ei-chan concludes he can only move forward...and attack with a slow ball! With his backhand, he hits a super angled shot crosscourt with a spin (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). Monma notes it's a super angle shot that bounds outward. Ei-chan thinks it's no good because Monma's able to catch up with the ball. He wonders where Monma will aim. Monma hits the ball down the line (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan doesn't touch it, but it's just barely out. 30-40. Monma tsks loudly, surprising Ei-chan. Monma thinks it's a good shot, but

it's the assumed range... He decides there won't be a second one. Ei-chan notes his ball had been overtaken perfectly and was hit a strong blow. This angle ball is close to his best...even so, being beaten that badly...he decides he can't use this shot with this deployment for the next while... He wonders if there's nothing else...a way to slip out of this deadlock...with a slow ball...a shot to link to the next, even if it won't settle the point in one blow. The umpire calls 15 seconds. Ei-chan concludes he can only work out something while playing. He sends his serve wide, and Monma returns it. Ei-chan thinks that if his shot is just a bit weak, he'll be pushed in, so he goes strong and deep. The rally continues. Kageyama comments that it's somehow longer than usual. But Yukichi counters that both sides are aiming for a slight opening, so it's a strange tension. Coach Aoi notes that this sort of contest of endurance is also Ei-chan's forte, but his opponent is Monma. Asano agrees, explaining that Monma is the backbone of Japan's national team, because he's the man entrusted with the final deciding match even in the recent Davis Cup. Coach Aoi adds that it was a match that decided whether Japan would be retained in the world group.
Flashback to the recent Davis Cup: The 5th match, the 12th game of the final set. The opponent is Colombia. The reporter announces: "Japan's Monma! He has a dangerous tenacity against an opponent with superior world ranking! Surviving 3 match points, he finally grabbed match point! We're depending on you, Monma! Save Japan somehow! Japan's National Team...staff...cheering party, everyone is holding their breath while watching... Monma really gets into it while being swung around! A tough development... Will a chance come? Keep at it, Monma..." A ball hit from an awkward position decides the point. Monma triumphs, and Japan's retention in the world group is decided. Incidentally, the score is 4-6, 7-5, 1-6, 7-6, 7-5. Ike and the other jubilant players on the national team rush up to Monma, calling his name. But Monma holds them off. They're surprised. He say that he understands they want to hug him, but orders them not to touch him. Swaying, he exchanges a handshake with his opponent. Then he sits on the bench, somehow injured. The nail on the side of the little toe in his left foot had detached and was soaked with blood. Monma had played in such a way that no one had realized. The players' and coaches' reactions: No way! How could you play?; Was it when you crashed into the wall in the final stage? Why didn't you take a timeout?; He probably pushed himself and hid it completely so that it wouldn't stop the flow; Monma-san...Monma-san? Monma had fainted while seated (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou), surprising all those present. They hadn't noticed because he was wearing his sunglasses. Someone gives an order to lift him slowly. End of flashback. Asano comments that that had made known to the world that guy's fearsomeness. Coach Aoi agrees that that's exactly the persevering Monma. Asano also thinks that, more than anything, Monma has continued to endure even the pressure of carrying Japan's tennis world for a number of years now. Even if Ei-chan's strong point is his mental strength, Asano can't imagine it would be a good plan for Ei-chan to challenge Monma there. Monma mentally tells Ei-chan: "If it's a war of attrition, I'll stick with you even until tomorrow morning. If it's not, attack me with techniques and tactics on Asano-san's level!" Ei-chan thinks he knows he has to attack...if he chooses an even-somewhat-easier-to-attack ball...and goes for a winner with a slow ball the same way... Ei-chan hits a drop shot, surprising Monma (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "All-out Attack." Hmm...it looks like Ei-chan's inviting Monma to switch to offense by hitting that drop shot, which he considers slightly easier to attack. I guess in doing so, Ei-chan's trying to control when Monma switches over, so that he has a better chance of responding to the attack. If that's the case and Monma realizes what

Ei-chan is doing, Monma might hesitate to go on the offense, which should still have the effect of throwing off Monma's timing, right?
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Corrections and additions to the summary: It's Ei-chan's change of pace that he acknowledges isn't producing an effect, so it's temporarily sealed. Asano doesn't point out that this is also one correct solution; he just thinks this. When Monma's shot went out, Monma tsks loudly. In the flashback, after Monma hits the winning shot, the reporter announces "He did it...! Finally... Monma did it! Japan's retention in the world group is decided!" Oooh! It looks like the No.3 in Japan shows up in the flashback...yup, that Kouno/Kawano is the guy beside Ike while they were watching Monma's match and the other recognizable player besides Ike among those who are stopped by Monma when they rush out to hug him. After Monma sat down, the exclamations around him are: You're hurt!?; I/We didn't notice at all...!; Eh!? Where!? Then after the injury was revealed and someone speculated Monma had hidden his injury so that it wouldn't stop the flow, someone else says "He even deceived his supporters?!" After they realize he'd passed out, the audio from the TV that Coach Aoi was watching says: I/We hadn't noticed because he's wearing sunglasses!; It seems like there was an accident on the Japanese side...?; Lift him slowly! Ei-chan's last thought just before he hits the drop shot is "If I choose an even-somewhat-easier-to-attack ball...and go for a winner with a slow ball the same way..." The blurb says "Aiming to overcome a world-class barrier, Ei-chan comes out hitting!"
Volume 38 extra
It's about the time when Ei-chan went to Natchan's place and he'd met her older sister, Mika. Natchan's parents get home, having bought the ice cream from Shinjuku that Natchan likes. The father comments on Natchan's appearance and asks if she's about to go out. Natchan explains that Ei-chan had come a little while ago. The mother says (probably she as in the mother, but could mean he as in Ei-chan) wanted to meet (him if it's the mother who wanted to meet, but Natchan if it's Ei-chan who wanted to meet). The father asks if Mika also met Ei-chan, and she says she did. So the father asks if all three were there (by implication, if Mika acted as chaperon). Mika confirms this as she takes a spoonful of pudding—which turns out to be expensive pudding that Natchan had given Mika as a bribe (probably to leave her and Ei-chan alone for a while).

Ch. 366
Ack! Ei-chan gets broken. But it looks like E-chan counted that last rally as his win because the one whose ability to focus broke first was Monma. Details to follow. I'm still finishing stuff at work. = = = Details: So Ei-chan hit a drop shot. The spectators consider his shot skillful. Ei-chan wonders if it's still weak. Monma returns the shot. Ei-chan notes that Monma was able to get it, but that Monma's posture is off. With this, he believes they're roughly on an even footing and he'll get a shot past Monma. However, Monma promptly heads back down the court (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan's surprised, noting Monma's fast return to the baseline. Monma returns the ball, thinking this point isn't all or nothing. He'll accept willpower. Ei-chan concludes that he's doubling back to a situation where he's again aiming for a chance with just a strong spin. Then he corrects himself, that his options decreased for having displayed a drop shot. It's good he had finished it without taking risks earlier, but...as it is, if the rally extends, he'd be at a disadvantage stamina-wise, so he wonders what he should do, how would Asano get through this situation, and what Monma wants to do here. He asks himself if he isn't he going to move against Monma in this stalemate. The rally continues. Monma thinks that if the situation where you can neither push nor

pull stretches out...for some reason you'll completely rely on even your opponent's intention to suppress you. That's because tennis is that much of a lonely struggle. Ei-chan returns the ball with an effort. Monma cuts in on the ball with his forehand. His thoughts continue: However, if someone who actively defends turns passive, that means he's surrendered the upper hand. Ei-chan manages return to Monma's strong crosscourt shot (see pic 2 on mangakansou) but realizes he's completely lost the upper hand. He wonders if Monma will switch to offense. However, he thinks that in this situation, a break point is too risky. Since it's come to this, there's no tactics nor bullshit. He'll just return the ball to a somewhat safe spot. Asano comments that it's tough when the upper hand has been stolen in a long rally like this. Coach Aoi adds that Ei-chan can't move as he intends, so he'll get excessively tired. He also notes that Ei-chan's turning into Asano, as Monma had said, is even more difficult. Asano argues that Ei-chan doesn't need to turn into him (Asano), because Ei-chan has something Asano lacks. Ei-chan thinks he wants to change this situation with a slow ball. He hits a slow slice deep with a strong spin (see pic 3 on mangakansou), taking Monma and the audience by surprise. Ei-chan thinks this ball won't bound, so Monma's flat type of shot will be easier to float. If it throws off Monma's timing even a little, he'll also have a chance in one go. However, Monma handles it without difficulty. As he expected, Ei-chan is tenacious at a break point. He thinks Ei-chan has more moves than he (Monma) thought. Ei-chan notes that up to now Monma still hasn't attacked even though he's gotten the upper hand. He wonders how cautiously Monma is going to get this one point. He thinks it's become an important point that will change the flow from hereon in a major way, depending on who gets it and how. The rally continues. Ei-chan thinks "Enough, even my breath is getting ragged... Such a tough one point is a first. I know it's hard to be better than Monma-san in defense, but that's what's needed here..." The audience comments on how long the rally has lasted and wonders how long it will continue. Monma notes that although Ei-chan evades power contests, he doesn't evade mental contests. He suspects Ei-chan has confidence
there (in his mental strength), but unfortunately for Ei-chan, Monma does too. Ei-chan returns a forehand shot from Monma. He scolds himself: So what if he's 54th in the world and on the national team? I haven't started anything yet...I can't lose! Monma returns a shot, noting the strong spin. Ei-chan notices that for the first time...Monma's shot is a slow ball that's somewhat short. So he decides to attack that: "Go!" He hits a cross. However, Ei-chan realizes his own timing is also thrown off, and his shot is short. He dashes for the open court, but Monma hits a cross, attacking the opposite direction. Ei-chan desperately chases the ball and dives for it, but he's a step short and doesn't reach it (see pic 4 on mangakansou). His service is broken. Audience reaction: Ooooh! As expected, Monma gets the better of him in a super-long rally!; It was simple but tense!; This match looks like it will be long, but it's gripping! Ei-chan acknowledges that he was beaten and completely broken. However, in the rally just now, the one whose ability to focus broke first was Monma; on just that point, it's Ei-chan's win. On the other hand, Monma concludes he knew Ei-chan is someone who was bound to get to the semifinals... Generally speaking, he's not bad. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Force." The teaser blurb is apparently "A Hellish Exchange of Mental Cuts, Next Issue: A Sudden Development...!?" The "hellish exchange of mental cuts" apparently refers to this chapter. So Ei-chan's broken, but it seems he's found a gap in Monma's shield. Now he knows to pay attention to his own timing when he succeeds in throwing off Monma's timing.

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Corrections to the summary: Monma doesn't think that if the situation where you can neither push nor pull stretches out...for some reason you'll completely rely on even your opponent's intention to correct himself. What he thought was that if the situation where you can neither push nor pull stretches out...for some reason you'll completely rely on even your opponent's intention to "suppress you."
Coach Aoi didn't say that Ei-chan's turning into Asano is still tough going, as Monma had said, but that Ei-chan's turning into Asano as Monma had said is even more difficult. After Ei-chan thought "I can't lose!" and Monma returned Ei-chan's shot, Ei-chan didn't decide first on a slow, somewhat short ball—he noticed that for the first time...Monma's shot is a slow ball that's somewhat short. That was the weak return. So he attacked that: "Go!" Given Monma's expression in the last page, his conclusion wasn't that Ei-chan is so-so, but "not bad." I'll update my summary to reflect these corrections.

Ch. 367
Ei-chan was broken in his very first service game, where he'd refined his tactics and showed plays where he held out for each and every ball. He acknowledges to himself that he'd unexpectedly been broken. Moreover, his chance up to now had been just that one ball, which had become slightly short, that he'd held out for and had felt was the end. He almost wasn't able to get Monma to let him play the tennis that's typical of him (Ei-chan), even in his service. Their levels are different technically and in physical ability. Ei-chan heaves a deep sigh and reminds himself he'd created a chance with the No.54 of the world, so it's possible he'll make one ball. On the other hand, Monma plans to proceed to the next stage. He sends his serve to the center. Ei-chan barely returns it. Monma puts it away with a cross in the opposite direction. 15-0. Ei-chan is galled, noting that with one break, Monma has released his power during his serve. In his return game, Ei-chan can't simply hold out with even a spin ball. Ei-chan remembers watching the videos of Monma's matches the day before their match. Coach Aoi had said that Monma's the type to expect caution no matter what kind of opponent he faces. When he gets the upper hand for the first time, he'll take risks that correspond to it. Consequently, he's rarely been known to lose to a lower-ranked opponent. On Monma's next serve too, Ei-chan's return turns out weak, and Monma's able to put it away with his next shot (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan concludes that it's useless, that Monma has started to go for even the somewhat deep balls in this service game. Monma attacks when Ei-chan's shots become even slightly weak. Ei-chan judges it to be a pragmatic change of gears, solidly matching the situation. Monma holds his serve in a love game. Scribbling in his notebook, Ei-chan thinks he hasn't been able to visualize breaking Monma's serve at all...First is his own service game...He'll hold one. The next game starts. After Ei-chan hits his serve, he moves back slightly. He thinks that the one ball where he'd created a chance was a triumph of persistence using spin balls...therefore, he'll move back from his home position from the start and wait exhaustively for a chance, and when it comes, he'll attack immediately! Monma thinks that whether it's because they're a new generation or simply innocent...Ei-chan and Kanda who dare to try to match him in persistence here are fresh. Because Ei-chan moved back, the contest with Monma's superior ground stroke shows an aspect of a second battle of their powers of concentration. Ei-chan, who had pulled off many stunning upsets previously with his concentration, commits to maintaining his concentration by visualizing those (probably referring to the stunning upsets). However, Monma is a man who had rescued the Japanese tennis world from difficulty several times by using his characteristic concentration. Once again Monma's able to put away the ball just when Ei-chan's return had turned out a bit weak. Ei-chan concludes

that it's no good. Because Monma geared up, Ei-chan's doing just the same as a while ago is out of the question. Not only is there an overwhelming difference in the amount of experience that sustains their powers of concentration, but the present Monma has psychological leeway from the one break (see pic 2 on mangakansou). The difference in their powers of concentration continues to widen with a cumulative effect applying the final blow. Ei-chan orders himself to calm down. He tries to determine what specifically is lacking in him. He concludes it's not just power, footwork, and technique, but control (which he's confident in) and number of tactics, even power of concentration, he can't surpass Monma in them. If there's just one something where he (Ei-chan) is superior, he wants to increase that further, but there's nothing... Even so...it still doesn't mean he's lost. On top of that...the very best plan to win... Similar to Monma, Ei-chan increases his risk in the return game. Continuing the tactic of persisting with spin balls, he attacked before he was attacked, without fear of a counterattack. In doing so, his errors naturally increase. If his shots are even a bit weak,
he receives a counterattack. In his service game itself, there were several points where he won on persistence, but Monma also geared up little by little along with the spread of the score. The result: though Ei-chan fought a long stretch and the first set took nearly an hour, he wasn't able to hold his serve even once. Audience reaction: Maruo, it can't be helped! But hang in there!; Although you're a high schooler, you're putting up a good fight against the 4-time emperor! Kageyama comments that he (probably referring to Monma) is so strong, however. Ei-chan's mom adds that with her untrained eye, she doesn't quite understand, but it seems Ei-chan's still no match for Monma. Natchan counters that Ei-chan's the type to show the power he develops by the second half. so there's still more and this is where it starts! Ei-chan scribbles in his notebook. Monma eats a banana. Scene switch to center court. Nabae thinks it's not so bad; he still has the flow. Ike thinks that now when he's overpowering is when he'll settle it! Nabae hits an angle shot. Running forward, Ike returns it. Seeing Ike's forward-leaning posture, Nabae hits a lob, thinking it can get past Ike. Even though it's unreasonable, Ike decides to go for it. He manages to smash it, but Nabae apparently predicted where that ball would go, and he runs there. Nabae hits a strong blow down the line with his backhand (see pic 3 on mangakansou). Though it slips past Ike's side, it's just barely out, and Ike clinches his victory. Ike raises his fist (see pic 4 on mangakansou) as the umpire announces "Game, set, and match won by Ike!!" The final score was apparently 6-4, 6-4. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "One Thing." This apparently refers to that one something that Ei-chan was searching for, where he is superior to Monma.

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Corrections to the summary: Ei-chan doesn't describe that chance he had as one that "hadn't felt correct/complete" but one "he'd felt was the end." When Monma thought Ei-chan and Kanda were refreshing, he thought "here" (apparently referring to the All Japan), not local tournaments in general. When Nabae hit the lob, he thought it can get past Ike.
Oh, the final announcement is: Ike Souji advances to the finals! The teaser blurb says "The All Japan Tennis Championship, the one who will play against Ike in the finals!?"

Ch. 368

Okay, first: the title of the chapter was apparently changed from "One Thing" (as per the footer in ch.367) to "One More Thing." Anyhow, audience reactions to Ike's victory: Ike finally checkmated Japan's No.1!; No...today I was surprised by Nabae; I've never seen such a high-level match between 18 year olds! Ronnie comments that Souji was able to play proper tennis only in the end of the first set. Even so, he'd expected Souji to win, but he was

surprised by Nabae's creativity. An intellectual, rational, strategic tennis that's typically Japanese against Souji who's un-Japanese in character...he (Nabae?) is a welcome existence as far as Souji is concerned. As Ike and Nabae approach the net, Ike wonders if he hadn't been able to make Wild Boy lose his temper. Offering his hand, Ike tells Nabae "let's do our best." Nabae agrees. Reactions from various tennis players: Watching at home, Ide says it's as could be expected of Nabae, but in the end he wasn't able to win? Ike Souji's strong! Watanabe (of the national A Team) takes note of Nabae and thinks this guy is likely to join the B Team. Okada: Hmm Tamakoshi: Seriously, what's with this generation...? Watching on his tablet, Ogata wonders how things are going on Maruo-kun's side. Yoshimichi, the 4th seed who should have been Ei-chan's opponent in the quarterfinals, is apparently watching the Ei-chan vs Monma match on his laptop. Kanda thinks that around now Maruo-kun is... Nabae and Takagi apparently go to Court No.1 to watch. About 1 hour after the end of the Ike vs Nabae match... Art shows Monma panting, then the wide-eyed, similarly panting Ei-chan.
Start of flashback: The score stands at 6-0, 5-0 with Monma leading. Then the announcement: 15 all. Ei-chan thinks that if he's broken here, it's 6-0, 6-0...an end with a score where he can't tell how much of a difference there might be (apparently referring to a difference in himself or his play between the first set and the second set). However, the acquisition of points in the second set up to now is 16 vs 24... If he considers it was 9 vs 20 up to the same 0-5 in the first set, he's gotten better at narrowing down the balls he should attack. In order to advance even more...he'll add α (alpha) to his strategies up to now. He serves and immediately moves back. He plans to include a variation to the strong, deep spin balls that were surely monotonous. After Monma returns the ball, Ei-chan decides to first hit an arching spin ball that's even slower than those up to now. In a previous game, he'd hit the ball with the frame of his racket by accident, and when that ball went to Monma, Monma's timing was thrown off for an instant. Monma returns that ball. Returning the shot with a backhand, Ei-chan concludes that as he'd expected, it wasn't as effective as the first time...but perhaps there's a point to it, because when there's a variation, Monma's return isn't very forceful. In that pause, one more thing (the chapter title!)...a fast spin ball with a slightly lower arc than so far. He'll use this only when he can use it cautiously with enough power that he won't be counterattacked. With all 3 types, it's a change of pace restricted to deep and strong-spin balls. With these, he'll manage to continue returning Monma's shots. Even if it isn't enough to throw off Monma's timing, if Monma applies a little too much spin and the ball goes short... A short ball comes. Ei-chan sets up for a forehand shot, telling himself not to rush it. He plans to increase the element of surprise further...with a fast forehand slice, and approach the net! Monma's return goes into the net. 30-15. The audience cheers for Ei-chan: Way to go, Maruo! You're getting the form!; First of all is one hold! Ei-chan realizes that it's a chance he'd gotten through a forfeit, but everyone's watching. If he becomes a pro, something like "0-6, 0-6 but he did his best" won't work...first of all is one thing: meeting expectations! Play continues with a long rally. Then he decides this is it. He rushes the net, but Monma gets a crosscourt shot past him. 30-30. Ei-chan berates himself: Wrong. It's too
forceful! If it's no good, go back. Ei-chan's thoughts in the next exchange of shots: I won't draw back here!; That's even if I'm being push with power; I'll put up an all-out defense of the advantage of my serve with just 3 types of balls!; There won't be many chances, but one is bound to come! He gets a shot past Monma. 40-30. Ei-chan thinks that this game is the first time in this match where he's taking the initiative. However, the next point goes to Monma when Ei-chan's shot goes out, bringing the score to deuce. Ei-chan apparently attributes the

error to his hesitation; he tells himself that if he's kind of hesitating, go for it. The next announcements shown: Advantage, Monma; Advantage, Maruo. Then Ei-chan realizes that if he can create this situation...this will also be decided! He hits a drop shot, and Monma is too late to return it. Game, Maruo, 5-1, second set. Ei-chan's exultant: Yeah! Audience reactions: Yeah! He finally held!; He survived one and from hereon!; (He's/I'm) so happy it's like (he/I) won! As Monma sets up to serve, Ei-chan thinks it's just one game but it's a significant breakthrough. They exchange shots and Monma gets a ball past Ei-chan. Ei-chan swears at the miss, but reminds himself that what he can do in a return game is limited...however, the flow has clearly started to change. As the game continues, Ei-chan thinks if he brings in his own patterns...he can do more...more! Ei-chan chases another ball but doesn't touch it. Game, set, and match won by Monma. Count: 6-0, 6-1. End of flashback. Ei-chan thinks: More... Teaser blurb: "Overwhelming Defeat...Though He Put up a Good Fight to the Best of His Ability!" The next chapter is titled "Squaring Off." It will have 23 pages including a color page(s). So there you have it. It really looks like Asano's advice was useful and not simply a distraction to Ei-chan. And even after seeing the chapter, I'm underwhelmed. I mean, Natchan was able to get to tiebreak against Yazawa who was touted the strongest
female player in the history of Japanese tennis. Kanda managed to hold his serve 7 times against what supposedly was Monma's best. And Asano had stressed that Ei-chan is smarter than he, whom Monma had never defeated, is. That's a lot of unmet expectations the mangaka built up. Makes me wonder what Yoshimichi thought of the match. I mean, a score like 6-0, 6-1 doesn't give the impression Ei-chan deserved his historic spot among the Best 4. Incidentally, Yoshimichi is No.5 in the A Team. Since he's injured, he might not be available for the next Davis Cup. I guess that's more foreshadowing of a Davis Cup arc, switching the setting from STC and high school, to NTC and the start of Ei-chan's pro career.

Ch. 369

I have a deadline, so I'll just hit the high points: after the handshake at the end of the match, Ei-chan immediately started studying his notes. He couldn't figure out what he could have done to win. As Monma passes in front of him, Ei-chan asks Monma for feedback, which Monma gives him. Then Monma tells Ei-chan he wants to meet with him, Araya, Kanda, Ide, and Nabae tomorrow before the finals. When Ei-chan leaves the court, he encounters Nabae and Takagi and tells Nabae about Monma's request. Nabae knows the contact info for Ide but not Kanda, so Ei-chan decides to pass the word through Araya. Ei-chan and Nabae exchange contact info because such connections would be useful when they're both pros. Ei-chan meets with Coach Aoi who has "good" news: Prince and ellesse want him to approach them around March to discuss contracts. Aoi's phrasing makes Ei-chan ask if that's "bad" and Aoi explains he'd hoped for better news. The late date means the companies aren't sold on Ei-chan and want to have more info to base their respective sponsorship decisions on. So Ei-chan has to do well in pro matches in the next 4 months to be sure of getting a sponsor. The next day all the requested guys show up. They're introduced to Maeda, the supervisor of the men's national team, and Asano is introduced as the new coach. Nabae is named a member of the national B Team. The rest are informed that they're candidates, so in their coming matches, they're told to keep in mind that candidacy because they'll be judged by their results. There's also something about a change of approach to the Davis Cup and how automatic placement in the A Team will only be for those with world ranking of 150 or better (in other words, only Ike and Monma). There was also something about a timeline changing from 5 years to 2 years. Anyhow, Ei-chan's

shocked that he's a candidate for the national team even before he turns pro. It doesn't feel real. The meeting breaks up with Monma and Ike's match about to start. Monma urges them to watch. Araya assumes Ei-chan will watch the match, and Ei-chan confirms this. Ei-chan ponders his future in tennis. Then the match starts. Due to work, I'm not sure when I'll be able to flesh this out. And I'll be traveling next week, so complete summaries will probably have to wait until the week after, when I can do ch.369, ch.370, and ch.371 in one go.
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Okay, so ch.369 opens with the color pic of Monma and Ike with the blurb of "He still falls short, but some day—" The smaller blurb says "A center color (illustration) marking a new challenge" The match ends with a score of 6-0, 6-1. Kageyama's kind of shocked that it's over. Yukichi comments that even though Ei-chan had started to hold his serve in the final stage, it wasn't good enough. Ei-chan thinks he'd only been able to hold once—a complete rout while he couldn't start keeping until his change of pace. Monma extends his hand, thinking that he'd also been in a tough spot because his serve was being predicted in the final stage, and there's also the fact that Ei-chan had just demolished Takuma's serve with his return. When he shakes Ei-chan's hand, Monma gives it a surprisingly tight squeeze. Ei-chan wonders if Monma had wanted to say something to him. Ei-chan picks up his notebook, dismissing that line of thought. Scribbling, he thinks that he'd finally managed to hold in the final stage using three kinds of spin balls and that he'd continued to get closer to his own form (possibly meaning his ideal tennis). However, he notes that it hadn't had sufficient impact to enable him to break Monma's serve. In the end, the increased types of shots were all hit. Even so, increasing the types of shots even more was impossible. He wonders what he should have done then. The audience notices that Ei-chan's started studying even though he'd just lost. They think he's interesting. Monma also notices.
Ei-chan wonders what he could have done to break. Then he corrects himself: there was no way he could have broken. He was lacking in everything: technique, physical, the number of tactics he has confidence in, the duration of his concentration. As he racks his brains on what he should have done, he notices Monma passing in front of him and remembers that Monma is a man who thinks about Japanese tennis. He approaches Monma and bows, asking for advice. Monma's advice: To put it concisely, Ei-chan "evades" without attacking or defending. For example, he (Monma) (is the type who) "attacks in order to defend"...Ike "defends in order to attack." Change of pace when being cornered isn't "offense"; neither is pulling through using spin balls "defense" if he has no other options. In the end, that's like having used "evasion" without attacking or defending. Ei-chan's shocked since he'd done all that with the intent of attacking and defending. Monma's final advice is an order for Ei-chan to first stand and fight (in other words, not evade), even before offense and defense, even with other youngsters. Ei-chan accepts this. Then Monma asks Ei-chan if Ei-chan could bring Nabae, Kanda, Araya, and Ide to him tomorrow before the finals. Monma acknowledges that it's sudden, so just those who can come would be fine. Ei-chan tells Monma he understands and thanks him with a bow. As Ei-chan leaves the court, Nabae hails him. Ei-chan asks how Nabae's match had gone. Nabae tells him he'd lost with a score of 6-4, 6-4 and hadn't been able to break even once. Nabae commiserates with Ei-chan over his loss. Ei-chan adds that he'd only been able to hold his serve once, and that even though he'd had time because of the forfeit and he'd prepared perfectly, everything wasn't enough. He concludes he has to redo everything from the foundation: mental, physical, technique. Nabae tells Ei-chan that he has to do the same. Ei-chan concludes it was a good thing to know before he turns pro. Nabae says that can be said of both of them. Then Ei-chan remembers Monma's request and conveys it to Nabae who wonders what it's about. Ei-chan

says Araya, Ide, and Kanda are included, and asks if Nabae has their contact details. Nabae says he knows Ide's but not Kanda's., then asks Takagi if Takagi knows (Kanda's, presumably). Takagi replies that it's impossible that he'd know. Ei-chan decides to he'll send word through Araya. Then Nabae asks for Ei-chan's contact details and points out that when they become pros, this sort of networking would be essential. Ei-chan agrees. Natchan hails Ei-chan. Kageyama commiserates with Ei-chan. Natchan congratulates
Ei-chan for getting to the Final 4. Coach Aoi orders him to change clothes so that Ei-chan doesn't get chilled, then adds they have an important briefing session. Ei-chan echoes "An important...briefing session?" Scene switch to the players locker room. Ei-chan summarizes what Coach Aoi had apparently told him off screen: contract negotiations with Prince and ellesse will be definite around March next year. Coach Aoi's response is a lackluster "I guess so." Ei-chan asks if that's happy news. Coach Aoi's reply is again a lackluster "I guess so." Coach Aoi adds that Ei-chan will be a pro soon, so he (Coach Aoi) is going to have a pragmatic discussion with him. He points out that Ei-chan's value has increased considerably in one swoop because of this tournament, since it's mentioned even in the newspapers that Ei-chan is 18 and the first in history to make it to the Final 4 from the prelims. Since the racket and sportswear Ei-chan uses is publicized at the same time, Prince and ellesse should also be happy. That's why he's told "we want to support you continuously in the event you turn pro." Coach Aoi says that much is good news. Ei-chan asks what the bad news is. Coach Aoi replies that he would go so far as to call it bad, but it's slightly different from what he'd expected. In other words, he'd hoped for better news. He points out that this time Ei-chan had made a flashy name for himself, beyond Coach Aoi's expectations. That's why he'd expected to be able to hear about more definite contract negotiations "right away." But the outcome turned out to be "That discussion will be 4 months from now." And no official word has come from other makers. The main point is that everyone probably "wants to see how things go a little more." Sure, Ei-chan made it to the Final 4, but he hadn't won through a seeded player the way Nabae had. And just looking at the score for the match with Monma, it was ignominious defeat. In other words, they (the makers) probably want to see the matches Ei-chan appears in until April next year and decide the details of the contract. This naturally means there's a chance of a big-money contract if Ei-chan takes part and wins in, say, a major tournament, but there's also a chance they'll back out completely if Ei-chan makes a poor showing. Either way, the 5 months until April looks like it will be quite an important time to prepare for being a pro. Coach Aoi suggests that in the next 2 or 3 days they work out precisely which tournaments Ei-chan will take part in. Ei-chan agrees. The next day is the finals. In the players lounge, someone apologizes, explaining this is the only opportunity where they can assemble. The speaker turns out to be Maeda Kazuki, the coach of the men's tennis national team. He announces that Asano has
been added to the coaching staff. Haketa marvels that Asano finally (agreed). Yoshimichi notes he and Asano are close in age, so he's glad. Watanabe adds (Asano's addition) will strengthen the technical side. Takuma just looks glum; however, Ike smiles. Asano says the change in coaches is the association's wanting to change the national team. He hopes the current national team understands that point well. Maeda explains that the current tournament has proven the high level of the teenagers they had heard so much about. So, with this opportunity, the association rushed to start reviewing the enhancement program to seriously capture the Davis Cup two years from now—not in 5 years but in 2 years. He assumes they understands what this means. From here on, they intend to steadily test lots of players without fixing the members of the national team. Naturally players who have high world ranking have precedence, but those 150 and below...in other words, presently except

for Ike and Monma everyone is all in a line (apparently meaning the same level). Maeda adds that the same thing is being conveyed to those guys, pointing to the teenagers around Monma several feet away. Facing the 5 teenagers he'd summon, Monma tells them the periods they'll turn pro would all be different, but either way they'll be participating in pro competitions from now on. Certainly he wants them to improve their track records within and outside the country and to be aware they will be added to the national team. Then he informs Nabae that Nabae's results in this tournament was assess and Nabae was drafted to the national B team. The drafting of other people was postponed (sounds like a reference to Ei-chan), but his greeting everyone today is because they are also candidates. After this, there will probably be times when they'll compete abroad, and he definitely wants them to play with that awareness. Ei-chan's surprised he's included among the candidates. Monma adds that if they want to join the national team like Nabae did, either personally defeat him or those guys of the current national team (Monma points to the group in the other side of the room) or give better results than us in an official tournament—anywhere in the world is fine. Monma ends with "It's simple and suitable, right?" (To be continued due to MF max. character count limits)
Continuation of ch.369: Then someone calls out to Monma, saying it will soon be time for the match. Monma tells the teenagers that's all and apologizes for summoning them, but it's something he
wanted to convey to them personally. He orders Nabae to discuss the details with the coach (probably meaning Maeda). He adds that since they'd made a special effort to come, he hopes they'll watch (the match). Ike adds that he has to get going too. Araya turns to Ei-chan, assuming he'll go and watch. Ei-chan confirms this. Someone (probably Araya) exclaims he's gotten fired up. For Ei-chan, being a candidate for the national team when he hasn't yet turned pro and he'd just been utterly defeated doesn't feel real. He wonders if this is the beginning of the world that he'd dreamed of. He's going to make a living by winning matches as a Japanese pro tennis player, starting next year. After that, there's the national team and the Davis Cup...there's also the Grand Slam that determines the best players in the world. He doesn't know if some day he'll be able to get to where Ike and Monma are, but he knows there's a pile of things he has to do. He wonders how far he can go if he's able to do the things he has to do, and how much stronger he can get. The announcement says the men's finals will start soon. End of chapter. The blurb says "The 18 year old ranked No.1 in Japan vs. the 29 year old currently holding 4 consecutive All Japan Championships."

Ch. 370

Ch.370, titled "Pride," opens with Ide asking who they think will win. He expects it will be Ike. Araya replies that as someone of the same age, he wants Ike to win, but here (the All Japan) isn't it Monma? Then he asks Ei-chan's opinion. After a bit of surprise at the question, Ei-chan says no one can tell unless the match is held, so... Araya thumps Ei-chan's shoulder, exclaiming "Seriously?" When Ei-chan pulls out his notebook, Araya's all "Ho! Here it is, Maruo's notebook." Ei-chan wonders how Ike will play against Monma, and how Monma who's a demon at defense and the one who told him "Don't evade in either offense or defense" will play against Ike. As Monma and Ike set onto the court, Monma asks Ike his impression of "here" (meaning Japan). Ike replies that it's a bit different from what he'd expected, but all the same, he's glad he came. Monma then asks if playing against him in the finals is also unexpected. Ike says it's not, explaining that it's as he'd expected or been aiming for, because he'd always thought that...it's the proper place for his attempt to be the best in Japan. As Ike sets up to serve and Monma to receive, someone in the audience

shouts for Ike to prove he's the best in Japan. Someone else counters that this place is Monma's stronghold. Then the announcement of "Three-set match. Ike to serve. Play!" Ike serves wide. Monma returns the ball. Then Ike puts the ball away with a winner to the corner. 15-0. Audience reaction: Amazing. Smooth footwork and a powerful forehand; A veritable prodigy! Ronnie approves, silently ordering Ike to shift his rhythm very quickly and to swing completely, powerfully, and compactly. Ei-chan thinks a forehand that gets a winner off Monma is to be expected, but likewise it's the serve that came before that. If he (Ei-chan) can also hit that sort of serve, he might be able to oppose Monma a little more. Ike's next serve goes into the net. Ei-chan wonders what Ike's second serve will be and how Monma will attack it. He notices that Monma sets up one step forward. Ike serves wide again. Monma returns it with a strong shot crosscourt. Ike wonders if it's here already and send the ball down the line. Monma again hits it crosscourt. Ike notices that Monma is playing at "that position" (possibly meaning closer to the baseline). His straight just barely lands on the side line. 30-0. Ike notes his shot had gone in but acknowledges the danger. Ei-chan analyzes the difference between the defensive areas of Monma's usual position and of his current position. He wonders if Monma's doing so as a countermeasure against Ike. Monma is playing around 1 meter forward of the forwardmost line of defense during his match with Ei-chan. He wonders if this is Monma's "attacking in order to defend." Ide marvels at how Ike's second serve had bounced high and how Monma had given it a strong blow. Ei-chan scribbles his notes. Araya comments that his impression is of Monma having come to grips with Ike's attack. The tempo is fast, but he's not pushing himself that unreasonably. Monma returns a shot close to the baseline. Ei-chan thnks that since Monma returns the ball right away when he's one step forward, the deployment speeds up and the degree of difficulty increases. The illustration shows that when defending from the back (Monma's usual position), you have time to make sure of the ball and the power of the oncoming ball also decreases, but when defending from the front (Monma's current position), you can return the ball with fast timing but you lose time and the risk increases. Ei-chan says he'd expected Monma to move farther back and wait for Ike's errors, but he was wrong. Ide explains that against an opponent who's a demon for offense, such a thing amounts to running away. Araya speculates that Monma intends to win on
defense by daring to deploy his shots even faster. Monma's shot goes out. Game Ike, 1-0. Monma glances at Ike. Then a flashback to the National Training Center. Monma remembers asking Ike's impression of the recent match with Colombia, which was Ike's Davis Cup debut. Ike replies it was his first team competition, so in the beginning he was a bit bewildered. He adds that it's nice for his own victory in tennis to be tied together with everyone's victory. Somehow he was surprised at himself being happier than he'd expected. He adds that he understands a bit how Monma feels, being fixated on the Davis Cup. End of flashback. Monma thinks Ike's being able to enjoy the tension at 18 is a big deal, but frankly the feelings he (Monma) harbors for Ike are more of concern rather than expectation. Monma serves. Ike returns the ball, then he and Ei-chan are surprised to see Monma take another step forward, so that Monma is right on the baseline. Ei-chan notes Monma is another step forward of where he played during his return game. Monma sends his next ball deep without moving back. A rally ensues. Monma thinks he'll defend this position without drawing back, no matter what happens. On Ike's next return, Monma takes another step forward and hits a winner down the line. 15-0. Ike curses silently, thinking it's again unexpected. Ide comments that Monma's proactive. Araya argues that it appears like that because the tempo when Monma is forward is fast, but Monma's just attacking without letting the chance get away, so in the end, Monma's style of winning through defense remains the

same. Ei-chan thinks it's as expected: it's exactly "a tennis that defends without evasion." A long rally ensues. Monma thinks Ike is the treasure of Japan's tennis world. For that very reason, in the near future everything of Japan's tennis will lean on Ike's shoulders. Monma believes that the moment he concedes a single line, Ike will be the mainstay of Japan whether Ike likes it or not. He considers Ike quite young and overwhelmingly strong, but for that reason he doesn't think Ike can comprehend that weight yet. Bearing expectations from all of Japan...having plays that everyone understands requested/desired, no matter where, no matter who his opponent is, no matter what the circumstances. Developing a tennis that is not for one's own self. But there's a tennis that can be attained from such isolation and heavy pressure. Monma thinks he'll do anything for Japan, so that Ike will understand that. However, it's not yet that time.
Monma hits a winner crosscourt to the corner. And elated Monma thinks the expectations from all of Japan still strengthen him and handing over this position to Ike is a sheer waste. Game, Monma, 1-1. Ike gives a defiant smile, thinking it's as he'd expected of Monma, the opponent he absolutely has to defeat. End of chapter. The blurb says "How will the Ike who smiles boldly move...?" The title for ch.371 is "The Climax of the Finals." Incidentally, the next chapter will again be in a double issue, so after the chapter next week (Dec.23), the next chapter will be released Jan.6.

Ch. 371
Ike takes the first set: 7-5. And Ei-chan seems to getting a lot of insight on offensive and defensive play from the examples before him and Ide's and Araya's comments. Details to follow
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So with the score for the first set at 1-1, Ike serves wide. After Monma returns the ball, Ei-chan notes that Monma intends to also play his return game at a position that's one step forward of his usual position (at the baseline). Ei-chan checks Ike and sees him move one step back. He wonders aloud if Ike intends to strengthen his defense. Araya disagrees, opining that Ike just wanted a bit of leeway in order to attack. Ide explains that when deployment speeds up, the options for offense decreases, so Ike's move probably cancelled out the distance that Monma had taken forward. Ei-chan realizes that even though Ike moved back, he's consistently attacking. Ei-chan wonders if this is the "defends in order to attack" that Monma had said. He notes that when Ike moved back, his offensive power decreased slightly, but Ike has certainly maintained his advantage. The rally continues, and then Ike hits a jump shot to the corner. Ide judges Monma's return as good, but Ei-chan counters that with this, Ike has an overwhelming advantage. Ike hits a drop shot that takes everyone by surprise. 15-0. Audience reactions: For an instant, time stopped!; So smooth it gave me chills... Araya: Hey, hey! After that rally, would you normally send that over there? Ei-chan: That absolutely-won't-give-up Monma-san didn't chase it... Ide: He couldn't chase it. It was that perfect. Probably Araya: Ide was often broken by that Ike, you know. Monma prepares to receive. Ike serves to the center. Another rally. Ei-chan remembers Monma's critique about how Ei-chan's play was similar to evasion without attacking or defending. He thinks that Monma, who's the best in Japan in terms of defensive ability, moved forward in order to defend against the attacks of Ike, who's the best in Japan in terms of offensive ability. On the other hand, Ike moved back in order to defeat Monma offensively. He realizes that this is the offense and defense that doesn't evade. So if he wants to develop a change of pace that doesn't evade... Ei-chan envisions Araya who hits strong shots from the baseline as an opponent. Should he also move forward? Would the difference in pace be

excessive because of that and Araya's constant attacks using powerful balls? He then envisions Ide as an opponent where he can't predict the situation itself. Since Ide's shots aren't that powerful, maybe a change of pace focusing on powerful balls while monitoring the state of affairs from a step back? He wonders what Nabae, who's capable of whatever response and doesn't have any weaknesses, would do. As the rally continues, Ei-chan thinks that having been beaten once and watching from outside, he understands quite well that if he's cornered with this development, he has no options. The current him is only capable of "evasion." Ike hits a short cross, but Monma chases it and gets a winner past Ike. Ei-chan thinks that if he plays without evasion in this exchange of high-level shots, he has to take the initiative in that while always ensuring multiple options for how to attack and how to defend, during the situation itself. He remembers Nabae telling him his goal of an all-A tennis and concludes that Nabae is strong because Nabae understands that (probably his conclusion about multiple options) quite well. Ei-chan remembers Asano's advice about creating a situation where Monma doesn't have to defend but has difficulty attacking, and notes that it was another option that hadn't occurred to him, that's why he tested it during the match, but thanks to Asano's advice, he was able to oppose Monma a little. Ei-chan concludes that the options he can do autonomously for defense and offense are all insufficient for him to win with change of pace. Besides power and technique, what he needs in order to do that...are footwork, fortitude, power of concentration, number of strategies, experience in actual matches...all the mental, physical, and technical qualities that he'd felt keenly after the match, things that can't be helped in a short span of time. They're all insufficient even though they're all necessary. He understands it's "all" but he finds it extremely far (probably as a goal). With the score for the first set at 6-5, Monma returns the ball down the line. Ike sets up to return it. Ide notes that Ike caught up and cut in on the ball, and considers it rash.
Monma apparently expects Ike to hit a cross, but it's a straight that lands right on the line for a winner. First set won by Ike: 7-5. Ike strikes a triumphant pose. Audience reactions: The end is Ike's forceful break!; It's not over. This is where it starts, right? Monma! End of chapter. The title for ch.372 is "Self" or "Ego." The blurb says "Japan's top finals is an even match...! What will happen in front of Ei-chan!?"

Ch. 372
Monma breaks Ike's serve at 2-3, then takes the second set 6-4. The match enters the final set. In the 14th game, Ike gets to match point. Monma tries to get a shot past Ike. Ike barely returns it; the ball hits the frame of his racket. The ball goes over Monma who gives chase. However, he doesn't catch up and the ball is in. So Ike wins: 7-5, 4-6, 8-6. Ei-chan got a lot of insight from the match. Details to follow.
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Correction to my earlier post. I was going by (faulty) memory and not the summary when I wrote 6-4 for the first set. Sorry about that. Ike actually won 7-5, 4-6, 8-6. Anyhow, I'll update this post later with the details. So with the first set over at 7-5, Ide opines that for the break in the last game Ike had played quite excessively. Araya speculates that Ike hadn't wanted to go into tiebreak from the first set, that regardless of the circumstances even Ike would have difficulty gearing up and when competing at the same level, the defensive side would have the advantage. Ide counters that Ike is one who improves when considering that, and adds that he (Ide) had also better be able to control his own gears more. Araya, however, wonders aloud if that last one gave more of an impression of excessiveness (trying too hard) rather than gearing up. He says that if he were Monma, he'd convert this and continue in the next

(set) using the same strategy. All the while, Ei-chan is scribbling notes and listening. He notes that the two are comparing themselves, while he hasn't even been able to describe his existence as "remote." (I guess Ei-chan's comparing his thoughts of only being able to evade at this point, while Araya and Ide are projecting ways of coping in a similar situation.) The second set starts with Ike's serve. Monma, who doesn't have another chance, moves his defensive position half a step forward. He blocks Ike's attack with a "sacrifice (desperate?) defense." Ike's persistent flow deteriorated. In the fifth game, he retreats another step back to try to restore his flow. Seeing that, Monma hits an angle cross without a moment's delay and takes the upper hand right away. Ike's return hits the net and finally Monma gets his first break in the match. Second set, 3-2. Audience reactions: This time Monma breaks first!; Ike recover right away! Starting with the next return game, Ike, who is losing the second set as he is, moves one step inside the baseline, like Monma. With powerful returns from a high impact point as a start, he already commences a close-quarter fight, betting the outcome of this set. Monma realizes it's (probably referring to the close-quarter fight) arrived. Ike attacks incessantly, lightning-quick, taking the maximum risk with his opponent at very close range. The iron-shield defense is gradually cornered by a desperate all-out attack by an offense demon. Here, Monma suddenly shifts his defense position back by around 2.5 meters. Even though it's Monma's service, Ike attacks and Monma defends, resulting in a development that hasn't happened until now. Simply defending, Monma withstands the surging offense and doesn't just wait for Ike's errors; because Ike doesn't take risk into consideration, Monma strikes Ike's weakened defense. Though the initiative appeared to have gone over to Ike, Monma actually taken hold of a tight spot, and while it was a hardship, he held his serve. After that, no matter how many times a break point appears, Monma bounces back, using his astounding power of concentration and defense. To try to wrench open that defense, the opposing Ike utilizes all the power, techniques, and ideas he has, and hastens the match with superior power, but it doesn't result in a break. The outcome is that both continue to hold their serves. Second set won by Monma. Count 6-4. During the break, Ike thinks that at the very end, he wasn't able to throw Monma off balance. He concludes it's a matter of not being able to throw him off balance as things stand. He wonders if this is the defense that has protected Japan (probably a reference to the Davis Cup). At this time, Monma's eating a banana. Then the final set starts. Araya comments that there's no telling whatsoever which one will win. In the first game, Ike reverts to his normal attack mode in his normal position. Whereupon Monma also reverts to the same position as in the first set. In the end, both players appear to want a match of direct opposition using their own tennis.

With the impetus of the second set, the first one to break is Monma. But Ike suddenly changes gears here and promptly breaks back in the next game. What's more, in the tenth game, Ike grasps match point. Here, Monma calmly holds fast, flaunting the difference in their experiences. This time Ike definitely "defends to attack" and Monma "attacks to defend." Their types are different in offense and defense postures, but they always have many options typical of them and open up paths without "evasion." And in the fourteenth game of the final match...there's an exchange of shots. Monma rushes to the net. He tries to get the ball past Ike. Ike lunges for the ball and catches it with the frame of his racket. The ball goes over Monma and is in. Monma fails to catch up to it. Ike ends it by picking up a win at the critical point. Game, set, and match won by Ike. Count: 7-5, 4-6, 8-6. The blurb says "The champion's deciding match declares Ike the winner!" The title of the next chapter is "The World."

Ch. 373
We get the reactions to Ike's win. Asano and the reporter Miyamoto show up and provide context and commentary to Ei-chan, Ide, and Araya. about how Ike's offensive tennis is newer and could be said to have been developed to defeat Monma's style, so in a match where the players are equals, the player with Ike's style would have an advantage. Asano tells the three that while Monma doesn't intend to lose (be inferior), but their generation is definitely starting out. Scene switch to Watanabe, Haketa, and apparently Takuma, taking in Monma's loss. Haketa notes that because Ike took part in the tournament, Monma's gotten stronger. And if they have the two of them, a Davis Cup win might not be just a dream. Watanabe points out it's not a matter of relying on just those two, since he's never seen all Japan so fired up, and they also have to do it. Takuma says he has no intention of being inferior to Ike or Monma. Then the award ceremony where Ike is presented with the trophy. Ei-chan remembers that it had been after watching an Ike match that he realized he wanted to become a tennis pro. But now is different from that time when he just longed to be a pro. From now on, he'll be competing in the world with those men.
Scene switch to school. Ei-chan informs his teacher that after graduation, he'll turn pro—which surprises the teacher. However, Ei-chan clarifies that registering as a pro would be after various contracts have become definite. The teacher asks if that's okay. Ei-chan explains that there are issues, but he's gotten his parents' consent. And after New Year, he'll steadily take part in pro tournaments, so it seems he'll again have to take occasional breaks from school. The teacher informs Ei-chan he'll make arrangements so that Ei-chan can graduate. He adds that if he does it this way, he'll support Ei-chan completely, since Ei-chan has resolved to do that much. He also notes that Ei-chan really changed through tennis, that he's become a guy who blazes his own trail. Oh, I can get p.2, now. So, anyhow, it seems Koshimizu was passing right then and overheard Ei-chan's conversation with the teacher. Koshimizu visits Ei-chan apparently in Ei-chan's classroom after school. He comments loudly about Ei-chan's making the Top 4 in the All Japan and and that he'd heard Ei-chan's decide to go pro. Ei-chan confirms this. Their classmates are all agog: Who's going to be what sort of pro?; Ei-chan, are you serious? That you'll go pro?; It's not Takasaki-san but Ei-chan?; How awesome! When Koshimizu adds that Ei-chan might be as famous as Natchan in the tennis world, their classmates ask when Ei-chan will appear in Wimbledon. Koshimizu is shocked by the question. Seeing his expression, their classmates apologize for whatever. Using the blackboard, Koshimizu explains how Wimbledon is at the apex of tennis tournaments. He then asks Ei-chan if Ei-chan has world ranking. Ei-chan says he's only had one win in the lowest level, the Futures, so he's 1700. Even then, Koshimizu is amazed that Ei-chan has already one point. Their classmates ask how many points the No.1 has. Ei-chan says it changes every week there's a match, but it's around 12,900. This sparks a discussion on how points are earned and how many points are awarded on winning a tournament in the Futures vs one of the Grand Slam. Koshimizu points out that winning a Futures tournament is difficult even for those counted among Japan's Top 10. Kageyama comes over and asks Ei-chan what's going on. Ei-chan explains. Kageyama asks what Ei-chan's current objective is. Ei-chan says it's an attempt to see how far he can go in the next 3 months. He'll decide with Coach Aoi which tournaments he'll participate in; he's hoping for wins in Futures and maybe even Challenger level. Their classmates are apparently worried since those are the lowest levels. However,
Koshimizu points out if everything goes really well, Ei-chan has a chance of taking part in [ATP] 250 tournaments, and if he keeps winning, just the prize money would be around 10 million yen. Ei-chan cautions that he doesn't expect to do that well. At which point,

Koshimizu asks Ei-chan for an autograph. When Ei-chan protests that he doesn't have one, Koshimizu points out that fan service is an indisputable part of a pro's job, so he has Ei-chan practice. Ei-chan first writes it in kanji, then in roman letters. Koshimizu objects that it's too neat; it should have a sense of speed (in other words, cursive like in the opening sequence of the anime?). Scene switch to STC. Ei-chan discusses his plans with Coach Aoi who explains that even for Futures tournaments, there are high- and low-level competitions all over the world. The tournaments that located far away and are inconvenient and dangerous have difficulty getting people, so the level is lower and the chances of earning points are higher, but it will exhaust many things. Plus it would take money. On the other hand, one in a large city will be convenient and safe, but there would be lots of players and naturally it would have a higher profile and will turn into a tough fight, no matter what. Ei-chan says he wants to take part in an ordinary-level Futures first, so Coach Aoi suggests an Australian Futures since it's nearby and reasonably similar in level to Japanese Futures, and Coach Aoi wants Ei-chan to get accustomed to competing overseas. The level is average, there's no time difference, and it's safe. It's currently a place that's becoming popular for rapidly fostering young players. Ei-chan considers travel expenses, board and lodging...for one week. He has to go no matter how, and it has to be cheap. Coach Aoi points out that it's off season until January and there aren't any tournaments, so Ei-chan should manage something in that time. So Ei-chan says he'll do his best in order to be able to go to Australia. End of chapter. The title for the next chapter is "To the North." Hmm...it looks like Ei-chan plans on earning money to cover his expenses for Australia. Maybe part-time work connected to tennis? But for some reason "to the north" suggests Hokkaido to me.

Ch. 374

So Ei-chan returns home from STC and looks up various things on his PC. He notes that a cheap direct flight to Melbourne costs over ¥70,000 [~US$600]...since hotels are expensive, he'll stay only in a motel...if he brings a number of meals from Japan, that would reduce [total cost?] to ¥250,000 [~US$2,100]...Being accompanied by his coach will simply double that. This time it's one person...the tournament period is one week...if he intends to win through, he wants to ready the total amount for one person. But even if he uses all his savings, it won't be enough. In which case, even though he'd made a special effort to get Coach Aoi's advice, it's impossible. But for pro tours, overseas will eventually be the major battlefields...if possible, he wants to compete abroad (see pic 1 on page 1 of mangakansou). Ei-chan sighs, then recalls the ellesse rep telling him people from a supplement manufacturer and a gut manufacturer had asked about Ei-chan (see pic 2 on page 1 of mangakansou). He goes online and checks the supplement manufacturer and learns its main item is a protein product called Haleo. He thinks he occasionally/rarely takes protein...then apparently reads that athletes who take just daily meals are malnourished, and that it's better especially for athletes who want to build up their physical strength to take it every day. Monma's appearance crosses Ei-chan's mind, then he tries touching the muscles of his own arm. Previously he'd just fully realized the necessity of strengthening his physique and increasing muscle power. [The company] might be glad to get him to support their protein. He thinks they're a fairly new company but have a good reputation and they continue to support athletes of Sendai, [the company's?] hometown. They'd steadily gotten bigger through word-of-mouth, so Ei-chan concludes they're probably a good company. Just then Ei-chan's dad gets home and is greeted by Ei-chan and his mom. Ei-chan's dad chortles and displays this month's issue of Tennis Times, which has Ike on the cover. He says there's there's quite a lot of coverage of Ei-chan, opening the magazine and displaying the page

with Ei-chan (see pic 3 on page 1 of mangakansou). Ei-chan and his mom marvel over it. His dad asks if the magazine is sold nationwide and wonders if he ought to buy 5 more copies. His mom wonders if they should distribute it to relatives. Ei-chan requests they stop, but then realizes that he shouldn't be embarrassed by this sort of thing and that this might be the time for him to attack. Ei-chan calls the supplement company, BodyPlus International, and introduces himself as someone who intends to go pro next year. He mentions he'd heard the other day, during the All Japan Tennis Championship, that their company was interested in him. He's asked if his call is about athlete support. He confirms this and requests a chance to make a presentation regarding an agreement/contract. The person on the phone is surprised that it's the athlete who wants to make a presentation [I guess it's usually the other way around.] He's granted this, and goes to Sendai. He borrows the suit that had been bought for his coming-of-age celebration, so he looks businesslike. When he arrives at the company, he tells them he has an appointment with Eric-sama. He's acknowledged and asked to wait. He's led to a room that he considers a spiffy office, and he wonders how the company is. There, he's greeted by Eric Holten, BodyPlus International's representative director, who compliments him on his performance in the All Japan (see pic 4 on page 1 of mangakansou). Ei-chan thanks Eric for the compliment and for his time. They shake hands. Eric says he'd heard there would be a presentation by an athlete, and was looking forward to it. Ei-chan first hands over a document titled "The reason it's necessary for Maruo Eiichirou to try out the protein, Haleo" and asks Eric to peruse it. Eric agrees that's something he wants to know. Thinking he's more nervous that during a match, Ei-chan starts his presentation. Apparently there's a time skip, because Eric then summarizes that Ei-chan's results at All Japan indicate physical immaturity or even lack of care. That's why in the future, Ei-chan wants to take their protein, and if that leads to results with physical training...it could demonstrate that efficacy to the world in a way that's readily understood. Ei-chan adds that he thinks an athlete with his sort of physique, which can't be said to be favored as a pro, would be able to demonstrate the efficacy more clearly to general consumers. Eric points out that in which case, any protein would be the same, that Ei-chan can use any protein to improve his physical strength and muscle power; so he says he wants to know why Ei-chan came to Body Plus. Ei-chan explains that first, he'd heard of their interest in him. Second, he was able to check up on the company and learned they'd started late in the supplement market and they're challenging major companies. Since he started tennis in high school and he's entering the pro world, he can sympathize with that. Eric pulls out the issue of Tennis Times that features Ei-chan. He tells Ei-chan he's also interested in tennis and has played for over 10 years, but recently has started having problems again with his backhand. So he understands well the difficulty of tennis. That's precisely why he'd been interested in the speed of Ei-chan's growth. He finds it hard to believe that Ei-chan made it to the Best 4 of the All Japan within 3 years of picking up a racket. So they want to hear more about that: what does Ei-chan think is the reason for his rapid growth?

Ei-chan ponders this, then comes to a realization. He pulls out his tennis notebook (No.74) and shows it to Eric. He explains it's his notes, which he'd continued to take from the very start. He'd realized he'd aimed too late to become a pro, and didn't want to waste even a little of what was happening in front of him, so he'd been single-mindedly noting down points for reflection and improvement. He was able to get this far with this, so he feels he also wants to continue hereafter. That's why if he can continue doing everything he can, he believes he can play even in a tough world (see pic 1 on page 2 of mangakansou). Eric is impressed. He tells Ei-chan there's one more thing he wants to hear: he wants to produce the most smiles, no matter how little. Ei-chan's confused: "Make the most...smiles?" Eric

explains that with his body Ei-chan will face adversity from now on, so when Ei-chan brushes that [adversity] aside, most people will smile. He asks if Ei-chan thinks he will produce smiles for people who are in the midst of adversity, just like him. Eric expects smiles that even Monma and Ike can't produce. Ei-chan calls to mind the moment Ike clinched the championship, and then he remembers the cheers he received when he defeated Takuma. He replies vigorously that he believes that's something he can do. Eric meets the gaze of another employee, then suggests they discuss specifics. An enthusiastic discussion continues from there. With the presentation over, Ei-chan calls Coach Aoi and reports that he'll be taking the protein every day after training, and will be reporting on its efficacy. He's also been able to get them to guarantee the minimum of his tour expenses. Coach Aoi congratulates him and proposes they handle the arrangements right away. Ei-chan thinks that with this, he can go to Australia. Hooray! End of chapter. The chapter title "To the North" is apparently a reference to Sendai, which is far north of Tokyo—a long distance for Ei-chan to travel on his own. The title of the next chapter is "Comrades" (basically like-minded people).
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The write-up on Ei-chan labels him a "Cinderella Boy."
Maruo Eiichirou A high school student who started tennis in high school, and took part in the competition
for the first time through a wild card from the Best 4 in the All Japan Junior. It seems this tournament's Cinderella Boy who defeated one of the favorites for the championship, Egawa Takuma, and is the first in history to advance to the Best 4 from the prelims, hopes to turn pro after graduation. The triangle in the second page generally emphasizes that most of the tournaments are overseas. From top to bottom: Grand Slam (4 tournaments in 4 countries: Australia, UK, France, US) ATP Tour Masters 1000 (9 tournaments in 7 countries: US, Monaco, Spain, Italy, Canada, China, France) ATP Tour 500 (13 tournaments in 12 countries; includes the Japan Open) ATP Tour 250 (39 tournaments in 27 countries; does not include Japan) ATP Challenger Tour (178 tournaments in over 40 countries; Japan has 4 tournaments) ITF Futures Series (650 tournaments in over 60 countries; Japan has 8 tournaments) This is why Ei-chan really wants to compete abroad.

Volume 39 extras
I'm going through vol.39 and I noticed bonus sketches. At the end of ch.367 (where Ike defeated Nabae), the sketch is of Takagi and Nabae's coach when the final score is announced. The coach comments that it turned into an important match for Yuu's [Nabae's] future. Takagi thought that he probably won't manage to stand on the same court as Nabae—and he concludes that Nabae is an irritating guy after all. In ch.369, Monma had asked Ei-chan to come meet him before his finals match with Ike in the All Japan and to bring along Nabae, Araya, Kanda, and Ide. Of course, since it's sudden, bringing only those who can come is fine. At the end of ch.371, the sketch is of Kanda's call from Araya. Araya tells him Monma is gathering those guys who can come tomorrow morning. Kanda: "Hah? Tomorrow morning!? I've already gotten back to Aichi [around 3 hours by train from Tokyo], though!?" Then there's a note that Kanda was later told what the meeting had been about. At the end of the volume, there's the usual 4-koma Extra about the TV Live Coverage of the All Japan finals. It's the end of the 2nd set (image shows the stadium and the score) and the voiceover says Monma won the second set by defense. The next image shows Monma eating a banana with Ike in the background and the voiceover says Monma's opposition of Ike's attacks has the feeling of stability of a veteran. The next image

shows a woman wearing sunglasses and the voiceover says Monma's fifth consecutive championship is at stake and his wife is watching attentively. The last image shows a boy wearing sunglasses and the voiceover continues: "And beside her, their son, Nozomu-kun, is also rooting for him." LOL The Monmas are a sunglasses-wearing family!

Ch. 375

So Ei-chan thinks that it's past Christmas and there's only a bit left to the year. December is off season for tennis, so it's a period where there are no tournaments and he can thoroughly drive his body. He's turning pro in April and has gotten a supplement maker to underwrite his tour expenses. Then his cell phone rings with an e-mail from Araya, which Ei-chan replies to. Then he thinks that for now he has funds for one overseas tour (not sure if this means just the Australian Futures tournament, or if it covers more tournaments). If he produces good results, he can consider the next development; if he loses, then it's over (might be referring to competing overseas). He's gotten STC to allow him to practice there as his base while aiming for Australia. Then Nabae and Ogata are included in the exchange (maybe of e-mail messages). Ei-chan thinks that from now the matches where he can't lose at all costs will occur again and again in order for him to make a living through tennis, so he's really thankful for this sort of invitation. On December 30, 7 guys (Nabae, Ide, Ogata, Araya, Okada, Kanda, and Ei-chan) meet as planned, gather at STC, and practice (see pic 1, p.1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan's shot goes into the net. Araya comments that Ei-chan is putting power strangely. Ei-chan acknowledges this, mentally attributing it to his overthinking things about the future, so his body is stiffening up. And there's the challenge Monma mentioned of finding a practice partner when he turns pro. An environment where this lineup will all be present is unlikely, so at a time like this, he has to grow, playing his own tennis. Practice continues. Nabae says he's warmed up and proposes they switch to a match style. Ide is for it. Okada points out they only have two courts. Araya suggests they alternate in one-set matches. Ogata taps Kanda as an opponent and Kanda agrees. Two matches start: Ogata vs Kanda, and Nabae vs Okada. On the sidelines, Araya comments that they did well to include this many members. Ide
adds that the timing was good; he's returning to Spain soon after New Year. Ei-chan's surprised that Ide will go again. Ide says he's taken a liking for over there. Ei-chan says he has difficulty asking, but what does Ide plan for funds? Ide explains that one of his acquaintances in Spain works for a gut maker, and he's arranged for Ide to receive some support. As for lodging, Ide will be passed around between houses of friends, so he'll survive. Araya comments that Ide's having several friends in Spain who'll let him freeload is unusual. Ei-chan remembers that in Florida he'd also been supported by Ike and concludes that playing abroad without expending money is tough-going. Ide adds that he doesn't want to always be supported by friends, so he won't extend it so much. Ei-chan says he also wants to leave home soon, but his parents told him it's better to see how it goes first when he's a pro. Araya says that many a time he has just enough funds to go around (?) the matches. He adds that among them the one who's secured a base and funds is Nabae. Ide points out it's because Nabae is a Japan rep. Ei-chan thinks everyone is also having a hard time. The matches continue: Okada 3-6 Nabae; Ogata 5-7 Kanda; Ei-chan 3-6 Nabae; Araya 6-4 Ide. Ide asks Nabae if his schedule for next year has been decided. Nabae replies that it has, generally: NTC will be his base, and he intends to trying challenging the highest levels of international competitions as he can. Kanda concludes that Nabae intends to win rapidly in superior tournaments and graduate from the Futures and Challenger levels early. Ei-chan realizes that means Nabae wants to get halfway up the mountain within the coming year

(see pic 2, p.1 on mangakansou). Kanda adds that the Challenger wall isn't something that can be surmounted quickly, so Nabae really has a lot of confidence in himself. Nabae asks Kanda's plans and whether he's going to the US. Kanda notes that the level there is high and his parents are there. Nabae asks if Kanda has settled on where he'll be based. Kanda replies that the plan is IMG again; he doesn't have to get a late start just because he's a year younger. Nabae comments that unexpectedly Kanda might be the one to advance to No.1 ranking next year. Kanda counters with "What's with 'unexpectedly'?" Araya curses and announces a switch. Behind him Okada strikes a triumphant pose. The matches continue: Ei-chan 7-5 Kanda; Okada 2-6 Ogata.

Ide exchanges a high touch with Ei-chan whose match was over, congratulates him on his win, and then suggests Kanda play against him next. Ogata remembers that Okada decided to go on to college and asks which, because he'd also decided to go to college. Okada mutters a reply; it turns out to be the same college Ogata will attend and Ogata says they'll be together. Ei-chan comments that with the two of them there, it will be super strong. Okada imagines their university life with him overshadowed by Ogata with the girls (see pic 1, p.2 on mangakansou). Ogata points out that more and more pros who are in college are increasing, and that there are also universities that sponsor tournaments, so they're just taking a different route. Okada tsks, shocking Ogata. Kanda asks who's next. Ide looks frustrated. Kanda 6-2 Ide. Okada calls Ei-chan to be his opponent. Ogata asks Ide to tell him how to get along well with Okada. Ide is surprised by the question. Ei-chan's match with Okada starts. The two exchange strong shots (see pic 2, p.2 on mangakansou). Okada thinks Ei-chan has improved even more. Ei-chan thinks that his stiffness at the start had disappeared, an effect he attributes to everyone there. Okada 2-6 Ei-chan. Araya suggests that everyone rest temporarily, then they each play two more matches afterward. Kanda comments that playing one match after another is tiring. Nabae adds that there's a feeling of tension no matter who the opponent is. Then Kanda asks Ei-chan how things are going. Ei-chan shares his plan to participate in an Australian Futures tournament. Kanda corrects him; he wasn't asking about that but about his girlfriend. Ei-chan's taken aback (see pic 3, p.2 on mangakansou). Smirking, Kanda asks how things went during Christmas. Even Ide looks excited, like he wants to hear. Ei-chan replies that they'd had a bit of time to meet during Christmas; however, Natchan's family apparently holds a Christmas party at their house every year and she kept getting e-mail from her dad, so Ei-chan ended up going home at 5 p.m. and spending it with his family. Kanda's surprised. Ide says he'd expected something more hot and heavy. Kanda argues that she should turn off the cell phone then. Ogata notes that in the future, trust will be important, which surprises Ei-chan. Ide asks if Ogata is already thinking of marriage. Ogata replies that it's natural since they'd been dating for a long time already. Ide is amazed. Araya comments that Ogata has a different perspective. Again, Okada tsks.

Kanda objects, wanting a lower-level topic: specifics about indecent topics (since he'd asked about Ei-chan's girlfriend, this probably means locker-room talk about girls). Araya realizes Kanda's that sort of idiot. Kanda argues that everyone's like that and it's Ei-chan who's weird for not getting hot and heavy on Christmas when he has such a cute girlfriend. Kanda ends up struggling for words. Ide tells Kanda he (Kanda) is unlikely to get a girlfriend for the time being and Kanda turns pale. Ogata: Aah... Okada: Pfft. Kanda turns on Okada and demands he not to laugh. Nabae points out that if they don't resume practice already, they won't have time. Ide suggests himself as Nabae's next opponent. Two more weeks until the Australian tour. End of chapter. The title of next chapter is "To the South." This suggests Ei-chan sets

off for Australia. Incidentally, the original poster also included a score of Nabae 6-4 Ogata, but no description. Some of the other match descriptions didn't have scores.
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Additions, corrections, and clarifications to the spoiler post: It wasn't e-mail that Ei-chan received but a message through a social networking app like Line. The suggestion to meet and have a group practice session comes from Araya (cat avatar). Nabae (yuu kanji avatar) immediately chimes in with agreement and that he's in depending on the location. Ogata (tiger avatar) says he'll be in the Kantou region visiting his grandma starting the 29th. Ei-chan (tennis racket avatar) says they can use the STC courts on the 30th. Araya and Ogata commend Ei-chan's immediate response. Ide (pic of Ide flashing a V sign) asks if he and Okada can join in. Nabae says holding it at STC works for him. Araya asks Ei-chan to make the arrangements with STC for the 30th. Ei-chan agrees. (Araya sends Kanda an invitation to the chat.) Araya then says he's invited Kanda and hopes that's okay. Ogata comments that Araya works fast. Nabae points out that it's far for Kanda. (Kanda joins the chat.) Kanda (ramen avatar) says he can go; his parents are coming to Tokyo just then. He adds that if there's this sort of group, tell him right away. Ogata apologizes. Kanda says Ogata isn't at fault. Araya asks if Kanda's saying it's his (Araya's) fault. Kanda apologizes. Ide reports that Okada doesn't know yet if he can make it, but Ide suspects he'll come. Ei-chan lists the participants and says that's 2 courts, or 3 if possible. Nabae confirms that they'll meet at STC on the 30th. Ogata thanks Ei-chan. The university Okada names is Kyouritsu. The score for the Okada vs Araya match, after which Okada strikes a triumphant pose,
is apparently 7-5. Nabae's standing behind Ei-chan when Ei-chan mentions his plan to participate in an Australian Futures competition, and Nabae looks kind of wide-eyed on hearing it. Kanda's comment about turning off the phone apparently means while on a date. Kanda turns pale, not red, and his turning pale seems to be a reaction to being told by Ide that he (Kanda) is unlikely to get a girlfriend. Kanda also demands that Okada not laugh. The teaser blurb says "Now, to the tour! Ei-chan will begin his attempt!"

Ch. 376
Looks like some culture shock for Ei-chan when he arrives in Australia the day before the tournament starts, but he seems to have found his mental bearings. Okay, the chapter starts with Ei-chan and Natchan doing the New Year shrine visit together. Ei-chan thinks it's been around a month and a half since the All Japan Championship. And he's put together a physical rebuilding menu for the two weeks until the tournament. He'll strengthen his upper body and increase flexibility, and put on physical strength. It might seem to be a circuitous route to produce results right away, but it's actually the best shortcut. Strengthening the body doesn't just improve technique and maintain concentration, it definitely affects the strategic approach (or concepts). After the tournament schedule was decided, he'd continued full training enough to actually feel that (probably referring to affecting strategic approach) in particular. And he'll head to Australia alone. Then the chapter has Ei-chan aboard a plane and reading Tennis Times. He compares Japan to Australia and thinks Australia is clearly more advanced in tennis, it's producing lots of promising young players, and it's a high-profile region. He wonders what sort of place it is. He arrives at the Australian airport. He thinks it's far, but there isn't much of a time difference, so he feels more comfortable than in Florida. However, this time Mike and Ike aren't there, so he has to get to his lodgings on his own. Although he's studied English somewhat, his English isn't perfect, so he feels

uneasy. He reminds himself that he'd checked beforehand and has lots of time, so if he goes carefully, he'll be okay.
He boards the train he needed without any problem. Through the window, he sees "Rod Laver Arena," recognizes it as the center court for the Australian Open, and remembers that the Grand Slam starts that week. Ike and Monma are in the final selection, while Takuma will be in the prelims, so he wonders if everyone has arrived. Ei-chan also wants to go. He remembers that he's now starting on the path that will duly lead him there. He wonders what sort of venue his own tournament will be held in. Two hours pass on the train. Then Ei-chan realizes his stop is the next station. The place looks quite desolate (no buildings) and he wonders if he'll be okay. He gets off at the station and notes that it matches his map. As he walks, he thinks it's excessively spacious and empty without any signs of life. He finds the motel and sighs in relief. He enters his room, takes a breather, but notices the clock, and tells himself he's arrived but this is no time to feel relieved. He has to go to the tournament venue and get to a practice court today to prepare for tomorrow. He get some light exercise to relax his body. Ei-chan gets to the courts and thinks the club more ordinary than he'd expected, but the courts are the same beautiful blue as the Australian Open's (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). He hails some people who look like officials, introducing himself and explaining he's come from Japan. The official greets him and guesses he's participating in the tournament tomorrow. Ei-chan asks where the practice courts are. The officials laugh and point out there are lots of courts right in front of him. Ei-chan blushes a bit, and guesses that means he can use whichever one he likes. As he heads to the courts, he notes that the officials hadn't offered any explanation or advice. He reminds himself this isn't Japan, and naturally he has to look for a practice partner on his own too. He hails another player, introducing himself and asking if that player will be taking part in the tournament tomorrow. Just then, the guy's friend calls him. He tells Ei-chan that Ei-chan is correct but excuses himself because he has to practice. Then Ei-chan sees an Asian guy who's by himself. He hails the Asian and introduces himself (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou). The Asian acknowledges the introduction but doesn't reciprocate. Ei-chan guesses the Asian will be participating in the tournament and explains he's looking for a practice partner. The Asian confirms Ei-chan's guess, then asks what tournaments Ei-chan has taken part in. Ei-chan saying the All Japan Junior, the All Japan Championship, and a Futures in Florida last year. The Asian stands up and leaves, telling Ei-chan to trying someone else (Oooh! Now I want Ei-chan to beat
that guy, then win the tournament!) Ei-chan wonders if he was turned down for lack of a track record. He continues asking others, but doesn't find any takers. He thinks it's useless, plus he doesn't speak fluently. Right then, an old man calls out to Ei-chan and offers to partner him in practice. Ei-chan happily enters the court, but the old man is no where in his league, commenting that Ei-chan's balls are different, as expected of a pro (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). An hour later, the old man tells Ei-chan to do his best (tomorrow). Smiling, Ei-chan waves to the old man. Ei-chan's grateful, but he thinks his adjustment ended with incomplete combustion, so he plans on going on a run to work up more sweat (to blow off the soot in the pipes, so to speak). Afterward, Ei-chan's eating in his room. Then he opens his tennis notebook. He thinks he'd intended to prepare himself, but nothing went as he'd hoped. He concludes this is probably what an overseas tour is like. He notes that his 1R opponent is a local, an Australian named Arber Christophe. He hasn't been able to get the data he wants, aside from the guy being 20 years old with a world rank of 1476. He's uneasy knowing hardly anything about the guy, but this is also something he's anticipated. His pulse speeding up, Ei-chan exhales deeply, thinking he's already started his fight as a pro: first is

clearing the prelims. He smiles (see pic 3, page 2 on mangakansou). The wind outside is audible. Ei-chan thinks the wind has gotten a bit stronger. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Self."
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I corrected the name of Ei-chan's 1R opponent in the summary. It looks like Ei-chan's focus on increasing flexibility is due to Tanemura's influence since Ei-chan's shown attempting a split, just like he'd seen Tanemura do. The article in Tennis Times that Ei-chan was reading was apparently about an 18-year-old Australian who won the U.S. Open. By the time the old man went up to Ei-chan, there was only one hour left where people could use the courts. The teaser blurb says "A Premonition of a Storm from the First Match." I do hope the "storm" is Ei-chan's success (like when Natchan predicted Ei-chan would be the eye of the storm) and it's not an actual storm.
Ooh, it looks like Ei-chan brought enough bananas to last him the tournament. I wonder if that's Monma's influence? Hmm...I also wonder if Ei-chan's world ranking is listed in the same place where he looked up Arber Christophe on his cell phone?

Ch. 377
Due to strong winds, the balls aren't bouncing as Ei-chan expects, so he's in the wrong position to receive and his timing is thrown off. Then he notices there aren't any previous balls left on court and sees the current ball roll downwind even though the wind had dropped. He concludes that the court is slightly tilted. I'm not sure how easily he can adjust to the difference, but once he adjusts, I think he should be fine. So the chapter starts the next morning, the first day of the Australia Futures prelims. The wind is blowing strong and Ei-chan's had a bad feeling about it since last night. He wonders if a match is possible in such a strong windstorm, even though there's no rain. He arrives at the venue and asks the reception desk if there will be matches today. The person at the reception looks out, then replies that the chairs aren't flying, so the matches are on. The reply has Ei-chan wondering if the chairs really do sometimes go flying. Ei-chan enters the court, thinking that even now it looks like the chairs could go flying, so the manner of speech implies they're used to it and it often happens. And since his opponent is a local, he's probably used to this wind too, so it might be a bother. Ei-chan concludes he has to thoroughly make the wind his ally. He meets his opponent, Alber Christophe (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). The two decide who will serve and who will receive using the mark of the racket's pattern. Ei-chan guesses wrong, so Alber chooses to serve. Ei-chan realizes that the prelims are self-judged (apparently where the chapter title "Self" comes from), which is different from Japan where even prefectural junior tournaments have umpires. He concludes that if the Rod Laver Arena he saw yesterday was the summit, this (venue) was the base...this is definitely the starting point. Alber announces "Three-set match. Play!" and hits a quick serve. Ei-chan notes that the quick serve is a slice that's carried by the wind (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). The serve is wide and he doesn't touch it. 15-0. Ei-chan concludes from the control, the quick serve from the low toss and hard-to-follow effect of the wind, the choice of a slice serve where the power is increased by riding the wind...that Alber is accustomed to playing in this sort of wind. The next serve is to the center. Ei-chan manages to return it. Alber returns the ball with a strong flat. Ei-chan's extended racket is completely blown off because the flat is carried by the wind, resulting in unexpected power. He thinks that in this situation, there are no ordinary shots that he can hit normally. He wonders if this is also a hometown advantage where his opponent doesn't miss this (or maybe, doesn't commit this error). The rally continues. Ei-chan's shot goes into the net. He thinks the only thing he can do is to start

getting used to (the situation) from zero. (Possibly the wind forced his shot down into the net.) In the next rally, Alber puts the ball away with a strong blow and strikes a triumphant pose. The first game ends as a love game. Ei-chan thinks it's hard to play, but he'd been prepared for there being various things, and he came because he had to experience those while it's still early. Getting to the serve position, he decides that he first has to hold his serve and grasp his own pace. He tosses, then the ball wavers in the wind. He manages to match and hit the ball, but even though it was a quick serve, the impact point was off. Ei-chan thinks it's in, but Alber calls a fault. Alber exhales then takes a posture of concentration. Ei-chan guesses the serve had been very close, and this sort of thing (maybe thinking it was in) is also an assumption. He thinks he has to focus on his play...if the next one is tough (or terrible or unfair, depends on the context), he'll deal with it. On his second serve, the toss is again disturbed by the wind, and the ball goes into the net. Double fault. 0-15. Ei-chan believes he's overthinking all sorts of things. He takes a deep breath and concentrates on the next serve. The serve to the center goes in. Alber returns it. Ei-chan thinks that this time it's a spin, but earlier, even though it was just a flat... The ball bounces higher than Ei-chan expected (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou), taking him by surprise. He returns it, but the ball was weak and Alber is able to put it away with a straight. Ei-chan thinks the ball bounced and decelerated, a big difference from the strong fast ball earlier. He concludes Alber is a player who hits balls Ei-chan has never experienced before. When he's upwind, he hits a flat. When he's downwind, it's a spin.
Ei-chan speculates that it might be an attack using shots that make the best use of the wind. The rally continues. Due to unexpected ball motion (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou), Ei-chan's shot goes into the net and his serve is broken because he couldn't get the timing. Even though he'd intended to take into account the wind, it's still no good. He thinks he first has to get used to the wind and spin right away... While sensing wind direction and wind strength with his body...watch closely... Now since the strong wind is facing his opponent...he predicts a spin (serve?) to the center. His prediction is correct, but... (see pic 3, page 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan wonders why the ball bounced and decelerated even more than usual. Alber puts the ball away with a crosscourt forehand. Ei-chan thinks that with this, even if he can predict the type of ball and the course, he doesn't match the timing. There's something off that isn't explained by just the wind. With this, he can't attack. In the third game, Alber again holds his serve. On the chair, Ei-chan scribbles on his notebook. His analysis: the upwind-flat and downwind-spin has been consistent. It's certainly an undesirable attack, but it's monotonous, so he ought to be able to handle it...and yet his timing is off. He tries drawing a picture of the wind direction and ball movement. He wonders why. It's already 0-3 and wants to stop it here. Since there seems to be some regularity, shouldn't he be able to pin it down? Then he notices the balls he'd left "here" (on the ground by the chair) are gone. The balls are rolling downwind. He's surprised to see them all the way "over there"; even if it's attributed to the strong wind...when the wind is weakening...it can't be...this court is slightly inclined?! End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Away."
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Corrections to the summary: what Ei-chan notices is that the balls he'd set down beside him aren't where he left them, and that they'd rolled over there (way beyond the baseline). In the double call of 0-15 in the summary, the second time wasn't called in the
manga, so it was the original poster's error and I just deleted it from the summary. The teaser blurb says "Will Ei-chan, who is being tossed about by an invisible enemy, recover?!"

Ch. 378

Okay, so to test his hypothesis, Ei-chan gently sets the ball down and it goes rolling—which confirms his guess that the court is sloped. He thinks something like that would be impossible in Japan. Then Alber calls his attention with a "Hey!" Ei-chan sets up to serve, thinking it's probably within competition regulations, but considering the slight slope, he can understand his sense of unease that wasn't explained by just the wind. When he's facing a headwind (he's downwind), he's hitting uphill (relative to the slope), so the ball slows down and bounces more than expected (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Alber wonders if Ei-chan has already noticed (probably the slope). Ei-chan's analysis continues: And that's why when upwind, Alber aims for the bouncing ball from above with a flat. So he decides he has to hit a slice serve that doesn't bounce at this point. Alber returns the serve, recognizing from Ei-chan's response that Ei-chan has noticed in only 3 games. Ei-chan returns the ball with power and a type of shot that takes into account the wind and the slope... Alber thinks Ei-chan is unlucky, that even if Ei-chan has noticed, Alber has an overwhelming advantage in power by being upwind (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). He hits a strong shot and puts away the ball. 0-15. It's a good thing Ei-chan was able to understand the situation at an early stage, but Alber again capitalizes on the strong wind and continuously fires off strong shots, and Ei-chan, handicapped by the unfamiliar headwind, fails to hold his serve. After that, he gradually adjusts his shots for the wind, while piling on errors, but he's also held down in this game by the power of Alber's serve from upwind. Alber strikes a triumphant pose: "Yes!" Game count: Alber 5-0 Ei-chan. They change court for Ei-chan's service game. Taking into account his being upwind this time, Ei-chan sends his serve wide. Alber returns it. Ei-chan decides to use the wind
and the slope, seizing the boost while being careful not have the ball go out, by controlling a flat ball. Carried by the wind, the flat is a winner. With the upwind game, Ei-chan finally takes a game in the match for the first time. Then he looks forward to making his first break in the next return game from upwind, but unaccustomed to attacking from upwind, he fails to break. It's 35 minutes since the start of the match and the first set is lost. (The score is apparently 6-1.) The wind shows no sign of letting up. Ei-chan thinks he was beaten; he's starting to get used to the wind, but his opponent is a specialist who uses the wind. However, the attack style is monotonous, and if he's upwind, he's sure to hold his serve, and he should be able to break Alber. And even when he's downwind, he should be able to hold. He'll rally from this point, and he'll bring in his own tennis. Alber thinks Ei-chan's ability to respond/adapt is remarkable. The second set starts with Ei-chan serving from downwind. He thinks strategy is important in order to hold his serve when he's downwind, which reduces power. He'll compensate for the away disadvantage (probably meaning his unfamiliarity with the venue) with strategy. He decides to use the course and a ball that won't bound so that it won't let Alber hit it with a high impact point from upwind. Ei-chan hits a slice serve wide. Alber returns it. Ei-chan thinks if he makes Alber run and hit a low ball, it won't be powerful. For his next shot, he goes for control with an angle shot that escapes outward. Alber manages to return thetsks (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan exults, thinking that with this, he completely has the upper hand. However, Alber calls it out. Ei-chan protests that it was in. Alber tells him to call a referee if he has a complaint, but adds that when one is called, based on the self-judge rule, the one who is closer is the one who judges, so he won't be overruled. Ei-chan tries to object. Alber says if Ei-chan doesn't trust him, he can get an assistant referee to attend them. Ei-chan thinks he understands the nuance, but he doesn't understand it well and quickly (I guess he's having difficulty with English). Ei-chan tells Alber he's sure the shot was in, so if Alber is doing it on purpose, he wants Alber to stop it. Alber

asks Ei-chan if Ei-chan heard what he said: call a referee. But he insists he has the right of judgment. Ei-chan thinks Alber's playing on Ei-chan's difficulty with English. Ei-chan reins in his frustration and irritation and goes to the service position. He reminds himself that this is a self-judged match overseas. He can't fight on equal terms using words. He mustn't be further disturbed now in a match where he needs to concentrate. In the first place, he came to get this sort of experience. He tells himself to pull himself together. Ei-chan serves to the center. Alber returns the ball with a strong forehand shot crosscourt and puts it away: "Yes!" Ei-chan realizes Alber had aimed for that immediately after agitating Ei-chan. With him a set down and the score of the first game at 0-30, Ei-chan doesn't want his serve broken. He closes his eyes and takes a deep breath, reminding himself to remember the good times when he'd made points and boost his concentration. Alber tells Ei-chan that Ei-chan is taking a bit long, so he'll time him. Opening his eyes, Ei-chan orders himself not to wear out his concentration even in this sort of circumstances. His next serve to the center is a fault, but Ei-chan thinks it's only barely a fault. Alber thinks Ei-chan is stronger, per se, but he can throw him off balance. (It's not clear here whether he means that Ei-chan is stronger than himself or that Ei-chan's game is usually stronger.) Ei-chan's second serve is wide. Alber returns it with a drop shot (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan fails to catch up with the ball. He swears because he hadn't been thinking about a surprise attack, and a drop shot is high risk with the strong wind. He then corrects himself, concluding that was the reason the drop shot was effective. Alber is sure he'll take the game here (probably because the score should be 0-40). Ei-chan's serve goes into the net. Alber plans to attack the second serve. However, it doesn't go in (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). Double fault. Ei-chan's serve is broken. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Natural Advantage(s)." So the current score is 6-0, 1-0 with Alber leading. Now I really want Ei-chan to defeat Alber.

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Corrections to the summary: the first time Alber judged a shot out, he'd managed to return it. When Ei-chan took time to center himself, Alber didn't just think Ei-chan was taking time, he told Ei-chan he's timing Ei-chan.

The teaser blurb says "Self-destruction...! The Way to Counterattack is!?"

Ch. 379

So the chapter opens with Ei-chan shocked that he'd double-faulted at such an important time and was broken first. Alber thinks, "Yeah! I herded him this far!" As they switch courts, Ei-chan wonders what to do: a countermeasure for a hometown opponent in his first competition; how to cope with self-judging overseas; a match in strong winds with which he has no personal experience; a court he lacks practice on—moreover, one that's probably sloping. With all these, he's not even thinking about his opponent's tactics, and he can't play his own tennis. He fixes his strings (routine to calm down). Then he reminds himself he's doing everything possible. As he prepares to receive, he concludes that he can only continue doing them all, also keeping in mind surprise attacks (probably referring to Alber's drop shot) and watching his opponent closely. Alber serves wide. As Ei-chan returns it, he notes that from downwind, it bounces without lengthening. An exchange of shots, then Alber hits a shallow lob. Ei-chan thinks it's a chance, but notices the ball is shifting because of the wind. He goes for a smash, which unfortunately goes into the net. Ei-chan wonders if the shot was calculated (I guess intended to invite the smash and resulting error). Narration in the text boxes: Up to this point, Alber's attacks had been "monotonous" (repetitive?). Alber's real distinction was the variety of his tactics. Right after the start of the second set,

considering he'd evaded using technique, he had attacked with power—a style like Nabae's, where he changes tactics completely if Ei-chan works out countermeasures. Because of that, even when Ei-chan gets to a good position, he's by no means able to break Alber. However, he continues to hold his serve, and if he doesn't break once, he'll lose. In any case, he concentrated and accumulated data on Alber's tactics so that he won't be flustered. (Score for the second set: 4-3) And at last the final stage of the set where the complete picture of Alber's tactics has been seen, when Ei-chan had planned to make a bold move, Alber's tennis suddenly transformed super aggressively. Alber's strong shot is a winner. Ei-chan's stunned, but Alber thinks Ei-chan starts to cope right away no matter what sort of attack, and he wonders what on earth Ei-chan is doing with his notes. Alber thinks that if he can't end it with this set, the final set will be dangerous. So he decides to break things off here. He serves to the center. A rally
ensues, then "Yes!" Alber holds his serve: 5-3. Play continues. Ei-chan hits a winner crosscourt: 5-4. Ei-chan thinks he held his serve and intends to break here. Alber thinks that if he holds, he wins. Alber tosses the ball. Ei-chan predicts Alber will serve wide, and reacts. Alber hits the ball and is surprised to see Ei-chan already in position to receive it. Ei-chan decides to attack since he's upwind; however, his shot goes out. Play continues. Alber hits a drop shot, thinking it ends with this. Ei-chan rushes the net and manages to return the ball. Unfortunately, the wind prevents the ball from clearing the net. Alber wins: 6-1, 6-4. After the handshake, a wide-eyed Alber leaves, thinking "That was dangerous...that was strange tennis." It turns out the Asian guy had apparently been watching the match. On the train back to Melbourne, Ei-chan reviews his notes, thinking he hadn't been able to use up his true strength. Then he corrects himself: he'd included everything; this is his current ability. He totally hadn't understood what it means to compete abroad. Australia Futures: 1R loss. Back in STC, Ei-chan reports to Coach Aoi, who says it's unfortunate, but asks if Ei-chan still feels down. Ei-chan replies that he's daunted, having gotten financial assistance and gone. Coach Aoi points out Ei-chan was able to gain good experience and can only retaliate in due time. He asks where Ei-chan will go next, pointing out there are many options including China, Thailand, and India. Ei-chan replies that he really wants to go but his funds are already... Coach Aoi points out that what Ei-chan has to do first is to make a report on the protein to his sponsor. He suggests Ei-chan make the best use of his defeat and proactively get backing to challenge overseas through an appeal. Ei-chan says he'll contact the company immediately. Coach Aoi asks if Ei-chan understands why a pro tennis player ought to acquire international experience, then answers his own question: they won't understand the court, climate, topography, culture, and everything else if they don't go. He believes Ei-chan already understands, but explains that the top world players take part in 17 tournaments in a year, at the very least, including the Davis Cup and Grand Slam. Ei-chan has to continue competing in numerous matches in those tournaments, which are scattered throughout the world, in order to gather points. In other words, in addition to mental, physical, and technical, Ei-chan also needs financial ability, adaptability, and even knowledge. Despite Ei-chan's always holding those sorts of things, he has to allow them to improve. Ei-chan is heading for that sort of world, so first before anything else, Ei-chan has to get used to overseas campaigns. Coach Aoi ends his lecture by telling Ei-chan to go in rapid succession to as many as he can go. Ei-chan agrees. Narration in the text boxes: And then I decided to put special priority on overseas campaigns during the period when there are no tournaments in Japan, from now on. First, I'll go to China in February. March will be Japan, but for April and May, I'll attempt to break through the lower tour in India and various other Asian countries. End of chapter. The teaser blurb for the next chapter is "The

Destination (or Future) of the Challenge from Low Level is...?!" The title of the next chapter is "Inexperienced (or Not Yet Experienced) Zone."

Ch. 380

So when ch.380 opens, about a month has passed since Ei-chan returned from Australia and it's now the middle of February and Ei-chan is in Shenzhen, China. On the phone, he reports to Erik (BodyPlus) that he'd gotten through the prelims but lost in the first round of the main draw (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Erik comments that Ei-chan has progressed since Australia. Ei-chan says he's also reflected on (what happened in) Australia and he's coping with the self-judging in English better than before. He'd arrived at the venue 2 days earlier (instead of just 1), so he was able to find a good practice partner. Flashback: Ei-chan's looking for a practice partner. Someone calls out to him asking if he's looking for a practice partner. Ei-chan's surprised because the one who'd hailed him was the Asian guy he'd met in Australia. The guy mentions they'd met in Australia; he offers to partner Ei-chan. Ei-chan asks why, when the guy had refused last time. The guy replies that he'd watched the match that Ei-chan lost and had wanted to try hitting against Ei-chan some day (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). The guy apologizes for that time and introduces himself as Wang Wei. Ei-chan introduces himself. They shake hands. Wang Wei says he's 16 and asks Ei-chan how old he is. Ei-chan's surprised Wang Wei is so young, and replies he's 18. End of flashback. Ei-chan says that he got used to the peculiarities of the hard court with practice, and this
time the weather was favorable, so he believes the result was his advancing to the main draw. Erik then asks why Ei-chan hadn't been able to win. Ei-chan fumbles his explanation, but gets out that his physical condition deteriorated and he had to default midway. Erik asks if Ei-chan is all right and where the problem was. Ei-chan says that during the match, he was struck with diarrhea. Erik asks if it's acute food poisoning. Ei-chan replies he'd taken medicine as is much better now, so the cause seems to have been something that disagreed with him. He adds that one the first day of the tournament, there was a body check (pat down) outside the venue, and the insides of bags and wallets were checked. That man was suspicious, so he didn't trust him and watched him to be sure, but afterward, when he noticed, most of the cash had been replaced with paper, like magic (sleight of hand). Ei-chan apologizes earnestly. Erik is flabbergasted. Ei-chan said he suddenly ran out of money after that. He economized and tried to get through, and at that time, locals were eating at cheap food carts/stands close to the venue. Ei-chan believes his eating there was the problem. He adds that he'd heard Japanese stomachs are the weakest in the world, but he's been made to fully realize this (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Erik breaks out in laughter, then apologizes, saying it's no laughing matter. He asks what happened next. Ei-chan said that during the match, he'd had to take a toilet break and he couldn't get out, so he had to default. Erik roars with laughter once more. He again apologizes and prompts Ei-chan to continue and asks how Ei-chan's 1R opponent in the main draw was. Ei-chan replies his opponent was a 25-year-old Thai with a world ranking in the 400s, but he felt that his opponent's power and technique were quite high level. However, it would be an excuse...but the guy wasn't on the level of Japan's top players, so Ei-chan believes that if he'd been in perfect shape, he could have done more (probably gotten further in the tournament). Nonetheless, Ei-chan tells Erik that from what he's seen in 2 Futures tournaments up to now, an opponent who wins through the main draw and advances might be stronger than Ei-chan, but at the same time, Ei-chan really feels he can get to a good spot at this level. In addition, Ei-chan points out there's the Challenger, and he's gained a full realization that the lower

tour is quite a deep layer/class. Ei-chan apologizes for losing in such a pathetic manner when he'd received support (from BodyPlus), and he hadn't been able to make even one point. Erik admits he'd wanted to hear better news, but now he has realized it doesn't mean he wants Ei-chan to have gotten 1 or 2 points. Erik points out that Ei-chan wrote down everything about
that defeat. Ei-chan confirms this. Erik tells Ei-chan that Erik is hoping the notes Ei-chan had taken in the two tournaments Erik had provided assistance...have "a source of smiles." Ei-chan remembers his first presentation at BodyPlus. Erik tells Ei-chan they'll still supply him the protein continuously. He requests Ei-chan to appear in matches with the patch attached to his sleeve then, and to try consulting Erik again when Ei-chan has another overseas tour. He explains that since he's a manager of a commercial enterprise, his funds are limited, but he'll work together with Ei-chan as long as he believes matter of the tour is the direction Ei-chan has to take. Ei-chan thanks Erik and informs him that in March he'll be participating in a Japanese Futures, so he'll inform Erik of his results there too. Erik tells him to do his best. After the call ends, Ei-chan looks emboldened, but...his stomach gives a rumble, and he has to run to the toilet again. Then in early March, Ei-chan participates in a Japanese Futures for the first time. He thinks he's in perfect form, possibly because he can really feel that Japan is an easy place to compete in. He's able to pass the prelims with his own tennis...and he breaks through 1R of the main draw. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose: Yeah! Finally, 1 point! Then his 2R opponent is Tsudanuma, world rank: 290; JTA rank: 10 (he was defeated by Tanemura in the All Japan). Ei-chan manages to come to grips with an opponent who aims intensely with powerful strokes (see pic, page 2 on mangakansou). But Ei-chan doesn't go another step further (this means Ei-chan loses in 2R). What he gained in these 3 months is the 1 point mentioned. The pro reality is harder than he'd thought. But he's starting to get better. However, it's already March, the period for discussing contracts with businesses. He had many experiences, but his world rank stops at 2 points for 1111. He wasn't able to amass achievements that enable him to turn pro with pride. He approached his high school graduation with his future prospects uncertain. The graduation ceremony is over, and Ei-chan is alone, sitting in his classroom. A classmate takes his leave, telling Ei-chan he'll definitely go watch Ei-chan's match. Ei-chan thanks his classmate. Kageyama arrives and apologizes for keeping Ei-chan waiting. He asks Ei-chan what's wrong, noting that Ei-chan is glum. Ei-chan explains that recently he hasn't been able to win as he'd hoped. Kageyama points out that "The
pro tennis world is hard" is a problem that was unthinkable when Ei-chan entered school. But as he was then, he was on the track, so he can't say he wasn't uncertain. Ei-chan agrees. Kageyama points out that Ei-chan's chances as an athlete are kinda easy to understand, but everyone's the same. He adds that because Ei-chan lost this time, he was able to attend the graduation ceremony, so it's good! Natchan and Sasaki arrive. Natchan congratulates him on his graduation. Kageyama asks what the two are doing and tells them to encourage Ei-chan a bit. He adds that Ei-chan seems depressed because Ei-chan lost recently. Ei-chan protests that he's okay and that Natchan already knows. The four chat loudly. Ei-chan thinks his high-school life ended today. Starting tomorrow is the future he chose himself. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Motivation" or "Determination" or "Willingness."
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Corrections and clarifications: First, while the furigana for Wang Wei's name can be read as "One Way," the kanji for his name matches the kanji for the Chinese baseball catcher's name. When Erik clarified his statement that he has realized it doesn't mean he wants Ei-chan to have gotten 1 or 2 points, he said he hopes that the notes Ei-chan had taken in

the two tournaments Erik had provided assistance have "a source of smiles." The patch on the sleeve Erik mentioned is apparently the "Hale" that's on Ei-chan's sleeve in the art. After the loss to Tsudanuma, after Ei-chan noted that he's starting to get better, he added that his results are currently also improving steadily, little by little. The stuff about "on track" was a reference to the flashback where Ei-chan was actually walking on the rails rather than the sidewalk. The teaser blurb just says "Amid Expectation and Uncertainty..." apparently referring to the the future Ei-chan chose himself.

Ch. 381

So it's the end of March and Ei-chan's at the office of racket manufacturer Prince. He's wearing a suit and looks nervous. The Prince rep comments that Ei-chan's vigorously going overseas recently even though he continues to face close games. Since Ei-chan's Best 4 placement in the All Japan, they've started to hear about Ei-chan in various places. His progress and drastic performance in the short term have been highly acknowledged. Nevertheless, they believe they can commit to a 1-year contract for assistance with campaign expenses, and rackets, bags, and the use of other equipment. Ei-chan thanks him, and the Prince rep reciprocates. Ei-chan then goes to ellesse. A despondent Sudou tells him that due to in-house reasons, he's only able to offer goods in stock and other types of clothing. He senses possibilities in Ei-chan, so he also wants to aid his pro activities and campaign expenses, but... Ei-chan thanks Sudou and assures him that just getting the offer for clothing is a big help and that he'll do his best in ellesse tennis wear. He bows deeply to Sudou. Then it's April. Nabae closes a contract with Wilson. There's a big writeup about that meeting, and in the same page below the writeup, the names of the players who turn pro this spring are listed: Araya (18, GITC); Nabae (18, Wilson); Nitta? (20, Takota); and Ei-chan (18, STC) (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). (Since Araya and Ei-chan are listed under their clubs, they apparently don't have sponsors.) Scene switch to a restaurant where Ei-chan, Natchan, Yukichi, Kageyama, and Sasaki are gathered. Yukichi proposes a toast to Ei-chan's new career. Everyone: Cheers! (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou) Yukichi comments that Ei-chan's now officially a pro. Ei-chan confirms this and asks him, "How's college?" Yukichi replies that junior-senior relationships are strict. Kageyama asks Ei-chan if Ei-chan won't meet with reporters like Nabae did. Ei-chan explains he's not that noteworthy, so he was interviewed at the presentation. It seems Nabae had close games overseas in January and February, but he won a domestic Futures in Japan. Then borne by the impetus from that, he finished second in a Challenger, so his pro debut match is attracting attention. Yukichi comments that it's not on the level of "Master" (Ike) who suddenly made his pro debut at the Japan Open and got written up in newspapers, but because Nabae's the top of the Ike-generation list, the expectations of people connected to the business world are rising. Natchan comments that when you think of it that way, Sou-chan and Takuma who won in Challengers right after graduating are amazing. Ei-chan agrees. Natchan adds that Ei-chan would too (do the same as Sou-chan and Takuma) before long. Ei-chan: "Eh?" Natchan points out that Ei-chan had returned from overseas and said he felt the depth/thickness of the Futures layer/class. Ei-chan confirms this. Natchan then says that because of that, she believes Ei-chan might break through within 3 years. The guys' expressions are all "Good gracious!" (can also be translated as "Well..." as in expressing doubt). Ei-chan asks why 3 years. Natchan explains that 3 years ago Ei-chan hadn't the slightest inkling just how close the pro world was, but now Ei-chan's already a pro tennis player. That means if it's a wall whose thickness Ei-chan is aware of, then he can do it in 2 years. Kageyama thinks that, as expected, Natchan doesn't worry about the details. Yukichi mentally notes that it became 2

years before they knew it. Ei-chan acknowledges her point (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Then Kageyama announces he has news: he and Sasaki have decided to go steady. Natchan congratulates them and adds that she's suspected something along those lines. Blushing, Sasaki thanks her. Natchan asks "Since when?" Sasaki fumbles for an answer. Kageyama notices Yukichi picking up his backpack with a gloomy expression, and seems to realize something (possibly that Yukichi might have been romantically interested in Sasaki). Yukichi takes his leave. Natchan tells him (Yukitchan) not to go home. Then in late April, Ei-chan goes abroad again for another campaign. He acquires hard practice and is defeated in 2R of the main draw of a Futures in India. He retrains again and in May...he's defeated in 1R of the main draw of the Cambodia campaign. Ei-chan thinks that even though he's doing everything he should, he hasn't been getting results. His hard fights have continued. Then in mid-June at a Futures in Thailand, he goes up against Wang Wei, the 16-year-old youngster ranked 776 in the world, in 2R of the main draw (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan thinks he's seen Wei in Australia and China and he's practiced with him. If it's an opponent that he has a certain amount of data on... Wei hits a sharp shot. Ei-chan manages to return it, thinking that this person has less
power than Ei-chan—which is unusual among pros—he's composed and makes few errors when he challenges. Wei hits a drop shot. Ei-chan gives chase and returns it. Wei calmly hits a lob. Ei-chan wonders if it will be in. He chases it, but it's a winner, and the match ends: 6-2, 6-4. They shake hands and Ei-chan leaves, looking gloomy. Wei wonders if Ei-chan was in bad condition. (Which suggests he expected better from Ei-chan.) Ei-chan returns to his room and prepares to go home. He thinks there are lots of difficulties in overseas campaigns, but he's gotten used to them. He's also been able to get sufficient practice, and his physical condition is perfect. And yet he hasn't been able to get the results he wanted. Why? What's the cause? He takes out his notebook and analyzes his play: at the final moment, the ball is returned with an unexpected shot...at a critical moment, he puts in power and commits an error...he gets to a good position but there are many wasted patterns. It's a pro world, so he knows full well that this sort of situation is especially important. It's natural, but he plays without giving up or losing focus, not even with one ball...He concludes this is a mental problem rather than a physical or technical one. If he had to say which, that was when he became pro even though he was confident...it doesn't appear he has been losing while feeling he wants to win...rather, has he been putting in too much strength? He's thoroughly mixed up. Right then, Ei-chan's phone sounds. Message from Ike: Where are you now? Ei-chan's reply: I'm in Thailand. I just lost in 2R of a Futures. Ike calls him. "Long time, no hear. Pity about the match. Well, I have a friend in Japan who's looking for a practice partner right now, you see. I'm currently in London, so I thought that if it's convenient for Maruo-kun..." Ei-chan: "London... (Oh, right...Wimbledon is around the corner.) I'm going back to Japan today, so tomorrow onward should be okay! By the way, Ike-kun got to London early, huh. Isn't Wimbledon 3 weeks away?" Ike: "I have 1 week of preparatory, then it's showtime. Wimbledon is a grass court, right? I don't hate it, but I'm not used to it, so I got here ahead of time." Ei-chan: "Is that so? Do your best, okay?" Ike: "Which reminds me, how many people are ahead of you for participation in the Wimbledon qualifying draw?" A stunned Ei-chan: "Eh...? Do you mean in rank?" Ike: "Not that! I'm asking in reality, if you register to participate in the qualifier, around
where are you in the waiting list?" Ei-chan: "Eh...? Waiting list? I don't get you, though..." Ike: "If you're a pro, you can check that online on Player Zone, can't you?" Ei-chan: "Of course, but...I've only gotten 3 points, and even if I enter, it's pointless, so..." Ike: "On top of that, you...aren't interested in how far you can get in Wimbledon right now, are you?" Ei-chan:

"...Well, after all, I have to earn results in Futures and Challenger first... My goal is to break through the lower tour, and I've only been able to consider that right now... If I'm able to win more, then some day..." Ike: "You can register ahead of time to participate in the qualifier. There are lots cancellations just before. You should move up the list. There've been quite low-ranked players who were able to take part, you know?" Ei-chan: "That sort of thing...even if I think about it, I haven't seen it." Ike: "Well, the odds of Maruo-kun, who's below 1000, being able to take part is probably nearly zero, you know, but isn't it better for you to keep checking around where you are at least? Because that's our pinnacle, you know." End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Tomorrow." So I wonder who Ike's friend is who needs a practice partner. Ogata, maybe? Someone on the National Team? Or perhaps someone based in IMG, like Krishna or Pete or Alex?

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Corrections and additions to the summary: Kageyama's and Yukichi's reactions to Natchan's "Ei-chan will break through within 3 years" comment were silent, not even muttered. And it seems the one who protested Yukichi's departure was Natchan, not Kageyama. It looks like Momoyama, the girl Natchan was stressing over before the first kiss with Ei-chan, the same one she later defeated in the All Japan Junior semifinals, also turned pro. The teaser blurb says "The Distance to Wimbledon from His Current Self...!?"

Ch. 382

Ike's friend is David Miller, a 20 year old, world ranked 430 (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). They'd practiced during the days leading up to the Showa no Mori Challenger, which David's taking part in. He thanks Ei-chan for the stimulating practice and asks him whether Ei-chan is also participating in the qualifiers, which starts tomorrow. Ei-chan says he's focused on the Futures, so he hadn't signed up. David expresses regrets because he thinks a match against Ei-chan would have been interesting. They shake hands and David asks if he can ask Ei-chan to practice with him another time. Ei-chan assures him he'd welcome it. David leaves. A somewhat red-faced Ei-chan thinks he hadn't registered for the Challenger, but he had sign up for the Wimbledon qualifiers and he's No.74 on the waiting list (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). He'd been spurred by Ike's words that Wimbledon is the pinnacle for them and the realization that he hadn't been sufficiently aware of the Grand Slam, that he'd been focused on what's right in front of him. He thinks that at No.74, it's impossible for him to be able to take part, but by registering, he can't think that it has nothing to do with him (other people's business)—which is a big change for him. And now he really wants to go on site, and it's like he can imagine he's closer. Ei-chan goes home. Natchan e-mails Ei-chan that she's arrived at Georgia University, and she gives him an update: there are 30 courts; they have the latest exercise machines, which she can use as much as she wants; trainers are always available; the facility is humongous. She's met a number of actual students and they're quite nice, so it's made a good impression. Among the schools she's visited, she thinks it's the one that seems to suit her best. (Oh! She's currently doing a tour of the universities to see which one she'll attend.) Ei-chan's impressed by Natchan but thinks they haven't been able to meet lately. (Flashback to him telling Natchan the problem of not being able to meet will be resolved by him winning more matches.) He'd intended to do enhanced training, but as he is now, he thinks it would be no good. He wonders if there's anything more he can do. Then another e-mail arrives, this one from Asano inviting him to practice with Takuma. Ei-chan goes to the NTC the next day and sees Nabae practicing with Haketa. Asano had requested Ei-chan to bring his notes on Takuma, so he asks if Ei-chan brought the notes. Ei-chan takes them out and Asano compliments him

on the amount; Takuma tsks. Asano explains that Takuma departs tomorrow for the Wimbledon qualifiers, and they want to validate Takuma's serve first. He adds that on Wimbledon's grass court, balls have a peculiar way of bouncing, which should make Takuma's serves a better weapon. So to put the finishing touches, the final criterion is Ei-chan's data. Takuma apologizes (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou), probably because Ei-chan won't get a complete practice match since the practice will consist of Ei-chan's returning Takuma's serves. Ei-
chan thinks it's an unasked-for chance to train at the NTC and says he'll do anything if he can cooperate for the sake of Takuma who's on the national team. So Asano has Ei-chan take the normal position to receive a serve once Ei-chan has completed his preparations. Practice starts. It progresses with references to Ei-chan's notes. Later, Asano announces a 10-minute break. Asano had been worried since Ei-chan hasn't been able to win any Futures, but his impression from Ei-chan's appearance is that Ei-chan's body is taking shape properly and he's growing. He wonders if Ei-chan needs some impetus. Ei-chan chats with Nabae and asks what Nabae's next tournament is. Nabae says he's attempting a lawn tournament and he might register for the qualifiers of an ATP 250; someone comments this would mean Nabae's tour debut. Nabae asks about Ei-chan's plans. Ei-chan says it's a Futures in South Korea, then admits to registering for the Wimbledon qualifiers and laughs. Everyone there stiffens. Haketa says he understands Ei-chan's enthusiasm, but of course he can't participate, right? Ha ha ha. Ei-chan thinks someone whose world rank is 1400 normally wouldn't even sign up. Nabae comments that Ei-chan would have some purpose (probably for signing up for the Wimbledon qualifiers). Ei-chan admits he was told by Ike that he's not aware of Wimbledon, and because he agreed, he just tried to register and got a good feeling from that. Asano asks if that means Ei-chan's also going to London. Ei-chan replies that he just registered. He points out he wants to go, but he's unlikely to be able to participate, so he won't go. Asano argues that even if Ei-chan can't participate, if he can go, he ought to go. He adds that Ei-chan's already a pro, so he thinks even just seeing it from outside (watching from the sidelines?) is enough of a point. He tells Ei-chan he's gone to the tournament several times, but he thinks it's better for Ei-chan to see it once while Ei-chan is young. Ei-chan replies that his funds are limited, and it's hard to get a ticket to the main event, and even if he can buy it, it's super expensive. That's why he's planning to take part in tournaments where he can play, get points, and increase his rank. Asano agrees that ordinarily that's the case, but he suggests that if Ei-chan does the ordinary approach, it will be no good (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan admits he wants to go and had tried to consider various ways. Asano points out that Takuma had said he has leftover family-use passes for the qualifiers, so Ei-chan can get Takuma to assign one to Ei-chan. (Blank-faced Takuma: "Okay?") Asano adds that the two of them can share
the hotel room. Since Takuma's turned into a strong player internationally, the tennis association is shouldering his campaign expenses, so with a big smile, Asano orders Takuma to cooperate and split the cost for the sake of a cash-strapped kouhai. Takuma's first reaction is a flat-out NO! Then he amends this, saying he doesn't have a problem with the pass, but sharing a hotel room with Ei-chan... Ei-chan's buoyed by the thought of going to London and seeing Wimbledon. He bows to Takuma and asks Takuma to take him along and basically offers to act as a gofer for Takuma. Takuma: "Give me a break... I want to concentrate on my matches!" Ei-chan promises to be quiet when Takuma is sleeping. He asks for just the pass and a place to sleep. Takuma protests that Ei-chan's always really too shameless only with Takuma. Ei-chan promises to do anything so Takuma can concentrate. He says his real motive is that recently he hasn't been able to get results at all and that he

doesn't know what to do besides this, so he wants to watch Ike and Takuma compete in Wimbledon right in front of him (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). Takuma tsks and turns his back on Ei-chan and gives the impression he said "Good grief!" He comments that Ei-chan has beaten him once and Ei-chan's loitering in the Futures is also pissing him off. Since he was instructed by the coach of the national team, he can't refuse. He orders Ei-chan to handle the plane ticket himself. Ei-chan thanks him, thinking he's be able to view the pinnacle. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "To the West." So Ei-chan's going to Wimbledon with Takuma. I wonder if that ups the odds of Ei-chan getting into the qualifiers. Maybe most of the people ahead of him will think there's no chance of getting in, so they aren't in London when a slot opens? Well, even if he doesn't, this is kinda like Ei-chan's first exposure to the All Japan Junior; he just went to watch that time. I wonder if Takuma will get Ei-chan to be his hitting partner at Wimbledon? And with Ei-chan watching, Takuma might feel the need to make an excellent showing of himself.
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Gosh, I loved all the bonding here. Nabae's such a nice guy. Haketa's expressions were so funny, even when he's just in the sidelines, listening to Ei-chan's explanation. Asano obviously wants to get Ei-chan into the B Team already so he can coach him. Takuma's so tsundere, and he apparently has difficulty with compliments, going by that scene were Ei-chan and Asano look astounded while referring to Ei-chan's notes.
I've added some clarifications to the summary, including the flashback to what Ei-chan told Natchan but no major corrections. The teaser blurb says "All of a sudden, the impossible Wimbledon!?" It looks like Ei-chan's current world rank is 1413, assuming the right-hand number in the waiting list for the Wimbledon qualifiers is world ranking. It also looks like Ei-chan's at the bottom of the list.

Ch. 383
It's the middle of June. Ei-chan thinks he's had lots of opportunities to go abroad lately, but it's been quite a while since he'd had such a long flight. He'd cancelled his planned participation in a Futures, and arrives in London 2 days after Takuma, just before the start of the Wimbledon qualifiers. He arrives in the room where Takuma is staying and bows his head deeply to Takuma, asking Takuma to put with him for just a little while. Takuma sighs (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou) and tells Ei-chan that if he's put down his luggage, then they'll go without delay. Ei-chan's surprised and asks where they're going. Takuma says to do laundry, then a meal. He'll have Ei-chan do some chores, but first he'll show Ei-chan around. They go to the coin laundry. Then Takuma enters a shop and tells Ei-chan they generally take their meals there. Ei-chan marvels that there's a Japanese restaurant nearby. There, they're hailed by Asano. Ei-chan notices that Watanabe and Kouno Junpei (world rank: 153; JTA rank: 3; didn't take part in the All Japan). He greets them. Kouno recognizes him (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou) as the Maruo-kun he's heard about who has defeated these two (apparently referring to Asano and Takuma) with 3 years of tennis experience. He asks how Ei-chan defeated them. Ei-chan stammers, at a loss for words. Asano tells Kouno to quit talking about that so suddenly. He turns the conversation to the Wimbledon qualifiers, which starts tomorrow. He orders them to enjoy it to the fullest. He announces that today, it's his treat, so they're to eat whatever they like. Everyone thanks him. At 5 o'clock the next morning, the alarm of Ei-chan's smart phone goes off. Ei-chan rouses Takuma, who smacks him with a pillow. Ei-chan reminds Takuma that Takuma had ordered Ei-chan to wake him. Then Ei-chan asks permission to use Takuma's PC. He checks the waiting list and notes that as of the current day, he's 68 on the waiting list. It's hopeless

but no different from the start. If things go well, those in the 300s are likely to be able to participate. He's now 1413 and wonders if that's near or far. Takuma urges him to breakfast. Outside, Ei-chan's surprised to learn they'll be fetched and brought back. Takuma points out it's normal for Wimbledon. Asano appears, explaining that courtesy cars generally belong in ATP 500 tournaments and above. Ei-chan marvels at the VIP treatment. He notes that the Futures and Challengers are the lower tour (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou) and that the world tour isn't just real ability but there's also a big difference in treatment, which is why the wall is also thick. Everyone arrives at the courts. Ei-chan's surprised by the lawn courts but remembers that the qualifiers have a different venue from the main event. Takuma reminds him they're about to start practice. Ei-chan and Takuma start practice. Ei-chan notes that because the ball bounds, it feels like the ball slips slightly. The bound is lower than in a hard court, so the ball feels somewhat faster, but in reality, the speed isn't so different. However, the grass isn't perfectly flat, so there are subtle, random changes. Ei-chan's ball goes into the net. He thinks that he needs to concentrate quite a lot until he gets used to it, but even so, Takuma's fighting spirit is amazing (see pic 4, page 1 on mangakansou). During a break, Ei-chan writes in his notebook. Takuma asks what Ei-chan is writing. Ei-chan says the special characteristics of the grass court. Takuma asks him how his shots changed. Ei-chan replies that they don't feel faster than on the hard court of the All Japan, but the changes of the ball have become more difficult, the flat-type shots feel like they're slipping/gliding, so Ei-chan thinks that they've become harder to play as a whole. He's grasped the significance of the advantage for Takuma. Takuma prompts him: "Ho, then?" Ei-chan continues, pointing out that Takuma's weapon, his serve, hasn't gone in much today. Takuma says it's just the serve, some days it goes in, some days it doesn't. Ei-chan asks if there's no reason, like putting in too much fighting spirit. Takuma dismisses it as being due to his first time at Wimbledon. Ei-chan asks Takuma when he started aiming for Wimbledon. Takuma says it turned out that way because he's been playing tennis since he was a kid. Ei-chan clarifies that he meant seriously aiming for Wimbledon. Takuma replies that it's probably since the Australian Open 6 months ago; the main point is it was when he'd participated in a Grand Slam qualifier for the first time. Because the sense of distance to the world pinnacle seemed real. Then there's also the recent French Open, where he lost in the qualifiers, which lit a fire under him. Ei-chan then shares how he copes with pressure: using the 20 seconds between points,
he remembers his best moment. He suggests Takuma try it. He cites as an example when Takuma had served at 240+ kph during Takuma's match with him. Takuma's irked that Ei-chan would suggest a match where Takuma lost, and demands if Ei-chan is making fun of him. Ei-chan clarifies that he didn't mean the entire match, just the time when Takuma was in perfect form. He adds that the memory should be intense, specific, pinpoint not vague, of that time when Takuma was at peak overall condition, and by doing so, Takuma can recall the feeling at that time. Takuma comments that Mike had told him something similar. Ei-chan agrees that that's it. Takuma goes to the serve position, muttering about "that time, that time." His serve goes into the net, even below the white strip. Takuma comments that it's troublesome and it's pissing him off. Ei-chan guesses that Takuma's image is still vague and hasn't been defined. Ei-chan suggests narrowing Takuma's image down to the one fastest ball: what Takuma saw at that time, the sounds he could hear, the feeling on his skin, temperature, scents, tastes—an image that uses all 5 senses. Ei-chan adds that it should only be that time when Takuma felt the serve would go in. Takuma remembers his serve, then tries hitting again. Although the ball goes into the net (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou), even Takuma looks surprised by his having hit a ball with so much strength.

Ei-chan guesses that Takuma had gotten there. Takuma decides to go for one more. Time passes and then Takuma summons Ei-chan: "Let's go." Ei-chan: "Okay!" End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Grand Slam Experience." = = =
Huh. Going by the art, it's possible that the chapter ends on the same day that Ei-chan coaches Takuma. The summary gave me the impression it was the next day of the qualifiers. I suspect they went to the venue early, so Takuma could practice and warm up. And the chapter and their practice end just as the qualifiers are about to start, so Takuma is heading to his match. The teaser blurb says "Now Takuma will challenge the world pinnacle, right before his [probably Ei-chan's] eyes!" Given all the details Ei-chan notices about the differences in ball behavior, it reaaaaally feels like Ei-chan will end up playing in the Wimbledon qualifiers. Dang, I'm going to be
so disappointed if it doesn't turn out that way. Also, the blurb on the first page says "He uses up his meager activity funds, and now in the airplane at 1 p.m...." If Ei-chan used up all his funds, things are going to be tight until he builds them up again. So if Ei-chan were called up for the qualifiers, that would be a start to replenishing his funds, since even 1R losers in the qualifiers get prize money (in 2015 it was £3,625).

Ch. 384
Takuma wins his 1st match 6-1, 6-2, against Juan Pedrosa, a 26-year-old Spaniard world ranked 147 (46 higher than Takuma, which means Takuma is 193). Takuma apparently also wins his 2nd match in straight sets. It's in his 3rd match that he wins 6-4, 3-6, 7-6, 7-5, against R. Diaz. So this means Takuma finally qualifies for the main event of a Grand Slam tournament—and Ei-chan doesn't get called up to fill a slot. This was all to get Ei-chan fired up so that he starts aiming seriously for the top.
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So, the details. The Wimbledon qualifiers start. Takuma, Ei-chan, and Asano head to the grounds. Asano's telling Takuma that although Takuma's opponent has a higher world ranking, there's no doubt Takuma's better on a grass court. There's no need for wait-and-see (apparently he's advising Takuma to go on the offense from the start). If Takuma can play as he'd like, he's sure to see results. They get to the court, and Ei-chan and Asano get seated. Ei-chan comments that as expected of Wimbledon, even the qualifiers draws a big audience. Asano agrees and adds that it's said advancing through the qualifiers is more difficult than winning 1R in the main draw. When Ei-chan asks if that's right, Asano explains that unlike other Grand Slam tournaments, the venue of the main event is different from that of the qualifiers, so if you lose in the qualifiers, it doesn't feel like you got to Wimbledon. Therefore, because everyone wants to stand on the courts of the main event, the qualifiers turn into desperate, intense matches. Just then, the start of Takuma's match is called. His opponent is Juan Pedrosa, a 26-year-old Spaniard world ranked 147—46 higher than Takuma. The match opens with Takuma's service. Takuma exhales deeply. Ei-chan thinks this is the important first first serve. Takuma takes the first point with an ace served wide (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Juan and the audience look surprised by this. Ei-chan and Asano: "Ok!"
Takuma's also elated, but thinks "one more shot... Go!" He hits his next serve to the center. Juan manages to return it, but Takuma had moved forward and puts the ball away with a volley. 30-0. Juan curses silently, thinking Takuma had ended it fast. The audience's excited commentary: Hey...that Asian's serve-and-volley is awesome!; His serve is fast and his volley is also something considerable; That's uncommon lately and it has impact, so he stands out! Takuma strikes a triumphant pose after he successfully holds his first game.

Asano: "Nice hold!" Ei-chan thinks that watching Takuma play this way, (he can tell that) Takuma's level has again risen substantially. Play continues with Juan's service. Takuma returns a serve to the center with his backhand. The two exchange shots. Ei-chan sees that even on this level, Takuma's strokes aren't inferior to Juan's; Takuma's dextrous, so he doesn't worry about the turf. Takuma hits a top spin with his backhand and rushes the net (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan considers this skillfully done, using a top spin when up to now Takuma has basically used slices when he goes to the net from the baseline. He notes that while both ball and tempo speed up, Takuma goes forward fast for a rapid evolution... Takuma volleys. Ei-chan believes Takuma has already increased his weapons since that time (referring to Ei-chan's match with Takuma during the All Japan). Combined with a slice with a long flight time, it (the volley?) is quite effective... Furthermore, the grass where the ball slides and looks fast seems to have even more of an effect. It turns out that Ei-chan is mumbling all this while watching the match. Asano gives Ei-chan a sidelong look, and from Asano's expression, it seems his expectations of Ei-chan's growth is ballooning further. Takuma clinches the point with a drop volley and abruptly succeeds in breaking Juan's serve. The crowd is in an uproar: A young guy might be able to reinstate serve-and-volley!; No, the speed of this tempo is an evolution, isn't it? Ei-chan thinks it's amazing that Takuma is already drawing a lot of attention...that Takuma is so cool... Takuma hits an ace in the fifth game and holds his serve. Game count: Takuma 4-1
Juan. Audience: Whoa, another ace!; Hey, hey, how much faster will it go? Juan looks mad and appears to be saying something. Ei-chan comments that Takuma's opponent has gotten mad. Asano tells him that despite appearances, overseas opponents are surprisingly calm, so it (when they get mad?) is more likely to require special care. However, the rhythm of Takuma's serve improves and he doesn't let his opponent close. Within an hour, he has an easy victory for 1R of the qualifiers. Game count: 6-1, 6-2. After the match, Takuma is besieged with requests for autographs. Ei-chan marvels that he's has defeated this guy (Takuma). The chapter continues with 2R (probably the next day). Takuma had gained confidence playing on grass, and 2R is another easy victory (this suggests straight sets). Then in the 5-set match that's the finals of the qualifiers with participation in the main event on the line, the match develops to Takuma's advantage... (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou). In the fourth set, the game count is Takuma 6-5 Diaz. It's Takuma's serve game and he's at match point: 40-30. The crowd cheer on Takuma, urging him to continue forward boldly. Kouno comments that Egawa is amazingly popular. Asano explains that Wimbledon has a history where serve-and-volley was overwhelming. It's especially irresistible to the generation older than Asano that sees this (probably Takuma's play). Plus, Takuma's serving for the match. Takuma serves to the center. Diaz manages to return it. Takuma goes to the net and volleys. An intense rally unfolds with the match at stake. (Ei-chan is oohing and aahing.) Diaz tries to get the ball past Takuma's backhand with a lob. Takuma jumps and returns the ball with a backhand high volley (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). The shot is a winner and ends the match. "Game, set, and match won by Egawa: 6-4, 3-6, 7-6, 7-5." Takuma strikes a triumphant pose (see pic 3, page 2 on mangakansou). Takuma's advance to and participation in the main draw is settled. Asano and company rush over to Takuma: "Yeaah!"
Ei-chan thinks, "I also want to play this sort of match...!" End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "The Pinnacle Before His Eyes." It looks like Ei-chan might be around to watch the main event too, at least the early rounds.
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So when Ei-chan was referring to "that time" as a baseline for Takuma's improvement, he had been referring to the All Japan. Ooh, it looks like Watanabe also came to watch Takuma's 2R and 3R matches. And it also looks like the meaning of Erik's words finally sinks home with Ei-chan when he noticed the tense excitement of the onlookers on either side of him. I suspect Ei-chan's thought of "I also want to play this sort of match" applies not only to the match but to its impact on the crowd. The teaser blurb says "He gets excited. He wants to do it! And on to the main event!" The next issue will have a color opening page and a special feature article. Oooh! Takuma manages to smile and it doesn't look forced!

Ch. 385

So it's now the first day of the main draw at Wimbledon. Takuma, Ei-chan, Kouno, and Asano arrive at the venue. Ei-chan marvels at the center court, a place he's seen on TV. Asano explains it's quiet because the event hasn't opened yet, but once the gate opens tons of people will come. Kouno comments that he's excited even though it's his second time. Asano adds that it's a good thing they were able to get a pass allowing those who'd registered for the qualifiers to enter the practice courts. Ei-chan thanks Asano for it. Asano says that this time, all 4 Japanese players will go up against seeds from the very start. Takuma's opponent is the 18th seed, Bastel(?) Müller, a 28-year-old German. Kouno's is the 22nd seed, Richard Gronn(?), a 27-year-old Frenchman (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Monma's is the 24th seed, Marcelo Garcia, a 19-year-old Spaniard. And Ike's is the 1st seed, Levina(?) Max, a 25-year-old Swiss (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan comments that Ike will finally challenge the world's No.1. Asano agrees and adds it will be Ike's first time in center court. Ike isn't yet among the Top 30, so he's not seeded. But the way it's turned out with him being able to play the 1st seed here, maybe
they should say he's lucky. Takuma tsks. Then they're approached by two of a TV crew who explain they've completed their prep for interviews. The crew apologize for getting them while they're busy, but congratulate Kouno and Takuma for making it to the main draw. Kouno thanks them. A TV guy refers to their conversation yesterday and requests they be allowed to hear about Kouno's and Takuma's aspirations heading into the tournament for the pre-tournament broadcast. They all go along, led by the TV guys. Ei-chan recognizes them as guys he's seen on TV. Then Takuma tells Ei-chan that his match will be a second match (meaning there's a match scheduled before his), so 2 hours before, they're to meet at the practice courts. He'll contact Ei-chan around that time, so until then, Ei-chan's to do whatever he deems proper and to handle the drinks for his practice. Ei-chan acknowledges this, and translates it as "in other words, it's free time." Ei-chan walks around, amazed that it's all real, apparently referring to the grounds. Finally he arrives at the practice courts. Then he remembers he also has the privilege of practicing there. It strikes him as such a waste just to watch when he went to a lot of effort to get to such a position. So he goes up to various players, offering himself as a practice partner. He's asked if he's a participant who's in a bind for a practice partner. Ei-chan explains he's not, he just has a pass. He gets some laughs about just wanting to practice and one guy thanks him, saying he'll take Ei-chan up on his offer if he (the speaker) has time. Ei-chan continues going around but gets no takers. He concludes it's pointless, after all, but tells himself that the guts that took was good training for Futures. Right then, someone asks Ei-chan if he's available for practice. Ei-chan says he is, turning to look over his shoulder at the guy. As the guy explains his practice partner suddenly couldn't make it, Ei-chan freezes: "...Eh!?" Change of scene. Ike's walking while using the phone. He's puzzled because he's sure Ei-chan must have arrived already, but

Ei-chan isn't answering his phone. He wonders what to do. He'd been hoping to get Ei-chan to partner him for a bit of practice. Ike gets to the practice courts and notices: "Hm? Huh? Maruo-kun is practicing with some...one? That's...? Isn't his opponent Espino Sanchez of Spain, ranked 8th in the world? Eh... Why?" (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou) Exchanging shots with Sanchez, Ei-chan thinks, "I was thinking anyone would do but...I never imagined I would be asked by a world top pro! Moreover...beside me is Levina Max, the world No.1! (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou) What's with this?!" (see pic 3, page 2 on mangakansou) ("This" apparently refers to the incongruous juxtaposition of No.1413 in the world between No.8 and No.1.) Ei-chan hits back Sanchez's ball, and thinks that it looks like Sanchez is hitting it lightly, but it's such a heavy ball! But...though it's practice...unexpectedly, he's been able to rally with a world top player!? Sanchez notes that Ei-chan has been steadily returning his shots with the same tempo—as he'd requested. Ei-chan's shot hits the top of the net and goes over. Ei-chan apologizes. Sanchez goes up to him and compliments him on his control and thanks him for setting a rhythm that's easy to hit and feels good. Ei-chan reciprocates the thanks and adds that it's an honor to hit balls with Sanchez. Sanchez comments that Ei-chan had said he hadn't been able to take part in the qualifiers, then asks what Ei-chan's world ranking is. Ei-chan immediately says it's 1413. Sanchez laughs out loud, then adds that he understands Ei-chan's not being able to participate, but guesses Ei-chan couldn't be patient and had come this far. He says it's great and understands that sort of thing. Ei-chan replies that thanks to Sanchez, it was worth coming here. So Sanchez proposes they try playing one game, match style. Ei-chan asks if he's acceptable as an opponent. Ike apparently hears this and looks with interest in the direction of Ei-chan and Sanchez. Ei-chan then asks how he should play. Sanchez replies it's the match style everyone plays. You play a match with the intention of defeating your opponent, no matter who it is. That's the same everywhere in the world, right? (see pic 4, page 2 on mangakansou) Ei-chan shivers with excitement. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "World." Oh, man! This sounds like a great chapter! It had me giggling several times just from the description...particularly after the scene switch to Ike. Chances are, Ike will claim Ei-chan as a practice partner after the game with Sanchez, and when Takuma finally arrives, he'll find Ei-chan in great demand.

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Corrections and additions: the TV guys don't ask Kouno and Takuma their aspirations right then. They say that's what they want to ask during the interview. Oh, after Takuma tells Ei-chan to do what Ei-chan deems proper, he also requests Ei-chan to take charge of drinks for his practice. Hopefully Ei-chan handled that while wandering around, before he got caught up with being a practice partner. Also, Ei-chan's ball during the practice with Sanchez doesn't go into the net; it hits the white strip on top of the net and apparently goes over. It wasn't "other people" who overheard and looked in the direction of Ei-chan and Sanchez; it was Ike, so I suspect Ike will hang around to watch. The teaser blurb says "The Arrival of a Golden Opportunity! Ei-chan Will Experience 'the World'!?"

Ch. 386

So when Sanchez's practice was about over, he invites Ei-chan to play one game. Ei-chan's heart pounds at the thought that even though it's practice, it's a game with Espino Sanchez, the No.8 in the world, that he'll play against a world top-level player on Wimbledon's grass court. Sanchez suggests he serve first (this might mean the "game" might be a one-set match). Ei-chan agrees to this. Apparently the knowledge that Levina is in the next court prevents Ei-chan from calming his heartbeat. Ei-chan thinks the situation is already

practically a dream, but he tells himself he mustn't just have fun. He takes position to receive and concentrates, thinking that if he can see the world's pinnacle for even a moment...he wants to burn it into his memory without leaving out a single ball. Ike thinks that Ei-chan won't go home just thinking it was good he (Ei-chan) had gone even though he hadn't been able to take part in the qualifiers, and that Ei-chan is a really interesting/funny guy. Sanchez eyes Ei-chan's appearance and smiles, thinking "Okay..." He hits a spin serve wide. Ei-chan extends his arm but doesn't reach the ball (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Sanchez's coach judges it a fault. Ei-chan can't believe it. He'd extended his arm to the best of his ability and yet he hadn't reached the ball. Even though balls don't bounce (as much) on grass, the spin serve had such a high bounce! Ei-chan goes to get the ball and is surprised by Levina looking at him. Bouncing a ball off his racket toward Ei-chan, Levina tells him it's Ei-chan's ball (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). Catching the ball, Ei-chan thanks him and thinks Levina somehow feels
quite impressive; then he tells himself he should instead be concentrating on how to handle a serve he can't reach from his usual receiving position. He thinks that it wasn't a ball he couldn't react to and that if he gets into a good hitting position, he has a chance of returning it. So even though the next one is a second serve, he'll move back a bit and aim for a spot where the ball is dropping from that height. What's left is watching his opponent closely and limiting the ball's course as much as he can. Watching Sanchez closely, Ei-chan judges the serve will be to the center. He manages to return it, but the second serve apparently bounced more than the first serve because Ei-chan thinks he's never seen a serve with such a bounce. Even though he'd moved back, it took his best effort to return it. When he wonders what's next, Sanchez punches out an angle shot that catches Ei-chan flat-footed (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou): 15-0. Ei-chan wonders how Sanchez was able to clinch it with one shot when Ei-chan had returned the serve to the center with a shot deep to the center and both of them were at the center (of the baseline). Does that mean Sanchez can put the ball away no matter where he is in the court? Then he corrects himself: he'd moved back but if he'd been more forward when he received the serve, Sanchez can't clinch point with an angle shot like he had just now. Ei-chan returns to his receive position. Sanchez's next serve is to the center. Ei-chan moves forward as much as possible and returns the ball. However, that ball hits the top of the net and goes out (see pic 4, page 1 on mangakansou): 30-0. Sanchez is apparently a bit surprised because his mouth drops into an O. Ei-chan is disappointed with the result, but he thinks that because he'd moved forward and hit it with a sudden angle, it's hard to match the timing. And because of the grass, the bound isn't uniform so it uses more sensitivity than he has. He concludes that from the feel just now, taking the ball sooner seems better. However, Ei-chan wants to basically combine that with a return from the back (not sure if he means baseline or further back). Play continues with a serve wide. Ei-chan extends his arm and manages to return it. He thinks it's also tough, but because he got it forward, he expects Sanchez can't clinch the shot like earlier. Ensuring a defensive position forward, Ei-chan hopes to aim for the course from there if possible. He'll attack the world's top during his return game. Sanchez hits a backhand crosscourt. Ei-chan manages to return it, but thinks it's no
good: it's tough and he doesn't have leeway to aim for the course. But he's somehow able to return it. However, it's taking everything he has to maintain the current status, returning the ball deep to the center and making it hard for his opponent to aim for an angle ball. After that, Ei-chan continues to somehow return the ball, but he's being run left and right. He thinks he's concentrating all his sensitivity on just continuing to return one point by picking all the balls. He compares it to the first match he played with Oobayashi: he can't attack, so

he's playing 100% defensively and waiting for a chance. The plan is a desperation measure for when the gap between their true abilities is too large. However, Sanchez hits a forehand straight (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou), gets it past Ei-chan, and lands it right on the line: 40-0. Sanchez: "All right!" Sanchez's coach praises the shot as good. Ei-chan puzzles over the shot, whether it means the current status is that Sanchez could clinch the shot anytime despite the depth and power of Ei-chan's shots. He concludes it indicates that the difference between him and Sanchez is nowhere like the one between him and Oobayashi back then. But he also thinks that just knowing what sort of gap there is between him and a world top pro would mean he can improve. So he decides to accept the reality before him right now. However, he sets aside thoughts of not being able to mount a thorough defense; he wants to find out how well his offense will go. He's resist somehow and if even one ball that might be good comes, he'd like to push things and attack. Sanchez sends his next serve wide. Ei-chan returns it fairly deep and plans on attacking the next ball. Sanchez returns the ball to Ei-chan's ad court. With his backhand, Ei-chan aims—a bit unreasonably, he concedes—using 1/81 control (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). It goes where Ei-chan intended and he rushes to the net right away. He thinks it's the best approach and Sanchez can only go for a straight. However, Sanchez clinches the point (and the game) with exactly that (see pic 3, page 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan doesn't reach the ball in time. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "World Balance" or "The Focus of the World" something like that. So Sanchez's serve is a love game, and we'll have to see if Ei-chan gets to serve too. Anyhow, it looks like things will go as Natchan predicted. Once Ei-chan has gotten a sense of the distance to the top, he'll move fast.
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Hmm...that's weird. Ei-chan does wonder how Sanchez was able to clinch it with one shot when Ei-chan had returned the serve to the center with a shot deep to the center and both of them were at the center (of the baseline). However, the art for that shows Sanchez was at the side when he returned Ei-chan's shot.
Correction: by going to the net for the last shot, Ei-chan was trying to limit Sanchez's course to a straight, not trying to prevent a straight. So his tactic worked that far—except he didn't reach the ball. Oh, the last blurb wasn't a teaser, just "A Hit to the Predicted Course" (apparently referring to the straight that Ei-chan was trying to prevent. EDIT: I just realized that by going to the net to limit Sanchez's course options, Ei-chan is applying the lesson Monma gave him about defense and offense.

Ch. 387
Ho-kay, so the game with Sanchez ends as a love game. At the end, Ei-chan had gone forward to attack, and just when he'd thought he'd limited Sanchez's options, Sanchez got the ball past him. Sanchez: "Yeah!" Ei-chan thinks that he'd used an excessive approach that had taken all his strength, but he'd been overtaken easily, and the shot had been set up with a stance that could hit the ball anywhere. Plus, he'd persisted in defending against a straight, but he hadn't even been able to touch the ball when it came down the line. Sanchez's coach comments that Sanchez had been able to clear the challenge/task considerably. Sanchez replies he'll be even better during the actual match. Ei-chan realizes Sanchez had gone for a straight because that was what Sanchez's coach wanted him to work on; he concludes that even though Sanchez would have put the ball away if Sanchez had hit a cross, as Ei-chan had expected, Sanchez had deliberately gone for the narrow shot. He wonders if Sanchez had so much leeway; in other words, right now Sanchez could have gotten past Ei-chan with just about any course Sanchez wanted (see pic 1, page 1 on

mangakansou). Ei-chan had felt he'd known just how amazing the No.8 in the world was, but for Ei-chan that would be the maximum limit of his pushing things: it wouldn't work unless everything was a success. Sanchez thanks Ei-chan and adds that he (Sanchez) had been able to have a good game and that he (Sanchez) had improved already. Ei-chan reciprocates with his
thanks. Then Levina hails Sanchez, noting that Sanchez's practice partner today is different from the usual. Sanchez greets Levina and explains there was trouble, but this guy who'd come from Japan helped him out. Levina turns to Ei-chan and asks: "Japan? ... Does that mean you know Souji Ike?" Ei-chan replies that he's a friend, so Levina requests Ei-chan to tell Ike that he (Levina) is looking forward to their match. However, Ike is right behind Levina and makes his presence known. Ei-chan acknowledges Ike. Sanchez is surprised. Ike thanks Sanchez for helping out his friend and greets Levina: "Nice to meet you, Max." Levina notes it's his first time to speak with Ike and extends his regards. Ike replies that it's an honor to be able to play against Levina here; he adds that he's always watched Levina so it doesn't feel like he's meeting Levina for the first time. So saying, Ike locks gazes with Levina (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou), which startles Ei-chan. Sanchez intervenes, asking Ike what he's doing. Ronnie steps in to scold Ike, telling him he's being rude. Ronnie adds Ike should be friendly/relaxed before a competition...and what does Ike want to say to the world champ? Levina acknowledges Ronnie. Ike apologizes and explains he was just taking the opportunity to greet Levina since he's nearby. Ronnie apologizes to Levina, who dismisses it as nothing and adds that he doesn't mind. Levina also says that he, too, is interested in guys who have been rapidly advancing. Having said so, Levina leaves. Ei-chan, whose heart had been pounding, wonders at the strange tense atmosphere. Ike then turns to Ei-chan and asks him to serve as his partner for a bit, until Ei-chan's practice with Takuma. Ei-chan agrees, thinking that Ike's amazing after all, because far from faltering, Ike had automatically turned openly hostile in front of the world champ. He concludes that Ike seriously intends to win today's match. Ike suggests they start (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Some time passes. Then Ei-chan is walking with Takuma and company outside the grounds. Asano comments that with the event open and people coming in, it quickly developing a festival atmosphere. Ei-chan marvels that everyone there are people who'd come to watch tennis. The time for the start of Ike's match is approaching. Ei-chan checks the time, thinking that center court requires a platinum ticket. Even with his pass Ei-chan can't enter there, so he'll be able to watch only through the monitor. Asano notes that Takuma's is a
second match, so Takuma will warm up and after that, they'll have a meeting just before the match. Asano adds that since Ei-chan is probably free...Asano holds out a JTA reserved center court ticket and says Ei-chan ought to watch closely and in person how Ike fights. Ei-chan asks if it's okay. Asano points out that Ei-chan has been collaborating with the national team and that Ei-chan had gone to a lot of trouble to come there, so he should watch it live. Ei-chan thanks him and hurries toward center court. Takuma comments that Asano is super indulgent toward Ei-chan, but Asano disagrees, thinking that it's because he intends it (probably the Wimbledon experience) to have an effect on Ei-chan (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan enters the venue and marvels that this is tennis sacred ground, Wimbledon's center court, and that Ike will be competing in such a place. He makes for his designated seat, and in the next seat is the national team head coach, Maeda, who recognizes him as Maruo-kun. Ei-chan greets him. Maeda comments that he'd heard from Asano that Ei-chan had come. Ei-chan excuses himself for taking the adjoining seat. Then he notices that Maeda is writing something in a notebook. Maeda notices his interest and explains that he watches the matches of national team members firsthand as much as

possible and makes it a rule to document them, so that he can choose suitable players for the Davis Cup regardless of the situation. He checks the fluctuations in long-term trends and so on. Ei-chan is struck by the thought of notes (or notebook). Maeda warns him not to peek too much. Ei-chan acknowledges the warning, remembering that Ike is also the ace of the national team and is responsible for various things, so that might be why Ike was so tense. Monma comes over and greets Ei-chan who reciprocates. Monma explains that his match is tomorrow, so he's lucky he can watch Ike's completely. He adds that there are a lot of people in the world, not to mention Japan, who'll be paying attention to this match. How much can Japan's ace do against the world's No.1 in Wimbledon—that result will become an evaluation of Japanese tennis itself. The time for the start of the match comes, and both players head for the court from their waiting rooms. Levina's entrance looks practiced. He enters the court, waving his hand casually at the roar of the audience. Ike stops momentarily, taking in the visible landscape, but his expression looks excited (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). Chapter ends.
The title of the next chapter is "Sacred Ground."
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Oh, both Sanchez and Ronnie addresses Levina as "Levy." It looks like Ei-chan left his tennis bag with Asano and Takuma, and took only the ticket and his latest notebook with him. I have to marvel at the detail the mangaka has gone to, even in Ike's walk from the waiting room to center court. It really shows off his research. It's going to be interesting seeing Ei-chan and Maeda taking notes during Ike's match. I'm looking forward to Monma's and Maeda's reactions to Ei-chan's note-taking, plus their expert commentary. The teaser blurb for the next chapter says: "The Best in Japan vs. the Best in the World! The Curtain Rises for the Game of the Century!"

Ch. 388
The chapter opens with Natchan. It's 7pm in Japan, and she's at home, in front of the TV, preparing to watch Ike's match. She remembers that Ei-chan is also in the venue, watching, and thinks that Sou-chan has finally made it to where he can compete directly with the world's best. The two players warm up, exchanging shots. Voiceover on the live coverage: The first round of the gentlemen's singles...now facing the World No.1, the Swiss Levina Max, is Ike Souji, who has zoomed to 44th in ranking! Japan's strongest player is about to challenge the pinnacle of the world! Levina Max commanded this year's Australian Open and finished second even in the French Open. He continues to have a large lead in world ranking, pulling way ahead of the No.2. He recently turned 25 but already displays a sense of stability that gives an the impression of a reigning champion. Ike Souji, the Japanese ace opposing him, lost in the first round of the Australian Open, and in the second round of the French Open. However, he's now the youngest in the Top 50. The 18 year old has spurred excitement in the Grand Slam with his super-aggressive tennis. Attention will be paid to how well Ike's tennis does against Max who has a reputation for footwork and power! The umpire calls the time. Applause and loud cheers of "Let's go, Max!" and "Ike! We're depending on you!" fill the venue, amazing Ei-chan. Umpire: "Five-set match. Souji Ike
to serve... Ready. Play!" Then silence. Ike's first serve faults. His second serve, to the center, goes in and Max returns it. They exchange shots. Gulping, Ei-chan thinks that even though over 15,000 people are there, only the sounds of running and the impact of the ball can be heard (see pic 1 on mangakansou). Ike hits a shot to the right corner and goes to the net. Max gets the ball past him with a tight cross (see pic 2 on mangakansou) that awes Ei-chan: 0-15. The grounds erupt with excitement: "Come on, Max!" Even Ike looks surprised by this

play. Silence fills the venue once more. Ei-chan thinks he's watched Wimbledon several times on TV, but did it have such an amazing atmosphere?...This place is...! Plus, everyone is all eyes, not missing a single moment, anticipating the play of Max, the world's best...It's Ike's first time in center court, but...with that first point, the world's No.1 surely showed off his play...For even Ike who shoulders Japan's expectations...he has to stand up to even more of such pressure here. Ei-chan wonders what sort of feelings Ike has as he plays now. The game continues with Ike's serve to the center. The two exchange shots, and then Ike decides "Here!" and puts the ball away with a drop shot (see pic 3 on mangakansou): 15-15. The crowd explodes with "He fired back!" and "Audacious!" and "That's worthy of Japan's Ike Souji!" Ei-chan's thinking "No way...A drop shot, which uses the most sensitivity, at a time like this!? What a choice...what a guy he is!" Ei-chan's hand holding the pen quivers as he grips it tightly. Monma comments that it's as if Ike's saying he intends to beat Max, let alone that he isn't hesitating. Coach Maeda adds that beyond taking responsibility for Japan, Ike absolutely won't draw back, regardless of who his opponent is or where they're playing, and that such an aggressive guy has never been seen before in modern Japanese tennis history. Ike smashes Max's weakened return to hold his first service. Game, Ike. 1-0 (see pic 4 on mangakansou). End of chapter. The title of the next chapter can mean "Sanctuary" or "An Issue that's Off Limits."

Ch. 389

Okay, so Ike lost 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. Then Monma reminds Ei-chan of Takuma's match, so the next chapter should feature Takuma. After Ike holds his first service against Max, play continues with Max's service. He sends his serve wide. Ike returns it, thinking that he'd held his serve, so the next phase... Max returns the ball. Ike goes around and cuts in on it, thinking that in order to break this forehand, he'll win even a ground-stroke contest. He hits the ball crosscourt. It goes into the right corner (see pic 1 on mangakansou), apparently as Ike had intended, but Max overtakes the ball as if it was only normal. Max swings back and sends the ball down the line for a winner (see pic 2 on mangakansou): 15-0. Crowd: "Thataway, Max!" and "Way to go, Max!" Ei-chan's shocked that Max had managed to handle Ike's full-powered forehand with one blow—without bothering to throw off Ike's posture. Plus, that winner was a stable shot that it absolutely couldn't have missed. While it doesn't mean Max had predicted Ike's shot, Max had closed the distance to zero instantly. With that posture, Max could have hit any sort of ball anywhere! Monma comments that Max realizes that his opponent had hit his best shot, and reacts to force his opponent to yield. This last shot was probably intended to drive home to Ike that this is the world's best. Ike wonders if that sort of thing is humanly possible. Coach Ronnie watches silently. Ike concludes that as far as the world's best is concerned, he's not on a human level, and if Ike doesn't also exceed human level, he can't win. Play continues with a rally. Ike hits a quick shot straight, going for a winner and thinking "How's this?" Max overtakes the ball the same way and returns it with a forehand cross. Ike: "Again?!" Ike attacks with what seems like a backhand rising shot, thinking he has to be more forward and to hit it stronger (see pic 3 on mangakansou). His straight is a winner: 15-15. Max looks somewhat surprised, but Ike seems even more surprised. Ike: "Yeah!" Crowd: "Whoooooa! Attack, attack!"; "That rising shot just now! It showed considerable
technique and power!"; "Apart from that, it showed extraordinary guts!" An engrossed Ei-chan records the intense exchange of the match in his notebook. He thinks it's just two games but you could clearly tell that Ike's aiming for the world's No.1. That's why even the people watching are fascinated, wanting to see what Ike will do. Max holds his serve, and

then Ike does too. Audience: "As rumored, he's a new star who's super aggressive!"; "Max's defense is also flawless so it's worth seeing!"; "As expected of an outstanding talent that the famous coach Ronnie accepted!"; "It doesn't seem like it will unfold unilaterally"; "No doubt this is a great talent that will enter the Top 10 in the near future!"' "You got that right." Ei-chan marvels that Ike is Japanese like himself, and an 18 year old like himself. He remembers the phone call with Ike and how for some reason he'd said "some day" and Ike's words about how "that's our pinnacle." Everything about the rally makes a strong impression on Ei-chan. With this progression, changes start to show with time. Max wins the first set, resisting defensively. From the second set, he responds by exchanging shots with Ike. Ike gears up during the intense exchange, but Max uses power to force him to yield. The final shot is a winner down the line (see pic 4 on mangakansou). The match ends with the score at 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. Ei-chan concludes that the result is that Ike made his presence felt, but he wasn't able to take a set from the world champion. The two players shake hands. Ike thanks Max. Max notes that Ike is 18 years old and that he'd better be prepared for the coming of an unthinkable generation. Ike replies that he'll come back here where Max is. Ei-chan's in a daze. Crowd: "Ike, nice game!"; "Well done!"; "We'll be waiting next year!" On Ei-chan's notebook are the words "In order to participate in Wimbledon." Monma prompts Ei-chan, asking him if it's okay for Ei-chan not to watch Takuma's match. Ei-chan's startled but replies he'll go right away. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Aim" (as in gun sights). Sounds like Ei-chan's goals are becoming more and more tangible. Which should lead to serious results when he returns on campaign.

Ch. 390

Okay, so Ei-chan follows Monma and Maeda to Takuma's court. On the way, Monma and Maeda discuss Ike's match. Maeda says Max held back in the first half, so even though Ike geared up, Max matched him and took the fight to him. Because he knew things would be uncontrollable if Ike really got going, Max must have made sure of the match. Maeda says the match probably went as Max had predicted but Max had been surprised by Ike's potential. Monma agrees, noting that Max had guarded against Ike's explosive power and had been pushed back, on the defensive, several times. Then he asks about Ei-chan's impression. Ei-chan exclaims it was amazing. Sure, Ike lost in straight sets, but for a Japanese of the same age as himself to play confidently in this venue...on seeing that right in front of him, the pinnacle of the tennis world, which he couldn't even imagine up to now, suddenly became real. He adds that he'd aspired to become a pro after seeing Ike's pro debut match, and now he's a pro. So he's really glad he was able to see this match. Monma thinks a switch seems to have been flipped within Ei-chan. Maeda agrees that Ike's play today was impressive. Young players who saw the match, just like Ei-chan, will aim for the world, and the children seeing that will pick up a racket. By doing so, Japanese tennis will become stronger. Then he tells Ei-chan that it will be Ei-chan's turn next to strengthen Japanese tennis. They get to court 12 in time for the start of Takuma's match against the German, Bastel Muller, the 18th seed. As they take their seats, Takuma's parents arrive. Maeda exchanges greetings with them. Ei-chan apparently remembers his own parents' support, and mentally tells Takuma to go for it. The match is announced. Takuma brings the first set to tiebreak. He gets to set point 3 times but fails to convert, so he's at a disadvantage. Then Muller gets to set point for the only time and takes the set. From the second set on, Muller blocks Takuma's service dash. Takuma's pressured by Muller's solid returns and aggressive passes into a high-risk battle. Takuma suffers a 1R loss in his first

appearance in a Grand Slam main draw in straight sets: 7-6, 6-3, 6-4. Some minutes later, Kouno also loses, failing to achieve his first 1R breakthrough.
As the Japanese group (minus Ike) leaves, Kouno comments that all the Japanese players today lost their 1R matches. They have to steadily face off against the upper ranks, but all the Top 30 seeds in the Grand Slam are outrageous monsters. He tells Monma he'll be cheering for Monma during tomorrow's match. While heading back, they overhear talk that James Fowler defeated the 14th seed. Ei-chan recognizes Fowler as an 18 year old Australian. Monma confirms this and adds that Fowler is ranked in the 40s and is as famous as Ike, an up-and-coming player that much is expected of. Someone adds that it's no sooner said than done. With this, Fowler's position and Ike's might get reversed. Monsters are showing up rapidly. Then Kouno notices Fowler and points him out. As Fowler passes, Ei-chan notes that Fowler is one more person at the pinnacle of his generation. A boy stumbles in front of Ei-chan and the boy's ball hits Fowler. The boy starts bawling at Fowler's scary glance. But then Fowler plays with the ball, fascinating the boy and other onlookers, then returns the ball to the boy. Ei-chan's impressed by Fowler's physique, his carriage, and his ability to instantly attract the people watching; however, he still found Fowler's smile a bit scary. That night Ei-chan has dinner with Asano, Takuma, and Kouno. Asano comments that he'd also invited Ike and Monma. Takuma points out that Ike doesn't see anyone on days when he lost a match. Ei-chan remembers that when he was living with Ike, there were days when Ike didn't come out of his room at all. Kouna explains that Monma's family had arrived, then asks after Takuma's parents. Takuma says he was told it's a rare opportunity for his parents to be in London, so they're going sightseeing. Asano confirms that Takuma plans to leave the next day with his parents. Takuma confirms this and then turns to Ei-chan to ask him his plans. Ei-chan replies he's considering various things. Asano suggests Ei-chan stay one more day to watch Monma's match. However, Ei-chan says he plans to go home tomorrow as well. He's gotten a lot of stimuli and already has a surfeit of things he wants to work on. He concludes, saying that's why he's going home...and next time, he'll come as a participant. Asano receives this news with a broad smile. Ei-chan thanks Asano and Takuma, who orders him to really come on his own merits next time. Someone proposes a toast to their being able to come there again next year. Cheers! Then someone else (probably Takuma) asks what that means.
As dinner continues, Ei-chan thinks his time there was really something major for him. It feels like he's able to see the entire picture of tennis for the first time. As he flies back, he reviews his notes of the points where the world's Top 10 (based on Max and Sanchez) excel, thinking he wants to stand on a court right away. His notes list footwork, serves, shots when their posture is thrown off, and he goes in detail about how those are excellent: reaction speed, zero to fastest speed, and so on. Then he lists countermeasures, things he has to do to offset those advantages. The blurb says "If the sights are fixed, what has to be done is decided naturally." The title of the next chapter is "Plus 30"—not sure what that refers to. There's also a mention of a big announcement with the next chapter; rumor is it's about a live-action adaptation of Baby Steps.

Ch. 391
The title of this chapter is "Reproducing the World," not "Plus 30" as mentioned in the previous chapter. Anyhow, Ei-chan returns to STC the day after he arrives in Japan. Yukichi and Coach Aoi are surprised to hear that Ei-chan had served as Sanchez's practice partner. Yukichi's all "Amazing! As expected of Aniki!" Coach Aoi comments it's experience that Ei-chan hasn't had up to now and that Ei-chan will put it to effect from now on. Ei-chan asks

the result of what he'd requested, and Coach Aoi points somewhere, saying they'd prepared it. Then Yukichi's shown standing on a platform with Coach Aoi noting it seems safe. Down court, Ei-chan requests Yukichi to hit a spin serve, wide or center doesn't matter. Yukichi tells Ei-chan it seems too high. Ei-chan agrees it's higher than actual conditions, but he's trying to replicate the power and spin of Sanchez's serve, so he feels that much height is necessary. Yukichi's surprised that the assumption behind the practice is the No.8 in the world as an opponent. Ei-chan confirms this, explaining that he feels if he doesn't use that setup with world-class level as his objective from now on, he won't reach that level in his lifetime. Yukichi replies he understands, and prepares to serve. As Ei-chan prepares to receive, he thinks he can remember how it felt by looking at his notes (Amazing spin and height!!): a ball that comes bursting out from below. The serve comes and Ei-chan decides to get it a little forward than usual. He manages a good return, but tells Yukichi the spin and power need to be increased. The next serve matches Ei-chan's memory of how Sanchez's serve had felt like. His return goes into the net. He requests Yukichi to try dishing out that same serve in various courses.

Practice continues. Some time later, two grade-schoolers walk along the corridor and notice Ei-chan training. One of them says he's never seen that sort of training before: Ei-chan's playing a serious two-on-one match against Coach Aoi and Yukichi. Ei-chan thinks that what changed overwhelmingly with a top world-class stroke is the footwork to get to the position where he hits a ball. He remembers that even if Max suddenly decelerated right after a sudden acceleration, Max had gotten the ball with the best impact point without his posture being completely thrown off. Using the same level of instantaneous movement, Sanchez had also overtaken the course Ei-chan predicted. Ei-chan think this practice comes close to the feeling he had at that time. When responding to an opponent who's hitting strong shots while moving instantaneously...what's important is reaction...the first step...acceleration...the timing of the deceleration... If he gets even one wrong, he'll lose the initiative in all at that moment. If that happens, his form is thrown off and he'll receive a lethal attack. So he couldn't do anything at that time (referring to the game with Sanchez). Yukichi finally gets a shot past Ei-chan, who says this is how it felt like. Yukichi thinks Ei-chan looks like he's enjoying himself. Ei-chan thinks he's able to react and he's able to make the first step in the shortest distance and direction. As practice resumes, Ei-chan thinks that the power of his sudden acceleration still isn't enough. The same goes for the power of his sudden deceleration. So when his timing deteriorates, the impact point of his shots is disturbed. As he goes through the motions, Ei-chan notes the steps: sudden acceleration!; once he's released his power, a sudden deceleration in the correct position!; then a swing loaded with power at the best impact point! Practice continues. After another shot gets past Ei-chan, he take a short break, thinking the practice is tough. Yukichi suggests it might be better if Ei-chan take a more defensive position by moving back from the baseline, if they're to continue the practice. Ei-chan notes Yukichi's point, but explains he's using his current defensive position with Monma's "Not Running Away" advice in mind. If he wants to play Sanchez seriously, he can't contend with Sanchez if he basically can't play at that position with his small body. (Image contrasts the "typical top pro's play area" and "Ei-chan's ideal play area" that's more concentrated around the baseline.) Ei-chan thinks that from that position, play isn't just technically more difficult. The
example of the greater technical difficulty is that there are more chances to hit a rising shot, and when he's closer to the net and baseline, putting the correct spin on a ball is necessary. His analysis continues: from a more forward position, he returns the ball faster, so inventiveness (power of ideas) when reacting in an instant is also necessary. (I guess this

means he's also exercising his brain.) He thinks he needs a fixed time to come up with good ideas, so his position is also for that purpose (apparently he's training his brain to require less time to come up with ideas and make decisions), and in the end, it means he can move faster. Inventiveness isn't acquired in a day, but he understands what he has to have in order to make his goal concrete. It's not enough just "looking at the match in front of him." By experiencing the "best level," his own deficiencies became visible for the first time (I guess compared to before when he thought he was doing everything he had to), so he's better able to see what's in front of him. After practice, Ei-chan reviews his notes and mutters to himself that he'll also apply this basic training to his serves and strokes...and he might have to increase muscle and upper-body training and short-range dashes to improve his instantaneous power... Yukichi smiles at seeing the absorbed and motivated Ei-chan. As Ei-chan puts away his notebook, Coach Aoi brings the two grade-schoolers over because they want to try hitting some balls with a pro, so Ei-chan's already doing his bit to inspire the next generation of Japanese tennis players. Coach Aoi apologizes since Ei-chan's tired but requests Ei-chan to agree. Ei-chan does, so Coach Aoi instructs the boys to warm up, so they run off. Yukichi comments that Ei-chan seems more and more like a pro. He asks Ei-chan about his plans. Ei-chan replies that he intends to take part in the next Challenger in Japan. He'd actually wanted to get results in Futures first, but his campaign funds are limited and he's considering rapidly taking part in lower-tour tournaments where he can, so he's going for the next lower tour (Futures or Challenger) that will be held in Japan—which turns out to be the Keiryou Challenger, which Yukichi's university is organizing (Keiryou seems to be a made-up name, so it's probably the name of Yukichi's university). According to Coach Aoi, it's a high-level tournament where players can get lots of points, the environment is good, and the tournament management is reliable, so veterans gather there every year with participants even among players ranked in the world's 100s. Naturally even Japan's top players also participate. It's a gateway to success for up-and-coming players trying to break into the world tour—so it's one that Ei-chan has to
win if he has his sights on the top of the world. End of chapter. The blurb says "The First Step to the World! Attempting a Challenger!" The title for the next chapter is "Potential."

Ch. 392

So Ei-chan hadn't seen Natchan in 11 days—which confirms the speculation that they're seeing each other, even if it's not been shown. Natchan got into Georgia University, and has been taking part in pro tournaments in Japan, while classes haven't started yet. She made it to the Best 4 in her latest tournament. Unfortunately, she's scheduled to leave for the States on the same day the finals of the Keiryou Challenger will be held. Oobayashi and Yukichi greet Ei-chan at the tournament. Wang Wei is also participating in the Keiryou Challenger; he's the No.1 seed in the qualification rounds. It sounds like Yukichi is in as a wildcard on the university's recommendation; he was saying he'd gotten stronger what with practice in the university and serving as Ei-chan's hitting partner. Oobayashi has been hearing about Ei-chan's training and asks about it. Ei-chan passes his latest notebook to Oobayashi, telling him his training menu is in the second half. Oobayashi flips through the pages and stops at one that says "The Shortest Route to the Grand Slams" and is surprised especially since it projects getting to the Grand Slam in 3 years, but he says he thinks Ei-chan might be able to do it. Wang Wei asks Ei-chan to be his practice partner. Oh, Ei-chan's opponent for 1R of the qualifiers is that Australian, Alber Kristoff, from Ei-chan's first Futures. HO-KAY! A chance for Revenge!!! And Ei-chan thinks so too! Details to follow...much later. I think I'll wait for the RAWs.

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So the chapter opens with Ei-chan continuing his training at STC: 2-on-1 with Coach Aoi and Yukichi, receiving practice, and so on. According to Ei-chan, the Keiryou Challenger is a month and a half away. There are no tournaments in Japan that he can participate in until then. He's also limited by the cost of an overseas campaign. However, he's able to train thoroughly enough to think through his regimen with his sights on the world pinnacle. He has grasped just how far off that is, but he's happy with the knowledge. As he exits STC after another day of training, he's hailed by Natchan. A blushing Ei-chan clenches his fist, thinking it's Natchan in the flesh after 11 days. She got into Georgia University, but she's in Japan until the enrollment period, taking part in what pro tournaments she can. As the two walk hand in hand, Ei-chan congratulates her on
making the Best 4 in the Ibaraki Open. She thanks him. Ei-chan notes she's been racking up points. Natchan replies she still has a long way to go. Ei-chan thinks the periods when they aren't able to see each other have been getting longer, like a rehearsal. Natchan says she'll focus on US tournaments while she's studying abroad. Ei-chan comments that there are lots of high-level competitions there. Natchan notes that Ei-chan's competition will finally be held next week. Ei-chan confirms this and adds that it's his first competition in a long time and that the final is scheduled right on the day Natchan leaves for the States. Natchan turns pouty, saying she knows and she won't be able to watch Ei-chan's victory. Neither of them mention they're already feeling lonely, because they'd accumulated a lot of resolutions.
Scene switch. It's now the middle of August and the first day of the qualification rounds for the Keiryou Challenger. Ei-chan thinks it's been a long time since he's been so improved from physical rebuilding to adjustment in a single competition, so he's feeling a bit nervous. He thinks the nervousness comes from his standpoint that it's the first step of his attempt (for the top), his first Challenger. As the name says, the Keiryou Challenger is hosted by Keiryou University. One of its characteristics is that students do most of the management. After Ei-chan registers, he's greeted by Yukichi and Oobayashi (who's apparently staff). Oobayashi asks Ei-chan how he is. Ei-chan replies he feels good and the atmosphere of the tournament is also good. Oobayashi comments that Fukazawa (Yukichi) also managed to make it to the qualifiers as a wildcard. Wildcards in the Keiryou Challenger are in two categories: ordinary and Keiryou-affiliated players (like how Ei-chan got to play in the Bradenton because of his IMG affiliation). Yukichi adds that it seems he's gotten slightly stronger due to training at the university, plus his helping out with Ei-chan's training. Oobayashi grabs Yukichi, complaining that Yukichi often says that but refuses to share what sort of training Ei-chan does. So he asks Ei-chan if Ei-chan would share his training program. Replying that he can show his notes, Ei-chan pulls out his latest notebook. Right then, Wang Wei walks by, recognizes Ei-chan, and hails him. Ei-chan acknowledges Wang Wei, comments that it's been a while, and welcomes him to Japan all apparently in English. Oobayashi recognizes Wei's name as that of the No.1 seed in the qualifiers, and Yukichi asks if Wei is an acquaintance of Ei-chan. Wei agrees that it has been a while also in English. Ei-chan explains in Japanese that Wei had often helped Ei-chan when Ei-chan was having difficulties in Futures overseas. Wei asks in English if he can rely on Ei-chan for practice after this, and Ei-chan agrees, also in
English. (This shows Ei-chan's gotten used to switching languages and using English.) Ei-chan offers his latest notebook to Oobayashi, explaining his training program is in the latter half. Oobayashi flips through the pages, commenting that it's as neat as ever. Then he stops on a page about "The Shortest Route to the Grand Slams" (and reads the title aloud; it's in Japanese), which lays out Ei-chan's analysis that participation in the qualifiers of a

Grand Slam seems to require a world standing in the lower half (close to the 100s) of the 200s. A world rank of 230 requires a little over 200 points. A straight-in to the main draw requires a ranking of below 100, which is around 600 points. According to Ei-chan's calculations, if he wins the Challenger, he'll pick up 100 points, bringing his count to 104 points and raising his ranking to the upper 400s. Then if he finishes second (or better) in an ATP 250 tournament, that would be another 150 points, bringing his count to 254 points and raising his ranking to the 200s. Or he could win 3 Challengers. Anyhow, he needs over 200 points. Blushing furiously, Ei-chan reaches out, saying that's not it (his training program). Oobayashi continues to marvel at Ei-chan's analysis. Ei-chan argues that it's only based on the points system, and he simply tried writing out the process if he were to win it all. Yukichi counters that Ei-chan is seriously aiming for it. When Ei-chan confirms this, Oobayashi (because he refers to Ei-chan as Maruo-kun, not Aniki) replies that he thinks Ei-chan might be able to do it in 3 years. (Wei was there the whole time, but who knows how much he understood, at the very least maybe "Grand Slam.") Some time later, Ei-chan thinks the qualifiers has a draw of 32 players, of which only 4 will proceed to the main draw. In other words, if he wins 3 rounds, it's the main draw. If he makes it to the main draw and wins, his world ranking won't just rise to the 400s, but it seems his Japan ranking will rise to below 20. If that happens, it seems he'll get into the national B team. If that happens, he'll be able to do more enhanced training and to appeal to sponsors, and his prospects for competing internationally would look brighter. Furthermore, getting into the national team, a World Tour debut, and the Grand Slams! Within him, they're all connected in a straight line to the match before him. It's his strongest motivation after turning pro! Plus, his opponent in 1R is Arber Christophe, whom he'd lost to in his first Australian Futures. Arber comments that today they're on Ei-chan's home ground. Ei-chan agrees and adds that he's looking forward to playing against Arber. Ei-chan remembers that the wind at the location hadn't been the only reason he'd been beaten. Arber's strong forehand,
variety of tactics, and the self-judging system...ultimately, Ei-chan had lost in total ability. But today, they're on Ei-chan's home ground, the weather is fine, and both Ei-chan's mind and body are prepared. Natchan arrives to watch the match. As the start of the 3-set match is announced with Ei-chan's service, Ei-chan thinks it (apparently of his attempt to make it to the world stage) starts with this revenge. Ei-chan serves wide. After Arber returns it, Arber notes that Ei-chan's power has increased and wonders whether Ei-chan's stability continues to be strong or not. Ei-chan chases the ball, concentrating on a fast response and fast movement. However, the shot doesn't go where he expected, so he has to back up. He returns the ball, and Arber responds with a strong shot. Then Arber's shocked to see Ei-chan perfectly placed to return the ball. As Ei-chan swings back, he thinks "This is it!" End of chapter. The blurb for the next chapter says "Will the results of his training be revealed?!!" The next chapter will have a color page plus a report on the live-action adaptation with 5 color pages. The title of the next chapter is "Aim."

Ch. 393

Reacting quickly to Alber's return ball, Ei-chan swings back and sends the ball down the line. Unfortunately, it goes out (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou): 0-15. Ei-chan and Natchan are surprised. Alber's somewhat puzzled by what that was just now. As Ei-chan goes to the serve position, he thinks he'd carelessly been focused on reacting and accelerating fast the way he had during training that he'd ended up too close to the ball. His timing had been thrown off, but he had time to spare... If he's able to get the timing right... Ei-chan sends his next serve wide. Alber returns it with a backhand. Once again, Ei-chan's quickly in position to

return it, causing Alber to freeze (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan hits a forehand crosscourt, which Alber manages to return. But Ei-chan thinks he'd completely thrown off Alber's posture. Putting away the ball with another forehand crosscourt, he decides: "Yes! This is it." 15-15. Oobayashi comments that Ei-chan's in good shape from the start. On hearing that, Yukichi stares at Oobayashi blankly, puzzling Oobayashi. Alber thinks it's a matter of milliseconds, but Ei-chan has a fairly long time to hit the ball.
Because of that, Alber can't at all anticipate the course of the ball, which he'd normally be able to do to a certain extent from the flow of the shots. He concludes he simply has to bring on a development that will deny Ei-chan that time. Ei-chan serves to the center. Alber cuts in on the ball to return it with his forehand. Noting this, Ei-chan remembers that when Alber aims with his strong forehand, over half of the time Alber hits a cross, so Ei-chan decides to be slightly more on the lookout for a cross. He tilts his center of gravity toward his right leg. Alber sends the ball crosscourt as Ei-chan predicted. Ei-chan thinks "Here it is! A correct first step... Accelerate! Ease off the power and time the deceleration well..." Alber's shocked: "Again...!" Ei-chan thinks it's the same rhythm he'd practiced. He takes the point with a forehand crosscourt: 30-15. Ei-chan notes it doesn't mean he'd added explosive power in the one month, but...this is the result of paying attention to getting to the hitting position fast. Oobayashi comments that if Ei-chan keeps this up, Ei-chan might be able to win. Yukichi points out that it's not just that, but isn't this kinda awesome. Oobayashi replies that they still can't tell, as expected, since Ei-chan's opponent is higher ranked. Ei-chan decides that first, he won't give up the advantage of his serve, and then he'll get to the hitting position fast. Playing that way, he puts away the ball with a backhand down the line: 40-15. Play continues. Ei-chan thinks that when he's able to do this perfectly, his opponent's motion will stop for an instant. Alber freezes. Then Ei-chan calmly hits a drop shot. Alber barely moves at all and Ei-chan holds his serve: "Game, Maruo. 1-0, first set" (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). During change court, Ei-chan thinks he couldn't tell because he'd been practicing 2-on-1, but this might be good. Alber sets up to serve, thinking that if it will be difficult to break, he'll definitely hold his serve. Ei-chan remembers he'd practiced with an eye to the serves of the world's best, so he ought to be confident of his returns. The instant Alber tosses the ball, Ei-chan takes a step forward, surprising Alber. The serve is to the center. Ei-chan returns it with a strong backhand crosscourt. Alber manages to return it, but he notes that Ei-chan's gotten skillful, using a backhand to dispose of a high ball. Then next moment...Ei-chan cuts in on Alber's slightly weak return ball. Seeing that, Alber gasps and freezes as he considers Ei-chan's possible shots: "Hey... Wait a second..." (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou).
Ei-chan hits a straight to take the point: 0-15. He believes that if he can do this in his return games, this match will go well. Alber's shocked. Yukichi continues his conversation with Oobayashi, telling him that because he'd partnered Ei-chan during Ei-chan's training, he can tell (who'll win). He points out that because Ei-chan's opponent's reactions and balls are slower than Ei-chan's "assumptions," Ei-chan's currently playing while matching those. Yukichi adds that it's the start of the match and it gives that impression because Ei-chan is taking points. However, Ei-chan should still have more scope to move and attack within him. Play continues with Ei-chan taking the next point: 0-30. Oobayashi can't believe his eyes: "No way? Was Maruo-kun this strong?" Yukichi replies that Ei-chan had struggled in the first half of the year since he wasn't used to playing in matches overseas and to the living environment, so he hadn't produced results. However, even when Ei-chan's vision had been clouded, he'd continued to progress through trial-and-error. When he lost, he'd train; if that also didn't produce results, he'd redo it and repeat. That's why when his vision cleared and

they noticed, something surprising had taken place. While they were talking, Ei-chan hits another winner: 0-40. And then a shot of his goes into the net: 15-40. Ei-chan moves his defensive position forward, closer to the baseline (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). Yukichi points out the change and explains that if Ei-chan's forward, developments speed up, but Ei-chan had decided it would work. However, Yukichi adds that it probably still doesn't mean Ei-chan is playing at full throttle. Where Ei-chan is playing now is actually Ei-chan's ideal defensive position. Even though Ei-chan can get points from farther back, it looks like he's daring to play in his ideal position. Obayashi: "That means, in other words..." Yukichi continues: "I think he's already trying to go for the kill" (see pic 3, page 2 on mangakansou). Then Ei-chan puts the ball away with a forehand down the line to suddenly break Alber's serve: "Game, Maruo. 2-0, first set." Ei-chan: "Yeah!" End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Intention." I expect it will start with "Game, Maruo. 2-0, first set."
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WHOA! Alber looks totally outclassed! All of Ei-chan's points were winners. The only 2 points he gave up were due to his own errors rather than Alber's efforts. And with Ei-chan going for the kill this early, he might even win 6-0, 6-0. Or maybe 6-0, 6-1 if Ei-chan takes this time to experiment with strategy.
I added a couple of details to the summary: the one point he gave up during Alber's serve and the last announcement of the score for the first set. Oh, the teaser blurb says: "Heading for a General Offensive Immediately After the Start!?"

Ch. 394
Ei-chan wins 6-3, 6-4 over Alber because he persisted in playing in his ideal defense position. The next day in 2R, he defeats the qualifying round 2nd seed, Kawagoe (JTA 17, world rank 427) 6-4, 3-6, 6-2. Then the next day in 3R, he defeats an Italian, Appia (world rank 780) 6-3, 6-2. Details to follow. But as usual, Ei-chan doesn't take things easy.
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Okay, so the chapter starts with Ei-chan's next service. He sends his serve to the center, and Alber returns it (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). On the attack, Ei-chan thinks that when he's forward, movement is fast...if this place (forward) is his main battleground in order to play in the Grand Slams, then he'll continue producing results here! Alber curses silently. Even under normal circumstances, developments are fast, but even more when Ei-chan's defensive position is forward. Alber thinks his response lags and whatever he does revolves around his opponent... Ei-chan takes the point with a forehand crosscourt: 15-0. Alber thinks Ei-chan is clearly different from the last time Alber had competed against him. Then he clarifies his thought: Since that time, Ei-chan's gotten a promptness of response...uncompromising mental strength (at this point, Alber's shot goes out)...and an unfathomable fearsomeness (Ei-chan volleys and puts away the ball)...even so...what happened...in just 7 months?! (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou) Play continues. In the end, Alber's shot goes out and Ei-chan takes the first set 6-3. Ei-chan immediately starts scribbling in his notebook. He thinks that Alber's tennis with its diverse attacks have become monotonous because Alber can only rely on his strong forehand to get through the fast developments. However, this tennis is also extremely
exhausting for him, so if he's to play even in the main draw, he wants to bring it to an end even if it's just a little sooner. Time is called and the second set starts with Alber's serve. Alber thinks it's no joke and he'll be damned if he'll be beaten like this. He sends his serve wide, and Ei-chan returns it. Then Alber moves a step back to cope with the speed of the developments. Seeing that, Ei-chan hits a forehand cross with an arching spin. Alber thinks

that this time it's a slow ball but with a strong spin! Ei-chan goes to the net. Alber thinks it's again deep...and notes that Ei-chan has come forward while Alber hadn't yet adjusted his posture. Alber's pride is pricked and he mentally bawls out Ei-chan since Alber has already been going around the lower tour for 2 years. He hits a straight that gets past Ei-chan to take the point (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan thinks Alber was able to put away the ball in a way that Alber hadn't up to now. He concludes that Alber is starting to cope with Ei-chan's defensive position. He fixes his gut strings and exhales. He notes that he too can move back a step, and if Alber's timing is thrown off by that, it might disturb Alber. However, that would trick Alber only temporarily. If Ei-chan moves back, then it will produce a hope in Alber of "I can move my opponent back." Should that happen, Ei-chan would realize that he'd "run away." Then he won't be able to win after this! Play continues with Alber serving wide. Ei-chan returns it with a backhand, thinking that even if this position is difficult, he'll find victory with this defensive position. However, Alber takes the point with a backhand. Ei-chan notes that even he has to produce ideas fast while moving fast, when he is forward. For that purpose, what's necessary, no matter what, are the experience and data he can get while continuing to play in that position. During the second set, both players hold their very first service games. Ei-chan thinks that often with even one ball, he accumulates countermeasures for every situation, so that he can instantly choose the best strategy among what's possible. By piling up those successes and failures... Both sides continue to hold and the second set enters its 7th game. Alber hits a drop shot. By concentrating and watching Alber closely, Ei-chan is able to anticipate the shot, chase the ball, and put it away (see pic 4, page 1 on mangakansou), thinking that by building up his ideas, he expedites the time he comes upon an idea. Yukichi exclaims
that Ei-chan finally broke Alber's serve. Ei-chan's thought continues that if he doesn't have more effective ideas, then he'll continue to examine his ideas. If he can't accurately hit stronger shots, then he'll continue to pursue that goal. This way, he'll be able to win reliably rather than pursue immediate victory! He'll believe that, wrap his mind fully around it, and move fast! If he wants to win internationally as a pro, if he really wants to win at that level, he can only continue doing this! (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou) Finally, Ei-chan wins the match with a forehand countercross (cross in the opposite direction?) for a score of 6-3, 6-4. After the match, the two players shake hands. As Alber leaves, he wonders if it was a matter of it/him having been the thing/guy up to now. (It's not clear if he means Ei-chan or his play style, like he/it has always been that way.) Oobayashi comments that Ei-chan had made it to the Best 4 of the All Japan Championship, which is said to be Challenger level. Yukichi insists Ei-chan has reliably gotten stronger since then. Then Wang Wei is shown turning away, apparently having watched Ei-chan's match. A happy Ei-chan goes to Natchan. With the decisive victory, Ei-chan regains his touch. In 2R the next day, he goes up against the second seed in the qualifiers: the 28-year-old Kawagoe Arata, rank 17, world rank 427, and defeats him 6-4, 3-6, 6-2. And in the next day, in the final round of the qualifiers, he goes up against the 22-year-old Italian, Appia, world rank 780, and defeats him 6-3, 6-2. From no-seed, he finishes in the spotlight of the main draw. With the 3 wins in the qualifiers, Ei-chan had realized an evolution he hadn't experienced up to now. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Challenger Main Event."

Ch. 395

So the chapter opens with Oobayashi putting up the results of the qualification rounds. A senpai of his calls out to him, noting that Ei-chan, whom Oobayashi is so proud of never having lost to, made it to the main draw. Oobayashi protests, asking his senpai not to make

fun of him. The senpai says he'd thought Ei-chan's making it to the Best 4 in the All Japan Championship might have been a fluke because he hadn't heard much about Ei-chan after that, but Ei-chan might really be strong. Oobayashi objects to the "might," asking if his senpai hasn't watched Ei-chan's matches. Oobayashi adds he thinks the senpai would understand Oobayashi's pride if the senpai had seen Ei-chan play. Then Oobayashi and the senpai tell Yukichi not to mind it. Crying over his loss in 2R of the qualifiers, Yukichi replies he's fine.
Ei-chan messages Natchan, telling her he'd made it through to the main draw. Hailing him, Wang Wei goes up to Ei-chan who reciprocates the greeting. Wei notes that Ei-chan has also made it through the qualifiers. Ei-chan congratulates Wei, who replies that his match had ended sooner, so he'd watched Ei-chan's. Wei comments that Ei-chan's tennis has changed and asks if something happened (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan wonders at the question because Wei usually doesn't ask about people. Ei-chan explains that this year he'd gone to Wimbledon for the first time and had gotten motivated, which might have been beneficial. Wei assumes Ei-chan hadn't meant he'd competed in Wimbledon, and marvels aloud that Ei-chan has the luxury of watching Wimbledon during this time when he's working the circuit of the lower tournaments. Ei-chan argues that he'd barely scraped up the funds to go—just like other players in the lower tournaments. When Wei remains silent, Ei-chan asks if this is wrong. Wei replies he's being supporting financially by Shanghai City, so he isn't needy. Ei-chan's amazed since that basically means Wei is state-sponsored. He adds that he's also aiming for that, explaining that if a player isn't on the national team, he can't be supported by the state. Wei argues that even if he wanted to go to Wimbledon, he probably couldn't have. Ei-chan asks why when Wei had funds. Wei explains that he doesn't have anyone around him who would approve of using the funds that way. The city is investing in him. Due to that, he can get subsidies not just for his campaign expenses, but also to live with his family in Shanghai, even though they come from a farming village. The city chooses the tournaments he enters, and he doesn't have the right to freely use his prize money or his contract money. Ei-chan thinks to himself that Wei has a lot of support, but in return it means the sponsors are influential. Wei adds that he wants to quickly become so strong that he can live even without anyone's support. Ei-chan marvels at Wei's spirit of self-reliance, but for himself, he believes that the many people who have supported him seem to have become his strength. Wei comments that the conversation had strayed, and turns it back where he'd intended, telling Ei-chan there's one more thing he wanted to ask: who's that Japanese guy? Wei points at Okada, explaining that when he'd watched him earlier, that player had hit
nothing but rising shots at the baseline, and it was Wei's first time seeing such a thing. During all this, Okada's fanning himself and complaining about the heat (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). The text explains that the 18-year-old Okada had made it to the main draw and his world ranking is 1,531. Wei asks if Ei-chan is also aiming for that sort of style. Ei-chan replies it's kinda different, but thinks to himself that Okada's tennis might serve as a reference for his current self. He identifies Okada and describes him as a magnificent player. Okada overhears this and is surprised that he isn't being insulted. Right then Pete hails Ei-chan: "Hey, hey! Maruo! Long time no see!! How's life?" Ei-chan recognizes Pete and Krishna (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Pete says they came to practice today in preparation for tomorrow. Krishna adds that it's his first time in Tokyo. Ei-chan comments that he'd thought he'd be able to meet them if they were participating in the main draw, and he's happy to be able to see them in Japan. Wei wonders if Ei-chan is acquainted with Krishna, who notices Wei and they acknowledge each other. Ei-chan asks if they're acquaintances.

Krishna explains that at 16, Wei is a year younger than him and they're the same generation as juniors, and also that he'd often seen him in international competitions, and they'd gone up against each other several times. Krishna tells Wei that Ei-chan was his roommate in IMG, which Wei recognizes as the Florida academy. Krishna and Wei shake hands. Krishna tells Ei-chan he'd watched Ei-chan's match, and his impression was "Maruo had turned out this way after all?" Ei-chan asks what that means. Pete explains it means they know Ei-chan's fearsomeness, and their coming this morning was also for the purpose of monitoring Ei-chan (in addition to going there to practice). Ei-chan protests that compared to theirs, his accomplishments fall way short. But he adds that he's working hard. Krishna counters that it's because Pete racked up quite a lot of points in Futures, after he lost to Ei-chan. Pete argues that he's still no match for Krishna, who'd recently finished as the runner-up in a Challenger. Ei-chan comments that Krishna had been able to take part in the Wimbledon qualifiers. Krishna notes that Ei-chan had also registered for them. He says he'd been surprised when he saw (Ei-chan's name). Wei is surprised that Ei-chan hadn't just gone to Wimbledon but had actually registered—even though there was no way Ei-chan could have taken part. He apparently thinks Ei-chan just barely made the line for participating even in this Challenger. Ei-chan laughs it off, explaining that he'd thought registering
was significant. Wei thinks that the more he learns about Ei-chan, the more he doesn't understand him. The lively conversation between Ei-chan and company continues. Okada notices this and wonders if Ei-chan had had that many friends, plus Ei-chan seems to be getting on that well with foreign veteran players. Scene switch. While Watanabe walks to a court, Yoshimichi hails him, saying it's been a while and asking whether Watanabe was going to practice (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou). Watanabe confirms this. Yoshimichi asks after Watanabe's condition. At Watanabe's low-key answer, Yoshimichi comments that Watanabe is phlegmatic as usual. He asks how Wimbledon was. Watanabe replies that it'd been a good experience, though he'd rather wanted to make it to the main draw. Yoshimichi comments that Watanabe had been attempting the Grand Slam for 3 years now. Then he reminds Watanabe that Watanabe had said this year Maruo-kun had been with them—the Maruo-kun he'd forfeited to in the All Japan because of an injury. Watanabe confirms this and adds that Ei-chan seemed to have enjoyed himself. Changing the subject, he asks whether Yoshimichi's injury was fine now. Yoshimichi replies that he's being told not to overdo, prompting Watanabe conclude it's not yet healed. Yoshimichi reveals he was kidding, pointing out that he couldn't have kept his ranking if his condition was dire. Irked, Watanabe tells him to leave off such jokes since the Davis Cup is coming up. Yoshimichi apologizes, but points out that if it would cause trouble for the national team, he would duly report it. Yoshimichi notes that he's already 30 years old, and he's finally at a point where he's a success, both individually and as a national team member. He's completely cured and his tuning is flawless because he'd come this far while practicing cautiously. He argues that in this local tournament where Ike and Monma aren't taking part, they have an advantage. The national team members have to win. Watanabe agrees, thinking that he (probably Watanabe) was the runner-up last year and he needs better results than that to defend his points (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). Watanabe thinks he absolutely can't lose in order to continue competing as a national team member and in order to make another attempt at Wimbledon. Ei-chan arrives home, thinking he was able to get through the qualifiers and he's glad to have been able to hit a few balls with Krishna and Pete. However, for it to turn out that his first round will be against Wei... (see pic 3, page 2 on mangakansou)

Scribbling in his notebook, he thinks he'd gone up against Wei in the 1R of the Thai Futures. Unusually among pros, Wei has less power than Ei-chan, but his technique considerably high. Furthermore, he has advanced from a world ranking of 774 then to 310 now. He lacks power, but if he's pushed using power, he uses that and counterattacks. That's why the way to fight him, first of all, is with strategy and footwork, not power. Ei-chan plans to attempt to use his way of fighting, which had worked in the qualifiers, and see how far he can go in the main draw. Wei had left behind strong results in Futures overseas. That's a wall Ei-chan hadn't been able to overcome when he went abroad. Ei-chan decides he'll show (Wei or other people or himself?) that he'll overcome it. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Necessity."
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Additions and corrections to the summary: everyone who made it through the prelims are familiar names: Ei-chan, Wei, Okada, and David Miller. Pete notes that Ei-chan's been working hard on his English. Wei doesn't ask if Ei-chan is acquainted with Krishna; he'd just wondered silently to himself. In the part where Watanabe thinks he has to defend his points, the text explains "defend" means maintaining his points, and that points are valid for 1 year (52 weeks) and if he doesn't improve on his results in the same tournament as a year ago, the odds are high that his ranking will deteriorate. Ei-chan's line of likely opponents: Wang Wei (world rank: 310), 1R; Aleksandr Kirilenko (4th seed, world rank: 137), 2R; Yoshimichi Daiki (7th seed, world rank: 178), QF; Vittorio Storace (2nd seed, world rank: 121), SF; Tim Williams (1st seed, world rank: 97), F. Assuming Pete doesn't pull off an upset, it's only if Watanabe beats Storace that Watanabe might go up against Ei-chan in SF. Krishna would have to defeat Williams first to get to the finals. The next chapter will have a color page and more pages than usual. The teaser blurb says "Ei-chan's Summer Has Come!

Ch. 396
So the chapter opens on the first day of the Challenger main draw with Ei-chan and Coach Aoi on a train, heading to the venue. Ei-chan's reading a tennis magazine (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Coach Aoi notes it's a special feature on Liu Jie, who's currently among the Top 20 in the world. It's a fairly old article, so Aoi asks why Ei-chan's reading it now. Ei-chan explains he thinks it might serve as a reference because
Wang Wei (his 1R opponent) had spoken a bit about himself yesterday. Wei's hometown is in the outskirts of a large city in China and he's now receiving support from Shanghai. And Ei-chan had remembered that the article said Liu Jie had a similar history. Aoi comments he'd heard that promising Chinese athletes receive quite a lot of financial assistance. But that's probably tough because it naturally can put a lot of pressure too. Ei-chan wonders if Wei had also implied that. Aoi adds that China is rapidly developing, and as a result, there seems to be a big difference between the rich and poor, and the urban areas and the suburbs outside those. If Wei's talent was discovered, and he's crawled up to competing here...he probably has a strength they can't comprehend. Ei-chan remembers Wei's words about wanting to become self-reliant. Scene switch to Wei taking a meal and thinking, "Wimbledon, huh...Then is that the reason he'd chosen that defensive position? ... It's a good thing I asked ahead of time." Another scene switch. Natchan arrives and joins Aoi, sitting in the bleachers. The 1R of the Keiryou Challenger starts. Wei and Ei-chan shake hands, hoping for a good game (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). The match begins with Wei's service. Ei-chan thinks Wei might lack power but is good at using his opponent's power, so a simple strong shot is off limits... Wei sends his serve wide. Ei-chan returns it with a forehand cross, giving priority to depth over power. Then he shifts to his forward-tending defensive

position (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Noting the prompt change, Wei returns the ball with a cross. Ei-chan thinks that while Wei is getting started, he's accurate, so in a disadvantageous return game, Ei-chan decides to attack before he can be attacked! He takes another step forward and hits a straight (see pic 4, page 1 on mangakansou). Wei is unable to catch up with the ball: 0-15. Wei notes Ei-chan was even more forward from "that position" than during the prelims, and in addition, the experience (of playing with Ei-chan?) is different from what it had been up to now. The game continues with a serve to the center. Wei immediately moves back after hitting the serve. Noting the change, Ei-chan decides to jolt Wei with a short cross (see pic 5, page 1 on mangakansou), hitting the ball to where he planned. Wei thinks that Ei-chan can't use much of an angle from the center. Ei-chan notes that Wei is able to catch the ball with some leeway. Since the angle was shallow, he wonders if Wei will attack suddenly. Wei hits a slow ball deep crosscourt, which Ei-chan observes maintains the
advantage of Wei's serve. Wei does this while way behind the baseline and it's solid. Ei-chan considers this Wei's strength: even though Wei is 16, he sees through the critical moment calmly. The rally continues. Ei-chan thinks that when his opponent's defensive position is further back, Ei-chan's way of playing will be the same as in the prelims. In this position, Ei-chan has to devise the best option among what's doable. He hits a fast slice to the center and goes to the net, thinking that this way it would be hard to get the ball past him on either side. However, Wei gets a winner past Ei-chan's right (see pic 6, page 1 on mangakansou): 15-15. Ei-chan thinks Wei got him that time. As he'd thought, at the critical moment, Wei is accurate. However, Ei-chan decides to continue this trial. He's confident that even if the trial at the start of the match is a failure, it will turn into a hint for discovering how to win. The next serve is again to the center. Ei-chan returns it with a backhand, thinking the first serve is a high probability and the course is good. Wei puts the ball away with a backhand cross: 30-15. The play continues with a rally. Ei-chan quickly reaches the spot where he'll hit the ball on the slight chance he'll nail down Wei. Wei freezes momentarily. On preventing Wei from counterattacking, Ei-chan goes for a fast attack and takes the point with a forehand cross: 30-30. The play continues with another rally. Wei hits a countercross and goes to the net. Ei-chan thinks that even though Wei was way behind the baseline, he'd sensed the chance and attacked, not letting the chance get away. Ei-chan hits a straight with his backhand, but Wei is able to put the ball away with a volley (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou): 40-30. Wei strikes a triumphant pose. In the next rally, Ei-chan's shot goes out the side, so Wei holds his serve. Analyzing his play, Ei-chan thinks that in the first game it might be said he'd attacked unreasonably early in his return game and was counterattacked, but if the rallies get prolonged, he'll be at a disadvantage while making high-risk attacks. Wei's steadiness and strong composure in competitions and his sensibility...this is the tennis that elevated him to the world 300s at such a young age.
The next game start. Wei remains in the far-back defensive position. Ei-chan notes Wei's choice but thinks he won't let Wei do as Wei likes in Ei-chan's service game. Ei-chan sends his serve to the center. Wei returns this with a backhand. Ei-chan sets up, thinking that in the center, he'll stop his opponent's motion. Once again, Wei freezes momentarily. Ei-chan hits a cross with his forehand. Wei runs after the ball, extends his arm, and returns the ball.
Ei-chan thinks that even if he hits a cross deep while his opponent is way back, if his opponent makes it in time, he'll accelerate further to the open court once again. Wei runs left and right but barely manages to return the ball. Ei-chan decides this is one pattern for when his opponent is way behind the baseline (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). End of

chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Wang Wei." Okay, it looks like this match will last at least 3 chapters, probably more.

Ch. 397
Ei-chan apparently held his serve in a love game. If Wei got any points off Ei-chan it wasn't mentioned. With one game per chapter, this really looks like it will be one of the more epic matches. Details to follow.
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Anyhow, the chapter opens with Ei-chan drawing his racket back for a shot and planning to set something up quickly. Wei is watching Ei-chan closely and notices a shift in his grip. As Ei-chan hits a drop shot, Wei sprints to the net. Ei-chan thinks that in the prelims, the shot would have been a winner, but Wei can get it. Ei-chan also goes forward. Wei manages to return the ball, but Ei-chan's in position to volley and takes the point: 15-0. (Sounds like Ei-chan deliberately telegraphed his drop shot for exactly this sort of development.) Ei-chan exults over the first point. Both players return to their respective baselines. However, Ei-chan thinks he hadn't handed over his advantage but he hadn't been able to simply pull it off. After the first point at the start, Wei had immediately shifted his position backward, and he'd calmly dealt with even Ei-chan's short cross. And he'd also responded to the drop shot just now. Ei-chan considers that to be different from the excellence of Ide's intuition; it could be called an extremely sensitive wariness. Wei's response was fast because he'd narrowed down his options in advance: 1) he can't catch up if a sharp cross to the open court arrives; 2) he'll be in a pinch if a fast ball in the opposite direction comes; and 3) the most unexpected (drop ball). In other words,
Wei has a highly developed ability to imagine the traps that his opponent is likely to set up.
As Ei-chan prepares to serve, he considers what to do to surpass that imagination of Wei's. He settles on an aggressive serve that he can hit with maximum power: a fastball with so much power even Wei can't return it. He serves the ball to the center. Wei's return goes into the net: 30-0. Ei-chan thinks he was able to show he can make a point on Wei even with power. So he plans to use this power in his serves with differences in tempo as a key point. He'll apply the course to various balls and aim for a probability of over 70%. His next serve is a slice that he sends wide. Wei thinks Ei-chan had put pressure on him with a flat, fastball serve, but next he'd put importance on course with a slice that escapes outward. In this short period, he'd improved the power, accuracy, and shot mix of his serves. Apart from that...the speed of his tempo without a pause for thought...even the timing of his strokes are getting better with each ball. Ei-chan hits a strong shot crosscourt and deep. Wei thinks there's a big difference in both Ei-chan's defensive position and tempo since the previous time he'd played against him...and yet Ei-chan's fine control is unchanged from before... It's proof he'd learned to overcome that even in that short time in between. Ei-chan thinks that with the speed of his tempo that surpasses Wei's imagination...he hits winner with a jump shot crosscourt: 40-0. Ei-chan exults in making a point off Wei using the speed of his tempo, even though Wei was keeping a position farther back from the baseline. Wei wonders if Ei-chan will do that much, then corrects himself: he'd had an unpleasant premonition (about Ei-chan) ever since the first time he'd met him. When a player whose name he'd never heard of in the juniors suddenly appears, the player generally has especially high physical ability and has been successful in another sport. However, that's not the case with Ei-chan whose physique is no different from Wei and who appeared in the international arena from Japan with crude language skills. Naturally he'd bounced off the international barrier, and if he goes to Wimbledon, it should have made him realize his (un)suitability for the harsh reality...and

yet... (Ei-chan serves to the center, and Wei returns it.) Wei's thoughts continue: Acceleration, deceleration, timing! Accurate...control! Wei tells himself he has to take it/those on here.
Ei-chan thinks that even though he'd sped up the tempo even further, the point isn't decided. Then he notices that Wei has shifted his defensive position half a step forward—which means Wei is on the lookout against a short cross and a drop shot. Wei thinks Ei-chan should know Wei is on the lookout against a short cross and a drop shot, so Wei expects Ei-chan to hit a deep shot at the very least to maintain his advantage. Ei-chan does as Wei predicts, and Wei decides to resist here. Ei-chan notes his advantage is unchanged but he isn't able to complete his attack. The rally continues. Ei-chan feels his options are being restricted. Wei notes it's a defensive battle, but Ei-chan's tennis has the higher risk, so he concludes it isn't bad. Ei-chan thinks it's difficult to surpass Wei with just power and speed of tempo—just those aren't enough. So he takes a step forward, thinking he has to overcome Wei's strong point, the ability to imagine the opponent's traps. Seeing Ei-chan's move, Wei expects him to try put the ball away using a rising shot... Anticipating Ei-chan will aim for a winner crosscourt, Wei shifts his weight to chase the ball. However, Ei-chan hits a slow slice in the opposite direction, surprising Wei. Game, Maruo, 1-1. (Yep, it was a love game.)
Ei-chan exhales, thinking that it was a slow ball, but he'd pulled it off with one shot because he attacked in the reverse of what Wei expected. He notes that continuing to come up with such ideas is difficult, though. Anyhow, he'd held his serve. Natchan exhales and comments that it somehow seems Ei-chan and Wei are reading each other at a high level. Coach Aoi explains it's because the two are the type who compete using strategy. There's a feeling of tension because of the bewildering changes in tempo, and it's turning into long rallies. Privately, Aoi thinks Wei is a fearsome 16 year old because he hasn't had any errors up to now with this playing style that's error-prone. Wei thinks it doesn't look like he'll be able to break easily. Of course, he also won't let that happen. In which case, it will turn into a tight match. He wonders what Ei-chan will do when one point will decide the match. If it turns into that sort of match with Ei-chan, Wei is confident he won't lose to Ei-chan. End of chapter. The teaser blurb says "Neither Player Draws Back Even Slightly at the Start! The Match Quietly Begins to Shift..." The title of the next chapter is "Insight."

Ch. 398
Wei is apparently manipulating Ei-chan to attack the way Wei wants...at least in Ei-chan's return games. I think Ei-chan has to learn not to take counsel of his fears—to hit an angle shot or drop shot even if Wei is on the lookout for those, and to plan two or three steps ahead of Wei. However, Ei-chan seems to have another weapon left, one he's holding off from using. I wonder, though, how effective it will be when the title of the next chapter is "Wang Wei 2." So in the third game, Wei serves wide and moves back. Coach Aoi thinks this is a skillful way of getting a sense of distance from Ei-chan who's trying to play closer to the net. Ei-chan returns the ball with a forehand cross, and then Wei hits it down the line.
Ei-chan gets around the ball and cuts in for a forehand, intending to use a fast tempo since Wei had moved back in his serve game. However, as Ei-chan is about to hit the ball, he sees Wei take a step forward (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou), and he changes his mind: if Wei is on the lookout against an angle shot, Ei-chan decides to hit the ball deep. He does so, but Wei returns the ball with a backhand down the line (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou) to take the point: 15-0. Aoi thinks Ei-chan wants to proactively challenge Wei with an angle or drop shot, but because Wei senses this and doesn't allow Ei-chan to do so, Wei is turning it into his advantage. Play continues, and Ei-chan wonders if there's anything

he can do to break down Wei's posture in a return game by deploying a surprise or using rapidity of tempo or power. Wei thinks that if it's too much for Ei-chan to attack, then Wei's chances expand by making Ei-chan run and making him hit (balls the way Wei wants). Wei sends a ball to the open court (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan thinks he's risking the match on a point where he'll break Wei, and he wants to steal the advantage. Again, Wei hits a ball that makes Ei-chan run. Ei-chan returns it with a strong backhand, thinking "This is it...!" Unfortunately, it's just barely out: 30-0. Aoi thinks that on top of Ei-chan being made to play an essentially high-risk tennis, he had hit a difficult shot. Because Wei lacks power, his way of playing during his service is like an adult's. Ei-chan takes the next point: 30-15. Then in the next, his shot goes into the net: 40-15. It ends with Wei going to the net and putting the ball away with a volley. Scribbling in his notebook, Ei-chan thinks that his inability to break using the tennis that had worked during the prelims means he can't win as things stand. Therefore, he ought to have used his next move/trick/technique...But...
Wei thinks that if he carries on until match point the way he has, he feels he can completely overwhelm Ei-chan, but...he's worried that Ei-chan is still going to try something... Ei-chan takes position to serve, wondering if Wei intends to move his defensive position backward here, but Ei-chan thinks that on his part, he has no reason to do so. During his service, Ei-chan's able to continue producing change-of-pace ideas at his defensive position, while facing an extremely danger-conscious Wei, and...manages a decisive blow... It was a hardship with Wei's sensitivity and the errors due to Ei-chan's high-risk tennis, but...with trial and error, he succeeded in defending his advantage and held his serve. Game count: 2-2. Aoi thinks in the start, the two are a good match...it's just that their tennis styles are so different they could be said to be in contrast: Wei who plays while being very cautious of the evolving Ei-chan vs. Ei-chan who keeps attacking, aiming for an even one-game earlier break. For Ei-chan who is moving sooner, it's a point where he wants a one-step lead, but...
Natchan is also watching with a serious look. The match continues. Pete calls out: "Hey! Krishna, how's Maruo doing?" Krishna replies that it's like Ei-chan's stuck trying to figure out how to break down a wall that looks like he can break it but hasn't been able to. However, Krishna has a feeling a big development is about to take place anytime now. Game count: 4-5, Wei leading. The next game is Ei-chan's service. He thinks he'd wanted wanted to break even a bit sooner but he hasn't been able to so far. Plus, Wei's mileage (distance traveled) up to now is longer since Wei is playing behind the baseline, but Ei-chan's the one having a harder time breathing. His tennis has him playing closer to the net, so his mileage is shorter but he repeatedly accelerates and decelerates... On the other hand, Wei's mileage is longer but because he keeps running at a constant average speed, the difference is starting to show... (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou) However, Ei-chan had been able to anticipate to a certain extent that this would happen. Flashback to the start of July: Ei-chan's training hard in that forward defensive position. Aoi calls for a break. Breathing heavily, Ei-chan sits down and takes off his shoes. Aoi comments that the Keiryou Challenger is a month away... He says it's a question of how long Ei-chan can use this way of fighting, because Ei-chan can only train in this. He
notes that even if Ei-chan has begun to fight in the forward defensive position, being able to continue it for a number of matches would be quite difficult. So he suggests Ei-chan bring his matches to an early end or come up with match strategies where he doesn't hit using a fast tempo. End of flashback. Ei-chan takes position to serve, thinking that it was for this sort of time that he'd kept his change-of-pace attacks using forehand straights to a minimum up to now today. Wei thinks that if Ei-chan still continues his dangerous attack here, if Wei considers things normally, Wei should continue as he has... However, this probably won't be

that way... He notes that Ei-chan has hit extremely few forehand straights up to now...that's still a variable that might change the situation when it comes... Ei-chan thinks Wei, who can take the set if he takes this one (game), has to be setting up something. However, it's still Ei-chan's service...and Ei-chan wants to use his weapon when it will have maximum effect. He serves to the center. Wei displays a prompt response (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan wonders if it's come (what he thinks Wei is setting up). End of chapter.

Ch. 399

So the chapter starts with a flashback to Wei's childhood. In a group of kids, he's the only one in short sleeves and he looks cold. The coach asks him about (why he's not wearing) a jacket. One of the other kids whispers to another that Wei is poor so he couldn't buy one. Wei eyes all the kids. The coach dismisses the problem, saying Wei will warm up once they start moving, so he starts them running. Wei tells one of the kids that the jacket that kid is wearing is his (Wei's) and to return it. The kid claims ownership and that it probably just looks like one Wei had worn. Wei argues the kid had taken it, knowing it's Wei's. Wei doesn't just suspect it's the same; he'd been watching that kid's movements, face, and even gaze. He speculates aloud that the kid hadn't taken it just because he wanted it and Wei's poverty, but because the kid had been ordered to by the one who'd been whispering. He says that he'll forgive the first kid if the kid returns his jacket. On meeting Wei's eyes, the first kid looks momentarily frightened, but he then tells the coach that Wei is trying to steal his jacket. When the coach asks what's up, the first kid says Wei is accusing him falsely. Wei then reaches into the jacket pocket and pulls out the lining—which has his name written on it (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). The coach inquires into the matter, and Wei notices that the two kids who had been whispering to each other at the start look disappointed and the one who'd mentioned Wei's poverty even clicks his tongue. Wei silently scolds the kids, wishing they'd use their brains for tennis rather than this sort of thing... For him who's being sponsored by the city and has to get stronger even a second sooner...their thinking is totally transparent to him. End of flashback. So the 10th game starts with Ei-chan thinking that Wei, who had moved back from the baseline, has come forward, resuming the usual playing position. Wei returns the ball strongly. Ei-chan notes that Wei has suddenly increased his power. Cursing, Ei-chan thinks their postures are equal and he'll again manage somehow. Wei remembers that although Ei-chan's forehand shots have mostly been crosses, Wei hasn't been able to break. He'd been disturbed at the start by Ei-chan's power, changes in tempo, and rapidity of tempo. After that, because he'd been outdone skillfully with a moderate mix of slow down-the-line shots...they'd reached this point without his having made Ei-chan hit a decisive shot with a forehand straight. As a result, he hadn't noticed he's being forced well into the deuce court for a while (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou)...which means he'd been taken in by Ei-chan the way Ei-chan had wanted. Wei moves further forward to play. Noticing this, Ei-chan concludes that Wei has shifted several gears higher and wonders what Wei is thinking. Wei feels confident of winning the critical moment, but he wants to pinch off the budding danger ahead of time by bringing about a development where Ei-chan is forced to use a forehand straight! He hits the ball toward Ei-chan's deuce court sideline (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). Ei-chan thinks that this is an important first point at a critical moment, and wonders whether he should pick a fight while their postures are equal. Wei tells himself he won't overlook even minor changes in Ei-chan's movements, expression, gaze...and mentally orders Ei-chan to quickly pull out that thing Ei-chan is hiding. However, Ei-chan returns with strong cross along an even tighter course. Wei

decides that if Ei-chan is still persisting in preserving it (his strategy)...Wei hits a strong forehand straight (see pic 4, page 1 on mangakansou), but it's just barely out: 15-0. Ei-chan notes the danger and that Wei had read him, so if Ei-chan can't go on the same way he has up to now... he exhales, then serves to the center. Wei pulls off a return dash. Ei-chan notes the forceful approach and that a down-the-line is open (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou). He hits a lob...but it's out: 15-15.
Wei wonders if Ei-chan intends to withhold his forehand straight to the bitter end. Ei-chan wants to avoid a prolonged drain on his stamina, so he can't drop this set to Wei, and he wants to somehow hold while playing the way he has. Then in the final chance to break (his next return game), he wants to lay a trap... He realizes his shots are being restricted, but while his cross still works... Ei-chan hits a forehand cross, which Wei quickly responds to—and Ei-chan freezes for a moment. Wei takes the point with a cross: 15-30. Ei-chan concludes the situation is bad...his forehand cross has become quite predictable. In the next rally, Ei-chan's backhand straight decides the point: 30-30. Next, Wei's shot goes into the net: 40-30. Then Ei-chan's forehand cross goes out the side: deuce. Ei-chan takes position to serve, wondering if it (probably the forehand cross) might already be at its limit. As Wei prepares to receive, he speculates that if Ei-chan will bring it (what Ei-chan is hiding) out, it might be here where Ei-chan absolutely can't lose (the game). Ei-chan sends his serve wide. Wei returns it. Ei-chan quickly gets into position to hit, swings back, and sends the ball crosscourt. Wei returns it, noting he's being forced well into the deuce court. He mentally tells Ei-chan that if it's coming, come on! (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou) Both players look at each other closely (see pic 3, page 2 on mangakansou). Then Ei-chan...puts the ball away with a cross. Advantage: Maruo. Smiling in admiration(?), Wei thinks "You bastard..." (can be translated as just "This fellow...") End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Boundary Line."
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Corrections to the flashback: Wei was watching all the kids. The kid who mentioned Wei's poverty wasn't talking to the one who took Wei's jacket. And Wei's scolding of the other kids was just in his head; he hadn't said it aloud. There's also no smacking of lips in anticipation, more of clicking the tongue in disappointment. I fixed the summary to reflect this. The teaser blurb says "Ei-chan opposes Wang Wei with tactics at the critical moment that is Wei's forte...His next move is?!" Also, the next chapter will be in double issue, meaning the week after next won't have a magazine release, probably due to the Obon holiday.

Ch. 400
Okay, so the 10th game ends with Wei's shot going into the net. Ei-chan holds his serve. Game count: 5-5. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose, exultant that he'd overcome Wei's resistance with the power of his serve and that he'd come that far without using his forehand straight. He intends to make a challenge in the next game and then hold the one after that to take the set. Wei thinks that even though he'd known what Ei-chan intended, things have gotten more difficult with the score tied. The longer Ei-chan's able to conserve his (forehand straight?) shot, the more effective it becomes as a weapon. Wei believes the odds that Ei-chan will use that weapon here (the 11th game) are high, so Wei can't drop his guard. Nevertheless, if he plays defensively, it will be easier to receive the attack of that weapon. The 11th game starts with Wei sending his serve to the side and thinking this is the crucial moment. Returning the ball, Ei-chan notes that Wei hadn't moved his defensive position backward and had come at him aggressively. Wei hits a forehand cross, thinking he'll capitalize on the advantage of his serve and probe calmly while attacking first. Ei-chan

considers the ball and decides: "This is it." Wei thinks, "Well, come on...!" And Ei-chan puts away the ball with a forehand straight: 0-15. Wei isn't able to move a single step (see pic 1, page 1 on mangakansou). Pete's shocked. Wei thinks that while he'd expected it to come, his body didn't react at all. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose, thinking that as a result of continuing to hold it back for 10 games, he'd seized the initiative in the return game with a winner. Coach Aoi also strikes a small triumphant pose of his own. Krishna wonders how far Ei-chan can leverage this. Pete is complimentary: "Awesome..." Wei tells himself it doesn't mean he's being beaten with a miraculous ball. It's just that his body hasn't gotten used to that ball. If he plays while being careful of that from now on... He decides he won't let Ei-chan hit it (forehand straight) and he'll put away the ball before it comes. He sends his serve wide. Ei-chan returns it with a backhand. Wei returns that toward Ei-chan's backhand. Noting the change, Ei-chan thinks that if Wei is aiming for his backhand...he adopts a position that leaves the forehand side open (see pic 2, page 1 on mangakansou). Wei sees this but refuses to take the invitation, persisting in hitting to Ei-chan's backhand. Ei-chan quickly gets into the hitting position and swings back, thinking that if the ball is hit to where he is, he can get into the hitting position that much sooner, and if he can get into position fast, then...his backhand straight is a winner (see pic 3, page 1 on mangakansou). 0-30. Pete realizes that with
this, Wei has lost his target. Play continues with a rally. Wei returns the ball deep. Ei-chan notes that this time Wei's aiming for Ei-chan's feet. He agrees that it me it makes it hard to use his long-awaited weapon, but he tells himself not to be impatient. Because even if it's his opponent's serve, if the balls are coming his way, it won't be rough going. Wei thinks that this is being too afraid of Ei-chan's weapon, so he's surrendered the advantage of his serve. Either way, he has to get used to the straight to resolve the situation. He can only play. He decides to defend aggressively by increasing his power. He hits a forehand cross, inviting Ei-chan to use that weapon...and Ei-chan takes the point with a powerful straight (see pic 1, page 2 on mangakansou): 0-40. Wei thinks it's no good. The difference between his expectation and the effective speed is too big! Aoi cheers: "Yeah, yeah. That's good!" Pete notes that Ei-chan now has 3 chances to break. Play continues with another rally. Wei tells himself to capitalize on his advantage without fear. Ei-chan thinks that with the lifting of the ban on his forehand straight, the breadth of his change of pace expanded suddenly... precisely because Wei has a well-honed ability to imagine danger...the shots that couldn't take the point earlier...can now decide the point...or they should. He hits a drop shot and Wei isn't able to move (see pic 2, page 2 on mangakansou). Ei-chan strikes yet another triumphant pose at finally breaking. End of chapter. The title of the next chapter is "Opposition" or "Counter." Since this chapter is in a double issue, there's no Baby Steps next week.

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Ei-chan looks very impressive in this chapter. And Yoshimichi (the guy who forfeited to Ei-chan) and Ooguro (Ike's practice partner during the All-Japan) look impressed. The teaser blurb says "A Surging Attack at the Crucial Moment! The Match Finally Shifted...!" Now I'm hoping the next chapter has Ei-chan taking the first set, and then the second set is just summarized. Like "Wei puts up a fight but..." Especially since Ei-chan's potential QF opponent is watching. Maybe as Triton87 says, Yoshimichi (and other national team players) will be the "opposition" in that chapter.

Ch. 401

So the chapter starts with audience reactions to Ei-chan finally breaking Wei's serve: Someone ranked in the 1400s cornered someone ranked in the 300s! Well, it's gotten interesting!; Wang Wei's a youngster who's currently attracting the most attention in China; Even though the match is a showdown between teenagers, it's quite a high level mentally. Coach Aoi notices that the number of onlookers has increased. During the break, Ei-chan scribbles on his notebook, thinking that he'd gotten through by using the straight that he'd been holding back all this time. In the past, he hadn't broken Wei's serve even once, but he'd used that experience, and with training and tactics, he'd broken Wei at Wei's forte (the critical moment). He trembles as he realizes he's really gotten stronger. However, he notes that he's spending more physical strength than Wei. If he doesn't take the first set, the tables can be turned on him and he'll be at a disadvantage. If he takes the next game, then it can be said that he's on par with Wei. He concludes this is a do-or-die situation where Wei will do anything to break back. Wei thinks that he couldn't get the drop shot because he'd been that completely disturbed at the baseline. Before that, he had to make Ei-chan hit the forehand straight, which he had to chase faster. However, he concludes that his moving his position backward, in response Ei-chan's way of playing forward, which is totally different from before, wasn't wrong. On the tennis court, if you move your defensive position 1 meter forward, the world changes completely: the ability to attack increases overwhelmingly but at the same time, it should be a double-edged sword in that it requires fast reactions and footwork. For Ei-chan to learn that much in this short a time...Wei thinks he couldn't have imagined such progress and wonders if it's connected to Ei-chan's having gone to Wimbledon. He reminds himself that he hasn't lost the set yet. The umpire call time. Olivier Pouget, Wei's French coach, thinks he's rarely seen Wei being beaten this way. As Ei-chan sets up to serve, he notes that Wei has taken a position farther back from the baseline than usual, even though it's Wei's return game. He'd expected otherwise, that Wei would come forward aggressively and take risks. So Ei-chan decides to leverage that and retain his advantage with his serve. He serves to the center. Wei returns it. Ei-chan think that if Wei is that far back, then a cross is effective. Wei returns the cross, thinking this is fine. Ei-chan notes Wei hit the ball to his forehand and wonders if Wei isn't on the lookout against (his forehand straight). So he decides to hit a forehand straight and Wei's right there anticipating it. However, when the straight comes,
Wei isn't able to move: 15-0. Wei thinks he'd been expecting the shot but he hadn't been able to completely disregard the cross, which his body had gotten used to. Ei-chan notes that even though Wei hadn't been beaten (with the last point), Wei was still way behind the baseline...even though Ei-chan's taking a risk and he's more afraid of being counterattacked first. He again serves to the center. A rally ensues with Ei-chan wondering what Wei plans. Wei hits another shot to Ei-chan's forehand. Ei-chan questions whether Wei isn't on the lookout against Ei-chan's straight, so he returns the ball with a strong shot crosscourt. Wei manages to return it, taking Ei-chan by surprise, but the ball goes into the net: 30-0. Ei-chan acknowledges the second point, but notes that Wei's response is improving. He entertains the possibility that Wei's prepared to drop the set in trying to get used to the situation. He thinks that if Wei takes careless risks and loses this game, the situation would continue into the next set. He wonders if it's bold, but concludes that Wei being steady, and even if Wei loses the set, Wei is confident of being able to win. Wei thinks his footwork is still crude, but the sense of discomfort is gradually disappearing. If it disappears completely, he has a chance of turning the tables on Ei-chan. He tells himself to watch the reality until it's difficult. Ei-chan serves wide, and Wei returns it. Ei-chan notes the serve was good, so he decides to go for a rapid development and swings back. Wei reminds himself to crush the obstacles in

front of him calmly one by one. Ei-chan hits the ball down the line, but Wei reacts without hesitation and manages to return it with a cross. Noting that the return is weak, Ei-chan goes to the net and volleys with a jump shot, putting away the ball: 40-0. However, even though Ei-chan is at set point, Wei's the one who strikes a triumphant pose which Krishna points out. Pete agrees, speculating that Wei might have put up resistance. Wei thinks it's about time things start going his way. The game continues with a rally. Ei-chan considers the situation bad. His weapon, the forehand straight, has a time limit. If Wei gets used to a certain uniform forehand straight, it will lose its effectiveness. Even though it's a weapon that had taken him 10 games to use, Ei-chan wonders if he's now in danger. So before Wei renders it powerless...Ei-chan hits another straight and Wei reacts instantly. Ei-chan notes that Wei was able to get into position and set up perfectly. He mentally challenges Wei to come on! End of chapter.
The teaser blurb says "It was aimed for! What will come?!" The title of the next chapter is "Ends and Means." It will have a color article and more pages than usual.
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Okay, the more I read this chapter, the more I'm disappointed in the development. I mean what the heck?! In the first point of the game, Wei isn't able to react to the straight because he supposedly hadn't been able to completely disregard the cross. Ei-chan hit a cross for the second point—which Wei managed to respond to. That should have reinforced the danger of the cross. And yet the very next time Ei-chan hit a straight, Wei's able to return it properly albeit with a weak shot?! When Wei is apparently trying out new footwork?! There's no mention of Ei-chan's shots losing power, so this development doesn't make sense. And as my brother says, what's with Wei's triumphant pose when Wei didn't really struggle to handle Ei-chan's forehand straight? Ei-chan only hit a forehand straight twice in Wei's service game, and in this game only three times. By the fourth time Ei-chan used it, Wei managed to get the ball over the net. MEH!

Ch. 402
So ch.402 starts with Ei-chan thinking that if the down-the-line is no longer effective, he absolutely has to take the set here (with this game). Wei then hits a drop shot, surprising Ei-chan. Krishna judges it as Wei's having set up perfectly with perfect timing that had rooted Ei-chan to the spot. However, the ball bounces off the net and returns to Wei's side of the court, giving Ei-chan the first set: 7-5. The audience cheers. Natchan sighs in relief. Someone comments that if Wei had pulled off the last drop shot, he might have turned the tables on Ei-chan. Someone else says that since the lower-ranked Ei-chan has taken the lead, the match has become much more interesting. Pete speculates that Wei's having given maximum priority to getting used to Ei-chan's down-the-line is in line with Wei's personality, but he also believes Wei also seems to be planning something. Krishna agrees. Pete adds that he wants to see it but notes that their time (probably scheduled matches) is coming up, and he suggests they get going. So he and Krishna leave (whoops, no intro to Natchan, then). During the break, Ei-chan thinks he'd wanted to use his forehand straight effectively a little longer, but the development can't be helped. Since he'd taken the set, he's capitalized on it. However, he remembers the final drop shot and notes that Wei's form
was very clean without anything strange to distinguish it, so it's hard to tell Wei would hit a drop shot until just before Wei hits one. Taking the first set was also physically draining, so Ei-chan wants to avoid a full set. If the odds that his situation with become unfavorable as more time passes, the essential condition to win is to bring the match to a quick end by raising his gear from hereon. Wei's coach reminds himself that Wei had chosen the sure

path to victory even if it's difficult. Wei thinks he'd been tricked by a Japanese guy of his generation using strategy and wonders if this is the true form of Ei-chan's mysterious fearsomeness (apparently referring to Krishna's comment in ch.395). Wei's confident he can win if the match goes a full set, but the problem is how to make it that far. Olivier then claps, catching Wei's attention, and shouts that it's okay, that Wei can definitely win, and that Wei is special. Flashback to the Riu Jie Tennis Clinic where Riu Jie demands why Wei is here in this level. When another coach asks what Jie meant by that, Jie explains Wei should be in the top-junior class. At that time, Jie was 23 years old, ranked No.1 in China and No.29 in the world. Jie asks whether it's because of Wei's small physique and lack of power that they didn't realize (his proper class). Wei is shocked. The other coach points out that Wei is a beginner who'd first held a racket when was scouted 6 months earlier. Jie replies that was precisely why he says so. He asks if there's any other kid capable of such a swing within 6 months. the other coach agrees that Wei's form is clean, but... Then Jie counters that he'd said "swing." He explains that the swing is necessary to baseball and golf, not just tennis. A series of motions is important, starting from the rotation of the hips, then using the shoulders, elbow, and wrist in turn, in order to convey power to the ball. The best swing—in other words, one that produces the most power with the least effort—takes even a pro years to raise it to its maximum efficacy, even though everyone is different, due to individual body types, musculature, and reflexes. Jie points out that despite all that, Wei has already learned it. Jie asks for Wei's name and then has him hit one more ball. Jie points out that the power from the rotation of Wei's hips is amplified to the fullest by his shoulders, elbow, and wrist. Of course, Wei is still immature physically, but what's really important is knowing how to use his physical strength. Jie says Wei's swing is a talent and acknowledges Wei is a special athlete. He asks Wei where Wei had learned his swing. Wei replies he'd always been copying Jie. Jie notes that his swing is kind of different; however, by some chance, how Jie swings might be a good match for Wei's body. Jie tells the other coach that Wei ought to be promoted to the top class and provided with as much assistance as possible. Wei asks Jie what the pinnacle of the (tennis) world is like. Jie replies that it's a place where you do nothing but compete. However, if you can get there, there's no other place as happy, because you can do everything you think is correct, you can live however you want to live using your own strength. It's a free place in the true sense of the word. End of flashback. Wei thinks of the Grand Slam and remembers Ei-chan's conversation with Krishna about Ei-chan having signed up for Wimbledon. Then he thinks he'll go too, by his own power (on his own merits). Olivier mentally calls Wei a "Cinderella boy" who's aiming to surpass Riu Jie in the Chinese tennis world. He believes that Wei has done well to have risen in the ranks this far, that the world is finally paying attention to Wei, and that Wei doesn't have the time to fail in a place like this. Coach Aoi thinks that Ei-chan has looked good up to now, and that Ei-chan should have stamina left what with Wei having fallen for Ei-chan's tactics and things having gone well. He notes that many pros retired without being able to break out of the lower tour. However, Wei's still young and his body is no doubt still developing, so he has a promising future as a top pro on the level of Ike. He concludes this might really be an important match for Ei-chan in order for him to break out of the lower tour even a little sooner. The chair umpire calls time. Ei-chan takes position to receive, thinking that he was able to fight 10 games in the first set without using a certain shot. Since he's no longer restricted, he can play as he wishes. He plans to continue moving even faster, so he has to continue producing even better ideas. Wei serves wide. Ei-chan returns it deep crosscourt, noting that Wei's defensive position is more forward this time and wondering if Wei also plans to oppose him directly. Then he notices the angle of Wei's wrist. Wei hits a shallow forehand slice, taking

Ei-chan by surprise. Ei-chan manages to return it, berating himself for not realizing it would be so short, because it could have been a chance (to put away the ball). He can't tell what shot Wei is going to hit until the very last moment. He concludes he's still at a disadvantage, but that he'd returned the ball to a good spot. Wei remembers Jie's advice that ultimately, the advantage of an efficient swing isn't just in product a lot of power from a little strength, it's being able to put off the choice of what kind of shot to hit until the very last moment, compared to many inefficient swings. Wei hits a lob, and Ei-chan judges it will be in. He catches up to the ball and returns it. Wei hits another shallow shot, this time an angle cross. Ei-chan's return goes into the net: 15-0.
Ei-chan notes that Wei's steadiness and composure and lack of reliance on power haven't changed, but Wei's style of attack has changed a bit. Wei has returned to a more forward defensive position, possibly because he's gotten used to Ei-chan rapid deployment. Since Wei had lost the first set by playing defensively, he might be coming to take the second set proactively. If that's what Wei is thinking, then the current deployment is: 1) forward, 2) backward, 3) forward. Wei will be making Ei-chan move forward and backward. As Wei tosses the ball for his next serve, Ei-chan wonder if that means it's that sort of thing (possibly something Ei-chan had read about Riu Jie's style?). End of chapter.

Ch. 403
So ch.403 starts with Wei hitting a spin serve that escapes quite widely, forcing Ei-chan to come forward to return it. Ei-chan wonders if Wei is choosing to hit serves that draws Ei-chan that far forward. Wei then sends the ball deep to Ei-chan's forehand side. Wei's next shot is again deep, but the one after that is a shallow angle shot—confirming Ei-chan's speculation that Wei's attacking by moving Ei-chan forward and backward. So Ei-chan goes to the net since shallow balls are quite risky even for Wei, which Ei-chan intends to convert into a chance. He mentally challenges Wei: Come on! Wei hits another lob, surprising Ei-chan who's unable to catch up with it: 30-0. Ei-chan thinks that Wei got him, also that front-and-back motions are more tiring compared to left-and-right motions. He concludes that Wei has realized Ei-chan's using a physically strenuous way of attacking, so Wei is striking at that point. That's not all: drop shots and lobs are shots that aren't normally used that frequently and Wei is skillful with those particular shots. Since Ei-chan can't differentiate between those shots and an ordinary ground stroke until just before Wei hits the shot, Ei-chan's one step behind no matter what. As Ei-chan prepares to receive, he thinks that it's an extreme strategy that calmly uses Wei's own forte for maximum benefit during this close fight. And Wei has probably had it in mind since the second half of the first set. That's why Wei was able to counter Ei-chan's conservation of his forehand straight so calmly. When Ei-chan thinks of it that way, even if Ei-chan is currently leading, Wei's winning vision is more distinct than Ei-chan's. As Wei tosses the ball to serve, Ei-chan concludes that this is the height of the wall of the world's lower tour. Wei serves wide. Ei-chan returns it, keeping in mind Wei's forward-backward tactic with the ball. Ei-chan successfully predicts a drop shot and sprints to the net, surprising Wei.
Ei-chan manages to return the ball deep, thinking he can handle it, even if Wei hits a lob. However, Wei sinks the ball at Ei-chan's feet and Ei-chan's return goes into the net: 40-0. Ei-chan realizes that because he'd been on the lookout for a lob, his back/hips had been out of place. Wei decides this way is good, and Olivier smiles. Play continues with a rally.
Ei-chan realizes Wei had created an open court and wonders if Wei will hit another drop shot, but he second-guesses himself. Then Wei really does hit a drop shot, taking the audience and Ei-chan by surprise. Ei-chan fails to reach the ball: Game, Wang Wei, 1-0,

second set. Someone in the audience shouts that Wei is probably hitting too many drop shots and marvels at how confident he is. Ei-chan thinks he'd anticipated it, but he hadn't been able to get it. Sure he can't tell until just before it's hit, but since he hasn't had any experience with this different deployment until now, he'd hesitated for a moment after all and applies the brakes—and that applies even further burden on his body. He concludes that in which case, he absolutely has to clinch the second set as he'd thought. So in order to break first, he'll raise the gears for his reaction and acceleration to the max and win in a brief decisive battle. Ei-chan serves wide. Wei returns the ball, and is surprised to see Ei-chan already in position to hit the ball, noting that Ei-chan has gotten even faster. Ei-chan returns the ball crosscourt for a winner: 15-0. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose: "Yeah!" Wei wonders if Ei-chan is aiming to manage to hold on, unafraid of exhaustion. Play continues with a rally. Wei thinks that Ei-chan's attitude of not running away is praiseworthy, but wonders why Ei-chan intentionally chose that difficult path—even though that's a development Wei is hoping for. Wei hits another drop shot. The audience considers the drop shot a preemptive attack in a return game. Noting the repetition, Ei-chan sprints forward and returns the ball. Coach Aoi judges that all things considered, Wei is sending the ball to a nasty spot. He notes that the difficulty of coping with balls sent forward and backward is having to bend your back the best you can if it's a low ball close to the net. When Wei hits a lob, Aoi thinks that for a high ball that is compelling you to step backward while paying attention to your opponent in front of you... (Ei-chan notes that Wei has again sent the ball to the back, and moves back, keeping his eyes on the ball.) Aoi's thought continues: however, if you reach the point where you hit these... (Ei-chan thinks it's a chance to turn around and counterattack!) Ei-chan thrills the audience by pulling off a high volley to take the point: 30-0. Ei-chan thinks he'll take it all. Wei thinks a return game is difficult—as he'd expected. Ei-chan hits a forehand straight for the next point: 40-0. Wei takes the next point with a cross: 40-15. Then Wei hits a lob beyond Ei-chan's reach, but it goes out: Game, Maruo, 1-1, second set. The audience is amazed by the seesawing score and how both sides manage to hold their serves perfectly. Play continues with Wei thinking that if things keep on this way, he definitely can take (the set). On the other hand, Ei-chan intends to finish the match even one game sooner. End of chapter. The teaser blurb says "Wang Wei's precise and persistent offensive! Will Ei-chan be able to move back and forth completely?!" The title of the next chapter is "Reply," which I guess means Ei-chan's reply to Wei's attack.

Ch. 404

Okay, so ch.404 opens with Ei-chan thinking that if Wei intends to move him front and back, then if Ei-chan makes sure of it when he goes forward, it will link to the attack. Then it comes at that point, it might be an angle shot or a drop shot or... Switch over to Wei who's thinking that if Ei-chan is on the lookout forward...Wei hits a fast ball deep toward the baseline, throwing off Ei-chan's pace. Ei-chan notes the shift, thinking he hasn't been able to predict what shot Wei will hit and he considers Wei's swing astounding. He can only move after he's sure of the shot, even if he's a step behind. Wei hits a drop shot. Ei-chan manages to return it. However, Wei puts the ball away with a straight that Ei-chan fails to touch. Wei holds: 2-1. The audience notes that the match remains even, but Wei was the first to launch a surprise attack in the second set and the times where Wei manipulates Ei-chan have increased. Ei-chan curses the development, wishing he'd been able to react half a step more quickly to the drop shot. Coach Aoi thinks that not chasing a ball you can't catch is also a way to conserve stamina; however, because of Ei-chan's good reactions, there's a chance (Ei-chan

will catch the ball), so there's no way he can't not chase the ball. Olivier thinks Wei's opponent is also good, but Ei-chan's no match for Wei's swing talent.
Play continues with Ei-chan thinking that during his serve, he'll put the ball away before Wei moves. He hits a winner down the line: Game, Maruo, 2-2, second set. The crowd cheers Ei-chan's immediate counter. Natchan: "Okay!" Wei gives Ei-chan a dark look, while Ei-chan exults. He thinks he's recovered, using the maximum time between points. The drain on his energies is relentless; he accelerates and responds with full power even during Wei's serve. He plans to move fast enough to make the shot on time, after confirming Wei's swing, and then to break even one point sooner. Wei serves wide. Ei-chan returns it. Wei thinks that with continuing to move this much, Ei-chan doesn't show any signs of a deterioration in his performance at this point. But he's sure that Ei-chan's fatigue will show up at some point. Until then, Wei plans to make Ei-chan run by hitting his specialty shots. Ei-chan thinks he wants to settle the point as soon as possible, but prohibits himself from being excessive. Wei reminds himself to be calm even during the critical moment, to be patient. Ei-chan tells himself to make sure of the special shot. But when Wei hits a drop shot, Ei-chan's taken by surprise and he fails to reach the ball in time. The audience is impressed that the drop shot worked again and wonders if it's something Ei-chan can't get. Natchan and Aoi don't look happy. Play continues with Ei-chan thinking that he'll pull a change of pace from the fast deployment, so he too hits a drop shot to take the point. The crowd cheers again: the pacing of Maruo's drop shot is amazing!; I've never seen this sort of match where drop shots keep making the points!; it's turned into an outrageous match! Play continues. (Ohhh! Yoshimichi is one of the spectators!) The score climbs evenly, finally reaching 5-5. The circumstances of both players steadily become more difficult: for Ei-chan, physically; for Wei, mentally, since he'll lose if he drops this set. However, Wei believes that if they're both in the same crisis, he doesn't feel like he'll lose. He'd come from nothing and gotten this far. He'd started from a crisis (referring to his childhood circumstances), and because he'd lived in difficulty, he's able to see through a match calmly. As Ei-chan charges the net, Wei hits a lob. Ei-chan steps back and chases the ball. Wei thinks it's impossible for him to yield first while both sides are increasingly beset by crises. Ei-chan goes for a smash, but it's out: Game, Wang Wei, 6-5, second set. During the break, Ei-chan thinks it's no good: even though he's able to hold, he isn't able to take it one step further and break. He eats a banana to recover physically, but as he writes his notes, his right calf twinges. He thinks that if he considers gearing down on his reaction and acceleration, he can do that any time. If he conserves his strength that way, he can have something left for the final set. Then he's struck by the trend of his thoughts and smacks his cheeks, telling himself that's wrong. What came to mind was a tactic to run away because he's currently having difficulties. (Obviously Monma's influence is showing in Ei-chan's thoughts here.) Even if he knows from experience that running away works well, that's just for the near future. Beyond that, it would present a much bigger obstacle. He thinks he can't defeat Wei by playing that way. There's no point in if it's not a strategy that he doesn't devise proactively and but "because it's difficult"—especially with Wei, who's a rival of the same generation. If Ei-chan is aiming to break through the lower tour to play internationally...Wei is an opponent Ei-chan absolutely mustn't run away from. The chair umpire calls time and both players go back on court. Ei-chan takes a deep breath, thinking that if he can hold even if it's difficult, then he'll stick to his current strategy. He plans to hold, and then win the tiebreak. He'll maintain his performance until the very end, so that he won't show any weakness. Ei-chan serves wide. Wei returns it, noting that it still hasn't weakened. Ei-chan thinks that if he has the advantage, he'll move fast...and control a ball that will build on his advantage even further. Wei returns the shot with a slow ball deep, thinking that if he

uses the tempo in moving Ei-chan front and back, it would be even more tiring (for Ei-chan). Ei-chan notes he has to adjust his hitting position more finely (apparently referring to his footwork) with a slow ball. As Ei-chan draws back to swing, his left leg jerks, and his shot goes into the net: 0-15. End of chapter.

Ch. 405

Okay, ch.405 is titled "Breakthrough." It starts with Ei-chan realizing his control of his legs had wavered because the tempo had suddenly slowed (basically a footwork problem). Wei thinks what happened just now wasn't Ei-chan's leg slipping but a drop in control that's clearly due to fatigue—the first visible sign. Wei smiles and takes a step forward. Ei-chan notices the shift in Wei's defensive position—it's the most forward that Wei has set himself until now. He wonders if Wei intends to take advantage of that wobble in Ei-chan's leg control. Ei-chan had bet on taking this set, discarding the final set, but he's going faster than he'd expected when he has to have this set. He considers how to cope with his fatigue without running away from Wei. He remembers he'd lost to Araya and
Kanda because of fatigue, which had made him realize his limits—but he'd managed until that happened (when his mind had forced his body to quit). Based on that, he hits a fairly slow serve with a fairly fast spin, because Wei isn't the power-type player who'd try to put away such a ball with a strong blow. Ei-chan thinks that if he reduces the pace for all his change of pace, then his acceleration will also be reduced and the burden on him will decrease. While the ball is slower, he won't gear down on offense because he'll take more risks using control: he hits a forward slice that bounces just short of the baseline. Wei thinks that if Ei-chan wants to slow the pace...he returns the ball with a strong shot. Ei-chan manages to return the ball, noting that Wei had accelerated the tempo. Wei then sends the ball to the open court for a winner: 0-30. Wei strikes a triumphant pose: "Yeah!" Ei-chan concludes it's no good: he can't continue with slow balls of a regular level. The advantage of his serve will just be taken away from him. He wonders what to do, how to cover for his fatigue until the end of the set. If he currently can't cover for his fatigue with the tactics and techniques he has... He can't cover for his physique with tactics and technique... The three qualities of an athlete are heart, technique, and physique. If technique is no good (to cover for physique), then what's left is heart...willpower? He doesn't think that's quite correct since strength and will are more like a set. His inadvertent exposure of his fatigue was because willpower is also close to the limit. The chair umpire calls a 15-second warning. Ei-chan tells himself that if there's something he can rely on now, he can only rely on what it is. He remembers that he'd lost to Araya and Kanda in terms of physique, but there were also things he'd done well. There was the pressure of not being able to go pro if he lost—and that became the basis of his willpower. In which case, what's the basis of his willpower now? He thinks Wei is the barrier to the international lower tour. As Ei-chan tosses the ball, he tells himself he wants to overcome that (barrier) in order to make a living as a pro. He serves to the center. Wei returns the ball, noting its power has increased slightly compared to recent ones. Ei-chan thinks that if he overcomes the lower tour, then there's the world tour, and after that the Grand Slam. He returns the ball with a strong shot, noting it's improved a bit. However, he also knows that the points he'd thought of were things he'd already been thinking about before the match, and wonders if there's anything else that's the basis for his willpower.

Wei decides to drive Ei-chan forward and backward again, using a mix of shots and tempo. He hits a strong shot, which Ei-chan returns. However, Ei-chan's shot is out: 0-40. The audience notes that Wei is at set point and that if he takes the set, it will be a turnaround and

Wei will have the advantage. Examining his racket, Ei-chan notices that a string had broken (apparently why his shot had gone out). He considers it just bad luck and goes to his bag to switch rackets. After pulling out a new racket, he remembers his meeting with the Prince rep, who'd told him he was putting all of Ei-chan's comments about Ei-chan's racket into a database. The Prince rep said it would be nice if they could make a racket for Ei-chan's exclusive use whenever Ei-chan makes it to the international stage. Ei-chan decides he has more reasons why he can't lose. The important "basis for his willpower" for him who is now a pro, beyond being entrusted with this racket, is that he wants to do all he can (leave nothing undone). Ei-chan serves, sending the ball in a body shot straight at Wei, who thinks Ei-chan has certainly revived. But Wei doesn't believe it's possible for Ei-chan to just cancel out his fatigue. So the instant Wei discovers even the smallest tear (in Ei-chan's performance), he intends to attack it. Play extends into a rally. Ei-chan thinks that he can't lose physically when he has the best racket (for him) lately. If he'd hit the ball right in the center a little while ago, the gut wouldn't have snapped. Wei thinks Ei-chan is moving even better than before, so he attempts a drop shot. Ei-chan gives chase, intending to at least hit the ball with his racket. However, the ball drops short of the net: 15-40. Ei-chan's relieved that he's survived one set point. Wei concludes he was thinking too much about the speed of Ei-chan's response, so he tells himself not to overthink things. If Ei-chan is mustering the dregs of his strength, it will only be for a short time. Wei decides he just won't brood too much on it being a chance. Ei-chan thinks that if he's strongly conscious of being entrusted with something, he feels like he's free of fatigue, even if just for a moment, because that can probably become a real basis for his willpower. He decides to ask Mike for a detailed explanation later, but he wants to continue in this manner. He considers what else he's been entrusted with: there's also his tennis wear; and Erik of Haleo believes in him when Ei-chan hasn't
produced results, entrusting him with producing smiles. Ei-chan feels he has to meet those expectations. He serves wide, and Wei returns the ball crosscourt. Drawing back to swing, Ei-chan thinks he wants to meet those expectations. He hits a forehand straight for a winner: 30-40. The crowd cheers as Ei-chan pulls a triumphant pose. Wei doesn't look happy. Neither does Olivier, who mentally urges Wei to stop this flow (Ei-chan's momentum?). Ei-chan then serves to the center and pulls off an ace: 40-40. The crowd cheers: An ace!; That's 3 consecutive points!; Maruo has caught up! Natsu looks exultant as does Ei-chan. End of chapter. The blurb says "One more step! Muster your willpower!" The title of the next chapter is "A Person's Strength."

Ch. 406

Ch.406 starts with the score at deuce (7-5, 5-6). Wei thinks it's been 5 points since Ei-chan's leg wobble, but for some reason Ei-chan's performance hasn't deteriorated. He doesn't know what sort of mental strength Ei-chan is using to hold out, but he has to stop him before the flow (Ei-chan's momentum?) grows big. Ei-chan thinks that being extremely aware of what has been entrusted to him, maybe even the awareness of challenging the higher-ranked Wei, can now turn into his strength without it turning into pressure. He wonders if the situation is similar to how Ide draws strength from his surroundings. As Ei-chan tosses the ball to serve, he thinks that if he's able to do that sort of thing, he'll get to tiebreak after two points. If he's more aware of the people close to him who strongly support him—at this point his parents come to mind—he might be able to draw even greater power. However, as Ei-chan is about to swing, something surprises him and his serve goes into the net. Thinking about his parents was no use at all. He remembers that just before he hit the ball, he'd felt an unusual sensation: it's like his winning or losing doesn't matter to his parents. He

suspects his parents might be too close to him, or that the sensation isn't useful because he feels as if he's being indulged; he imagines his mom dismissing his loss with "Work harder next time, but for now, eat steadily." So he concludes that if the person he's aware of doesn't impart a moderate tension on the level of applying slight pressure, it won't work. Then he considers Natchan. She imparts some tension because she's someone who makes him feel like doing his best too, but she actually indulges him quite a lot, so he also decides to set thoughts of her aside for the time
being. He considers Coach Aoi but concludes that Aoi is someone who'd support him regardless of what happens. He considers Kageyama and Yukichi who expect things of him, but he concludes that (their expectations?) might be somewhat different. The chair umpire calls time. Ei-chan thinks it's bad (possibly because he hasn't struck on anything that works). But as he sets up to serve, the image of all the people he'd considered comes to mind with all of them urging him on. The image gives him the feeling he can do well. Ei-chan serves to the center. Wei returns it and notes that even though it's a second serve, it has a firm spin. Ei-chan moves forward to meet the ball, thinking it's a chance. He hits a strong shot crosscourt, which Wei manages to return. However, the ball goes out: Advantage, Maruo. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose. Ei-chan thinks that one just now was good. He concludes that considering people individually didn't work, but if he remembers everyone, the result turns into even greater power. On analysis, he realizes he has various personal relationships with those people, so if he considers them individually, those relationships color his awareness. However, when he considers everyone (as a group), he produced an image of being supported by them all—and that became the "basis of my willpower." Ei-chan tosses the ball, thinking that with this, he'll be able to play his own tennis a bit more. Whatever the result, he'll simply maintain his best performance: he'll rush forward, using all his willpower without hesitation. He serves wide. Wei returns it and thinks it's fast. As Ei-chan draws back for his next shot, he decides to show everyone who gave him "willpower" that power. He hits a winner crosscourt: Game, Maruo, 6-6. Tiebreak game, second set. Natchan cheers the tiebreak and Aoi looks elated. Ei-chan strikes another triumphant pose, thinking he can pull it off. Olivier and Wei don't look happy. The audience is in an uproar: He's finally gotten to tiebreak!; Maruo's able to play this well against Wang Wei?; It seems Maruo picked up a racket in high school; That can't be true...!?; That's an outrageous story, isn't it?; Moreover, he's only 18 years old, so we can expect a lot from him; I have a dream, you know!; Maruo, do your best! Seven more points. Get over him! Natchan notes that the cheering for Ei-chan has increased. Aoi adds that at the start, everyone came to watch Wei, but because Ei-chan has come this far and this is Japan...that's what's called the home court advantage.
Wei thinks that if he doesn't take this tiebreak, he'll lose. If he takes it, Ei-chan might not last the final set. So this tiebreak will decide the match. He decides not to hope for a decline in Ei-chan's performance; he'll just consider how to get points off an aggressive Ei-chan at max performance. Then he realizes that's not enough since he hasn't been able to break Ei-chan even once today, so he has to hit on some technique during the tiebreak. At the same time, Ei-chan thinks he wants to turn the audience's cheering into strength without it turning into pressure. However, from this point on, he can't just depend on the strength from his surroundings. He thinks he'd been consistent in recovering his exhausted strength in this set. He hasn't hit on a proactive plan aside from "move quickly and attack." He has to hit on a suitable technique at this critical moment in order to get past Wei: specifically, he has to break through the front-back movement that Wei has imposed on him and take a point from Wei—meaning he has to capture Wei's strategy. As Wei sets up to serve, the crowd cheers: Maruo, end it here!; Wang Wei, fight! Wei serves wide. Ei-chan returns it and notes it was a

good serve at an angle. Wei's next shot sends Ei-chan running to the open court. Ei-chan decides that if it's no good simply aiming for the "front" of Wei's front-back strategy, then... (Wei follows his angle ball with a deep shot.) Ei-chan goes with his superior power from the baseline. He hits a strong forehand flat, aiming for a sudden attack without fearing a counterattack. However, the ball hits the net: 1-0, Wang Wei. Ei-chan thinks he'd overdone it unreasonably. Wei thinks Ei-chan's unreasonable attack was an unconscious attempt to escape difficulty. So he tells himself to watch calmly and to challenge when it's time to challenge. Ei-chan concludes it's no good, that it's monotonous and a desperate tactic. He takes a deep breath, then prepares to serve. He thinks that even if his body moves, if he doesn't produce ideas, then... He tosses the ball, thinking that what he can deliberately consider now...is the most difficult strategy. He serves. End of chapter. The blurb for the next chapter is "Ei-chan's Choice is?! Wang Wei's Response is?!" The title for the next chapter is "Autonomy"; it can also be translated as "Independence" or "Self-Discipline." The next chapter will have a color page and more pages than usual. Hopefully, the increased number of pages means Ei-chan will take the tiebreak.

Ch. 407

Anyhow, ch.407 opens with Ei-chan thinking that in order for his idea (strategy) not to become a desperate "escape," he'll now deliberately use the most difficult strategy he can think of. He serves to the center. Wei notes it's a slice serve that cuts away fast. He returns the ball deep, then notices that Ei-chan had moved way behind the baseline—for the first time. Ei-chan thinks that moving down from the forward defensive position he'd been fixated on is because he's having a hard time physically; however, it doesn't mean he's on the defensive and running away. As the ball bounces, he steps forward to meet the ball, thinking that moving back is for Wei's deep balls: by taking a step forward, he can include the shift in his body weight in hitting the ball, which increases the power of his shot. Then he goes forward, moving fast to cover the increased distance. Wei tries to sink the ball. However, Ei-chan volleys, thinking it's all in order to take more forward defensive position first and then an even more forward one; he rushes the net. Wei wonders whether Ei-chan is deliberately moving front-back on his own. The audience notes Ei-chan suddenly closed the distance and speculates whether he's too close. Ei-chan thinks that if he has closed to this point... Wei thinks that Ei-chan's being audacious but that he's doing what Wei had hoped he would (probably because he expects the front-back motion to be even more tiring). He hits a lob—but this is exactly what Ei-chan expected. Ei-chan tracks the ball calmly—the audience notes that the lob is skillful, but Ei-chan's move backward was also fast. Ei-chan thinks that even though he'd known it would come, it's still a tough lob. If he moves back and sinks the ball, he'll lose his advantage, so even if he can't hit a strong shot, he has to use a smash. Even if his full-power sprints for the difficult front-back movement have increased, he absolutely has to hit it. Knowing it wasn't enough to put away the ball, he sprints back to the net, surprising Wei. Wei notes his two shot options: lob and a down-the-line. He chooses the straight, but it goes into the net: 1-1. Wei curses his choice, thinking he'd hesitated because Ei-chan had predicted the lob just now. He wonders why Ei-chan comes this far and chooses a strategy that will exhaust himself, and why that choice is possible for Ei-chan. Ei-chan sets up to serve, recognizing the earlier danger but thinking he can consider the point a strategic victory: for the first time, he'd captured Wei's front-back attack using a proactive strategy. However, no matter how he looks at it, continuing this strategy will be tough.

Coach Aoi thinks that if Ei-chan brings the play to a lob vs. smash contest, a smash is better, except that in this situation (probably where Ei-chan is close to his physical limits), it's an unreasonable choice. However, if Ei-chan will move up, he has the opportunity where he has

to overcome his current self even if he's being excessive. Aoi mentally orders Ei-chan to break out of his shell here (his words here seem to imply a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis to complete its metamorphosis). Natchan shouts, urging Ei-chan to get a second point. The audience cheers: Maruo, you're looking good!; Do your best! Hearing the encouragement, Ei-chan thinks it feels like the cheers had taken away his fatigue, though just a bit, and plans to turn everyone's support into his strength. Therefore, he believes his strategy will work. Ei-chan serves to the center, then drops back again. Wei notes the repetition as he returns the ball. Ei-chan thinks that while he has the advantage of his serve...he jumps forward to meet the ball, then again rushes to the net, wondering what shot Wei will use. Wei doesn't intend to be taken in by the same strategy a second time, so he decides to dare a lob. Aoi notes the confidence of Wei's shot—and that the lob achieves an even more exquisite height. Chasing the ball, Ei-chan wonders whether he'll be able to reach it. He jumps—then refrains from swinging his racket, surprising Wei. The ball is called out: 2-1, Maruo. An exultant Ei-chan strikes a triumphant position. Aoi thinks that Ei-chan's earlier excessiveness is showing its effect and that the simple hold is a big deal. As the crowd cheers "Maruo, break here!" and "Third point!" Wei fixes the strings of his racket. He sets up to serve, thinking that he's accustomed to away matches. In fact, this away game can cheer him up because he has the freedom here to overcome this point by himself. Wei serves wide, and Ei-chan returns. Wei thinks he'll rout those who block the path to freedom that he'd miraculously seized. He hits a fast angle shot crosscourt to take the point: 2-2. The onlookers marvel at the speed of Wei's shot and comment that he has considerable power. Ei-chan thinks it was Wei's fastest angle shot up to now. He wonders if it means Wei will start using strong shots even if he's weaker. He notes that when he overcomes one obstacle, there's another one soon after. However, he reminds himself that he's now able to make a point when he goes to the net. He decides to take the net and just deal with Wei's strong shots somehow. He confirms to himself that he hadn't been
mistaken in deliberately choosing a tough strategy—that avoiding it to defeat Wei is a path he can't take. Wei serves, and Ei-chan returns. Wei takes the next point with a drop shot: 3-2, Wang Wei. Ei-chan serves, then charges the net. He puts the ball away with a volley: 3-3. Play continues, then Ei-chan hits a backhand straight for the next point: 4-3, Maruo. Wei returns the favor, getting the ball past Ei-chan on the side: 4-4. Wei also takes the next point: 5-4, Wang Wei. Then Ei-chan lands the ball right on the line for the next point: 5-5. End of chapter. The blurb for the next chapter says "Victory after 2 More Points! At the Same Time, a Highly Possible Defeat...!" The title of the next chapter is "Transcendence," which sounds very positive to me because Coach Aoi was urging Ei-chan to overcome Ei-chan's current self. Overcoming would mean rising above; in other words, transcendence.

Ch. 408

Okay, so the chapter opens with a hard-breathing Ei-chan preparing to serve, thinking that if he takes this point, he'll get to match point, but if it's taken from him, Wei will similarly get to set point, which would almost be match point (probably because it could mean playing the final set). He believes that even if the physical demand of creating a chance from the baseline and going to the net increases, his strategy of not scaling back has the effect of making a short decisive battle easier, so it's the correct choice. However, he hasn't been able to break through. Having come this far, Wei has started to push back with power and has gotten Ei-chan with the difference up to now. Wei's also breathing hard. He hadn't been able to imagine that an athlete who'd been blessed by circumstances (probably referring to training and background) and made it this far would opt for the more difficult choice in this

predicament. Remembering what he'd seen of Ei-chan overseas, he thinks that even just a little before, Ei-chan hadn't been the type to do so. He wonders if what made it possible was Ei-chan's hope of going to Wimbledon or his hometown advantage or something in Ei-chan's notes. Whatever it was, he should have anticipated even the slightest risk, so he acknowledges it was to his discredit (like he had looked down on Ei-chan?). Having faced that, Wei considers what to do. Ei-chan, on the other hand, considers how he'll compete. Up to now he's been able to
play without running away from Wei or from his fatigue. What he's scared of is running away when he doesn't intend to run away. However, with the results today, he's been able to demonstrate that by "not running away" (remembering Monma's critique of "obvious change of pace = running away") he has cornered Wei. So he decides to deliberately push on with the more difficult choice. Wei thinks that if Ei-chan's capable of playing that way, Ei-chan will take aim at Wei's strengths even more. He then identifies what he considers them to be: always maintaining his composure; pulling off his own play at the critical moment; putting off his choice of shot until just before he hits the ball; he's also been able to use power shots now; and (Wei remembers a conversation with Riu Jie who identified Wei's strongest point as his sense of stability) not making errors. As Wei prepares to receive, he mentally challenges Ei-chan: "If it's coming, come on and try!" Ei-chan has come to a similar conclusion: he'll directly confront Wei's strong points (reminds me of Nabae's decision (after playing Ei-chan) to oppose his opponents on their strengths: Araya with power, etc.). His listing of Wei's strengths is identical if more detailed: 1) always maintaining his composure (especially strong during critical moments); 2) it's hard to tell whether he's going for a drop shot, angle ball, lob, or some other special shot until just before he hits the ball; 3) he's started including power shots, which he hasn't hit up to now; and 4) few errors overall (especially during critical moments). He decides to counter those as follows: 1) to attack so that Wei can't be composed; 2) to counterattack these when he has an opportunity; 3) targeting those themselves; and 4) being prepared to draw the game out long enough that he can force his opponent to commit an error. As Ei-chan tosses the ball, he acknowledges it's all rough and he doesn't really have a strategy or anything, but what's most important in this sort of time is a winning vision...and resolve. He serves wide. Wei returns with a sudden strong shot. Ei-chan notes this and goes for the same with a countercross. Wei returns this with a backhand slice. Ei-chan curses mentally, noting that the long flight time of Wei's deep shot cancels his countercross. Wei thinks that if Ei-chan increases the risk unreasonably, the chances of an error increases, so he welcomes Ei-chan's choice. However, he's aiming for the same thing at this point. Ei-chan hits a straight, then Wei's fast angle cross makes Ei-chan race for the open court. Ei-chan decides to go for a similar shot: he returns the ball with a fast forehand
slice crosscourt. A surprised Wei manages to return the ball, and he notes it's his strong shot and angle ball (it was returned with the same), confirming that Ei-chan is starting to aim for his strong points. Ei-chan returns the ball down the line, but he thinks it's no good: Wei is stable and it's taking everything Ei-chan has to maintain the advantage of his serve. Wei runs to the open court and returns the ball with a backhand straight, thinking he'll make his shallow balls more intense, the deep balls stronger...and he'll corner Ei-chan with a readiness for a drawn-out game in order to prevent Ei-chan from going to the net. Ei-chan notes that both Wei's shallow and deep balls are certain. Returning the straight with a cross, he marvels at Wei's composure. However, the current situation is unworkable. So as Wei replies with a cross, Ei-chan decides to oppose Wei's composure even further. He remembers his notes and thinks: "If it's this...how's this?!" Ei-chan hits a high lob, taking Wei

and everyone else by surprise—especially since his opponent is behind the baseline. Coach Aoi wonders what Ei-chan was thinking to have done so: what's the point in doing such a thing when Ei-chan's barely maintaining the advantage of his serve and the two have been evenly matched? Ei-chan thinks it's high and so fast that Wei can't smash it—if possible, it's a ball that will shake Wei's composure. Jumping back, Wei notes the ball has a considerable spin. Seeing the shift in Wei's position, Ei-chan concludes Wei won't smash the ball nor hit a rising shot, so he dashes to the net. Wei realizes Ei-chan has come forward again, and prepares to hit the ball with his forehand. From Wei's form, Ei-chan narrows the possibilities to an angle cross, a lob, or straight. Since Ei-chan had made consecutive points off Wei's lobs earlier, but after that, Wei had gotten a ball past him down the side, Ei-chan decides to be on the lookout for a shot to either side. Wei thinks that a lob is slow, which makes a strong shot difficult. However, he can make sure of Ei-chan's movements. He knows this is the most important critical moment. He'll watch Ei-chan steadily and make a sound choice. He won't overlook the slightest shift in Ei-chan's weight (center of gravity?) or even of Ei-chan's eyes. As the ball bounces, Ei-chan acknowledges that Wei is composed and Wei's awareness of danger is strong—he's not an opponent that can be easily duped with a feint—so Ei-chan can only wait. The ball reaches the top of its arc and starts to drop. Ei-chan thinks Wei is weak, so he
shouldn't be able to produce that much power. Ei-chan decides to believe in the excellence of his own response and move the instant he knows the course. Wei watches the ball and as it reaches the optimum hitting height, he shifts his focus to check on Ei-chan. Ei-chan stares back. Wei mentally demands: "Which way is it? ... Move!" Ei-chan thinks, "I can't tell the course... I can't move!" The two locked gazes in a standoff as the ball continues to drop. Finally, Wei scoops up the ball, going for a straight. However, the ball goes into the net—and even if it had cleared the net, Ei-chan was in position to volley: "6-5, Maruo!" Ei-chan remains determined, but Wei looks shaken. End of chapter. The blurb says "Seizing Match Point!" The title of the next chapter is "Outside Help" or "Reliance on Others." That sure doesn't sound like it's referring to Wei who finds independence to be relaxing. Hopefully, it means the cheering of the crowd will strengthen Ei-chan.

Ch. 409

Ch.409 opens with the audience surprised that Wei had committed an error with such a slow ball. Coach Aoi is amazed that Wei and Ei-chan's reading each other had reached such an extreme and turned out this way. Coach Olivier suspects Wei's composure has expired. Ei-chan's elated that he'd forced Wei to commit an error at this most important critical moment, and reached match point. Wei's analysis is that Ei-chan had thoroughly resisted Wei's competitive shots. Wei had been fine with both of them at their respective baselines and they'd been deadlocked. Then Ei-chan had hit that unexpected lob. Not only had Ei-chan sealed Wei's strong point (waiting until the last moment to decide what shot to use), he'd attacked Wei's weak point (forcing him to decide with very limited time?). The crowd cheers encouragement to Wei: he can still hold and turn things around; it's still tiebreak. Wei tells himself Ei-chan's strategy won't work a second time: he just won't be captive to his existing concept of Ei-chan and he mustn't forget Ei-chan's fearsomeness. In other words, if Wei becomes emotional about his strong point getting sealed, he'll self-
destruct. If he holds here, using his own tennis dispassionately, he can win. Wei serves. Ei-chan isn't able to touch the ball. However, the serve is judged a fault: the ball had bounced well into the wrong side. As Wei prepares to serve again, he exhales deeply. Ei-chan notes this is the first deep breath Wei has displayed that wasn't part of his routine.

Wei tosses the ball, and Ei-chan decides to suddenly attack here. Ei-chan rushes forward to the baseline as Wei swings, taking Wei by surprise. Wei hits the ball, then realizes he'd applied too much of a spin to it. Ei-chan pulls off a return winner: Game, set, and match won by Maruo. Count: 7-5, 7-6. The crowd goes wild: Finally, Maruo got away!; A 1000s ranker defeated a 300s ranker!; The exchange of drop shots was too amazing!; The way they were reading each other was seriously nerve-wracking! Ei-chan's in disbelief that he'd defeated Wei. A tired and despondent Wei raises his head to the sky, then looks over to the other court and sees an elated Ei-chan. The audience applauds the two with a pair of college girls commenting that the two players are still in their teens and are players to look forward to. Yoshimichi (7th seed) overhears the comments and thinks that this enthusiasm at a first-round match of two players who both came up through the prelims is more than he'd expected. This Challenger is a path that the top players in the world have to pass through. It's a place where the ability to make it to the top might defy common sense. It's a tennis that attacks the opponent's vital spot with strategy, using their brains and sensitivity freely to the greatest extent, despite their slender physiques. It's a match that tempered the raw material of both players. Ei-chan and Wei shake hands. Yoshimichi turns his attention to two courts on the other side where Pete (world rank: 294) seems to be overpowering his opponent, Haketa (member of Japan's national team, world rank: 215), with a powerful forehand shot, and Krishna (world rank: 195) is doing the same with his opponent. The audience is amazed that someone 2 meters tall can move the way Pete does. They consider him (America's rising star) a demon with his forehand and serve-and-volley game. Haketa curses Pete's considerable power and good reaction. Krishna hits such a strong backhand slice that the audience is shocked into silence, and takes the point. Someone in the audience comments that Krishna has made it to the world tour at only age 17. Yoshimichi laughs to himself, thinking that this time, quite a lot of raw material has gathered (at the tournament). In the players changing room, Olivier consoles Wei, saying Wei had done well. Wei requests some time to himself to rethink his tennis from square one. Wei's understanding is exactly what Olivier expected of Wei and he comments that grasping the lessons to be learned is Wei's talent. However, if Wei is rethinking his tennis, Olivier decides to make it an opportunity to remind Wei that Olivier believes in Wei's prospects and to suggest that Wei rely on Olivier more. Wei accepts the suggestion. As Ei-chan climbs the bleachers, Natchan asks how he's doing physically, and he replies that it had been close but he managed. Aoi compliments his performance, but points out Ei-chan pushed himself excessively. He asks what Ei-chan had intended if the match had gone into the final set. Ei-chan says he would have continued without running away from his fatigue until the very end. He doesn't know what his limits are, but he thinks it was his resolve that enabled him to win. Aoi acknowledges this but points out that Ei-chan has had 4 consecutive matches, having come through the qualifiers, so his fatigue will manifest readily. Ei-chan comments that his legs had wobbled, but he believes he'll manage the fatigue somehow, what with today and tomorrow. He's also looking forward to finding out how much he can play when he's fatigued. Aoi asks if that means Ei-chan's ready for the next one. Ei-chan confirms this, then requests a favor of Aoi. And Aoi announces that it's his turn now. Ei-chan enters the clinic to see Wei receiving treatment with Olivier looking on. The players acknowledge each other, then Ei-chan takes the vacant cot. Aoi starts treating Ei-chan as Wei finishes his consultation. Just before Wei leaves, he tells Ei-chan they stand at 1 win and 1 loss, and says his goodbyes: "Next time." Ei-chan calls out to Wei, asking for Wei's contact details. He explains they're bound to meet each other again at tournaments, and it might be good if they could share information. Ei-chan silently wonders if it's no good, then stumbles on with his

explanation, pointing out that they're friends. Wei's dumbfounded by "friends," then agrees to the suggestion. Musing aloud that Ei-
chan is friends even with rivals, he writes down his contact details on a piece of paper, which he hands over to Ei-chan. Ei-chan thanks him and echoes Wei's goodbye. Wei looks happy as he steps out the clinic. End of chapter.

Ch. 410

So the title of ch.410 is "Rhythm." It opens with Coach Aoi having completed Ei-chan's treatment. He tells Ei-chan that Ei-chan has accumulated quite a lot of fatigue, so it's a good thing Ei-chan doesn't have a match tomorrow. Because of this, if Ei-chan moves his body in moderation today and tomorrow, (his recovery) should be more or less complete by the day after. Ei-chan thanks him. As they exit the clinic, Natchan calls Ei-chan's attention, saying that the next match has somehow turned into something great. Ei-chan comments it's the match that decides his next opponent. He steps up beside Natchan and sees Kirilenko (4th seed, 21, world rank: 137) hit a strong shot. Isobe Shunsuke (24, world rank: 811) returns it with a sharp angle shot crosscourt and puts away the ball: 30-15. Isobe strikes a triumphant pose to the audience's cheers. Ei-chan considers the shot skillful since it used Kirilenko's power. The crowd gets worked up over the possibility of the 811th defeating the 137th and notes there has been a lot of giant killing today (probably referring to Ei-chan's earlier victory). The score stands at 6-4, 5-2 in Isobe's favor. Ei-chan's shocked that Isobe is likely to be his next opponent—which is bad since Isobe had been under Ei-chan's radar, so Ei-chan probably doesn't have any info on him. Play continues with Isobe barely managing to return Kirilenko's shots. As Kirilenko hits another strong shot, Ei-chan thinks Kirilenko attacks, has power, and uses the pace of the match. However, even though Isobe is simply enduring desperately... Just then, Kirilenko hits a straight that bounces beyond the sideline: Out! Kirilenko looks frustrated, looking at his free hand and shouting something unintelligible, as if he can't understand why his shot went out. Having watched the match for some time, Natchan comments that she's gotten the impression Isobe has completely matched Kirilenko's rhythm. Ei-chan agrees, adding that there's the feeling that Isobe has gotten into the rhythm despite his suffering. Which means Isobe might be the worst possible opponent for Kirilenko in terms of compatibility. Kirilenko attempts a drop shot that takes Isobe by surprise. However, the ball falls short
and lands in the net. Ei-chan attributes the error to Kirilenko's throwing off his own rhythm. Game, set, and match won by Isobe. The audience breaks out in cheers as Isobe roars and strikes a triumphant pose. Ei-chan considers it was a complete victory, and finds it scary that tennis also has something like this. He wonders if Isobe's rhythm is a peculiarity, and thinks it might warrant special attention. He's glad he was able to watch even just a little. A shout of "There it is! Jumping Okada Bazooka!" then catches his and Natchan's attention. Ei-chan notes that Okada is also in the middle of quite a close contest against Minami (22, world rank: 254) with the score at 6-2, 7-6, 6-5 in Minami's favor. Minami hits a strong shot crosscourt. As Okada runs to meet the ball, Ei-chan notices Okada's footwork and agrees (with Wei) that this way of playing—not moving back, the use of a rising shot, the attack position—is quite close to Ei-chan's current style. Okada returns the ball with a strong flat down the line. Ei-chan thinks that even though it's high-risk tennis under normal circumstances, Okada uses only a flat shot, which the most difficult and makes things even harder. As he continues watching Okada's footwork, he thinks that might be why Okada seems to get to the hitting position much more smoothly than Ei-chan. It might be the result of training, but where and how—specifically—is it (Okada's style) different from Ei-chan's?

Okada's shot goes into the net, giving the point to Minami. Game, set, and match won by Minami. Count: 2-6, 7-6, 7-5. Okada leaves the court to applause from the crowd and a cheer of "Don't mind, Okada." Ei-chan meets him at the top of the steps with "Okada-kun, good job! You almost got it, right?" Glaring up at Ei-chan, Okada asks what Ei-chan's business is with him, whether Ei-chan was there to look down at him from the standpoint of having won in the first round. Ei-chan protests that isn't what he intended at all. Okada tsks. Ei-chan explains that there's something he'd like to ask about Okada's playing style, and apologizes for the timing, but he'd prefer to do so sooner (than later). Okada mutters to himself, "What's with this guy? He's shameless and annoying." He gives a deep sigh, then agrees if it's after he's had a shower and changed clothes, and
walks away. Ei-chan thanks him and says he'll wait over there. Some time later, Ei-chan and Natchan see Okada approach. Ei-chan and Okada go over to some vacant seats to talk. Ei-chan shares that he's also using fast acceleration and fast deceleration, and intends to improve his timing. He admits that Okada does it much more smoothly than Ei-chan, and wonders if there's something Okada is keeping in mind. Of course, if it's a secret or something, then it's fine (Okada needn't answer). Okada replies that he has no such reason. He mutters that even though he might appear this way, he's been grateful to Ei-chan ever since that match. He explains that he'd started becoming conscious of "how to get to the hitting position" right after he'd lost to Ei-chan, because after that, he'd once again decided he had to master the rising flat. Ei-chan prompts Okada on "that thing Okada started keeping in mind." Okada tells Ei-chan he's fine with sharing it with Ei-chan, but Ei-chan isn't to tell anyone else. Ei-chan immediately agrees, then guesses it's a secret after all. Okada denies this, explaining that it's merely embarrassing. Ei-chan's taken aback that there's "an embarrassing way to get to the hitting position." Okada orders Ei-chan not to
laugh—absolutely. After Ei-chan agrees, Okada turns his head away and mutters that it's a samba way. Ei-chan is all "Eh...?! What did you say just now?" Okada clears his throat, then haltingly clarifies that it's a samba rhythm. This brings to Ei-chan's mind an image of samba no pé dancers in costume and he totally can't see the connection. He asks if Okada meant the samba of the Brazilian Carnival, and a blushing Okada confirms this. Okada explains that even among the various samba music, there's a super fast-tempo 16-beat one. That rhythm and wavelength matches Okada's attack perfectly since Okada uses only flat shots and goes on a rapid offense. That's why he ticks away time and plays to that rhythm at the critical moment. Ei-chan is struck by the thought of 16 beats. Then he thinks that speaking of rhythm, Isobe had toppled a big shot using rhythm just a little while ago. Remember the recent match, he concludes that rhythm is important. Scribbling in his notebook, Ei-chan comments that Okada has a good sense of rhythm to be able to move in rhythm with such relentless music.

Okada disputes this observation. He claims he has no sense of rhythm, so he went through a lot of trouble to master this. However, he believes that a guy with a normal sense of rhythm would be able to put it to use right away. Ei-chan asks what Okada did to master the samba rhythm. Covering his blushing face, Okada replies he'd taken lessons, attending the classes of a lady in his neighborhood. A trembling and totally blank-faced Ei-chan asks, "Is...Is that so?" A vein pops up on Okada's temple as he roars: "Hey, aren't you laughing?" Ei-chan gets himself under control, then silently develops the concept of using rhythm: it would be good to pay attention to his movements by matching an up-tempo rhythm. Rhythm is also important to matching the impact point (probably of the ball to the racket) when drawing back quickly or taking a stance suddenly. But Ei-chan's situation uses change of pace, so maybe he'd switch between various rhythms? He imagines different beats. In which case, might the

tempos of various other rhythms become necessary, not just samba's? During his match with Wei, going forward and back had been difficult, but when he'd forced himself to move forward and back to a faster tempo, the situation improved. If he'd been able to keep in mind some rhythm that suited the situation at that time... Ei-chan thanks Okada, saying it was an awesome reference, which surprises Okada. Ei-chan offers to practice with Okada if anything comes up, and then requests Okada's contact details. Okada's taken aback that Ei-chan's treating him like they're friends, but agrees. Ei-chan thanks him again. Later, as Ei-chan and Natchan leave the courts, Ei-chan thanks Natchan for waiting. She's glad he could talk to Okada and asks if he'd gotten a hint. Ei-chan says he had, explaining that to put things simply, Okada said he's able to use his sense of rhythm during the match. Natchan notes that Ei-chan has a good sense of rhythm since he sings well. Then she's struck by a thought and comments that it would be better if he were to work up a bit of a sweat tomorrow. On Ei-chan's agreement, she says she has training only in the morning, so she suggest they try doing rhythm training together. End of chapter. The teaser blurb says "Natsu hit on a good idea...which means what?" The title for the next chapter is "Rhythm Training?"

Ch. 411

So ch.411 opens on the day after the first round of the Keiryo Challenger. Natchan exchanges shots with a kouhai in STC. The girl thinks she might not have another chance to be able to practice with Natchan for the next while. Practice ends, and the girl comments that Natchan will be leaving for the US this week, and apologizes for taking up Natchan's time when Natchan's probably busy. Natchan says the formalities for her enrollment in Georgia U is all done, all that's left is her departure during the weekend, so she's unexpectedly free and she's glad to be able to train. The girl regrets Natchan's departure since there's still lots of things she's hoping Natchan would teach her. She thanks Natchan and Natchan reciprocates, urging the girl to work hard. Ei-chan arrives at that point. The girl recognizes him since he's also a senpai. She remembers that he ought to be right in the middle of competing in a Challenger. She also notes that he's famous as Natchan's boyfriend (! LOL) Ei-chan asks if they were practicing until now. Natchan confirms this but says it's fine and proposes they begin Ei-chan's training. The girl asks if they're going to practice and if she may watch. Natchan immediately agrees, and Ei-chan haltingly gives his permission soon after. The girl wonders what sort of training the two who hope to be pros will do. Ei-chan asks Natchan what she meant by "rhythm training." Natchan starts of by asking Ei-chan why he was able to defeat Wei yesterday. He thinks it was because he was able to play without running away from Wei's strong points or his own fatigue. So she asks what Ei-chan did in order "not to run away." He replies he'd chosen the difficult option. She points out his use of "difficult" in his answer and tells him to remember that. The kouhai notes the similarity to a class in school. Then Ei-chan pulls out his notebook, surprising the girl. Natchan says that from hereon is the real issue; she reminds him that he'd heard from Okada yesterday the issue of "rhythm." She asks what is rhythm—in other words, music. Ei-chan replies that it's fine arts that uses sound. Natchan agrees that that's the meaning of the word, but that's not what she meant. She asks why people get absorbed in music. He argues that her question is too broad, and asks for a hint. Her hint is that there are various theories for the origin of music: yells for encouragement during hunting or manual labor; intonation as conversations steadily become more complex; among others.

Ei-chan scribbles in his notebook as the kouhai marvels to herself that this is related to tennis. Natchan points out that the samba that Ei-chan had gotten interested in yesterday originated in Brazil. She adds that a prominent theory says it began with slave workers who'd

been brought over from Africa in the end of the 19th century. She asks Ei-chan why people in a position of "difficulty" as slaves would dance samba. He speculates it's for the release from "difficulty." She agrees, and adds that since Ei-chan has to choose the "difficult" option, he has to learn this skill: "footwork with rhythm." Ei-chan is awestruck by her suggestion, and adds that she's good at teaching. Natchan says she'd done a bit of research yesterday. The kouhai wonders at the mood she's picking up from the two, and she's surprised that Natchan is the thorough type. (Ho-kay, isn't this actually Ei-chan's influence?) Natchan rummages in her tennis bag and brings out a music player and earbuds. She proposes Ei-chan try hitting to a rhythm. She'd loaded tunes of various genres with different tempos on the player, and asks him what he wants to start with. He's surprised she'd done that much, and thanks her. He asks if she'd loaded samba; of course, she did. The kouhai sees them sharing the earbuds to listen to the music, and feels like a third wheel. So she takes her leave, even though Natchan says they'll be practicing right after this. Natchan then suggests they try rallying while Ei-chan listens to samba. Ei-chan puts on both earbuds and queues up the music. He sets up to receive while what he considers amazing up-tempo music is playing. They try rallying, but Ei-chan's balls keep going into the net after a few shots. He takes out the earbuds and declares it's no good at all: since he's trying to force his body to match the music, it's conversely difficult; and since he can't hear the sound of the ball hitting, it might be even more difficult to get into the rhythm. His explanation apparently confirms something for Natchan who smiles brightly, surprising Ei-chan. It's no good even if Ei-chan matches his movements to music, but she believes this is an important point. She then suggests he try listening to the same piece repeatedly for around 10 minutes; if he wants to move to the music, he can leave
it to his hands and feet to move spontaneously. Ei-chan listens to a piece and finds his hand tapping to the beat. He considers samba a somehow passionate music, maybe music that might ramp up even his tension/mood. He feels he can understand people in the past using this music to reduce pressure and stress during times of difficulty. Then Natchan says the 10 minutes are up and suggests they start. This time Ei-chan's to take out the earbuds and hit the ball while calling to mind the music he'd listened to just now. This time he's able to rally effectively. He gets a winner past Natchan and she lights up, noting that his last shot had a good feel to it. Ei-chan agrees. Previously, he'd been trying to match the rhythm he could hear, but this time he was playing it back inside himself (meaning, mentally), so it feels like he's able to match it on his own, at will. They resume rallying. At just past 3, they take a break and Ei-chan notes that not being as tired as usual is a good feeling, but he feels his shots are becoming monotonous. Natchan speculates it's because he's been listening to the same piece all along. Ei-chan points out that his tennis changes with different tempos, so she suggests he try listening to something else. As they share the earbuds, she queues up a different tune. Ei-chan recognizes it as classical music, maybe Beethoven's Ninth (Symphony), but a fast-tempo version of it. Natchan suggests that this forceful, noble feeling is reminiscent of Levina Max. Ei-chan agrees. Then she queues up another piece that Ei-chan describes as up-tempo Latin music, and he identifies it with Sanchez. Natchan comments that there's music that matches people, and suggests it might be better if Ei-chan were to choose music that he likes. But tennis requires fine tuning of the impact point in a matter of centimeters and tenths of a second, so she thinks a fast tempo might be fundamentally better, and it might be good for Ei-chan to choose a tune he likes on the music player, and listen to it before his match. As Ei-chan considers this, Natchan offers him the player and tells him she's giving it to him. He demurs since she uses it, but she tells him she has two and she'd loaded it with lots of tunes, including tunes she likes. She tells him to

listen to a lot. He accepts the player and thanks her. Then she suggests he listen for another 10 minutes and another rally. Someone (probably Ei-chan) wonders what tune would be good. End of chapter. The teaser blurb says "Tomorrow, the second round of the Challenger!!" The title of the
next chapter is "Representative" (which I take to mean "National Team" since the team members represent Japan). Maybe Ei-chan is informed that he's qualified for the B Team?

Ch. 412
Oooh! After fumbling a bit with switching rhythms in his first service game, Ei-chan defeats Isobe 6-2, 6-2—which brings Ei-chan's world rank to the 700s. And Ei-chan realizes it's the result of not just the match with Wei and the rhythm training, but of everything he's done since turning pro. Yoshimichi also wins his match and encounters Ei-chan at the board showing the draw. Ei-chan remembers Monma's words about the criteria for joining the national team. Details when the RAWs come out.
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Okay, so it's the third day of the Keiryo Challenger, when the second-round matches will be held. According to the draw, Krishna advanced to 2R, as had Yoshimichi (who'd played 3 full sets), Watanabe, Pete, and Storace (who'd also played 3 full sets), in addition to Ei-chan. Pete will be going up against Storace in 2R. In the players room, Ei-chan listens to music on the music player Natchan had given him. He thinks that if he wins today, he'll be in the Best 8 (quarterfinals)—which means being able to get roughly the same 18 points as if he'd won a Futures tournament. Based on the table that Ei-chan brings to mind, the Keiryo is a Challenger 100,000 tournament. Following that line of thought, Ei-chan realizes the additional 18 points would bring his total points to 22—catapulting his world rank to the 700s. He claps his cheeks: "Okay!" (I'm guessing this is part of Ei-chan's psychological preparation, listing what's at stake and identifying the sources of pressure.) Even before the match starts, the audience is already excited since it's a match between the 1415th, who defeated the 310th, and the 811th, who defeated the 137th. Both are young hopefuls who're improving, so it promises to be an interesting match even though the players have low ranks. Ei-chan (18 years old) and Isobe (24 years old) arrive at the court. The chair umpire announces a 5-minute warm-up period. As the two players exchanges shots, Ei-chan notes that Isobe has more power than himself or Wei; however, he also judges Isobe's footwork and form to be quite wasteful (inefficient?) and his impression from Isobe's shots is that Wei's shots definitely felt more stable. There's also the fact that Wei's too awesome, but it seems to Ei-chan that Isobe has openings he (Ei-chan) can take
advantage of. However, Isobe is strong in consecutive deployments of a fast tempo, and Ei-chan has recently been making quick movements central to his tennis, so Ei-chan reminds himself to be careful about that. Isobe thinks Ei-chan is the type to occasionally demonstrate a mysterious strength. While Ei-chan's world rank is in the 1400s, he'd defeated Takuma in the All-Japan Championship...and defeated Wei the other day. However, Isobe reminds himself he'd also defeated someone in the 100s while reaching for the place he'd dreamed of. The chair umpire announces the 3-set match starts with Ei-chan's service. Ei-chan serves wide and Isobe returns the ball with a straight. Ei-chan calls to mind a fast 16-beat rhythm and hits the ball crosscourt. He thinks he's gotten into the rhythm and notes that Isobe returned the ball deep—just ordinary. This confirms Ei-chan's opinion that Isobe is strong with serial fast deployments. So Ei-chan decides to change the pace from the 16-beat one and try slowing the tempo by changing the tune he's playing back in his mind. He's able to match the slower timing with the impact of the ball on his racket. Isobe notes the change

in rhythm and looks like he has difficulty with the slower ball. Ei-chan decides to switch back to a fast tempo at this point, surprising Isobe. Ei-chan hits a strong shot; however, it goes into the net: 0-15. Ei-chan thinks it's not that he's having difficulty getting into the rhythm but that using several tunes during the same one point is difficult. But if his last shot had gone in, it would have been an overwhelming point. As Ei-chan bounces the ball, preparing to serve, he thinks that if he gets into the rhythm, he won't just be able to get to the hitting position quickly and punctually, but since it's harder to get tired, he'll finish without turning out like he had after the match with Wei. If he doesn't have a reason to avoid the long distance (drawn-out match), then he can deliberately choose a tune and get into that rhythm. Isobe thinks Ei-chan's movements seem to flow with a lot of fast and slow, and he wonders what that last shot was. Just before Ei-chan tosses the ball to serve, he thinks he can see his winning vision. The focus shifts to the adjacent court, where Yoshimichi is playing. At 30 years old, he's 178 in the world and the 7th seed, as well as being on the national team. He's shown hitting a series of strong shots confidently, then hits a winner to take the game, bringing
the score to 4-6, 6-3, 5-4 in his favor. His Taiwanese opponent, Lin (25 years old, world rank: 267) marvels at Yoshimichi's energy: "Is he really in his 30s?" Watanabe (25 years old, 6th seed, world rank: 161, also on the national team) is watching Yoshimichi's match and notes that Yoshimichi is in excellent condition, plus he's able to use his entire body fully even though he'd just recovered from an injury. He concludes that's Yoshimichi's tennis and that's all there is to it—but wonders if it's not scary (not sure if he's referring to Yoshimichi's tennis or Yoshimichi not being scared of another injury). Yoshimichi hits a winner: "Game, set, and match won by Yoshimichi..." Back at the other court, Ei-chan sprints and gets into hitting position, to Isobe's dismay. Ei-chan hits a powerful shot that Isobe fails to touch: "Game, set, and match won by Maruo. Score: 6-2, 6-2." The crowd cheers as Ei-chan and Isobe shake hands. Someone comments "Maruo's so strong!; He again (defeated) a higher rank. This time it was a complete victory!" Isobe thinks he didn't have a way to hit the balls at all. As Ei-chan shoulders his tennis bag, he thinks there's the match with Wei...and yesterday's training, but it's not just those...(everything) he's done since turning pro is now rapidly starting to bear fruit. In the players room, Ei-chan studies the updated draw and sees that his next opponent will be Yoshimichi. Finally, he'll go up against someone on the national team—Yoshimichi, whom he hadn't been able to play against in the All-Japan. Yoshimichi exits a room and notices Ei-chan. He waves to Ei-chan, and Ei-chan responds with a bow. Ei-chan then remembers Monma's words before the All-Japan finals: "If you want to join the national team, then defeat a current national team member personally in an official tournament, or produce better results in an official tournament than a current national team member." Ei-chan watches a confident Yoshimichi walk away. End of chapter. The teaser blurb for the next chapter says "He turned pro and has finally reached one of the strong people who carry Japan!" The title of the next chapter is "Position."

Ch. 413

So ch.413 starts off with Ei-chan watching Yoshimichi leave and thinking about the national team. The A Team, which competes in the Davis Cup, are the top 7 in JTA ranking, with Ike and Monma at the head of the list and Takuma having recently been added: 1) Ike; 2) Monma; 3) Kouno; 4) Watanabe (who's probably going up against
Pete); 5) Takuma; 6) Yoshimichi (who's going up against Ei-chan); and 7) Haketa (who lost to Pete). The B Team, which aims to be on the A Team soon, is composed of Nabae and a number of promising players 23 years old and below (only Nabae (#1) and Takeshita (#2)

are listed, though). They receive assistance from the country, are given preference in the use of the latest facilities, and even their overseas tours are subsidized. Plus, there's the advice they can get there, the connections with the people involved (in tennis), etc. They have advantages in all aspects. For someone like Ei-chan who's aiming for the world tour from Japan, there's no requirement more than this (being on the national team). But since the slots are limited, he can only take it by winning on his own merits. Coach Aoi finds Ei-chan in the players room. Ei-chan tells him he's relying on him again today for recovery. Aoi replies that from today on, he's prepared and will do it (work on Ei-chan's recovery) thoroughly. Ei-chan questions the "thoroughly" and asks if they're going somewhere. Aoi brings Ei-chan to a room in a nearby business hotel where Yukichi is waiting. Ei-chan's surprised to see him, but asks why there. Yukichi assures him it's fine and encourages him to get into the bath—which Ei-chan sees is an ice bath. Yukichi explains that icing is the fastest effective way, but Ei-chan can take his time getting in. Ei-chan points out that icing is usually done by cooling just one part of the body, but this is the entire body. Aoi counters that the entire body is connected. With this much, it will provide full care in one go. Ei-chan gingerly dips his toe in, then eventually sinks chest-deep into the ice-filled bathtub. Aoi notes that Ei-chan's fatigue was at its peak because of his match with Wei the other day. Ei-chan was able to take things easy yesterday and today, so Ei-chan should recover in a flash. Ei-chan shivers through this explanation. Yukichi adds that after being in the bath for some minutes, Ei-chan's to get out, allow his body temp to return (to normal) and then get back in (the ice bath). He requests that Ei-chan repeat this several times. He explains that the goal is to stop not just the inflammation and fatigue byproducts(?) throughout the body but also the diffusion of energy. Ei-chan then remembers to ask why Yukichi is there. Yukichi explains he recently started studying to be a coach, and part of that is assisting Aoi. Ei-chan's surprised to hear this. Aoi adds that it means from hereon, they aim to supercompensate, intending to produce a good condition even during a big tournament, not just before the tournament, in order for Ei-chan to seriously aim for the top. In defeating Wei, Ei-chan has broken through a barrier he hadn't been able to overcome all this time. He was exhausted as a result, but if he can recover well here, he might do well with a continuously improving condition from here. A shivering Ei-chan asks if that's true, then asks if he can get out of the bath. Scene switch to a fully clothed Ei-chan lying prone on the bed. (It's implied that some time passed while he completed the ice bath treatment.) Apparently remembering Aoi's confident words, Ei-chan comments that though he said that, Ei-chan's next match—the quarterfinal—is against Yoshimichi who's JTA ranked 6th and is on the national team. Aoi comments that Ei-chan's unusually timid and reminds Ei-chan that Ei-chan has defeated Takuma who's currently ranked 5th. An uncomfortable Ei-chan counters that that had been before he'd turned pro and he hadn't known much about the national team, either. Aoi reminisces that he'd also been on the B Team for a while. Yukichi's surprised to hear this. Aoi adds that he'd been compelled to withdraw soon after because he was injured. But because of that, he'd seen Monma's and Yoshimichi's growth as national team members up close. Ei-chan speculates that everyone changes somehow when they join the team, as he'd thought. Aoi confirms this, saying those guys had suddenly exhibited a sense of responsibility in their remarks after that, and they all changed the way they lived and their tennis changed after that. Around that time, he'd retired and was watching them from a distance, so just like Ei-chan, he'd wondered what was different about being on "the national team." However, after becoming a coach and seeing Ei-chan's growth, he'd understood that it was people wanting to hope and people wanting to others to expect things of them. He points out that Ei-chan probably wants to meet the expectations of people. Ei-chan agrees

and adds that he considers it one of his major motivations. Aoi continues, saying the Davis Cup is a situation where you're competing for the sake of many people—the maximum number of people. It could be said to be the ultimate. That's why where many players are concerned, it has enough merit that they can stake their entire life on it if they're chosen (to play). Ei-chan concludes that (the Davis Cup) is in itself a matter of having a relentless opponent. Aoi agrees and adds that for Ei-chan, it's yet another barrier he has to overcome—if he also has the resolve to become a member. With a look of determination, Ei-chan replies he'll do his best. The next day, the third round of the Keiryo Challenger, Ei-chan's standing by the fence, watch Yoshimichi at early morning practice. Reviewing his notes, he thinks Yoshimichi
is 30 years old with a world rank of 178. Ei-chan got a lot of data and footage just of Yoshimichi's being on the national team. From the looks of things, Yoshimichi's injury doesn't appear to be giving him problems. According to Ei-chan's notes, Yoshimichi's best results was advancing to 2R of the Australian Open; his highest world ranking was 106. This year he's won 1 Challenger, was runner-up in 2, and won 1 Futures. He's been on the national team for 7 consecutive years to date. He'd appeared in 4 matches and was the reserve for others. Features: hard hitter; baseliner; down the line is a specialty; a strong spin on his second serves. Physical: bottomless stamina but injured his knee(?); good footwork but average response; strong (something). Ei-chan notes that Yoshimichi's best record was 5 years ago when he made it to 2R of the Australian Open; after that, Yoshimichi achieved his highest world ranking of 106 at age 26. Yoshimichi joined the national team 7 years ago and his Davis Cup appearances consist of 3 times at doubles and 1 time in singles. He was the reserve on many times and has long experience on the national team. He's the same generation as Monma and has long experience leading Japan. He thinks that Yoshimichi's main results this year is 1 Challenger win, 2 runner-ups; and 1 Futures win. Based just on the data, Yoshimichi seems strong. Just then, Krishna greets Ei-chan and asks if he can request Ei-chan to be his practice partner, because it looks like Pete overslept. Ei-chan replies he's free. Krishna thanks Ei-chan and asks if Ei-chan was watching Yoshimichi. Ei-chan confirms this and asks if Krishna is familiar with him. Krishna replies that he's never spoken with Yoshimichi directly, but he checks everyone ranked 200 and above. Ei-chan's taken aback that Krishna checks all 200 of them: "Amazing." Krishna adds that this year Yoshimichi has had 1 Challenger win and 1 Futures win. Ei-chan checks his notebook (Tennis 80), which confirms Krishna's statement. Then Krishna assures Ei-chan it's okay. If it's Ei-chan, he can defeat Yoshimichi. Surprised, Ei-chan asks why. Krishna is quiet for a moment, and then he smiles and says it's purely based on his calculations (I suspect he means his expectations of Ei-chan's growth as a player). He suggests they practice. Yoshimichi, Watanabe, Ei-chan, Krishna, and 3 unidentified players are shown in the middle of practice. An bashful Pete is also shown on his way. Visitors arrive, among them Ei-chan's mom, who greets Aoi in the bleachers. He tells her that making it squarely to the Best 8 of a Challenger is a big deal. She replies she still can't believe Ei-chan is working as a pro.
In the players' room, Ei-chan listens to music, using earbuds. The audience turns to greet the arrival of Yoshimichi and Ei-chan: Oh, they're here!; Yoshimichiiii!!; Will Maruo, who's continued his giant killing up to here, defeat Yoshimichi too?; It's the 1415th vs the 178th; Maruo, do your best! An official says Yoshimichi will serve first. Extending his hand to Ei-chan, Yoshimichi says this is his first time speaking with Ei-chan properly, but he's been hearing a lot of things about Ei-chan from various places. A shocked Ei-chan is all "Okay..." As they shake hands, Yoshimichi adds that he wasn't able to play against Ei-chan before (at the All-Japan) because of his absence, but they're facing each other again, so this might

already be fate. If so, then he's going to meet Ei-chan with full force. Ei-chan says he's looking forward to it. As Ei-chan prepares to receive, he thinks Yoshimichi is somehow a straightforward person. However, regardless of whether Yoshimichi is on the national team or what sort of person he it, what Ei-chan will do remains the same: believe in himself and overcome the barrier. The chair umpire announces "Three set match. Yoshimichi service. Play!" End of chapter. The teaser blurb says "Against a tennis that supports Japan!?" The title of the next chapter is "A Japanese Mother." Incidentally, Baby Steps will be on break next week, so the next chapter should be out Nov.30.

Ch. 414

The title of this chapter is "Energetic" or it might be better as "Upbeat"; "A Japanese Mother" turns out to be the title of the next chapter. Ei-chan broke Yoshimichi's serve to take the first game of the first set. The featured characters in the side lines this time are Yoshimichi's wife and Watanabe. Details to follow after the RAWs are available.

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So ch.414 opens with Yoshimichi taking a deep breath, then tossing the ball for his first serve. Ei-chan concentrates on receiving it, but the ball goes into the net. Ei-chan thinks he's prepared for around 60% of Yoshimichi's serves that clock in the 190 kph range to go in. Yoshimichi's second serve is to the center. Ei-chan notes that it has quite a strong spin and course; however, he considers it preferable to Sanchez's serve. He returns it with a backhand deep. Yoshimichi chases the ball and manages to catch it at the edge of his racket. Ei-chan notes that Yoshimichi's posture is off balance, so Ei-chan has unexpectedly stolen the advantage from him. He remembers that Yoshimichi is of the same generation as Monma: the type to pin down his opponent using ground strokes. Ei-chan, on the other hand, is of Ike's generation, which sets out to compete first. He returns the ball and goes to the net. Seeing this, Yoshimichi then chases the ball and hits it down the line. Ei-chan judges Yoshimichi's response as average but Yoshimichi runs fast. With Ei-chan having gone forward, Yoshimichi's straight is a winner: 15-0. Ei-chan thinks the ball had gotten past him perfectly: this is the true ability of someone on the national team. He believes his consecutive strong shots were also monotonous, but the ball that Yoshimichi had hit at the critical moment was strong. He hears Yoshimichi talking to himself (Okay! Second point!), and notes that while Yoshimichi gives voice to his fighting spirit, Yoshimichi refrains from striking a triumphant pose. Yoshimichi serves wide. Ei-chan considers it a good serve, but he's able to return it deep. A rally ensues. Ei-chan thinks that Yoshimichi's ground strokes are standard and quite intense. Ei-chan's response to Yoshimichi's footwork and power is to take a forward defensive position (right at the baseline). In his analysis, Yoshimichi covers a wide area with his fast running, while Ei-chan returns with short timing. However, he also believes that he needs to get into the rhythm to continue attacking without losing stamina. He concludes that doing that and fighting without running away from Yoshimichi's ground strokes is a shortcut to victory. As Yoshimichi returns the ball with another strong shot, Ei-chan thinks that there aren't any openings; as things stand, he won't make any progress. Since it's his return game, he decides to take a risk: he shifts his grip on his racket and hits a fast forehand slice, taking Yoshimichi by surprise. Yoshimichi returns the ball, but Ei-chan suspects Yoshimichi's timing is off. Ei-chan counters with a slow ball deep to the corner, so that his shots don't get monotonous, and dashes to the net. Yoshimichi hits a cross. Ei-chan dives for the ball and manages to volley and take the point: 15-15. The audience erupts: Maruo fired back forcefully!; Way to go, Maruo! Ei-chan thinks he'd been unreasonable after things had gone well. Even though he'd gone to the net, it looked like the ball would get past

him: Yoshimichi's ground stroke is more than Ei-chan had anticipated. Just then, Yoshimichi smacks the strings of his racket in a clapping motion. Ei-chan realizes Yoshimichi was praising him. Then he hears Yoshimichi talking to himself (That one just now couldn't be helped. Okay, take the lead here!).
Ei-chan notes how Yoshimichi gives voice to his feelings during a match, and thinks Yoshimichi is an unusually open guy (in comparison to Ei-chan's recent opponents?).
Ei-chan then guides his thoughts back to the game: first is that footwork, an instantaneous power that doesn't give the impression Yoshimichi had been injured; Yoshimichi's endurance is also bottomless, as far as Ei-chan could tell from watching past matches. Overall, Yoshimichi is similar to Monma, but if only leg strength is considered, Yoshimichi's might be above Monma's. Yoshimichi serves. Scene switch to Yoshimichi's wife, Youko, watching by the railing. Watanabe Takatoshi (6th seed in the Keiryo Challenger, member of the national team) notices her while running and greets her. He's quite familiar to her because she addresses him as "Taka-kun." He comments that she's apparently come to support Yoshimichi. She replies that she rarely gets the chance to do so overseas. Right then the score is announced: 15-30. It seems Yoshimichi committed an error, because he exclaims "Stupid... That's wrong, that's wrong. Next!" Youko comments that he's loud as always. Yoshimichi's next serve is an ace: 30-30. Yoshimichi's reaction is "Okay! This is it! Lead!" Ei-chan thinks that in the sense of displaying his emotions openly, Yoshimichi is the same as Araya; however, it doesn't look like Yoshimichi uses that (his emotions) to change his play. Whether Yoshimichi pulls off a shot or not, he doesn't get excited or depressed; he's simply upbeat all the time. In that sense, Yoshimichi is more stable than he appears. Which means Ei-chan has to overcome that leg strength, intense ground strokes, and sense of stability—which feels like an outrageously difficult task to Ei-chan. Youko asks Watanabe what sort of kid Yoshimichi's opponent is. He replies that although Ei-chan made his appearance (in tennis) late and only recently, Ei-chan is the strange type that has excessively diverse attack patterns even if he doesn't have power. Yoshimichi serves wide. Pulling a fast rhythm (Ta-ta-ta), Ei-chan hits a return winner down the line, shocking Yoshimichi: 30-40. Striking a triumphant pose, Ei-chan thinks that one just now matched his rhythm perfectly. Youko is impressed, commenting that Ei-chan's a strong opponent even though he's young. Watanabe thinks that at a closer look, Ei-chan uses quite a precise attack centered on the return that defeated Takuma. As Ei-chan prepares to receive, he thinks it's an unexpected chance to break. Bouncing the ball, Yoshimichi tells himself that here he'll absolutely get one point! He serves to
the center. Ei-chan returns the ball. Yoshimichi hits another strong shot. Ei-chan returns it deep with a high bounce that forces Yoshimichi to take a step back before returning it.
Ei-chan realizes he'd made Yoshimichi step back when Yoshimichi had the advantage, so he hits a drop shot. Yoshimichi sprints to the net, surprising Watanabe (not sure if Watanabe's reaction is due to the speed of Yoshimichi's reaction, to the fact that Yoshimichi even chased the ball, or if he'd noticed something else, like Yoshimichi's form being off). Yoshimichi manages to intercept the ball before it bounces, but it goes into the net: Game, Maruo, 1-0. Coach Aoi and Ei-chan's mom look impressed. As the audience cheers, Ei-chan thinks "It's here! A sudden break!!" Yoshimichi looks at him, thinking "This is the Maruo Eiichirou he's heard so much about, huh..." End of chapter. The teaser for the next chapter says "The absolutely stable Japanese barrier he wants to overcome in one stroke!" The title of the next chapter is "Japan's Mother."

Ch. 415

Ch.415 opens with the first set at 1-0 and the audience commenting on Ei-chan's sudden break and whether it means he isn't outdone even by a member of Japan's national team. As Ei-chan and Yoshimichi change courts, Yoshimichi notes that Ei-chan has good reactions, a skillful return, and diverse attack patterns from a forward defensive position. He considers Ei-chan as Ei-chan takes position to serve. Yoshimichi thinks that with that body, plus to have come this far in just a short number of years, Ei-chan must have packed a lot into that time. If Ei-chan succeeds as a pro, Yoshimichi believes Ei-chan would be a promising talent, not just in Japan but in the world. He's finally able to imagine Ei-chan's strength. Scene switch to the sidelines where Watanabe asks Youko whether Yoshimichi's leg injury is really okay. She replies that Yoshimichi himself says so, but... Her words trail off, and then she chuckles. When Watanabe asks why, she explains that Watanabe's really worried about Yoshimichi. A blushing Watanabe blusters that it's natural and adds it would be a problem if that guy isn't on the national team. If Monma is the national team's father, then Yoshimichi is like the mother. Flashback to two years earlier, at the Davis Cup's world group first round. A voice-over says that they went into the third match with one win and one loss, and that the Japanese doubles team of Yoshimichi and Watanabe have been cornered. The stands are packed with people beating clappers and cheering "Japan!!" As a heavily breathing Watanabe prepares to serve, he thinks if he drops this serve and loses, Japan will be in a critical position. Everything would depend on Monma's singles match tomorrow. He glances to the side where Coach Maeda, Monma, Kouno, and another Japan team member are watching. He flinches at Monma's grim expression, which he interprets as a message of "Don't run away. Attack!" A daunted Watanabe stares at the ball in his hand, panting. Just then, Yoshimichi shouts "Hey! Taka!" from behind him. Yoshimichi looks around, then whispers that he'd noticed only now Watanabe has just one really long nostril hair sticking out. After an embarrassed Watanabe covers his nose with the hand holding the ball, Yoshimichi confesses it's a lie. Watanabe freaks and demands what sort of joke that was at a time like this. Smiling, Yoshimichi replies he wanted to make sure whether Watanabe is duly aware that they're being watched all over Japan. He adds that if Watanabe is duly aware, then Watanabe shouldn't make that (cornered) face because it would worry people all over Japan. He points out they have reliable teammates; if someone fails, then someone will compensate. That's why the Davis Cup is about being able to play with all one's heart with everyone. Yoshimichi and Watanabe bump fists. End of flashback. Watanabe tells Youko that regardless of whether Yoshimichi plays in a match or not, Yoshimichi has a mysterious power to make the national team optimistic just by his presence. That's why Yoshimichi is absolutely essential to the national team. Yoshimichi prepares to receive Ei-chan's first serve. Ei-chan thinks his tennis has made rapid progress in the direction he'd hoped after the match with Wei. He's been able to do nearly ideal plays yesterday and today. The sudden break against someone on the national team is an extreme result, but it's also as he'd hoped. As Ei-chan tosses the ball, he decides to leverage his lead and hold his service offensively. He serves wide, right to the corner of the deuce court. Yoshimichi returns the ball crosscourt. Ei-chan decides to hit the ball deep while Yoshimichi's posture is off, but to get into the rhythm without it downgrading, still moving fast and returning early. He hits the ball straight, and Yoshimichi returns it. A rally ensues. Someone in the audience comments that Ei-chan's also dominant in his service game.

This observation elicits agreement and a comment that Ei-chan's amazing. Ei-chan thinks he'll make sure when to attack, and attack in one blow. He hits a strong shot to the corner. Yoshimichi suddenly sprints forward and returns the ball down the line with a strong backhand. The ball bounces right on the inside of the sideline and is a winner: 0-15.

Ei-chan's shocked that Yoshimichi overturned everything with one ball. Yoshimichi prompts himself: "Second point!" Ei-chan tells himself that one was rather excessive, no matter how he looked at it, and plans to convert the next one. Watanabe comments that if Yoshimichi steadily displays this sort of Yoshimichi-like plays, then Yoshimichi will do well today. Youko wishes that's what will happen. Ei-chan hits a winner down the line: 15-15. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose, thinking this time he's maintained his advantage. Play continues. Ei-chan decides to use various changes of pace during the early stages of the match, while Yoshimichi still isn't used to it. He hits a fast backhand slice and rushes to the net, believing it's completely to his advantage. Ei-chan's move takes Yoshimichi by surprise, but Yoshimichi hits a lob in an arc that's beyond Ei-chan's reach: 15-30. Ei-chan considers the lob skillful, especially when he'd aimed the ball deep and the slice produced a ball that didn't have much of a bounce—making a lob difficult. Yoshimichi prompts himself: "That's right. You can do it, you can do it!" Bouncing the ball in preparation to serve, Ei-chan thinks the advantage hadn't been stolen from him, but when he was cornering Yoshimichi and was about to go for the clincher, Yoshimichi turned the tables on him with a super shot. He wonders if Yoshimichi is the type who's strong when he's being cornered...or if Yoshimichi had been aiming for the shot that would have been the starting point of Ei-chan's attack. He sends his serve wide, and Yoshimichi returns it. They rally. Yoshimichi speculates that Ei-chan is probably thinking it strange when Ei-chan is attacking the way Ei-chan wants to during his serve. He's often told that by guys (players) like Ei-chan who compete using tactics. He believes Ei-chan has difficulty understanding his (Yoshimichi's) tennis, but Ei-chan would simply be overthinking things. Yoshimichi's tennis is awfully simple. Majority of tennis matches are decided by ground strokes. If you assume that one point is decided by approximately 10 ground strokes...it would be extremely difficult if you try to make all those 10 your best shots. However, if it's just one ball among the 10, he can hit his greatest shot. Yoshimichi hits a powerful
ball crosscourt to take the point: 15-40. Ei-chan's shocked that this time Yoshimichi attacked without warning. Yoshimichi strikes a triumphant pose: "Okay!" Ei-chan serves to the center, refusing to give up his advantage, no matter what, and telling himself he won't neglect his vigilance against all balls. Yoshimichi thinks that ground strokes are 90% patience. Nearly all strokes are for the sake of one's life and the lives of one's family: solid, careful, holding on no matter what. (As they exchange shots, Ei-chan thinks he can keep his advantage while being vigilant, and when his advantage expands at some point, he'll attack.) Yoshimichi's thought continues: However...just one (stroke) in one point, you hit, putting all your heart and soul into it, for the sake of Japan. He swings back and hits a strong shot down the line: Game, Yoshimichi, 1-1. The crowd erupts with cheers: Yoshimichi broke back already!; The start is suddenly interesting! End of chapter. The teaser blurb says "Can he overcome him...this guardian spirit of Japan?!" The title of the next chapter is "Clear-cut" or "Unequivocal."

Ch. 416

Ei-chan seems to have noticed a habit of Yoshimichi's when Yoshimichi's about to hit his for-Japan shot. And Yoshimichi likens Ei-chan's play to a veteran's. Aaaaaand Ei-chan breaks Yoshimichi again! Details after the RAWs.

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So, according to ch.416, the first set opened with a rare development: both players showing their distinctive plays and breaking each other's serves. Ei-chan's mom comments that she's thought Ei-chan had taken the lead, but Yoshimichi had caught up with him right away.

Coach Aoi thinks that Ei-chan had investigated Yoshimichi thoroughly, but Yoshimichi's the type who intuitively bulls his way through using his fighting spirit, so he's hard to understand. However, Yoshimichi hasn't gotten Ei-chan's tennis, either. Aoi concludes that it's a matter of which player can grasp his opponent's tennis first. As Ei-chan goes through his routine of fixing his strings, Yoshimichi's apparently giving himself his usual pep talk. Ei-chan turns to face Yoshimichi, wondering at what place the attack that will abruptly change the situation will come. Recalling the first two games, he notes that the attacks had come when his ball was weak and, on the other hand,
when he was cornering Yoshimichi perfectly, but there are also times when it was neither situation, yet Yoshimichi attacked unexpectedly. Yoshimichi doesn't hit a specific type of ball or course, either. Nor are the balls limited the shots that Yoshimichi's good at. Ei-chan concludes that he doesn't really get it, so he decides first of all to attack using his own tennis while investigating Yoshimichi's tennis. At the other end of the court, Yoshimichi tells himself: "Okay! One point here!" As Yoshimichi tosses the ball, Ei-chan reminds himself to watch closely. Yoshimichi serves wide, and Ei-chan returns the ball. He decides to probe where that blow will come. As Yoshimichi chases the ball, Ei-chan notices him pucker his lips (I think people tend to do this when inhaling particularly deeply) as Yoshimichi takes aim at the ball. (Incidentally, in the previous chapter, the mangaka would focus on Yoshimichi's footwork at this point, or show Yoshimichi only after he'd started or finished his swing, so this mannerism was also hidden from readers.) Then Yoshimichi hits a winner down the line: 15-0. Ei-chan thinks that he'd again been beaten with a blow when he'd had the upper hand; however, he wonders if perhaps that one just now... Yoshimichi serves again, this time to the center. Ei-chan thinks Yoshimichi doesn't have any habits in his form nor does he use one pattern or another. Ei-chan decides to pay attention to Yoshimichi's face. Play continues. After Yoshimichi hits the ball, Ei-chan notes there was no change to Yoshimichi's expression at that point. He opts to change the pace with a slow ball and expand his advantage. Once again Yoshimichi puckers his lips, and Ei-chan takes note: "This expression! The attack earlier came when he'd made this expression!" Ei-chan anticipates that if the attack will come, it will be to the open court. Yoshimichi does hit a strong blow as predicted. Ei-chan's shocked that it really came, but he manages to return the ball, surprising Yoshimichi. The ball hits the white strip on the net, then lands on Yoshimichi's side of the court: 15-15. Ei-chan apologizes for the cord ball; Yoshimichi acknowledges him with a thumbs-up of approval. Ei-chan's flabbergasted that he can tell when the showdown will come from Yoshimichi's expression right before Yoshimichi hits the ball. He couldn't tell from past videos, but on court it's quite easy to tell. He wonders, "Is there such a thing?" He snaps out of his daze with a "No...No no no..." (There's no indication whether he's denying there's such a thing or is just getting his thoughts back on track.) He thinks he was able to anticipate the one just now, but he was attacked. Even if he can tell when a
showdown will come, it's still tough. Where that's concerned, it's a question of what kind of shot will come. No matter what sort of shot it is, it's high quality. He ponders how to oppose it from hereon without running away. Conversely, if he's too caught up in that (probably how to oppose it), he'll lose sight of his own tennis, so he decides to handle it at that time (when it comes). Yoshimichi serves wide. Ei-chan returns the ball, then stares at Yoshimichi's face, which doesn't change. Ei-chan thinks that if he can tell that attack isn't coming, he should be able to attack proactively. He hits a winner down the line to take the point: 15-30. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose at taking the lead. The audience is amazed that for some reason, the return side gets ahead in points in this match. Ei-chan remembers that his opponent is on the national team. If possible, he wants to break first once again. Yoshimichi thinks that

Ei-chan is like a veteran, attacking at an undesirable time. As Yoshimichi tosses the ball, Ei-chan notices him puckering his lips. The serve is an ace: 30-30. Shouting "Okay!" Yoshimichi thinks he won't let Ei-chan break his serve so easily. Ei-chan thinks he couldn't have done anything about that last one. However, with it, he's almost certain an attack will come when that is Yoshimichi's expression. He wonders if he can use it somehow. Play continues, and then Ei-chan sees Yoshimichi puckering his lips. He anticipates the attack will be to the open court. When Yoshimichi does attack with a straight to the open court, Ei-chan chases the ball, resolved to do something with it. He hits an acute angle ball to take the point: 30-40. Yoshimichi's all "What?!" Ei-chan's initially surprised that he pulled it off, but strikes a triumphant pose as reality sinks in. Someone in the audience exclaims "It's another break chance for the lower-ranked Maruo!" Ei-chan thinks he doesn't want to lose here. Yoshimichi looks grim, then exhales deeply. As Yoshimichi tosses the ball, Ei-chan opts for a proactive approach. Yoshimichi sends his serve wide; Ei-chan predicted it correctly, so he's in position to return it well and deep. He takes the opportunity to dash to the net to play forward. Then he notices the pucker of Yoshimichi's lips and realizes Yoshimichi's attack is coming—to the right! He
lunges and barely manages to volley. As he regains his feet, he notes he was right (probably that the attack would come) twice in succession. Yoshimichi chases the ball and again makes that expression. Ei-chan is surprised that another attack is coming. Yoshimichi realizes he's being read in a big way, but he dismisses it with "So what?!" and wallops the ball with roar. Ei-chan's shocked to see the ball heading right at him. As he flinches, the ball hits the net: Game, Maruo, 2-1. End of chapter. The teaser blurb says "A break...! However, Ei-chan, whose weapon is his eyes, wasn't able to respond!" The title of the next chapter is "Shoulders" (maybe a player on the national team that represents the team's shoulders? or maybe just the future of Japan resting on someone's shoulders?) Note that the next issue will be a double issue, so there won't be any Baby Steps on the Wednesday after Christmas; the next chapter should be after New Year. Okay, so it looks like Yoshimichi really is that straightforward and open; his mannerism makes sense and might be obvious only because of Ei-chan's excellent eyesight. However, Ei-chan seems to have experienced firsthand the difficulty of playing at the net. It looks like Yoshimichi's drive would have surpassed Ei-chan's reaction time if the ball hadn't gone into the net. Of course it could mean that Ei-chan will be on the lookout for it next time and will be able to react. But the blurb doesn't seem so optimistic.

(end of previously compiled summaries, beginning of my compiling of Vampire Cat’s summaries)

Ch. 417
So ch.417 opens with the announcement of the score: Game, Maruo: 2-1. Audience reaction: "Maruo breaks again!!" and "What's with this exchange of breaks?!"

As Ei-chan heads to the bench, he thinks that he was able to break, but if Yoshimichi's ball had been 5 cm higher, he wouldn't have been able to react. Yoshimichi had also countered Ei-chan's forceful attack with two consecutive game-clinching (for Japan!) shots.

At the benches, Ei-chan scribbles in his notebook, while Yoshimichi drinks. Ei-chan thinks that even though he has such an easy-to-read hint of an attack from Yoshimichi's expression, he'd been attacked perfectly. He looks through his notes, wondering if there's a

trend in when Yoshimichi makes that face. If he can grasp that, he might be able to prepare a bit mentally. Other than chance balls and aiming for an explosive attack...it's when he'd changed the pace in a major way with a forehand slice or an arching spin. Ei-chan's shocked to consider Yoshimichi's opposition is getting fired up (by the chance of pace). However, he feels that might be enough for the easy-to-understand (straightforward) Yoshimichi.

On the other hand, Yoshimichi thinks to a certain extent, it can't be helped that he's being read. However, he also notes the way it's happening is rather early. He considers the way Ei-chan is playing in a forward defensive position to be magnificent; that's not something that can be done if the player doesn't have ability. First of all, Ei-chan's eyes are quite good. In addition, he gives the impression of having the power to reproduce what he sees accurately while being trained surrounded only by fine things; in the case of STC, there's Souji and Takuma, plus Ryuu (Aoi) is his coach. Ability and environment...and because of that physique, trial-and-error has produced that unique tennis (image of Ei-chan in a particular stance that results in a drop shot or fast forehand slice or a sinking ball. Yoshimichi concludes that Ei-chan is quite a gem in the rough for Japan—so there's merit in knocking him down!

The chair umpire calls time and the two players return to the court. As Ei-chan sets up to serve, he thinks that he's prepared for a counterattack when he makes his typical (Ei-chan change-of-pace style) attack. It's a question of how much he can narrow the options for that counterattack. Ei-chan tosses the ball, thinking that if he can get into the rhythm like when he'd broken Yoshimichi's serve, he'll definitely be able to hold his serve.

Ei-chan serves wide, and Yoshimichi returns the ball. Ei-chan plans to lower the pace suddenly with his next shot. Usually he'd be able to expand his advantage with this, but...Yoshimichi's case requires special attention. He hits a cross, then sees Yoshimichi pucker his lips. As Yoshimichi prepares to hit the ball, he thinks that using this sort of shot here is a new idea, but the depth of the shot and strength of the spin are insufficient. Yoshimichi hits a for-Japan power shot that Ei-chan manages to return. Unfortunately, the ball goes into the net: 0-15.

Audience reaction: "Whoa...Yoshimichi deliberately came on strong with that ball too, right?" and "Yoshimichi's fired up today!"

Ei-chan notes that even though he'd still held the advantage, Yoshimichi had aimed for it and overwhelmed him again with a single shot. However, it was just one step more (I think he means he'd managed to get behind the ball, even though it had gone into the net), and the situation is easy to understand.

Yoshimichi, on the other hand, thinks he's also giving it his all, because a true gem in the rough will sparkle as well as it's cut. (In other words, he's setting a good example for Ei-chan to learn from?)

Ei-chan serves to the center. Yoshimichi returns the ball, and a rally ensues. Ei-chan decides to compete at this point with a fast slice crosscourt. He expects that the return from such a shot would be an angle ball crosscourt. Yoshimichi puckers his lips and does hit an angle shot. Ei-chan successfully returns the shot down the line, and Yoshimichi notes Ei-chan had

finally returned it. However, Yoshimichi thinks that it's over with this: he hits a shot to the open court: 0-30.

Ei-chan thinks that even though he'd correctly predicted Yoshimichi's shot in his service game, he hadn't been able to retain his advantage. He considers the last shot to be world top class, comparable to Sanchez. He realizes that about 1 in 10 of Yoshimichi's shots are on the same level as Sanchez's. He wonders why, even though only that single shot is high risk, it has a high probability of going in. Judging from that expression of Yoshimichi's, Ei-chan speculates Yoshimichi's fighting spirit for that single shot is different from for the other balls. If it's fighting spirit, then that means willpower. He remembers how he'd managed to pull through the match with Wei with willpower.

Flashback to the night after the match with Wei. Ei-chan's on a video call with sports psychologist Mike Maguire of IMG. Ei-chan had asked why he'd been freed from his fatigue and his willpower enhanced after he'd paid attention to the people around him who support him. To confirm that, Mike fired a question back at Ei-chan: why was Ei-chan playing then? Ei-chan replied that as a pro he wanted to win the match. Mike followed up with "Why did you want to win?" Ei-chan said that he had to respond to the people rooting for him at the time, but that's because he'd been looking for the source of his willpower as things were getting difficult. The primary reason is that he wanted to break through the lower tour even just a little sooner because he wanted to get to the Grand Slam. Mike persisted in his questioning, excusing it as his being a psychologist: "If that's the case, why do you want to get to the Grand Slam?" Ei-chan explained that when he'd actually gone to watch, he'd wanted to get (play) there. Mike asked why Ei-chan wanted to get there after he'd watched. Ei-chan replied that it was a fantastic place, that he was able to meet Max and Sanchez, and that Ike had dared it there, and Ei-chan had spontaneously thought "Me too." Mike then asked, "Why 'Me too' about those guys being in that fantastic place?" Ei-chan said because it was cool. Mike asked, "Why do you think that's cool?" He explained that if Ei-chan follows the argument to its logical conclusion this way, Ei-chan will get close to the answer.

Ei-chan replied it was because the people watching Max's and Ike's tennis were so fascinated that 15,000 people couldn't take their eyes off the tennis of those two. It was because they could engross those people. So Mike asked why Ei-chan thought "Me too" after having been engrossed in the match. Ei-chan thought about it, then replied that he also wanted to play that way over there. He wanted to get strong enough so that next time (when he's the one playing) he'll be able to provide the energy he'd received in the stadium that time (when he'd watched the match).

Mike commented that Ei-chan had finally gotten close to the answer, so Mike proposed returning to the beginning. If that's the case, then it became a matter of Ei-chan's playing because he wanted to provide energy to the people watching (in other words, to get them fired up?). Ei-chan was pulled up short by this, so Mike explained that while Ei-chan had certainly been supported by the people around him and drawn on that for willpower, Ei-chan had also tried to produce power for their sake and had succeeded in that. Ei-chan focused on Mike's words that he'd provided (energy)..."For the sake of the people who supported him." Mike explained that people can become stronger when they produce that sort of strong motivation. He added that in Japanese, it's called a sense of duty. End of flashback.

Ei-chan looks over to Yoshimichi, who's psyching himself with "One more point!" Ei-chan thinks that if "sense of duty" to support Japan is that single shot, then it's not a peculiar technique nor power nor reason; it's psychological. However, he believes the strength of one's fighting spirit and sense of duty shouldn't be decided by the number of people you want to support. Which means...Ei-chan decides he'll win on mental strength, return that single shot, and overcome a member of the national team, as he serves wide.

Yoshimichi puckers his lips as he prepares to return the ball. Ei-chan sees this. Then Yoshimichi hits a return winner: 0-40.

The audience is in an uproar: "There it is! Is Yoshimichi already fired up?!"; "When Yoshimichi gets going, you can't hold him back!"; "C'mon. Break! Please, Mr. National Team!" End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "Can he overcome it...the sense of duty of a member of the national team?!" The title of the next chapter is "Latent Strength."

Ch. 418

Okay, so ch.418 opens with Ei-chan shocked that his first serve, which he'd hit with sufficient willpower, had been countered with a single strong blow...which means... (Yoshimichi thinks he'd leveraged his lead and made an educated guess, which proved to be correct.) Ei-chan's thoughts continue, rejecting his initial conclusion. He can't imagine Yoshimichi predicted the mix of Ei-chan's serves this fast, so he concludes it was just guesswork on Yoshimichi's part. He tells himself to calm down, and plans to adjust. It's his third (service) game. He figures that Yoshimichi's real strength is more comprehensive/integrated than his own, but that doesn't mean he can't get a point off Yoshimichi. It's just that he's practically unable to cope when Yoshimichi makes that expression as Yoshimichi suddenly levels up, even though it's temporary. Ei-chan's impression is that Yoshimichi concentrates and his performance increases abruptly, maybe due to his fighting spirit that comes from his sense of duty as a national team member. Ei-chan considers that temporarily higher quality to be world-tour level. The height of Yoshimichi's overwhelming performance when he's concentrating is Yoshimichi's strength, in Ei-chan's opinion. (During this time, Yoshimichi's giving himself his usual pep talk, telling himself he'll decide it here with one point.) However, Ei-chan thinks Yoshimichi's powers of concentration might not have durability...so if Ei-chan doesn't hand over his advantage during his service, he should have a chance. In which case, the first and most important thing for defeating Yoshimichi's fighting spirit is the serve.

Setting up to serve, Ei-chan decides to boost his focus suddenly right from the beginning. Tossing the ball, he thinks he'll aim to make the point with his serve, not just with the mix of serves but also by increasing the power and the tightness of the course of his serve. Ei-chan sends his serve to the center. Unfortunately, he faults. Ei-chan thinks that he'd aimed for too much and that he should concentrate more.

Then he notices Yoshimichi's habit: Yoshimichi already has his lips puckered, which suggests to Ei-chan that Yoshimichi intends to attack Ei-chan's second serve. Since a serve with a bouncing spin is easy to hit because it's high, Ei-chan opts for a slice serve that won't bounce much to make it difficult for Yoshimichi to clinch the point with a single blow. He also

chooses a course to the center that will escape away from Yoshimichi. Ei-chan hits his second serve as planned; however, he double-faults: Game, Yoshimichi, 2-2. The audience exclaims over the break and wonders how long the exchange of breaks will continue.

Ei-chan blames the error on his overthinking and inability to concentration. Then he corrects himself: he was paying too much attention to that expression of Yoshimichi's. Yoshimichi's fighting spirit forced Ei-chan's error.

Ei-chan's mom comments that even though Ei-chan had taken the lead, Yoshimichi had taken it away. But she still marvels that Ei-chan can get this far against a member of the national team. Coach Aoi notes that Ei-chan hasn't been able to win a Futures, the lowest class of the lower tour, since turning pro. Just with Ei-chan's activity in the Keiryo, he's already gotten past that point, and Aoi believes a world ranking in the 300s is within sight for Ei-chan. It's just that Ei-chan's opponent (Yoshimichi) is a player who has maintained a world ranking within 250 for 8 years. Aoi explains that in tennis, there's actually a big barrier around the world ranking of 250, adding that 250 is approximately the line for participation in the qualifiers for the Grand Slam. It's the barrier that shows whether or not a player has what it takes to view the pinnacle of the world (probably the tennis world, in other words, the Grand Slam).

At this point, Yoshimichi serves wide, and Ei-chan returns the ball deep.

Aoi continues his commentary: Even though he said that, there isn't that much of a difference in power and skill between someone ranked 178 (Yoshimichi's current rank) and someone ranked 300 and below. The major difference is clearly mental. To put it simply, a player ranked within 250 is strong at the critical moment. He has the mental strength to be able to concentrate, which can be called a "psychological technique."

Ei-chan has been rallying during this commentary. Yoshimichi thinks he isn't able to complete his attacks because Ei-chan has a wild number of deployment patterns from a return. He suspects Ei-chan might really join the national team, while he, on the other hand, is close to retiring from the team, now that Souji has joined the team. Ei-chan decides to change the pace offensively and hits a fast forward slice. Seeing this, Yoshimichi thinks that precisely because of this (his imminent retirement from the national team), he's always considering what else he can do for Japan.

Ei-chan notices Yoshimichi puckering his lips, and moves back from the baseline—but just for this upcoming single blow. The shift takes the audience and Yoshimichi by surprise. Ei-chan thinks he's not running away; by moving back, he increases his tactical options.

Yoshimichi thinks that first of all, he'll concentrate on the one ball in front of him—for the sake of Japan! Ei-chan concludes that being farther back is enough, and he decides to use the strength of Yoshimichi's ball. He hits a winner down the line: 0-15.

Striking a triumphant pose, Ei-chan exults at having taken a point for the first time off one of Yoshimichi's single blows (what I call a for-Japan shot). While he doesn't have the sense of duty of supporting Japan, he intends to compensate using tactics.

The onlookers comment about how the return side is leading again and that they can't predict (the match) at all. Aoi tells Ei-chan's mom that Yoshimichi is a player who's had the sort of mental strength of someone ranked 250 or below; however, he doesn't think Ei-chan will be defeated so easily, either. In his opinion, Ei-chan is already first-rate psychologically speaking. With the match turning into a contest of powers of concentration, especially now, Ei-chan shouldn't lose so easily when he's concentrating on the one ball in front of him. What Aoi doesn't tell Ei-chan's mom, however, is that Yoshimichi probably has something pushing him recently that Yoshimichi hasn't had until now: the awareness of his retirement from the national team.

As Yoshimichi focuses on the ball in preparation for his serve, Ei-chan notices him puckering his lips again. He figures Yoshimichi is brimming over with the intent to fire back for the point Ei-chan took. Yoshimichi thinks Ei-chan had done something major by taking the last point. If what Ei-chan's shown up to now is Ei-chan's caliber, then Yoshimichi wants to hit everything he'd gained on the international level. He wants to see what will happen with Ei-chan...and because of that with himself.

Yoshimichi serves to the center. Ei-chan manages to return the ball, but then he notices Yoshimichi's habit making another appearance—this time while Yoshimichi's running (not simply right before he hits the ball). Yoshimichi hits a strong shot crosscourt. Ei-chan returns it, noting it's again a terrific ball. Yoshimichi again makes that expression as he swings back. A rally ensues with Yoshimichi hitting one for-Japan shot after another; all this time Ei-chan's apparently been at his ideal position at the baseline instead of farther back.

Ei-chan's surprised. He thought Yoshimichi hit those only once per point, but Yoshimichi's been hitting them in rapid succession. He concludes that Yoshimichi has raised the standard of his usual strokes. He wonders if it's possible for all of something like these to go in. It's taking everything Ei-chan has to return the ball at his current (forward) defensive position.

Yoshimichi hits yet another for-Japan shot. Ei-chan's in disbelief. However, if it's a high-risk shot, Ei-chan thinks he can aim for Yoshimichi committing an error, so he'll just return the balls for now. Then Yoshimichi bares his teeth in a snarl that takes Ei-chan aback. Silently demanding that Ei-chan show him for the sake of Japan that Ei-chan will overcome him, Yoshimichi hits a super shot down the line to take the point: 15-15. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "The gear was raised once again...or was it?" The title of the next chapter is "Range."

Well, there you have it. However, the teaser blurb suggests Yoshimichi can't maintain this performance for the rest of the match. Plus, once Ei-chan has gotten the "range," he's going to start closing the distance. Also, if Ei-chan defeats Yoshimichi fair and square (as in no forfeit due to injury), his win would imply he's right up there in the 250-and-below level, which should make winning the Keiryo plausible. I'm wondering how Watanabe is reacting to all this.

Another thing I get out of this chapter is that Yoshimichi now has high expectations of Ei-chan and he now intends to show Ei-chan everything he's got (learned on the international stage), because he believes Ei-chan will learn—and maybe that passing on the

techniques will fast-track Ei-chan's development and strengthen the national team. On the other hand, Yoshimichi's forcing himself to hit serial for-Japan shots might prove to Yoshimichi that he's capable of more, and improve his own tennis too.

Ch. 419

Okay, so ch.419 opens with the game score at 15-15. Ei-chan's stumped by Yoshimichi's bared-teeth snarl. Just as Ei-chan had managed to handle Yoshimichi's attack when Yoshimichi puckers his lips, now Yoshimichi bares his teeth and hammers an even more outrageous shot. (Yoshimichi's talking to himself at this point: Yeah! That's it!) Ei-chan thinks Yoshimichi had raised the level of his stroke—no, his coordination. Just when Ei-chan thought he'd come to grips with Yoshimichi's play, Yoshimichi boosted his fighting spirit further? Ei-chan's in disbelief.

On seeing Yoshimichi so fired up in the opening of the match, Watanabe concludes that Ei-chan is no ordinary guy. Youko comments that guy (probably referring to Yoshimichi) is simple, so he's easy to understand. Watanabe takes his leave of Youko (probably to continue warming up for his match with Pete), and Youko tells him to do his best.

Ei-chan tells himself that even though he thinks this is the maximum, willpower is something you can produce more of, so he should expect Yoshimichi to have an even higher level. If Ei-chan plays with that perspective...

Yoshimichi serves to the center. Ei-chan manages to return it, but it takes his best effort just to touch the ball, so he practically wills the ball to go in deep (sounds like he's not confident of his control). He then sees Yoshimichi pucker his lips on the backswing, so he moves one step back from his preferred defensive position. Yoshimichi hits a strong shot to the corner. Ei-chan's able to return it but he considers the situation to be a one-sided defensive battle.

For the next shot, Yoshimichi looks calm, so Ei-chan expects Yoshimichi had returned to his default play. Ei-chan decides that if he aims to turn the tables, this is the time. Yoshimichi hits a straight deep to the corner. It's a good shot, but Ei-chan thinks he currently won't get a better ball, so he goes for a drop shot. Baring his teeth, Yoshimichi charges the net and volleys. With Yoshimichi closer at the net, Ei-chan decides to hit a high lob to the back court. However, Yoshimichi's able to reach the ball and put it away with a backhand: 30-15.

Ei-chan concludes it's no good. Even with that, the precision of his drop shot was insufficient. Yoshimichi thinks a drop shot requires fine palm sensitivity: it's not a shot that a player can hit so simply when he's worried stiff during a Davis Cup match. Ei-chan thinks he's gotten the range for Yoshimichi's expressions. The 3 patterns are: 1) normal, 2) puckered, and 3) bared teeth, with a proportional increase in fighting spirit and quality. So he plans to shift his defensive position based on them: his regular position for normal where he'll risk attacking; one step back for the puckered where he'll try to return the ball deep if possible; and another step back for the bared teeth where he'll just return the ball. The forward-backward movement will make things more difficult, but he plans to pay attention to his rhythm and remember a song that he'd listened to before the match.

Yoshimichi prepares to serve with a #2 expression. He serves wide, and Ei-chan manages to

return it deep. When Yoshimichi pulls the same expression for the next shot, Ei-chan moves back and returns the ball deep. He feels he's started to be able to handle #2. After Yoshimichi hits another #2, Ei-chan thinks that despite that (being able to handle #2), he can't attack, and he wonders why Yoshimichi's shots can continue going in this way.

Yoshimichi notes that Ei-chan's returning the balls well. Baring his teeth, he silently asks "how's this?" Seeing #3, Ei-chan moves further back and shifts 100% on the defensive. However, he thinks it's no good: even if he can return the ball, he won't be able to get back (to position?) and the next shot will end it. So he decides to aim for the corner. Unfortunately his shot is out, though just barely: 40-15.

Audience reactions: Ohh...almost!; Yoshimichi's shots are amazing, but Maruo's also holding out well!

Ei-chan wonders if a defensive battle is the most he can do in a return game. Then he considers this might be a technique for Yoshimichi to be able to build up his fighting spirit, and wonders if Yoshimichi can really continue through the match with such fighting spirit.

Coach Aoi thinks Yoshimichi is special in that he's always cheerful during a match and he can sustain a psychological condition where he can readily fire himself up. This seems simple, but it's actually quite difficult during a solitary tennis match. It's the biggest reason Yoshimichi has been able to maintain a rank within 250. There's also the fact that the time when Yoshimichi can use his own strength at the fullest is long. And this is clearly a characteristic that Yoshimichi had gained by becoming a member of the national team.

Yoshimichi thinks that defense is important, but he still won't lose to a guy with this amount of offense in a one-sided defensive battle. Baring his teeth, he mentally challenges Ei-chan, ordering him to have a weapon that will oppose Yoshimichi's attack if Ei-chan will defend Japan (in other words, become a member of the national team).

Ei-chan notes Yoshimichi's expression and manages to return the #3 shot. He then sees Yoshimichi's face reverted to #1 and wonders if he'll have a chance (to attack). However, Yoshimichi hits a winner down the line: Game, Yoshimichi, 3-2.

The audience goes wild. Yoshimichi's the first to hold his serve in the exchange of breaks. Ei-chan's in shock. Even though Yoshimichi's expression had been normal, he'd hit his best ball today.

Yoshimichi concludes Ei-chan is quite a player. There's no doubt Ei-chan is a candidate for the national team. However, Yoshimichi thinks it's too soon to surrender his position on the team to Ei-chan.

Ei-chan considers the expressions of Yoshimichi's that he'd seen. He'd anticipated Yoshimichi's having an even higher mode. However, for that mode to have the same expression as #1 is...

End of chapter. I'll do the summary of ch.420 after breakfast.

Ch. 420
Ch.420, titled "Tension," starts with Ei-chan sketching Yoshimichi's expressions in his notebook and numbering them 1 (normal), 2 (puckered), 3 (bared teeth), and 4?/1? (normal). When he thought he could return #2 and #3, there's a more intense #4...and there's no way to distinguish #4 from #1. Even #2 and #3, he was just able to return them, but he couldn't tie his return to an attack. All the same, he can't keep moving his defensive position back; he's switched to playing at a forward defensive position in order to defeat a player of this level. Ei-chan tells himself to calm down. First, he has to make sure of #1 and #4. As for #2 and #3, he'll return the shots even if he moves back. If his opponent has a normal expression, Ei-chan plans to play in his normal forward position while watching out for #4. The chair umpire calls time.

As the two players return to the court, Ei-chan reminds himself this is his service game. He'll hold it and break Yoshimichi's unusual concentration. As Yoshimichi gets into position to receive, he thinks he'd finally held his serve. With this, he believes he's adjusted his condition to be able to play as he likes.

By the railing, Youko remembers when Yoshimichi left that morning. He'd told her his opponent today might be a guy he can entrust Japan's future to. Because no matter what, he's a guy Ayu (Monma) has been concerned about. They have an age difference, and there's no telling whether they'll be able to play against each other on the same team. He'd already missed one chance to do so. Having another chance to play against Ei-chan come is fate.

Ei-chan serves wide. Yoshimichi thinks he wants to play with his all, doing his best. Seeing Yoshimichi's blank expression, Ei-chan notes that regardless of whether it's a #1 or a #4, Yoshimichi's motion is fast. Yoshimichi hammers a #4 crosscourt. Ei-chan returns it and sprints for the open court. Again, Yoshimichi's expression is normal. Ei-chan expects a #4 but refuses to move back: C'mon! Ei-chan manages to touch the ball, sending it back in a high arc. However, he realizes he's in an unfavorable situation after 2 balls, even though it's his serve. He hopes the ball goes deeper, but Yoshimichi backs up and smashes the ball crosscourt to take the point: 0-15.

Yoshimichi thinks it's complete: he's finally brought back even this condition after his comeback (in other words, after his injury, so he's at his best condition). Ei-chan thinks Yoshimichi's too strong, but if he (Ei-chan) gets used to it, he should see an opening somewhere that he'll take advantage of. He serves wide. Yoshimichi's expression is blank, so Ei-chan again debates whether it's a #1 or a #4. Ei-chan's racket barely touches the ball, and it's so strong his racket is pushed back: 0-30.

Ei-chan realizes his reaction had been half a step behind, possibly because of his indecision over whether Yoshimichi's expression indicates a #1 or a #4. So he tells himself to proceed as if Yoshimichi's normal expression indicates a #4. However, he also notes that Yoshimichi's expression hasn't changed for some time now. Could it mean...this has become his default? Yoshimichi hits a jump shot down the line: 0-40.

Ei-chan concludes that he's correct. Yoshimichi's expressions from #1 to #3 were the

process by which Yoshimichi boosted his powers of concentration to the utmost, so he's finally reached his best condition. This normal expression is Yoshimichi's best condition. In which case, Ei-chan tells himself he can only try to do something in the current situation.

He serves to the center, then decides to try moving back a step farther from the baseline. However, Yoshimichi sees that and hits a drop shot: Game, Yoshimichi, 4-2.

Audience reactions: Yoshimichi breaks again!; He's calm! Has the difference in their actual strengths finally appeared? Aoi thinks it (Yoshimichi's movements?) is already brisk.

Ei-chan thinks it's no good. His service was broken overwhelmingly. He can't move his defensive position farther back than #3. Moreover, Yoshimichi's service is coming up. Ei-chan no longer has a hand to play. As it is, it's like he's playing against a top-ranked player. Then he thinks further and reminds himself that Yoshimichi isn't top class. This situation can't simply continue. So he wonders if he can't manage to play in a way that will break Yoshimichi's concentration. He remembers his match with Takagi and the tricks Takagi pulled to throw off his game and prevent him from maintaining his concentration. He recalls how he'd maintained his concentration and the process Aoi had written out: Apathy → Anger → Pressure → Defiance

He considers plays that will anger Yoshimichi and make him feel pressured. Since it's quite hard to apply pressure right now, how about making him mad. He entertains the thought of noncommittal (irresponsible) tennis, due to Yoshimichi's straightforward personality—but immediately dismisses the notion. If he were to do that, Yoshimichi would get mad, but Ei-chan would get hammered and it would be over. Then he remembers that when he played his typical tennis, he was attacked psychologically—wasn't that similar to anger? In which case, if he plays his typical tennis...which might be difficult right now.

The chair umpire calls time, surprising Ei-chan. In the end, Ei-chan decides he can only try everything he can think of. He takes position way back from the baseline to receive Yoshimichi's serve. Yoshimichi notes the change. As Yoshimichi tosses the ball, Ei-chan dashes forward to his normal position; he'd just been pretending. He manages to return the ball deep.

Noting that Ei-chan had returned to his usual defensive position, Yoshimichi wonders if it had been a feint. He hits a strong shot down the line. Because Yoshimichi's reaction had been half a step late, Ei-chan counters with a drop shot, even though it's difficult. Yoshimichi rushes to the net, wondering if Ei-chan hasn't learned not to simply use a drop shot. Ei-chan thinks that it's precisely because he knows Yoshimichi can reach it (that he chose a drop shot).

Ei-chan also rushes to the net. He knows he's at a disadvantage in a ground stroke contest. However, he's confident of his reactions, so he'll commence a reaction contest. Yoshimichi and Ei-chan exchange volleys. On Ei-chan's second volley, he gets the ball past Yoshimichi. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb for the next chapter is "Will it turn into a step toward bouncing back from his

unfavorable situation?!" The title of the next chapter is "Decisive Blow."

Ch. 421

So ch.421 opens with the chair umpire announcing the score: 0-15. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose. He'd brought things to a contest of reactions and taken the point from Yoshimichi at Yoshimichi's #4 setting. Ei-chan wonders how Yoshimichi will change because of this, and hears Yoshimichi talking to himself: "Almost but not quite! Focus more! It can go better!"

Yoshimichi exhales deeply, and when he looks up, his concentration seems more intense. Seeing Yoshimichi's expression, Ei-chan thinks Yoshimichi is as intense as usual, without any change. Rather, Ei-chan feels that Yoshimichi is proactively controlling his emotions. In which case, Ei-chan decides that his next move is to shift his receiving position so he's forward of the baseline. He plans to take another point in succession, shake Yoshimichi's emotions, and break Yoshimichi's concentration.

Ei-chan's move seems to pique Yoshimichi, who wonders whether taking the previous point made Ei-chan feel like challenging him. Or is it another feint and Ei-chan will resume his usual position? Or... (Ei-chan's move seems to have succeeded in forcing Yoshimichi to think instead of just focusing on quashing him.)

Ei-chan remembers this is his return game. He'd been thinking he ought to move back to the edge of his defense zone, but in a certain sense, a return is a contest of reactions!

Yoshimichi decides to handle whatever comes in his usual manner. As Yoshimichi tosses the ball, Ei-chan thinks he has a chance to suddenly get the upper hand if he predicts Yoshimichi's serve correctly. It's already a critical moment, so he has to risk it. Going on his data, he predicts the serve will be wide—and is correct.

Ei-chan returns the ball crosscourt with a solid blow. Yoshimichi's surprised that Ei-chan has attacked at this point from the front and that the return is deep. Yoshimichi counters with a straight. Ei-chan thinks that Yoshimichi had countered it normally even though Ei-chan had hit a good return. However, Ei-chan believes they're currently on an even standing, so before things turn into a stroke contest...he hits a drop shot, hoping to bring about another contest of reactions.

Both players rush to the net, Yoshimichi thinking "That again?" He volleys but simply floats the ball, the long flight time giving him time to return to the baseline and avoid the contest Ei-chan was aiming for. This move takes Ei-chan by surprise, and it looks like the slow shot was short of where Ei-chan expected the ball to go. He barely manages to volley, since the ball hits the frame of his racket. (Last night, my brother and I were discussing the spoiler post and were disappointed that Ei-chan hadn't gone for another drop shot at this point, but it looks like Ei-chan didn't have much leeway, so I guess that's okay.) Ei-chan has sufficient control to send the ball fast to Yoshimichi's feet, and then he plants himself at the net, prepared for another contest of reactions. However, Yoshimichi lobs the ball, and the arc is beyond Ei-chan's reach: 15-15.

Ei-chan's impressed by the shot, especially since he'd thought he'd cornered Yoshimichi. He wonders how long this concentration of Yoshimichi's will continue. For Yoshimichi's next serve, Ei-chan's prediction is wrong, so his response is delayed and he barely manages to return the serve. Since his return is weak, Yoshimichi easily puts away the ball: 30-15.

Ei-chan thinks he hasn't been able to challenge Yoshimichi in a contest of reactions ever since the drop shot. As play continues with an exchange of shots, Ei-chan wonders if there's nothing he can do. So he tries the high arcing shot that had worked so well against Wei, then runs to the net. (The audience recognizes the shot from the match with Wei.) Ei-chan thinks that because it's a slow ball, it's a contest of reactions where Yoshimichi's power is halved. He believes he'll take the point and break Yoshimichi's concentration. However, Ei-chan barely touches Yoshimichi's shot and doesn't succeed in returning it: 40-15.

Ei-chan's frustrated: "This is also no good?" Yoshimichi exhales, giving Ei-chan a thoughtful look.

Coach Aoi thinks today's Yoshimichi is too good. It might be that Yoshimichi harbors expectations of Ei-chan, and those expectations are allowing Yoshimichi to maintain his concentration for a longer time than usual. Plus, this is his comeback from injury, so his motivation might also be quite high. While play continues with Yoshimichi serving and Ei-chan returning, Aoi concludes that that completes the favorable conditions for Yoshimichi, who's good at firing himself up psychologically. Even though Ei-chan's able to compete well enough that it seems his play would work against the normal Yoshimichi... Aoi wonders if the mental strength of a national team member, which Aoi couldn't overcome, is something that can't be overcome in any way.

Ei-chan hits a fast forward slice, planning to bring about a drawn-out match. He continues to exchange shots with Yoshimichi. Even though he'd wanted to play at a forward position during a stroke contest, he'd moved way back behind the baseline. Since it's come to this...

Yoshimichi hits a winner. The shocked Ei-chan thinks he can't even push (Ei-chan was nicknamed the Pushing King of Kanagawa, if I remember correctly). Game, Yoshimichi, 5-2.

Audience reactions: Isn't this a perfect comeback for Yoshimichi?; There's still a long way to go before it's said he's reached his physical limits at 30; If Yoshimichi returns to the national team now, we can dream of making the Best 4 in the Davis Cup!

At the players' benches, Yoshimichi drinks while Ei-chan scribbles in his notebook. Ei-chan wonders if there's nothing else he hasn't tried that might work, is challenging Yoshimichi to a power contest still reckless? If he doesn't have some strategy to resolve the situation, he'll be beaten in his next service. If that happens, not only will he lose the set, there will be the super tension of losing the match. He reviews his notes, thinking that now that Yoshimichi's expression has only been #4, Ei-chan has moved back even though he wants to play forward, and he's being beaten in a stroke contest. As things stand, he might not be able to change the situation even in his service game. He sketches his current defensive position, noting that if he's too far back (behind the baseline), he can't respond (to a drop shot or a shot crosscourt). He concludes that even his position is no good. If it's no good even when he moves back, then what should he do? If things are no good in any case, he wants to play

at his own (ideal?) defensive position, but...he realizes that "escape" is also no good. So he tells himself to discover a means where he can compete with his own style (typical of him)...a route that will overcome the mental strength of a member of the national team...!

The chair umpire calls time. Yoshimichi gets up to return to the court, but Ei-chan remains seated, bent over his notes. Audience reactions: Huh? What? Maruo still isn't moving...?; He's concentrating so hard he doesn't hear...; I wonder if he's hit upon some way to challenge (Yoshimichi) next? Yoshimichi stares (apparently at Ei-chan) while hearing the murmurs around him.

Ei-chan continues staring at his notes and mumbling to himself. End of chapter.

The blurb for the next chapter is "What will he discover with the extreme focus produced by the crisis?!" The title of the next chapter is "Special Skill."

Ch. 422

Ch.422 opens with Ei-chan considering his notes and telling himself to discover an offensive option where he can play in a typical (to him) manner, an option that would be a basis for his getting the upper hand. Without that, he'd just be "running away," no matter how hard he tries. He definitely can't defeat someone here (on the national team level) that way. What's produced results up to now are just attacks where he'd skillfully drawn Yoshimichi into a contest of reactions. Other than that...

At that point, the chair umpire's voice penetrates his concentration: "Player Maruo, can you hear me? It's time." Ei-chan jumps to his feet and apologizes, then quickly heads back on court.

Audience reactions: Hahaha, he didn't notice the call?; In which case, that's amazing concentration, isn't it?; Doesn't it seem like he's found something else? Yoshimichi's taken aback. Not only isn't Ei-chan broken at this point, he's starting to ramp up his concentration.

As he prepares to serve, Ei-chan plans to turn his serve into a contest of reactions. He's uneasy about it but still decides to try it boldly. He serves wide, then dashes to the net to shorten the distance in the contest of reactions. Audience: "Serve and volley!" However, Yoshimichi anticipated Ei-chan and sends the ball down the line to take the point: 0-15.

Audience comments: That's an awesome return, you know; Before that, doesn't it mean Maruo's wanting to play at the net was exposed?

Ei-chan, on the other hand, decides to capitalize on Yoshimichi's correct prediction. He serves to the center—and again rushes the net, shocking Yoshimichi. Audience reaction: "He's doing it right again even though he was beaten once...?!" Yoshimichi returns the ball to Ei-chan with a body shot. However, Ei-chan's able to sidestep and volley. The shot's a winner: 15-15. Ei-chan: "Yeah!" Audience: "Whoa! His reactions are good, after all!"

Yoshimichi attributes the result to his hesitation over where to aim because Ei-chan's move had been too surprising. He thinks that if Ei-chan finds even a slight possibility, Ei-chan digs

his teeth into it and aims for it without letting go. He considers Ei-chan's resolute behavior to be unusual.

Since his rush to the net worked well, Ei-chan decides to capitalize on that one too. He serves wide, then rushes forward. Noticing Ei-chan's movement, Yoshimichi thinks Ei-chan is doing that a third time in a row, and refuses to allow it. Then Yoshimichi's surprised to see Ei-chan falling back and stopping at the baseline. Yoshimichi returns the serve but realizes he was tricked and the ball might be a bit short...and Ei-chan will aim for the chance right away. Ei-chan hits a strong backhand crosscourt to take the point: 30-15.

Yoshimichi thinks Ei-chan's good. The crowd cheers as Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose. Audience reactions: He was tricked by Maruo's tactics; A young gun is challenging a veteran player using strategy. Ei-chan's mom looks encouraged.

Coach Aoi sighs in relief, then comments that Ei-chan's success in getting a point from his position could be big. Aoi thinks the end (future) might not be visible, but generally speaking, Ei-chan working on the point before him and taking things one step at a time—and that Ei-chan's Ei-chan-ness is showing.

Ei-chan serves, thinking that from here he has further options. He takes one step forward, so that he's standing on the baseline instead of his ideal defensive position just behind the baseline. Yoshimichi wonders what Ei-chan intends to do when Ei-chan already faces difficulties even when he's farther back. Yoshimichi returns the ball and a rally ensues.

Ei-chan acknowledges the higher risk of his new position; however, it also increases the elements of a contest of reactions. The higher risk also means a higher reward. If a ball comes that's even slightly short/shallow, he'll turn it into a chance right away. It also puts pressure on Yoshimichi to hit deep. His analysis: shallow ball (turn it into a chance right away; can return it with faster timing); deep ball (it becomes difficult to return; the defensive distance contracts (the art shows him needing to use a rising shot)); out (by putting pressure on Yoshimichi to hit shallow balls, the chances of a ball going out increases). It's a super-high-risk/high-return option.

Yoshimichi hits another strong shot, mentally ordering Ei-chan to show him what Ei-chan can do from there (Ei-chan's position on the baseline). The shot goes out: 40-15. Ei-chan thinks that if he takes the next point, he'll hold his serve. Yoshimichi, on the other hand, realizes that result what also something Ei-chan was aiming for (inviting the error).

Ei-chan serves, then steps forward, intending to play the point again on the baseline. Yoshimichi returns the ball, then moves back. Ei-chan notes the shift in Yoshimichi's position and that the return was deep. Ei-chan sends the ball crosscourt.

Yoshimichi thinks that with him further back, the physical sensation is the same as up to now and he can aim as he normally does. At the same time, Ei-chan thinks that with Yoshimichi further back, Yoshimichi's defensive distance expands, so he expects Yoshimichi to attack boldly. He watches Yoshimichi closely, but Yoshimichi hits a super-strong ball to Ei-chan's feet. Even though Ei-chan manages to hit the ball, it goes into the net: 40-30.

Ei-chan dismisses the error as inevitable since he's trying to attack Yoshimichi's balls from right on the baseline while Yoshimichi is in good condition. Ei-chan serves to the center, still intending to try playing from his present defensive position. However, he tells himself it's currently his service and he mustn't accept such a risk on equal ground. As he chases the ball, he thinks that simply increasing his options is not enough. He needs a more fundamental...offensive weapon! In which case, what can he do now? What, in fact, can he believe in the most in himself right now? On the back swing, he sights Yoshimichi's end of the court, mentally superimposes what's apparently a 10 x 10 grid on it, and targets a block of four squares by the sideline (I suspect he's going for a ball that escapes outside). End of chapter.

The blurb for the next chapter says "The predicament simplifies his considerations?!" The title of the next chapter is "Return from the Brink" (or Recovering from a Hopeless Situation).

Well, that's it. So it seems that the flashback to Coach Miura's words was the interpretation of the poster in mangakansou. There's no mention of it in the actual chapter. However, that aside, a 10 x 10 grid shows amazing progress on Ei-chan's part. I remember when a 9 x 9 grid (for 1/81) was the bleeding edge of his control. Of course, he's "just" doing 4/100 here.

Ch. 423

So ch.423 opens with Ei-chan swinging his racket back, considering a weapon that can turn the tables in one shot, and concluding that if he's applying his current potential, that weapon is only his control. He goes for a 4/100 shot; unfortunately he doesn't get the ball in the sweet spot of his racket and his shot goes out: deuce.

Audience reactions: Ohh, too bad!; Maruo had suddenly gone for it!

Looking worried, Ei-chan's mom comments that Ei-chan's been cornered because he'd committed an error at an important point. Coach Aoi is initially dumbstruck but then argues that while Ei-chan has been driven to the brink, Ei-chan might have discovered the very best offensive shot currently possible for him. Ei-chan's mom asks Aoi for clarification. He explains that there's a basic difference between crosscourt and down-the-line shots: to put it simply, a cross is a shot where power is important. (The diagram shows that a down-the-line shot covers a shorter distance and goes over the net at a point where the net is high, while a crosscourt shot has a longer distance and goes over a lower point of the net. The longer distance and lower net make it easier to hit a crosscourt shot, so a crosscourt shot puts an emphasis on power.) Aoi's explanation continues: Compared to this, sure control becomes important for a down-the-line because of the shorter distance, in addition to going over the net at a higher point. If Ei-chan's able to leverage his reaction and control and hits a strong shot down the line from over there (Ei-chan's position right on the baseline, forward of his ideal position), it will become quite a weapon. However, he cautions that this is all theoretical: adding one more weapon isn't that easy.

As Ei-chan prepares to serve, he thinks that he's been cornered, but if the ball had just been some centimeters on the inside, it would have worked. The shot had been somewhat unreasonable, but there was a response that seems like it can be turned into a weapon. So he wants to be able to make the best use of it.

Yoshimichi thinks that if the one just now goes in even once, the situation will change. He wonders if Ei-chan has finally thought up an offensive weapon because Ei-chan has been cornered. He concludes that Ei-chan is a guy who becomes more dangerous the more Ei-chan is cornered, and approves: "I like that!"

Ei-chan tosses the ball, planning to look for a chance without rushing, and to aim for it. He serves wide, and Yoshimichi returns with a strong shot crosscourt. Ei-chan thinks that if there's a chance where he can hit the ball down the line at his home position (slightly behind the baseline)... As a precaution against that ball Ei-chan had hit just now, Yoshimichi moves farther back from the baseline; he considers it another position where he's strong.

As the ball bounces toward Ei-chan, he takes a step forward onto the baseline. Since the 4/100 shot earlier was no good, he goes for 4/81 using the same power as with his earlier down-the-line. The ball is inside but bounces short of his target. Ei-chan thinks it won't go that simply. Yoshimichi returns it with a backhand slice crosscourt. Since Ei-chan still has the upper hand, he decides to hit another one down the line right away, this time aiming a bit deeper with 2/81. Again, his shot is short of his target area, although it's deeper than when he hit the 4/81, and Yoshimichi returns it crosscourt. Ei-chan concludes his shot wasn't bad, but this time the power wasn't enough. If it's not effective with one shot, there's no point to it...and if he continues, his attacks will become monotonous. He still has the upper hand, though just barely. Since his opponent is that far behind the baseline....

Yoshimichi notes the angle of Ei-chan's wrist and anticipates that Ei-chan will hit a drop shot. He dashes to the net, thinking that if Ei-chan had hit one more down-the-line, he (Yoshimichi) would have been glued back there (way back behind the baseline), but Ei-chan's use of a drop shot is overly optimistic. Yoshimichi manages to volley and put away the ball: Advantage, Yoshimichi. He strikes a triumphant pose: "Yeah!"

Ei-chan wonders if it's no good and whether he should have put up with it (the down-the-line?) a bit longer. Given the situation, his control and power for the down-the-line is already at his limits. He considers trying for a 4/100, resigning himself to self-destruction. He dismisses the thought, because intuitively the earlier 4/100 was a shot that's beyond his current capability. He plans to discover an opening that's within the range of his current capability without running away. He serves to the center. However, Yoshimichi's already rushing to receive his serve, so he realizes Yoshimichi had predicted his serve.

Yoshimichi returns the ball to the side (possibly inviting another down-the-line?) with a strong shot. Ei-chan thinks that going for that down-the-line when he doesn't have the upper hand is difficult, but he'll pull it together somehow. He hits a forehand slice down the line. Unfortunately, it goes into the net: First set won by Yoshimichi, 6-2.

Audience reactions: It's reasonable that the first set is Yoshimichi's; It's unusual but Maruo self-destructed in the second half. Hearing this, Aoi disagrees: "It wasn't like that (self-destruction). He was verifying the maximum extent of what he could do and attacking."

At the bench, Ei-chan pours over his notes, thinking he hadn't been able to hold even once. He wonders if there's nothing else he can do besides waiting for Yoshimichi's concentration

to break, whether he can't overcome Yoshimichi's mental strength after all. Yoshimichi looks at Ei-chan, then approaches the chair umpire. They talk, and then the chair umpire announces: "Yoshimichi is receiving medical timeout."

Ei-chan's surprised to hear the announcement. Even though it's Yoshimichi's comeback from injury, Ei-chan hadn't noticed any problem at all in Yoshimichi's movements. Far from that, Ei-chan considers Yoshimichi's footwork to be better than usual. During the medical examination of Yoshimichi's right knee, Yoshimichi flinches. Afterwards, Yoshimichi shakes his head at the chair umpire, who then announces "Player Yoshimichi has just now requested to withdraw (from the match) due to a knee injury... Therefore, it is determined that this match is player Maruo's win." End of chapter.

The blurb says "The moment of victory, which came without him being able to overcome the barrier..." The title of the next chapter is "The Meaning of Victory."

Okay, I expect Ei-chan will be feeling discontented at the result. However, I suspect Yoshimichi will have some words of advice for him that will cheer him up. And since Ei-chan has time, what with playing only one set, maybe he'll test the limits of his control after this...after checking out Watanabe's match against Pete.

I wonder if Yoshimichi will address Ei-chan as "Ei" (A) or "Ei-kun" after this? According to Takuma in the omake in vol.43, Yoshimichi has a habit of addressing the people he acknowledges by a shortened version of their given names, which is why he calls Watanabe "Taka." Takuma is an exception because "Taku" sounds similar to "Taka," so to avoid confusion, Yoshimichi uses Takuma's given name. However, Monma is "Ayu" (which is generally a girl's name).

Ch. 424

So ch.424 starts with Youko shocked by the announcement that Yoshimichi is defaulting due to his knee injury, and she rushes off to meet him. Ei-chan's mother comments that she hadn't noticed that Yoshimichi was injury. Coach Aoi explains it was a prior injury but he hadn't expected it was bad enough for Yoshimichi to default. Even Ei-chan's in disbelief.

On court, Yoshimichi approaches Ei-chan and tells him he'd wanted to play against Ei-chan a bit longer, but he'd decided to quit before his injury became too serious. He's sorry that it's in this form but acknowledges it's his loss. Ei-chan argues that Yoshimichi had seemed totally fine up to now, so if they'd played one more set...he doesn't feel he would have turned the situation around even if Yoshimichi had a handicap, so he feels awkward. He apologizes for his words, explaining he was just surprised. Yoshimichi tells him that if the match would really end after one set, he might have won; however, he never imagined he'd be as drained as he is now. He adds that his decision is the result of thinking over a lot of things based on the breadth of his experience, and that he didn't want to overdo just because he wanted to win here and now no matter what. He points out that it's for the sake of the national team. Ei-chan is struck by Yoshimichi's mention of the national team. Yoshimichi offers a handshake, telling Ei-chan to do his best in the next match and addressing him as "Eiichirou." Ei-chan shakes Yoshimichi's hand and thanks him.

Yoshimichi exits the court to applause from the audience and comments of "Yoshimichi-san, thanks for your hard work" and "Are you okay?" and "Come back again!" Ei-chan eyes the scoreboard, thinking that he'd completely released his full power but he'd been roundly defeated.

Scene switch. Youko commiserates with Yoshimichi, telling him what happened was unfortunate, but she thinks it was really great that he could decide to default with that fast timing. Her comment surprises Yoshimichi. Then he acknowledges her point and adds that he'd had a bad feeling (about what would happen) if he'd continued playing. Youko tells him that being able to see the big picture, including himself and everyone (the national team), by doing so is his strong point. Yoshimichi looks assured, commenting it (his decision) was good...he can still play at least one more time as a member of the national team. Youko retorts it's natural, pointing out that he's supported by her and tennis fans throughout Japan. She adds that today is proof that Yoshimichi can still evolve much more. He remembers how he'd pushed his performance past the 1 excellent shot in 10. He agrees that today was really great and proposes they discuss it further over good food.

Scene switch to Watanabe and Pete entering their court. Watanabe has heard about Yoshimichi's default due to injury—even though Yoshimichi had assured him he's okay. Watanabe concludes that the time has come when he can't afford to be dependent anymore—he has to become the pillar of the national team! In which case, for the sake of the national team, his top priority is defeating the one in front of him: Pete Gonzales. Pete is ranked 294th in the world, is 19 years old, weighs 110 kg, and stands 200 cm tall. Watanabe Takatoshi (aka Taka) is ranked 161st in the world, is 26 years old, weighs 73 kg, and stands 183 cm tall.

As Taka and Pete exchange greetings, Taka thinks he has to give this candidate for the US team a beating. He'll directly connect defeating players with this sort of good physique when playing overseas to the strengthening of the national team. The chair umpire announces the opening of the 4R match as a 3-set match starting with Pete's service.

Ei-chan and Aoi arrive and sit in the bleachers. Aoi wonders who Ei-chan's opponent in the upcoming semifinals will be. He notes that Taka's physique is better than the average Japanese but Pete is even bigger. He speculates that Ei-chan would have an easier time playing against Pete, whom Ei-chan has defeated once, than against Taka. Ei-chan agrees, but his thoughts range back to after his match with Yoshimichi, when his mom congratulated him on his win. Ei-chan had argued that he'd been completely defeated by Yoshimichi, but his mom reminded him it's said that luck is also part of true ability (something I think Natchan had mentioned before). Ei-chan knows it's true, but the reality is that he hadn't been able to sketch a winning vision at all.

Aoi instructs Ei-chan to watch how Taka handles Pete's serve-and-volley, snapping Ei-chan back to the present. Ei-chan scolds himself, telling himself he has to switch over to the next match. Pete serves fast and wide, then rushes to the net. Seeing this, Taka calmly sends the ball to Pete's feet. Pete stoops and volleys; Ei-chan notes Pete's reactions are good as always. A rally ensues with Pete volleying at the net. Ei-chan notes that Taka is minimizing Pete's physical advantage by sinking the ball, but Pete's handling of it has gotten considerably better. Pete volleys with a sharp angle shot. However, Taka manages to

intercept it with a drive volley that gets past Pete: 0-15. The crowd cheers.

Aoi comments that there are many Japanese who are inferior to overseas players because of their physique and physical ability, despite having relatively high skills. So in a sense, Taka could be said to be different from Japanese—his physique is comparable (to overseas players) and his physical ability and power could be said to be almost equal. His overall ability is high and he has his sights on going even higher, a promising player that Japan has high hopes for. On the other hand, the accuracy of Pete's volleys is also considerable.

Ei-chan feels the current Taka is overflowing with internally generated fighting spirit that Taka hasn't had up to now. As Taka swings back, he thinks his rank is higher and he mentally orders Pete not to underestimate Japan's No.4. He hits a winner down the line. Having begun to pay close attention to the national team, Ei-chan reaches a vague understanding that they release their full power at the critical moment and that they've acquired the means to tie it (releasing their full power at the critical moment) to results.

Play continues late into the afternoon. Ei-chan's sure that Taka, like Yoshimichi, is playing conscious that he represents Japan, and he feels they must be converting that into strength. The ball lands beyond the baseline. Then the announcement of "Game, set, and match won by Watanabe. Count: 6-4, 7-6."

Aoi comments that Ei-chan's next opponent is Taka and that it's a good thing Ei-chan was able to watch closely. Looking daunted, Ei-chan agrees, then adds that it means his opponent is a member of the national team who's ranked even higher than Yoshimichi. Aoi concludes that Ei-chan has been influenced by the match with Yoshimichi much more than Aoi had expected. He tells Ei-chan he's going to make a phone call, and instructs Ei-chan to prepare to go home and then wait for him.

While waiting, Ei-chan notices Krishna playing (probably his own 4R match) and remembers that Krishna had said Ei-chan could win. He wonders why Krishna could say that. Aoi returns, apologetic about keeping Ei-chan waiting. He tells Ei-chan they're going to take a roundabout way home. Ei-chan asks whether they're going somewhere after this. Aoi describes their destination as a short stopover for the sake of beating the national team. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "Aoi's tactic for the next match is?!" The title for the next chapter is "A Different Kind."

Ch. 425

Ch.425 opens at the BodyPlus office in Sendai where Erik is staring at his monitor. His secretary asks how Ei-chan is doing, and Erik laughs at being discovered that he's watching tennis during office hours. He comments at the convenience of being able to watch tennis while working at his desk. He tells his secretary that it was a lucky win, but since it's settled that Ei-chan would make it to the semifinals (Best 4) of a Challenger at 18 years old, his world ranking will go up to the 600s. He thinks that it would be worth seeing how Ei-chan ties in this loss to the next match, so he instructs his secretary to check his schedule for the weekend. She acknowledges his instruction.

Scene switch to Ei-chan and Coach n a train with Ei-chan asking what Aoi meant by preparing for the match with Watanabe, who's on the national team. Aoi speculates that Ei-chan's probably thinking along the lines of "The national team is different, after all." Ei-chan gulps at Aoi's accuracy, then reminds him that Aoi had said something similar. Aoi agrees but points out that there are various types on the national team. Monma and Yoshimichi have long track records (in tennis and being on the team), so their emotional attachment to the team is particularly strong; however, that doesn't mean everyone goes that far in staking everything on being a member of the national team. Ei-chan asks about Watanabe specifically. Aoi replies that Watanabe is one player who suddenly grew after joining the team, but he's only 25 years old and hasn't been on the team that long, so he's probably a bit different from the veterans. Ei-chan argues that Watanabe has experience playing as a member of the national team (meaning in an official Davis Cup match) and because Watanabe's world rank is higher than Yoshimichi's, Watanabe is among the regular players. Then Ei-chan gasps at hearing what he's saying. He smacks his cheeks, saying his timidity is no good because however it happened, he won and got another chance to challenge the barrier of the national team. He has to find some way to overcome it in the next match. Aoi notes Ei-chan's use of the word "barrier" and comments that he too had always been aware of that barrier. But he wonders aloud if there's really such a thing and suggests it might simply be a product of their (his and Ei-chan's) timidity. Ei-chan considers that possibility, then points out that he has to overcome it. To state the source of his timidity more clearly, he has to overcome the self that is more afraid than he has to be. Aoi notes that Ei-chan won't be ranked with members of the national team right off, but Ei-chan should do something about the trauma of not being able to trump his opponent's attitude even once in one set. Ei-chan agrees, saying that if he's able to do it... Aoi comments that there's no telling if that would be able to resolve it, but they can only try. He then tells Ei-chan they've arrived at their destination.

The place is a "kickboxing fitness studio," which Ei-chan guesses is a martial arts gym. Aoi says it's also his first time to go there. He announces their presence and introduces himself as the Aoi who'd called earlier. The man who responds says he'd heard about them from his younger brother. Aoi and the man shake hands and exchange greetings, and then Aoi prompts Ei-chan, asking if Ei-chan doesn't think the man resembles someone. Aoi reveals the man is Ike Yuudai, a mixed martial artist and Ike's (Souji's) older brother. Yuudai comments that it seems Ei-chan keeps helping his younger brother. Ei-chan's astounded that Souji's older brother is a martial artist—in fact, he hadn't known that Souji had an older brother, in the first place—and he marvels at the siblings.

Yuudai tells Aoi that a "meeting of different sports" sounds interesting; apparently Aoi had proposed the meeting during his phone call, because Ei-chan doesn't have a clue what they're talking about. Aoi explains that Ei-chan had recently turned pro and is experiencing a baptism of fire, and just when it looks like he's about to overcome it, he was badly beaten today by a veteran of the national team. Yuudai comments that recovering from a loss of confidence is a matter of survival no matter where in the professional world. Aoi adds that Ei-chan's next match is against another member of the national team, so they want to eliminate what amounts to a phobia. The main point is they've come for mental training. Yuudai isn't certain he can help, but he asks permission to bring in someone else, who he describes as his kouhai (junior) and a good guy.

Yuudai calls over Harada, who was Japan's high-school champion last year and had just turned pro. Since Harada's the same age as Ei-chan, Yuudai hopes Harada might provide some sort of encouragement. Ei-chan's initial impression is that Harada seems quite gentle, but Harada's level of strength would be akin to Nabae's in tennis. Then Harada opens his eyes and smiles, introducing himself as Harada Itsuki—and a daunted Ei-chan revises his initial impression: Harada's scary, after all. Ei-chan responds by introducing himself, and they shake hands.

Aoi kicks off the meeting by reminding Ei-chan that Ei-chan had made it to the Best 4 in the All Japan, so even though their field are different, their circumstances are similar; he orders Ei-chan to try asking anything related to tomorrow's match without holding back. He explains this is also linked to training, so Ei-chan should be frank. So Ei-chan asks Harada how Harada handles the pressure if his opponent is a strong guy who's top class in Japan. (Harada tells Ei-chan to call him Itsuki.) Harada comments that it's better to speak his thoughts on this. Yuudai agrees, so Harada says there's something he wants to ask first: in the first place, does Ei-chan suffer from pressure in a tennis match?

Ei-chan's shocked by the question, so Harada clarifies that there's no danger of getting bloody or dying. A startled Ei-chan agrees but then argues that he can't make a living as a pro if he doesn't produce results, and there's also the sense of duty toward the people who support him. Harada accepts this but counters that (their situations) seem completely different. While he's also grateful to the people supporting him, he doesn't have any leeway at all to think about that sort of thing before and during a match. Harada muses that Ei-chan had asked about an opponent who's top class in Japan, which means he's very strong... In Harada's case, he'd be scared before a match and would be imagining the worst-case scenarios. Ei-chan's surprised and asks for clarification: worst, not best, not positive thinking?

Harada flatly rejects the possibility of positive thinking: what sort of positive thing can you think of when you might be viciously beaten up by an opponent who's stronger than you after this? Have you ever watched martial arts? Ei-chan apologizes and replies that he hasn't. However, he explains that as much as possible, he tries to think positively before a match.

Harada notes that when they (fighters) lose, there are times when they lose consciousness from a strangle hold. There are even times when their arms are broken because a joint lock is applied poorly. Ei-chan imagines Harada putting him in a strangle hold, and gulps. Harada continues explaining, saying that when they lose because that's done to them, they're generally staggering, so they reflexively give up out of fear. There are also times when they realize they're losing without being able to think objectively, even though they can still fight. That's why he sets tight bonds on the situation, by having himself imagine the worst beforehand—the worst "how I absolutely won't tap out because I won't die even if I'm put in a strangle hold and pass out" or the worst "give up if I'm beaten this badly because I'll break a bone from a joint lock." Win or lose, even if a match is 15 minutes, at the longest, he'll fight with the resolve to surrender if the situation is so bad that he'll die. If he doesn't, then when it really happens, he won't be able to stand it and his body will flee on its own.

Scribbling in his notebook, Ei-chan acknowledges that there's no such pressure in tennis. He

thinks if the type of pressure is different, then the way of coping with it also changes. Harada comments that positive thinking might be better against a strong opponent in tennis, but that's because there's no such danger in tennis. Ei-chan argues that it's not that simple. There's continuing to lose in consecutive matches during overseas campaigns, particularly the times when he doesn't have money or confidence...he boosts himself by find a positive factor. Harada is struck by the mention of consecutive matches overseas, and asks if there are that many. Ei-chan replies that he'd like to participate in at least 25 major tournaments in a year, surprising Harada. Ei-chan then asks how many matches Harada fights in in martial arts in a year. Harada replies that he's young, so he has quite a lot: 5 or 6 matches. When Ei-chan notes the "6," Harada asks if Ei-chan considers that few, but counters that 25 is too many. Ei-chan clarifies that 25 is the number of tournaments; however, the number of matches depends on the outcome (win or lose), so he's at the point where he wants to exceed 70 matches—again surprising Harada.

Harada counters that the density of a single match is completely different. Ei-chan agrees but points out that tennis is a sport with unexpectedly many injuries. A player repeatedly does stop-and-dash at full power over 2 hours on average, and he uses the physical strength of the entire body. No matter how much care he takes, there are times in a single match when he'd gotten cramps and lost the ability to move. In reality, Ei-chan won today because his opponent defaulted due to an injury. Harada notes that Ei-chan is aiming for 70 matches of that (Ei-chan's description of the effort involved) in one year...which naturally comes to roughly to one match every five days.

Ei-chan adds that the locations of the matches are scattered in various corners of different countries all over the world. A top pro travels around 120,000 km in a year while continuing to compete. Harada says he can't imagine 120,000 km, so Ei-chan draws a comparison to going around the world 3 times. Harada's so shocked he opens his eyes: "Doesn't that mean continuously fighting in numerous battles in 1 year?" Ei-chan replies that that's what happens when you succeed in this world. Harada wonders whether it's possible be an average person with that sort of schedule, even before doing things like improving skill and maintaining motivation. Ei-chan brings the conversation back to handling pressure, asking Harada to tell him more about how martial artists handle the pressure from fear. Harada wonders if that sort of topic is interesting, and Ei-chan replies that he's extremely interested right now, so Harada says he has a good story. End of chapter.

Ch. 426

Ch.426 is titled "Ways of Thinking." Harada says that the story he has in mind is the story of a senpai. There's a man who lights incense sticks while in the waiting room before a match. Ei-chan asks why the man does that. Harada's understanding is that the man is conducting his own funeral. Harada thinks the man achieves a conviction that he's died once by imagining the worst-case scenario. It seems that the man heads to the ring after thinking about his wife and children and crying buckets. Harada thinks this is only being afraid and not a matter of fighting using the motivation of not wanting to die. But Harada considers the man to be the same as himself in the sense that he prepares himself and deals with the pressure by imagining the worst.

Yuudai injects that there are those who do the opposite: they brag before a match. They

deliberately puff themselves up and trash-talk their opponent. Yuudai concedes that it's also a performance as pros. However, it's embarrassing if they lose. He thinks that, in a sense, it's also a preparation to fall into a difficult situation. Of course, it depends on the person; they all have different ways of fighting pressure.

Ei-chan thinks it's kinda amazing. While they don't have that many matches, the weight of the pressure they suffer at one time is out of proportion to that of tennis. Harada says he understands that tennis is grueling because of the long stretch of continuous activity, but since there are so many matches, isn't there an advantage in being able to challenge when you're comfortable because of that? While there are important matches, isn't it important to just get by somehow when it's not important? So Ei-chan explains how ranking is decided by how good your results are through points in 18 tournaments in a year. He thinks the world tour where you can get lots of points and prize money could be called important tournaments, but there are only around 120 people who can participate in the main draw of those tournaments. You can't even enter that stage if you don't continue to win in the lower tour. Ei-chan says that if he thinks he can just do his best in the next match (meaning if he slacks off on this one), his sense is that he won't be able to emerge from the lowest level.

Harada concludes that tennis also has a gentle fear that can continue to strangle you; he considers it slightly unpleasant. Ei-chan protests that while it's difficult, it's preferable to actually being strangled. Coach Aoi laughs and points out there's the element of being suited or not suited to it. Yuudai comments that he'd heard from Souji that the tennis world is harsh, but he notes that Ei-chan has forged his body thoroughly. Ei-chan thanks him for the compliment and adds that he's gotten that far thanks to the protein supplied by his sponsor. However, Yuudai concludes that it's more a matter of whether or not one can put their life at risk, and not the body (physical)—and he adds that doesn't seem possible for Ei-chan. Yuudai explains that they fight using power and technique in martial arts; however, what's important in the end is how far one can consider winning through a will to die. He doesn't know how it is in tennis, but in their (martial arts) world, the scary ones are the guys who are seriously willing to die. Those guys have a chance of turning things around, no matter how large the gap in ability. He points out that tennis is also a one-on-one match, so there might be similarities. He suggests Ei-chan try things their way at least once: go at it prepared to die. Harada immediately invites Ei-chan to try it out right then and there. Ei-chan sounds like he's about to accept the invitation, but Aoi intervenes, reminding Ei-chan that Ei-chan has a match tomorrow.

Ei-chan and Aoi take their leave of Yuudai and Harada. Aoi thanks Yuudai, who replies that he's glad for it because they also seem to have gotten something out of it. Aoi agrees it was worthwhile and suggests they do it again. As Aoi and Ei-chan walk off, Aoi prompts Ei-chan for his impressions. Ei-chan comments that he's glad to be able to think he's suited to tennis. Aoi laughs and agrees. Ei-chan adds that he also feels a bit easier. By learning there are all sorts of pressure, he's been able to think that the pressure in tennis of overcoming someone who supports Japan is nothing special. And maybe because he was able to talk with people who fight with the pressure of dying, he feels they aren't that different. But since he plays tennis, where death doesn't figure in things, he feels he can try harder. Of course it doesn't mean he's no longer scared, but he can imagine coming up with more realistic strategies for this fear (probably referring to going up against a member of the national team, since the bubble is beside Watanabe's image)...in which case (flashback to Yuudai suggesting Ei-chan

go at it prepared to die), Ei-chan tells Aoi it's possible for him (Ei-chan) to play prepared to die.

Scene switch to Natchan's bedroom. Her phone display shows she'd messaged Ei-chan, congratulating him on his win, telling him she's definitely going tomorrow to cheer him on, and that she's going to cheer for him with all her might because she won't be able to watch his matches for quite a while. Lying in bed, she exhales, thinking that she'd more or less been able to meet with friends, and she'd sent off her packages. She marvels that she's really leaving for America the day after tomorrow. Her phone rings. When she checks, it's a message from Ei-chan thanking her, then he asks her to wait for him after his match ends since the only time they can meet at leisure is tomorrow, and then he adds that he's going to play in a way that puts his life at risk in tomorrow's match, so he asks her to support him. Natchan puzzles over "put his life at risk."

Scene switch to the next day and the semifinals of the Keiryo Challenger. Aloisi defeated Williams in the quarterfinals—6-1, 6-4—to go up against Krishna who won his quarterfinals against Valkanis, 6-3, 6-3. Ei-chan is up against Watanabe, who defeated Pete 6-4, 7-6. As Watanabe stretches, Asano comments that as the final holdout of the national team, Watanabe can't lose. Watanabe replies that, frankly, that sort of thing doesn't matter to him. Asano notes that Watanabe is cool, but adds that sort of guy is also necessary to the team. Watanabe speculates that it's better for Asano as a coach to cultivate a young sprout. Asano's all shocked: "What are you saying?! The team trains the strongest guys at that time!" He points out that in that sense, Ei-chan was no match for Yoshimichi yesterday. But if Ei-chan defeats Watanabe today, that's a different story. Watanabe gives Asano a flat look and tells him he won't lose. Asano grins and comments that Watanabe is reliable. He orders Watanabe to show him a fight that's typical of a member of the national team.

The audience start arriving, among them Ei-chan's parents with his father commenting that he can finally watch Ei-chan's match. Erik and his secretary are there too. At the bleachers, Kageyama and Sasaki greet Natchan, who tells them they somehow look like college students. Natchan confirms that her flight is tomorrow, after Sasaki asks for confirmation; Sasaki tells her it's a good thing they could meet today and asks about Ei-chan's condition. Natchan ventures the opinion that it's probably...not bad.

In the waiting room, Ei-chan's listening to music and reviewing the notes in his Tennis 80 notebook. He takes out the earbuds as Aoi tells him it's nearly time (for the match).

When Ei-chan and Watanabe walk to the court, the audience is already fired up: They're here!; Watanabeeeeh! Defeat Yoshimichi's opponent!; Maruooooh, get to the finals!

Aoi greets Ei-chan's parents as he sits down. Ei-chan's dad expresses his appreciation for Aoi's help. Aoi thinks it would be good if Ei-chan can go in with a good feeling, having capitalized on yesterday, though. As Ei-chan walks, he wonders how far he can risk his life in tennis, where you won't die. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "How effective will the mental training be?!" The title of the next chapter is "How to Risk One's Life."

Ch. 427
Ch.427 opens with Watanabe classifying Ei-chan as similar to Nabae, whom he lost to in the All Japan. He thinks that if he's to make the best of that loss, he'll use power as his base but hold back on his full power. On top of having grasped the strategy of being challenged, he'll decide objectively on the allocation of the power he uses. (I get the impression Nabae wore out Watanabe through strategy, so Watanabe committed errors and lost.) Watanabe tells himself that even before being a member of the national team, a 26-year-old pro ranked 161st in the world doesn't have the time to lose to someone below him here.

The chair umpire had apparently flipped a coin and Watanabe won the coin toss, so Watanabe chooses to serve, while Ei-chan chooses to receive on the side of the court he (Ei-chan) is in right now. The two players shake hands and exchange greetings. Then they head to their respective ends of the court while the chair umpire takes his seat. Ei-chan exhales, apparently in relief since he thinks he doesn't feel that strange unease he'd had during the match with Yoshimichi (when Ei-chan was thrown off by Yoshimichi's friendliness?), so he suspects that being able to hear stories yesterday about martial artists who risk their lives in matches might have had a big effect. In addition to that, he'd been able to prepare better than usual.

Flashback to Ei-chan's bedroom yesterday. He'd called Nabae, wanting Nabae to tell him as much as Nabae knows about Watanabe. Nabae said during the All Japan, he'd been overwhelmed in physical ability at the start (of the match), so he'd compensated by slowing the tempo and pushing (holding out/hanging on). After that, he'd accelerated the tempo and gone to the net, and he'd managed to hold on, switching tactics before he could be beaten. So Nabae suspected that Watanabe doesn't feel he (Watanabe) had been beaten in real ability. Nabae added that as things are now, he believed it (defeating Watanabe?) would be tough, and he's preparing himself so that he won't be inferior in power next time. He offered to send Ei-chan his data from that time (the match with Watanabe), which Ei-chan eagerly accepted. End of flashback.

As Ei-chan and Watanabe exchange shots to warm up, Ei-chan thinks that in his present condition, he too can't defeat Watanabe in physical ability. But if Nabae could defeat Watanabe, then there's a way. Thanks to Nabae's data (the art shows the paths of multiple points; they're apparently from Nabae's match with Watanabe), which Ei-chan analyzed, Ei-chan was able to create hypotheses based on someone else's ideas. However, if he's risking his life in this match, even that (creating those hypotheses) isn't enough.

The chair umpire announces the start of the semifinals as a the-best-of-three-sets match with Watanabe to serve. As Watanabe prepares to serve, he plans that at the same time as he certainly restrains Ei-chan with power, he'll get a general view to see how much power he needs. (Hee-hee. Considering Yoshimichi was forced to play at 100% and keep himself at the level of top-class players like Sanchez, Watanabe will need full power.) Watanabe serves wide. Ei-chan returns the ball crosscourt, noting the serve was strong, as expected. Setting up to hit the ball, Watanabe concedes Ei-chan's return is a good one; however, he plans to gradually drive Ei-chan into a situation where the difference in their levels of power manifests.

Flashback to Coach Aoi and Ei-chan as they were making their way home after the sports meeting at the gym yesterday. Aoi commented that it's well and good to say something like "Play with a willingness to die," but it's no hardship when he can plan on doing it. He asked what sort of image Ei-chan had of "willingness to die." Ei-chan replied that his main image was from the saying "a cornered rat will bite a cat." Aoi generalized this as "baring your fangs when you're about to be killed by a stronger opponent." Ei-chan explained that he couldn't come up with something more practical, based on his own experience, because he's never been in a situation where he's likely to die.

Aoi suggested, "What about that?" Ei-chan's all "That?" so Aoi pointed out that it had been mentioned before, "that" when a person who's about to be run down by a car escaped harm, and things looked like they were in slow motion. Ei-chan immediately connected this to the zone—and speculated that it meant that if he develops a willingness to die, then he'd approach the zone. However, he concluded that it isn't something that could be done by planning on it. Aoi agreed but noted that Ei-chan has experienced the zone, which might serve as a hint for an Ei-chan style of "willingness to die." First of all, Ei-chan can only try playing tennis where his life is at risk. End of flashback.

Ei-chan thinks that if his life is really at risk, then he doesn't have time to stint on (not use) the weapons he has. So he decides to explore the possibility he saw yesterday—and hits the ball down the line with 4/81 targeting. The shot's a winner that takes everyone even Ei-chan by surprise: 0-15.

Watanabe wonders that the sudden attack. He thinks that if Ei-chan really aimed for that shot just now, then what would follow... Watanabe concludes that Ei-chan's errors will build up and his play will become monotonous, so in the end, it's to Watanabe's advantage. Ei-chan, on the other hand, marvels that the response was completely different from yesterday. (I suspect it's because he's more rested and confident than when he tried it yesterday.) Ei-chan feels that the contradiction between "I will risk my life" and "I won't die" (in tennis) is becoming an impetus for him to be able to play with all his heart. If that's really the case...

Aoi notes that Ei-chan's good today...but it's a matter of how far that "good" will go/take Ei-chan.

Watanabe's next serve is to the center this time. Ei-chan considers it a powerful serve, but he returns it confidently. Watanabe responds with a strong backhand, planning on keeping a watch for a deep ball until the critical moment when he will use his power. Ei-chan thinks that if his life is at risk, then now while his opponent isn't ready...he'll attack with his weapons. Aiming for the corner, he hits a backhand down the line with 2/81 targeting. It's another winner: 0-30.

Audience reactions: Whoa, that's two consecutive winners down the line all of a sudden!; He clinched it quite easily, you know...; He's also lucky, huh; Will he keep doing that sort of thing?; However, it's unlike Maruo, you know. Asano's also surprised, thinking "Oh...this is awesome!"

Ei-chan thinks: "I can go with this...maybe." End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "His opponent is higher ranked and a member of the national team...How far can he go with this?!" The title of the next chapter can be translated as "Forced Attack" or "Drastic Measures" or "Hard-line Tactics."

Ch. 428

Given what happens in this chapter, I'd translate the title as "Hard-line Tactics." Ch.428 opens with Ei-chan thinking that this time the ball had gone to a spot he'd aimed at with 2/81 targeting, so it's probably not just that he's in good condition. He feels that it's a very good fit to Watanabe's start to the match, which is much more low-key than he'd expected.

Watanabe thinks Ei-chan's quite different from yesterday. At a glance, the two consecutive winners were unreasonable and he'd been taken in. However, when power and stability go together, it's naturally hard for them to coexist. He concludes that if it's just a mere fluke, it's better not to put an end to it (probably because he expects Ei-chan to commit errors). He serves to the center, and Ei-chan returns the ball to a corner.

Now Ei-chan wonders how Watanabe will attack. Since it's Watanabe's service and Ei-chan expects Watanabe to want to attack using power now, Watanabe should naturally go for a strong shot crosscourt, which would be effective. However, a cross would present Ei-chan with a chance to attack by hitting the ball down the line. Which means Ei-chan will understand Watanabe's strategy with this one shot.

Watanabe debates whether to attack or to hold back for now. He finally hits the ball down the line. Since it's not a cross, Ei-chan concludes that Watanabe is wary of Ei-chan's down-the-line: in other words, his down-the-line (weapon) holds true as a weapon. His notes show his contingency planning "in the event where the opponent is aware of and wary of my down-the-line": 1) hit a strong shot crosscourt → attack in the opposite direction using power and course; 2) control a short ball crosscourt → attack in the extreme opposite direction using course; 3) a slow ball deep and crosscourt → take over the timing.

Since he won't die even if he makes an error here, Ei-chan decides to send the ball crosscourt in a power contest. Watanabe manages to return it with a backhand. He looks over his shoulder, surprised that Ei-chan's gone for a power contest here. Ei-chan notes he's taken the upper hand from Watanabe, so he decides to continue boldly—and hits a drop shot, surprising Watanabe as well as Coach Aoi, Natchan, and Asano, to take the point: 0-40. Ei-chan mentally exults that he did it! Without dropping a point because he made Watanabe wary of his weapon (down-the-line).

Audience reactions: Suddenly a triple break point?!; Isn't Maruo awesome today?; But it's still just the start so... Natchan comments that Ei-chan might be really good today, as Kageyama and Sasaki gape in surprise. Ei-chan's parents are also taken aback, but Aoi wonders how things will go from now on.

Watanabe questions whether he'd been too wary of Ei-chan's down-the-line. However, he tells himself there's no way he wouldn't be wary of it because he'd been beaten that way twice. Nevertheless...he concludes that this is bad: it's a pattern where he's suddenly in deep

shit. He breathes deeply and exhales, flexes and fists his fingers, and dismisses the situation as "it can't be helped." He thinks that it's better to basically return to the starting point for once at a time like this.

As Watanabe prepares to serve, Ei-chan is fiddling with the strings of his racket. Ei-chan notes he has 3 break chances. However, this sort of moment when a superior opponent is likely to get serious is really scary. It's for a time like this that he'd imitated Itsuki (Harada) and considered how to deal with it. He'd simulated the worst-case scenarios that he'd thought of completely with the intention of risking his life: how would he be forced to surrender using power, and how he should counter those. (By doing this, Ei-chan already has potential solutions thought up, so he won't freeze because he's racking his brain for ideas!) Ei-chan thinks that even here, what's important is that he won't die even though he's risking his life.

Watanabe serves wide. Ei-chan overtakes the ball and cuts in to meet it with a forehand. Seeing this, Watanabe wonders whether Ei-chan's going for another down-the-line.

On the back swing, Ei-chan thinks that even with a powerful serve... Telling himself to calm down, he watches Watanabe closely, notices Watanabe starting to sprint for the corner—and hits the ball in a strong shot crosscourt to the opposite corner: Game, Maruo, 1-0.

Audience reactions: Seriously?!; Another winner!

Ei-chan makes a fist, thinking "Here it is...! A break!" Moreover, he could see perfectly—not just Watanabe's movements but even his state of mind.

Watanabe thinks he's suddenly being made to rush about. As they switch courts, he tells himself to calm down and reset. He'd known that Ei-chan's down-the-line was good, so it's all right to accept the situation if he's beaten there. However, it's not good that a point was taken from him because he was afraid of it (Ei-chan's down-the-line). If he can smoothly modify this awareness, then he can change the situation.

The result of the game confirms for Ei-chan that the basic way of competing is the "risk my life" mode, which he'd prepared. However, he'll boldly switch over to "my life isn't at stake" mode only at the times when it's hard to decide (it's not clear whether he means decide his shot or decide the point). "Taking a big bite" is okay (apparently for "my life isn't at stake" mode).

Ei-chan serves wide, and Watanabe returns the ball crosscourt. Ei-chan counters with spin to prevent Watanabe from hitting a strong shot. However, he's surprised to see Watanabe skip forward to meet the ball, and Watanabe returns with a strong shot that Ei-chan fails to touch: 0-15.

Audience reaction: "As expected of Watanabe! A fast attack with power and technique!"
Ei-chan notes that by using footwork, Watanabe easily matched the impact point for the ball. Watanabe thinks that even if the ball is slow, he can hammer it if he can get to a high impact point.

Exhaling in preparation to serve, Ei-chan thinks that Watanabe has a strong torso as well as technique, so if his (Ei-chan's) ball is even slightly shallow, Watanabe will hammer it. To avert that sort of thing, Ei-chan has prepared as many patterns as possible for fighting a power contest. So thinking, he sends his serve straight at Watanabe.

Watanabe's thrown by the body shot, though he manages to return it. With Watanabe off balance, Ei-chan goes for one more blow without any delay—down the line (a strong one)! Watanabe was heading for the open court, but manages to get back to the corner to return the ball. However, his shot goes into the net: 15-15.

Stunned silence from the audience. After a moment of shock, Asano looks excited, thinking that this style of fighting against Watanabe, who's a member of the national team...goes beyond the level where you'd say Ei-chan's doing well.

Ei-chan also looks stunned. He thinks it's perfect...it's similar to when he entered the zone...except that unlike that time...it feels more real... Ei-chan looks transcendent. However, Watanabe looks like he's decided to get serious and stop trying to conserve his strength. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says: "The Premonition of an Awakening to the Ideal Build-up...?!" The title of the next chapter can be translated as "Regimentation" (imposing order or discipline) or "Rallying" (mobilizing for a common cause) or "Concentration" (gathering together).

Ch. 429

Given the events in ch.429, I'd translate the title as "Pulling Together" (assembling). The chapter starts with Ei-chan thinking that the previous time he'd experienced the zone, it was a curious sensation—as if a latent power had manifested—but it's different today. He's astonished, but he can understand what he did. He suspects the sensation for the zone may steadily change from now on if he grows (probably as a player). However, since he'll lose his grasp on the zone if he thinks about it deeply, he decides not to pay any more attention to it than he has now.

He serves wide, intent on "defending his life" from a power contest. Watanabe considers the angle of the serve to be a good course; however, he changes the flow of the game by attacking with power, hitting a strong shot that deprives Ei-chan of the advantage of his serve. Ei-chan's forced to return the ball crosscourt. Watanabe decides to use power to hit the ball to the center, a move that can eliminate Ei-chan's down-the-line.

Ei-chan, on the other hand, wants to be able to connect his response to an attack to his weapon (down-the-line). He recalls the options he'd previously worked out for a situation where he's being made to hit crosses by his opponent: 1) be the one to hit a cross (in a power contest); 2) leave an open court to invite one (a cross that will let him hit a down-the-line); and 3) continue to hit deep and wait (at some point he'll get a shot that he won't hit as a cross). He remembers that he'd learned from Wei to deliberately choose the difficult option for the self that unconsciously runs away when he's in a difficult and unfavorable situation. Because of that, he settles on the 3rd option and survive somehow until a cross comes.

Watanabe hits a strong shot down the line and deep. Calling to mind a fast rhythm, Ei-chan overcomes the difficulty to return the ball crosscourt with a rising shot from his ideal defensive position. Noting that Ei-chan returned the ball as it was, Watanabe sends the ball down the line, and Ei-chan again returns it crosscourt, still intent on enduring until Watanabe hits a cross. Ei-chan thinks he'll defend his life without neglecting to prepare so he can wield his weapon anytime.

A rally ensues. Watanabe thinks that if he avoids a cross too much, his play will become monotonous and he won't expand his advantage. So he decides to ramp up the power on his next shot—and hits a cross. Ei-chan's response to the cross is so fast that Watanabe suspects Ei-chan had been waiting for it. Rushing to the corner, Watanabe wonders if another down-the-line is coming. However, he remembers how Ei-chan had beaten him with a cross, and reminds himself not to be too wary of a down-the-line. At that point, he freezes, caught between the possibilities of a down-the-line and a cross. Asano notices that Watanabe's motion had stopped.

Seeing Watanabe's posture, Ei-chan decides that it will go well: he can overcome a national team member's mental strength, which he'd been afraid of, as well as his own timid self. He boldly hits a strong backhand down the line with 1/100 targeting—and Watanabe fails to touch it: 30-15. The audience notes that Ei-chan has hit another winner down the line. Ei-chan thinks it's a point where he'd taken back the upper hand after he'd been suppressed by Watanabe using power.

Play continues. Ei-chan thinks that if that's the case, then while his opponent in on the lookout for his down-the-line...he sends the ball on a sharp angle, and rushes to the net. Watanabe chases the ball past the doubles sideline and manages to return the ball. However, Ei-chan volleys to take the point: 40-15.

Play continues. Ei-chan thinks that when he can do perfectly everything he tries to do, his game goes this well. He realizes he's now pulling together in this play what he's done up to this point since turning pro and everything he's gained in this tournament.

Watanabe thinks that anything can happen in a match. Even so...there's no excuse for him to be beaten this much. Having difficulty with and being beaten by a youngster is something that often happens, but if he's being overwhelmed this much, the cause also lies in him. As Watanabe swings back to return the ball, he decides not to rely only on power. He hits a strong shot down the line and dashes forward to play at the net. (Obviously, Watanabe isn't used to playing at the net since the strong shot means he has less time to get to the net.) However, he sees Ei-chan cut in front of the ball to return it with a forehand—and he realizes Ei-chan can hit a down-the-line or a cross. He concludes that if he turns back at this point in time, the ball will get past him either way, so he commits to chasing a down-the-line. Seeing Watanabe's movement, Ei-chan sends the ball crosscourt: Game, Maruo, 2-0.

Natchan thinks the match seems to be going well. As Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose, she's sure he'll win...which means...they can't meet tomorrow (when she leaves for the States). End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "Ei-chan's growth backs Natsu's resignation (probably to not being able to meet tomorrow)." The title of the next chapter is "Full Capacity." Hopefully, this refers to Ei-chan, but it might mean Watanabe's going to pull out the stops and make a comeback.

Ch. 430

Ch.430 opens with Watanabe preparing to serve for the third game of the first set, and thinking that though it's the start of the match, his situation is completely unfavorable. It's as if Ei-chan is a different person from Yoshimichi's opponent yesterday. Watanabe's serve goes into the net. Watanabe reconsiders his conclusion, speculating that there might not actually be a big difference (between Ei-chan yesterday and today): it's a matter of Ei-chan's reaching the centimeters he didn't reach yesterday and the balls that didn't go in by centimeters now going in...and the tactics that didn't work are now working.

As Watanabe bounces the ball before his second serve, he concludes it's only a slight change. Assuming there's this sort of change in one day, it's mental. He doesn't know what happened yesterday, but it (the mental change) is something he's been able to experience himself. Watanabe serves wide, and is surprised (either by the speed of Ei-chan's response or because he realizes Ei-chan's going to hit a straight). Watanabe returns the ball crosscourt, and Ei-chan hits a backhand down the line that Watanabe fails to touch: 0-15.

Play continues. Chasing Watanabe's crosscourt shot, Ei-chan thinks this sensation is similar to what he felt during the match with Iwasa some time back. He takes a step forward and returns the ball with a backhand down the line. He thinks that the new skills he'd desperately built up in order to move to a higher level (the art shows Ei-chan's ideal forward defensive position, the rhythm training, his down-the-line) have started to further increase even his new tactics that use them (the new skills). Watanabe counters with another cross. Ei-chan's analysis continues: by acquiring a new mental outlook, he's connecting the disparate pieces—and without him noticing it, this cycle/repetition results in the ability to draw a bigger vision.

Anticipating another down-the-line, Watanabe races to the other side of the court. However, Ei-chan aims for a sharp angle shot. He has no doubt he's in the zone, but it's not just that. Ei-chan's shot is a winner. Watanabe's all "Hey...are you serious?!" Striking a triumphant pose, Ei-chan feels it's a sudden growth spurt because he'd overcome a barrier.

Play continues with Watanabe managing to return a shot. However, the ball goes into the net: Game, Maruo, 3-0. Coach Aoi is wide-eyed. Audience reactions: Maruo breaks again!; His momentum isn't stopping...!

Play continues. Ei-chan serves an ace: Game, Maruo, 4-0.

Watanabe raises his racket at the call, apparently on the verge of throwing it down. However, he stops himself. He concludes he's wrong (maybe about the change in Ei-chan just being a slight change)—it doesn't mean that he (Watanabe) is at fault (implying that he thinks he's not playing badly, just that Ei-chan really is outplaying him). If that's the case, he can only accept it.

Play continues with Watanabe hitting a cross. Ei-chan hits a strong backhand down the line; Watanabe fails to reach it, but it's out. Watanabe notes that there's no way Ei-chan won't make a single error. Watanabe thinks that right now he can only find a means of escape/survival, intending to make that (Ei-chan's errors) a starting point. (So Watanabe apparently concludes he's reduced to pushing?!) He hits another cross, and again Ei-chan counters with a strong backhand down the line—and this time, it's in. Ei-chan thinks he'll hit it (a down-the-line) even if it fails...it's necessary to show that he has a weapon.

A wide-eyed Coach Asano looks on in silence as play continues. Ei-chan thinks he'll leverage the threat of "Where will he (Ei-chan) pull out his weapon?" for other shots. He hits a drop shot that catches Watanabe flatfooted: Game, Maruo, 5-0.

Audience reactions: Whoa; Have Watanabe's feet stopped?; No, Maruo stopped Watanabe's feet!

During the break between games, Watanabe watches Ei-chan scribbling in his notebook. He's in disbelief that Ei-chan is growing flat out during this match. And he's all "What's up with that?!" when he's been a pro for 7 years...he'd entered the 200s ranking at age 22, and after joining the national team, he's practiced more than anyone (in his opinion) in a good environment. He's even made it to the Grand Slam qualifiers for 3 consecutive years.

However, as play continues, Watanabe thinks that he hasn't made it even once to the main draw of the Grand Slam. He remembers that Takuma succeeded in doing so at the latest Wimbledon. He concludes he's steadily being surpassed by the young guns (apparently referring to Takuma, Ike, and Nabae) and wonders why he isn't growing. As Ei-chan hits a cross, Watanabe wonders what's different. He returns the ball, wondering whether it (the difference) is in ability...or effort. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose after clinching a shot.

Watanabe's thoughts continue: "Is this my limit?" After getting a shot past Ei-chan, Watanabe strikes a triumphant pose, telling himself that (conclusion) is wrong...it has to be wrong! (The art shows a graph where Watanabe's growth has plateaued.) Then Ei-chan hits another winner crosscourt. Watanabe's posture is completely off as the chair umpire announces: "First set won by Maruo, 6-0." An exultant Ei-chan clenches both fists.

Audience reactions: Whoa, Maruo took it in a bagel!; Unbelievable!; Watanabeeeeh, (take it) from here!; It's obvious that Maruo's attacking and winning, you know; I wonder if he's a bad match for Watanabe?; Would it turn out like this just because of that?

During the break between sets, Ei-chan scribbles on his notebook as usual. Watanabe, on the other hand, drapes his towel over his head after toweling his hair, and broods, looking extremely frustrated. Asano notes that Watanabe has been stagnating for quite a long time. He considers Watanabe's current competition with Ei-chan to be an ordeal, but if Watanabe overcomes at least that (the stagnation?), Watanabe will have gained something. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "Will he be able to seize victory with his compilation (apparently of new skills, new mental outlook, and new tactics)?" The title of the next chapter can be translated as "Crossroads" or "A Parting of Ways."

Ch. 431
Anyhow, ch.431 starts with the break between sets. Watanabe scolds himself because he shouldn't be thinking about the reason for his stagnation during a match. What he should be thinking about, instead, is how to handle Ei-chan now. He looks over to the next bench and watches Ei-chan scribbling in his notebook. He thinks that every time they change court, Ei-chan's frequently writing in his notebook that way. He's come upon players who takes notes once in a while, but normally they just making memos of things they'd noticed. He suspects that if Ei-chan finding some use for those notes, it's a matter of immediately making a database of the essential points Ei-chan had experienced, and then creating strategies that apply them. The main point is accurate analysis. He acknowledges that he might be lacking in that aspect, but for that to be a big difference in strength... He considers his strong points to be his physique and technique—he's made it a policy to train and control his body and, at the same time, polish the related skills. Even so, he doesn't ignore tactics, relying on his coach to cover that weakness. And yet, he's being beaten too badly, no matter how he looks at it.

Ei-chan glances over at Watanabe, speculating that Watanabe is confused by his tactics, so Watanabe's mental disturbance is likely to reduce Watanabe's usual performance. If he continues as he has in the start of the second set... Ei-chan puts that thought on hold as he flips through his notes to check the data he'd received from Nabae. He concludes it's too optimistic to think he'll be able to get away completely from Watanabe as things stand. For example, if his down-the-line is captured (Watanabe gets the hang of it?), Watanabe will close up the difference in an instant. The situation is still critical.

The chair umpire calls time, and the two return to the court for the first game of the second set. As Watanabe prepares to serve, he tells himself he'll take his time and set his mind in order. He'd already decided in advance to put out the minimum of his usual power. He serves wide, and Ei-chan returns the ball crosscourt. Watanabe thinks he'll keep his strategy simple without overthinking things...and make a preemptive strike before he's beaten. He hits a strong shot to the corner to clinch the point: 15-0.

As the audience roars in surprise, Ei-chan notes it was a quick attack that didn't give Ei-chan time to bring out his weapon. The attack confirms for Ei-chan that he can't continue as he has—and he adjusts his position backward, so that he'll receive the ball from several steps behind the baseline. Watanabe's surprised by the shift and wonders why Ei-chan's doing it that way instead of moving forward. He admits that Ei-chan's new position would increase Ei-chan's ability to defend against his preemptive attack. However, the new position would also make it difficult for Ei-chan to produce the down-the-line that Ei-chan hits from a forward position, since the baseline is an area where power is a big factor. In a power contest, moving back from the baseline isn't good because of the additional distance to the opponent. On the positive side, the additional distance increases Ei-chan's ability to defend against a strong shot. However, Watanabe finds it's hard to imagine that Ei-chan will suddenly go on the defensive after being proactive up to now. (Hehe, Ei-chan's forcing Watanabe to think!) So Watanabe mentally challenges Ei-chan to show him how Ei-chan will wield his weapon (the down-the-line) from there.

Ei-chan believes this game is one that Watanabe absolutely can't lose. He has no doubt about this, given how Watanabe made quite a difficult preemptive attack. He thinks that he first has to survive his opponent's serve. He can't use his precious weapon—his taking a defensive position in the rear is for that purpose... However, he can't win with just that. Watanabe serves wide, and Ei-chan takes a step sideways to receive the ball. Watanabe anticipates that from that position, a proactive Ei-chan will hit a controlled ball as either a straight to the corner or a short angle shot crosscourt. However, Ei-chan hits a strong cross deep to the opposite corner, taking Watanabe by surprise.

Watanabe returns the ball, then notices that Ei-chan has moved his defensive position forward, back to his original position. He wonders if it's a surprise attack...and notes that Ei-chan is playing him with a certain degree of power. Returning the ball with a strong shot, Ei-chan notes that Watanabe's return was deep, but concludes he's brought the game to an almost equal footing (so Watanabe's lost the advantage of his serve). Watanabe believes Ei-chan intends to wait for a chance to hit a down-the-line from his usual position on the baseline. He looks rather frustrated, thinking that Ei-chan's taking out measure after another in rapid succession (meaning Ei-chan has anticipated what Watanabe will do). However, as he swings back to hit the ball, he thinks the situation is still even, so he mentally challenges Ei-chan to show it (the down-the-line) if Ei-chan can.

Right then, Ei-chan dashes to the net, again surprising Watanabe. Watanabe tries to sink a short cross, but Ei-chan lunges for the ball and volleys: 15-15.

Watanabe's thoughts are a whirl of confusion: why did Ei-chan go to the net now...when Ei-chan had already taken a set from the baseline with his down-the-line...when Ei-chan had already created a situation now where Ei-chan can use the down-the-line? Then Watanabe gasps, snapping out of his thoughts upon noticing that Ei-chan had again taken a receiving position that's way behind the baseline.

As Watanabe tosses the ball to serve, he reminds himself it's his serve. He has the initiative and will just take care of that return just now. He serves to the center, but it's a fault. Bouncing the ball, he tells himself not to rush. Then he notices that this time, Ei-chan has done to opposite: moving so far forward that he's stepping on the baseline. So Watanabe serves to the center, going for a serve with a lively spin (so it bounces high).

Making a short hop, Ei-chan strikes the ball from above with all his strength. Watanabe's baffled that Ei-chan has chosen yet another (consecutive) power contest. Rushing to the net, Ei-chan thinks he's essentially at a disadvantage when it comes to strong shots. However, it's the top of the second set and he'd taken the first set using strategy, so he expects that to have had some effect. And instead of using a down-the-line, he'll bring things to a reaction contest at the net.

Watanabe tries to get the ball past Ei-chan with a down-the-line. However, Ei-chan intercepts the ball, volleying to take the point: 15-30. Watanabe notes that Ei-chan has good reactions, and wonders if that's why Ei-chan decided to contest the point at the net...which means Ei-chan has two weapons that Watanabe hasn't been able to capture (get the hang of?)... He concludes: "This is bad."

Ei-chan clenches a triumphant fist as the audience roars. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "He has now dared a second time! Will he be able to follow it up with another?!" The title of the next chapter is "Balance" or "Equilibrium."

Ch. 432

Ch.432 starts with Watanabe thinking that Ei-chan has two weapons that Watanabe hasn't been able to get the hang of: the down-the-line and the reaction contest. To think his (movements) have been arrested with one weapon. (The art shows the down-the-line.) The second one won't simply double its effectiveness when he's attacked at that point. (The art shows Ei-chan volleying at the net.) Ei-chan thinks he'd done it...even though he's pushing himself, it's an ideal development that he'd wanted to make a success of. Watanabe wonders if it was a strategy Ei-chan had prepared for the start of the second set. He thinks even if Ei-chan is a rookie who's overpowered him in a bagel, he can't see any relaxing in Ei-chan's guard or any wonderment on Ei-chan's part. He wonders if that means Ei-chan was able to imagine getting this far.

Watanabe serves to the center. Ei-chan returns the ball to a corner.

Narration switches over to an omniscient perspective: Ei-chan commences a reaction contest, throwing Watanabe off balance with strong shots while the down-the-line (strong) is effective. This was the best vision Ei-chan had drawn to defeat Watanabe. He implemented this for the first time with everything going as he'd hoped. Furthermore, the impact of being able to produce his second weapon with this timing—when it's essential for Watanabe to hold to turn things around—was major. Even if Watanabe pushes himself a little too much here, if he could get a hang of the down-the-line and hold his serve, he could offset the first set where he was overpowered.

When Watanabe hits a cross, Ei-chan plans to contest it here. Ei-chan hits another down-the-line to take the point: 15-40.

Omniscient narration continues: However, the effectivity of the weapons that overpowered him (the art indicates Watanabe) actually increased sharply. Watanabe needed to overcome Ei-chan's resistance right away, starting with his first serve, in order to change this situation.

Watanabe serves wide. Ei-chan hits a forehand slice crosscourt. Watanabe returns it crosscourt, then watches Ei-chan closely, wondering which way Ei-chan will hit it.

Omniscient narration continues: But when it turned into a ground stroke contest without Watanabe being able to do that, Watanabe had to take into account not knowing where Ei-chan's shots (weapons) would go, and shift his defensive position back. The distance from moving back improved his chances of being able to cover the shots, no matter which one appeared. On the other hand, this was a desperation measure that personally suppressed the power that was Watanabe's weapon.

Watanabe wonders if Ei-chan's shot will be a down-the-line, a cross to the forecourt, or something else...? Ei-chan eyes Watanabe's position and decides to hit a drop shot.

Omniscient narration continues: Ei-chan didn't pass up the opportunity of Watanabe's having moved back.

Watanabe dashes to the net and manages to volley. However, Ei-chan had also gone to the net, and he countervolleys to put away the ball: Game, Maruo, 1-0.

The audience goes wild: Are you serious?! The second set also started with Maruo's break!; It can't be... Will it continue this way...?; Hang in there, Watanabe!; You can still pull it off!; Take it from here! Don't give up!

Watanabe hears the shouts of encouragement and remembers the Davis Cup match when Yoshimichi broke Watanabe's tension by lying about Watanabe having a long hair sticking out of a nostril. He remembers Yoshimichi's advice about not showing his tension to the audience because it would make them worry. Watanabe realizes he'd forgotten that he's being watched, and taking a drink from a PET bottle, he reminds himself he's a member of the national team.

Omniscient narration continues: As the second set continues, the second game is Ei-chan's service. Starting from the serve, Ei-chan developed it to his advantage with an offense that used his two weapons freely. However, Watanabe devotes himself to pushing and steadily started to slip out of his horrible state of confusion. But even then, he failed to break. (Score: 2-0) Then in the third game, Watanabe's next service, Watanabe's pushing from the rearcourt starts to bear fruit: at the same time as the effectiveness of Ei-chan's down-the-line (strong) fades, this way of fighting is powerful at the critical moment. (The art shows Watanabe hitting a (sudden?) strong shot and Ei-chan's return going into the net.) And Watanabe finally held his serve for the first time in the match.

Watanabe thinks he still has time and plans to pull himself together.

Omniscient narration continues: In the situation where one break would be fatal to his overwhelming lead, Ei-chan moves his defensive position forward, to the limit (of his ideal defensive area?), in order to enhance the effectiveness of his weapons. Because of this, a situation develops where both players' defense and offense reach a balance in a certain sense. (So this is what the title of the chapter refers to.) And the match progresses with both sides holding their respective serves. (Score: 6-0, 3-2. Score: 6-0, 4-3.)

Watanabe hits a shot down the line, and thinks that dragging things out in a contest of physical strength is what he's hoping for. If he gets one (game?) back, it (the set?) will turn to his favor. He takes a step, moving his defensive position forward.

Omniscient narration continues: During this stalemate, Watanabe sometimes tried to return to his original defensive position, aiming for a turnaround... (The art shows Ei-chan's down-the-line shooting past Watanabe.) However, each time he did, Ei-chan desperately (risking his life) blocked him with his two weapons. (Score: 6-0, 5-3.) Proactively compeled into relentless forward-backward movement, Ei-chan's fatigue started to manifest and the occasions when he lost points due to errors in judgment also increased. (The art shows Ei-chan rushing to the net, but Watanabe gets a shot past him.) Nevertheless, Ei-chan keeps

a tight desperate grip on his chance of winning by continuing to display an aggressive posture.

Ei-chan reminds himself that his opponent is a member of the national team—that's precisely why he's taking chances! He thinks that if he abandons one of his weapons now, Watanabe will get the hang of Ei-chan's other weapon and Ei-chan will be pushed back right away.

Omniscient narration continues: In the meantime, the opposing Watanabe was moving forward little by little. Using his reserve strength, he slowly improved his defensive position and even now has returned to his usual defensive position. (The art shows Watanabe hitting a strong cross that's a clear winner.) And in the tenth game of the second set... (Score: 6-0, 5-4.) As things stand, it won't be good enough. Watanabe goes all out, rushing forward from his home position and using technique and all his power in a ground-stroke contest.

Ei-chan sends the ball to a corner. Watanabe counters with a strong shot crosscourt. Ei-chan chases the ball. He fails to touch it, but it's out: Game, set, and match won by Maruo. Count: 6-0, 6-4.

Ei-chan's parents look shocked but thrilled. Even Coach Aoi looks somewhat surprised. Asano looks daunted. Natchan simply looks confident and triumphant. Audience reactions: H... Hey...; Watanabe, a member of the national team, lost!; Maruo who came up through the prelims...will advance to a finals at last...! The crowd cheers as Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose. Ei-chan silently exults: "I managed to hold on!"

Omniscient narration continues: For Watanabe, the frustrating defeat was just like the match with Nabae, and at the same time, it was a complete defeat that he was compelled to recognize even more than the other time. Watanabe holds his head with a bitter expression. Ei-chan walks to the net to meet Watanabe for the usual handshake. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "For the first time in Ei-chan's professional career, he heads to a Challenger final!" The title of the next chapter is "Growth."

Ch. 433

Ch.433 opens with the usual handshake between players. Ei-chan thanks Watanabe who looks too frustrated for words. With the scoreboard showing 6-0, 6-4, the audience is all worked up with many smiles and excited faces to be seen: Whoa, someone ranked in the 1400s swept the 161st?!; A sweep?; Advancing to the finals on his first attempt at a Challenger is a big deal in the tennis world, you know; Amazing...; Maruo Eiichirou, huh...I hadn't heard of him since the All Japan; Isn't he the next rookie in the Ike generation that we can expect a lot from, after Nabae? Eric smiles as he looks around and sees the happy faces.

As Ei-chan leaves the court, he remembers the match, thinking he was able to do everything he'd wanted to do...he'd defeated a member of the national team, even if only by a small margin. He realizes he's gotten stronger! It's (His efforts have) taken effect! Natchan and the others are there to congratulate him as he climbs the steps beside the bleachers. Kageyama says Ei-chan had gotten so strong without Kageyama realizing it.

Ei-chan looks relieved to see them and in his relief, his legs wobble and he stumbles into Natchan. Hanging on to her, he looks at her in surprise, then rests his head on her shoulder, exhaling deeply. Natchan notices how his hands and legs are shaking, and comments that it had been life-or-death deal. Coach Aoi explains that that way of playing also held the possibility of self-destruction. Luckily, Ei-chan had taken the initiative and Watanabe had gone in with a wait-and-see attitude. Ei-chan can't aim for a match like today's, but it's a fact that he pulled off what he tried to do. With this victory, Ei-chan ought to be confident of being able to do this much.

Then Aoi suggests it's about time Ei-chan put a bit of distance (between Ei-chan and Natchan). Several bemused people, besides Ei-chan's friends and family, are watching them—including one guy who seems to disapprove. An embarrassed Ei-chan releases Natchan.

Scene switch to the room set aside for player treatment where Asano and Watanabe are perched on separate cots. Asano tells Watanabe it was a good match, but the result was tough. Watanabe isn't able to say anything in response. Asano continues, speculating that Watanabe already has various points to reflect on, but requests he be allowed to say a few things as a coach of the national team. Asano says he'd heard that Watanabe has had his sights on participating in the main draw of the Grand Slam all along, but he suggests it might be better if Watanabe were to stop that already.

Shocked, Watanabe looks up and stares at Asano. An embarrassed Asano tells Watanabe, "Oh...That's not it, that's not it. I'm not saying it's impossible, okay?" Asano explains that he feels that that (participating in the main draw) has become Watanabe's final goal without Watanabe realizing it. He points out that Ei-chan has the same objective as Watanabe when Ei-chan has only seen a Grand Slam and hasn't even taken part in the qualifiers. Ei-chan is seriously aiming for the main draw of the Grand Slam, just like Watanabe. But when considering actual ability, Watanabe mustn't say he's the same as Ei-chan. Asano explains that for Watanabe, participating in the main draw is a transit point—Watanabe ought to set winning one round first, no, reaching the Best 8 as his objective. The disheartened Watanabe argues that it's because he hasn't actually taken part in the main draw yet. Asano argues that's irrelevant. He wants Watanabe to have a better understanding of just how important setting a goal is in this world—because Watanabe has a future ahead of him.

Asano explains that if Watanabe's objective is simply participation in the Grand Slam, earning points in the lower tour might be easier to achieve, but if Watanabe continues with just that, he won't be able to win when he participates in the main draw. (The diagram indicates that since the level and points earned in the lower tour are low, it's easier to earn points, but you take part in more tournaments and there's the risk that the number of high-level matches in the tournaments you take part in will decrease. In the world tour, it's harder to earn points because the level (of the matches) is high, but if you win, not only are the points a lot, you get used to matches that are on a level similar to the Grand Slam, and it becomes easier to compete in the Grand Slam.)

Asano's explanation continues: Of course, winning in the lower tour is important. However, because Watanabe is certainly trying too hard to win there, Watanabe's tennis is

atrophying—which probably applies technically and psychologically. Watanabe is chagrined to hear this. But Asano points out that it means Watanabe has room for growth—surprising Watanabe. Asano assures him he'd confirmed that (room for growth?) in the second half of today's match; which is why he really believes it was a good match. He tells Watanabe he'll work with Watanabe, and suggests they start from here. Watanabe accepts the offer.

Scene switch to outdoors. Ei-chan has changed clothes and he's looking on while his parents greet Eric. Aoi reminds Ei-chan that Ei-chan has a match tomorrow, and suggests they go for his post-match treatment. Ei-chan thanks Eric for making a special effort to come and watch his match. Eric replies he's finally saw Ei-chan producing smiles, and adds that he believes Ei-chan's capable of more. Shaking Eric's hand, Ei-chan thanks him again, and thinks that at last...it's a finals!

At this point, Krishna and his opponent exit the players' lounge and head to the court. Krishna notices Ei-chan, and smiles and waves as he passes Ei-chan. Watching Krishna and his opponent enter the court, Ei-chan wonders whether his next opponent will be Krishna or the 5th seed, the 152nd ranked Aloisi.

Aoi asks Ei-chan's dad to record the match, and Ei-chan's dad agrees. Then Aoi suggests to Ei-chan that they set out. Watching Ei-chan's group leave, Eric's secretary comments that Ei-chan was cool. Eric agrees and adds that Ei-chan's steady but bold. If it's possible for Ei-chan, he will grant their wishes. There's a thrilling charm to how he destroys his obstacles.

Kageyama and Sasaki take their leave. They encourage Ei-chan to do his best in the finals and for Natchan to take care tomorrow. Natchan hugs Sasaki, suggesting they meet up when Natchan gets back. Kageyama suggests that since they have a connection with Ei-chan, Natchan let them hear about everything.

Ei-chan undergoes post-match care, including the ice bath. Finally, Aoi announces it's done. Ei-chan thanks him. Then Ei-chan's phone rings with a call from his dad, Kazuya. Ei-chan answers and asks what happened with the match. He's surprised to hear it's already over with a score of 6-3, 6-1. Ei-chan tells Aoi that it seems Krishna swept his opponent. Aoi comments that it's only been an hour and the opponent was higher ranked. Ei-chan marvels that his opponent in the finals is Krishna. Natchan comments that he's a friend from when Ei-chan went to Florida (IMG), and Ei-chan confirms this and adds that he's happy he can have a match (with Krishna) in this sort of setting. He says he has to go home fast and come up with strategies while watching the video. Aoi asks whether Ei-chan doesn't have other plans, and reminds him that Natchan is leaving for America tomorrow. A blushing Ei-chan replies that he's just talking about today's outcome, of course. Natchan notes that it can't be helped if Ei-chan has a match tomorrow, and adds that he has to rest early. She wants Ei-chan to win. They're able to be together all day today, and she's fine with that. Aoi thinks she's surprisingly easy about it. Someone announces they'll make absolutely sure by devoting it (the time) to the championship. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "A tactical session with Natchan, devoted to the championship!" The title of the next chapter is "Evening." I'm looking forward to Natchan's input.

Ch. 434
So ch. 434 opens in STC where Ei-chan, Natchan, and Coach Aoi are watching the video of Krishna's match with Aloisi. Aoi comments that Krishna is skillful, that even though Krishna has a slender physique, he's coping well against a burly opponent and outhitting him. Ei-chan remarks that it seems Krishna has suddenly gotten stronger, so that Krishna's capable of that. Aoi describes Krishna's left-handed forehand slice as nasty. Every time Krishna hits it, Aloisi's posture is thrown off. Aoi adds that on watching the course of events all throughout, Krishna's quite smart. He doesn't lose a point the same way twice. And he's quick to spot his opponent's weaknesses. Ei-chan tells him Krishna seems to have a very good memory, and it's possible he remembers everything. Ei-chan has a flashback to his conversation with Krishna about Yoshimichi's results this year and how what Krishna mentioned matched Ei-chan's notes. Aoi compares it to what Ei-chan's doing with his notes.

Aoi asks Ei-chan how Krishna had been last year after losing to Nabae at the Super Juniors; that was around the time Ei-chan was in Florida (IMG), so Ei-chan must have seen Krishna. Ei-chan replies that a year ago, his score against stood at two wins and two losses during practice matches, and the wins of both players were won through pushing. Since it was just practice, Ei-chan doesn't have a grasp on Krishna's specialty. He thinks Krishna was trying out various tactics like that forehand slice that Krishna hit with a strong lateral rotation. He's not sure how things will turn out if Krishna's fixated on winning in an official match.

Aoi comments that Krishna's kinda similar to Ei-chan and Nabae. However, Natchan disagrees; she thinks Krishna's more the intuitive type than the analytical type. When Ei-chan asks for clarification, Natchan slows the video to highlight how Krishna hits a ball and points out how Krishna takes his eye off the ball a bit faster than average. Ei-chan sees her point. Aoi notes that if you can minimize looking at the ball, you can check your opponent's movements and quickly decide where to aim next. Natchan adds that if you have a good memory and a good situational judgment, then if intuition is a strong consideration, Krishna might be the type who would play better by making split-second decisions on the spot. Aoi agrees that the moment that sort of guy gains power and technique, he's likely to become stronger.

Natchan asks Ei-chan if he has any memories of Krishna. Ei-chan replies that the first time he went to IMG, they were roommates, but Krishna hadn't been the type to talk much. Since Ei-chan was poor at English, he didn't talk much, either, so he'd felt a sense of fellowship with Krishna, Krishna being a year younger and having come to the US by himself. However, Ei-chan overheard Atsushi ask Krishna what sort of book Krishna was reading—and Krishna replied fluently and at length. Krishna's English had been perfect. Shocked, Ei-chan had asked Krishna why Krishna was so quiet, and Krishna's answer was that he thinks he's not good at asserting himself. That left a strong impression on Ei-chan. However, the second time Ei-chan met Krishna in Florida (IMG), he had a different impression. Ei-chan asked Atsushi about it, and Atsushi explained that Krishna learns to assert himself and had gotten stronger.

Natchan marvels at the answer. But Ei-chan wonders if it's possible for one's tennis to get stronger because you can assert yourself. She believes it's possible, especially in America, where it's hard to do various things if you can't state clearly why you want to do something. Aoi comments that Ei-chan's always had clear objectives, which is why he's able to get lots

of people to help him out. Ei-chan might have been able to do it (assert himself?) well. Ei-chan speculates that Krishna has made that (his objective?) clear recently. Aoi concludes that Krishna is an outstanding talent who will no doubt advance in the tennis world in the future, so it's good that Ei-chan can play against him now.

The discussion continues until around 7pm. Ei-chan and Natchan take their leave of Aoi. Ei-chan thanks Aoi for staying late. Aoi prompts Ei-chan about tomorrow's match, and tells Natchan to take care since she's starting a new life over there (in the US). Natchan thanks Aoi for everything, and tells him she'll contact him when she gets back (to Japan).

Ei-chan and Natchan walk off, holding hands. He tells her he'll walk her all the way home. She thanks him and suggests they take the long way home and stroll. So they take their time walking around and look like they're having an enjoyable conversation. Then Ei-chan mentions that in Atlanta, close to the University of Georgia, which Natchan will be attending, there's an ATP250 match that's part of the World Tour. He doesn't have enough points yet to take part in that match, but one of his objectives is get to the point where he can take part in it summer next year. Natchan's revved by the possibility, saying that if Ei-chan comes, she'll definitely go cheer him on. She adds that it would be terrific if he were to win in the prelims and make his world debut there. She gets even more excited, telling Ei-chan he definitely can do it. Ei-chan replies that somehow he also feels he can. He feels he's gained a bit of confidence with the current tournament. Natchan tells him he can stay over at her place then (when he goes to Atlanta to play in the ATP250). Ei-chan's surprised because he's under the impression she was staying in a dorm. However, Natchan reveals she's renting a place closer to the campus. Since the place is fairly large, it's okay (for him to stay over). A blushing Ei-chan informs her he'll take her up on her offer. Natchan comments that it's one year from now, which is soon.

They reach her home. Natchan tells him that even though she says that, she'll come home if there's time, like for the New Year holidays. They'll also have video calls, so unexpectedly, it doesn't feel like they'll be apart. She takes her leave. Their hands release, and then Ei-chan grabs Natchan's hand, stopping her. He hugs her tight and tells her that the more he thinks about it, the more he doesn't want to be apart from her after all, that she's essential to his life plan. Natchan is surprised and gets teary-eyed on hearing that. Ei-chan continues, telling her he's sure that if they're both are true to themselves, no doubt they'll be fine no matter where they are. So he tells her to enjoy herself to the fullest. Agreeing, Natchan hugs him back. Then she tells him to tell her about that plan properly next time. (Ei-chan: "EH?") Because she'll make amendments (to it) depending on the situation. (Ei-chan: "EH?") She points out that it also has her plan, right? (Ei-chan: "That...that's right!") Then the two blush, both of them thinking that that one just now sounded like a proposal.

Natchan waves, taking her leave again. Ei-chan waves back, agreeing to next time. She enters the house, while Ei-chan remains standing outside, staring blankly at her window. The light goes on in her room. Then Ei-chan's surprised when she opens the curtain. She's also surprised to see him still there. She tells him to go home quickly and rest and do his best tomorrow. Ei-chan acknowledges her. They wave at each other as Ei-chan turns to leave. End of chapter.

The blurb says: "The separation of the two is to bring them closer together." The title of the

next chapter is "Finals.

Ch. 435

Ch.435 opens early morning with Ei-chan receiving a message from Natchan saying she's going and will be rooting for Ei-chan in the sky. She includes a selfie at the entrance to the airport. Ei-chan replies that he's going to do his best, putting his life on the line, to be able to report a good result. He leaves home and goes to Keiryo for morning practice.

Krishna's there as well. Even that early, people are already coming to watch, including Kobayashi and Yukichi. Kobayashi comments that although it's a tempestuous tournament where the top seeds rapidly disappeared, he never imagined that Ei-chan would really make it to the finals. Ei-chan was amazing yesterday against Watanabe. Yukichi counters that it wouldn't be strange for Ei-chan to win as Ei-chan is now.

Ei-chan's phone rings. It's Atsushi; apparently Ei-chan asked him to call because he has something to ask Atsushi. It's currently 19:00 (7 p.m.) in Florida, which means 8:00 a.m. in Japan. Atsushi guesses Ei-chan wants to ask about Krishna; apparently Ei-chan had told Atsushi he's up against Krishna in the Keiryo finals. Ei-chan explains the match is coming up and he'd remembered yesterday that Atsushi said Krishna had started being able to assert himself and got stronger. He asks why Krishna was bad at asserting himself and how Krishna started being able to do so. Atsushi explains that with Krishna's results this year, it was decided that Krishna would go on to a famous university. Ei-chan notes there are a lot of pros going to university lately; the universities act like prominent sponsors for strong players, especially in America. Atsushi comments that the number of pro matches they can take part in decreases, but aside from that what they can get out of it increases. Ei-chan thinks Natchan is doing the same.

Atsushi reminds Ei-chan that Krishna's family is unbelievably wealthy (actually Ei-chan hadn't known), so Krishna doesn't really need a sponsor. Krishna has the funds to travel around the world all year. And even if he didn't, a single word from Krishna's father would gather lots of sponsors. Ei-chan's envious, thinking that Krishna lives in a different world from him who doesn't have money and Wang Wei who doesn't have freedom. Atsushi adds that if you're as strong as Krishna, you'd have a training environment even if it's not university facilities.

Ei-chan asks why Krishna's going to university in that case. Atsushi replies that Krishna's going simply to study. A shocked Ei-chan asks whether Krishna intends to turn pro. Atsushi confirms this, saying this is where Krishna's self-assertion comes in. He says Krishna had always been troubled that he couldn't do tennis to the extent of living on tennis the way Pete and Alex do. Ei-chan asks if there's something else Krishna wants to do. Atsushi explains there's Krishna's family and it seems Krishna wants to study business and actually has considerable ability, and since he couldn't devote himself to tennis, he hadn't been able to state his goal clearly, so he couldn't assert himself well. Krishna felt he couldn't say anything to Atsushi who was desperately working only on tennis, and couldn't ask advice from his friends, whom he's competing with, when he could see their difficulties up-close. Then around a year and a half ago (which I'm guessing is shortly after Ei-chan's first trip to Florida), Krishna said it's like he made a breakthrough.

Start of flashback. Atsushi commented that Krishna's going to go pro. Krishna confirmed this, explaining that tennis has enriched his life and is the best sport...he loves tennis. That's why he'll continue playing tennis all his life and intends to aim for the top. However, he'll also pour his efforts into other things—that's what he's decided. Pete rubbed Krishna's head, saying everyone knows Krishna loves tennis and they know there are other possibilities for Krishna. Atsushi added that if that's how Krishna has decided to live, he has everyone's blessing. End of flashback.

Atsushi adds that after that, Krishna suddenly became stronger. Ei-chan asks if that means Krishna will play as a pro while also working in another field, and if Krishna can do that. Atsushi acknowledges it's difficult but if it's Krishna... Atsushi thinks there are lots of people in America who feel that how the Japanese devote their life to just one thing is a virtue; however, there are actually people in America who are doctors as well as gold medalists, or lawyers as well as pro athletes, so Krishna is serious about going in that direction. And it seems there are cases where such people hit a slump when they're made to focus on only one thing. However, the coaching staff (in IMG) sigh over how strong Krishna could become if only he concentrated only on tennis.

Ei-chan thinks it's amazing: someone who's too capable in everything and thus is undecided has decided to do something. Atsushi asks if that sort of thing is enough. Ei-chan replies that it is and thanks him. Atsushi tells Ei-chan to do his best in the match and ends the call. Then he thinks that Ei-chan's also amazing to have reached a Challenger final after one year.

More people arrive at the Keiryo venue. They exclaim over the finals being a face-off between teenagers, and one side is someone ranked in the 1400s who came up through the qualifiers. They wonder what sort of match they'll see. Among the people are Ei-chan's parents, Coach Aoi, and Asano.

Krishna and Ei-chan arrive at the court. They put their things on their respective benches, then shake hands. Krishna notes it's been a while since they'd played against each other, and he tells Ei-chan he's happy. Ei-chan echoes the sentiment. He thinks he's worked hard. He intends to win here and get a step closer to (getting on) the national team. He'll gain points and the best environment, then the world tour next year...and then summer in Atlanta.

The chair umpire announces the start of the Keiryo Challenger finals as a 3-set match with Krishna serving. As Ei-chan prepares to receive, he thinks that he first has to return the peculiar left-handed serve well. Krishna serves to the center. The ball bounces farther left than Ei-chan expected, so his posture is off as he returns the ball. He considers the inflection (of the ball) tough, but manages to send the ball deep. However, Krishna's ready for it, and he hits the ball to the corner. The inflection of the ball prevents Ei-chan from even touching it: 15-0.

Ei-chan notes that Krishna had clinched the point with a single blow, even though the ball had been deep. Ei-chan definitely feels that in comparison with before, Krishna is playing like he'd made a breakthrough. And with just this (exchange?) now, Ei-chan can tell that Krishna's gotten much better. So Ei-chan concludes he has to return the serve more properly. He shifts his receive position to the doubles sideline. He plans on being on the

lookout for the peculiar left-handed serve that cuts sharply (away) compared to a right-handed serve. If he brings the play to a rally while coping with this (the left-handed serve)...

Krishna notices the shift and thinks this is just like Ei-chan. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "What Ei-chan's aiming for is naturally to win the first move" (meaning to seize the initiative). The title of the next chapter is "Respect"; this apparently refers to Krishna's attitude toward Ei-chan.

Ch. 436

Ch.436 opens with Ei-chan having his receive position farther out, by the doubles sideline. He reminds himself that the position, which is intended to counter Krishna's peculiar left-handed serve (the art shows how the position makes it easier for Ei-chan to receive Krishna's slice serve, which cuts away from the receiver), puts him farther away from the middle of the court, so he has to return fast (to eliminate the open court, I guess). Coach Aoi notes that Ei-chan doesn't have much experience playing against southpaws, so the first thing Ei-chan has to do is to get sufficiently accustomed to countering Krishna's shots. Studying Ei-chan's position, Krishna thinks the center looks open, so he's tempted to aim for it. However, he serves wide.

Ei-chan has sufficient time to get into position to receive the ball, but the slice serve results in a low bounce. He's forced to scoop the ball, and it hits the net cord and goes out: 30-0. Ei-chan notes that the low height of the ball increases the chances of it going into the net (or going out). Even though the serve came as he'd expected, the low bounce makes the ball that much more difficult to return. He concludes that Krishna's slice serve has evolved that much into a weapon.

In preparation for Krishna's next serve, Ei-chan again plants himself slightly to the left of his usual receive position, even for the deuce court. Krishna serves to the center; it's again a slice serve that requires Ei-chan to scoop the ball—which goes into the net: 40-0. Audience reactions: The course really cut things close (the ball bounced very close to the center line); That's an amazingly good serve.

Ei-chan swears mentally. He'd thought it would go well this time, so he'd increased the power of his swing. He concludes that it's as Atsushi had said: this isn't the same Krishna as before. However, considering he's forcing Krishna to take risks, it's not bad.

Krishna faults on his next serve. Ei-chan thinks that was dangerous since Krishna had served in a way that the ball went farther aside. However, Ei-chan believes that if it comes again in the second serve, his countermeasure should succeed. So thinking, he shifts his left leg forward. Krishna notices Ei-chan's movement, then tosses the ball.

Ei-chan's surprised to see the ball tossed much farther to the left than before. Krishna serves to the center: a kick serve with a very strong rotation to the ball. Ei-chan barely touches it: Game, Krishna, 1-0.

As Ei-chan heads to the bench, he thinks it's a second serve that Krishna has never hit before (I assume he means in his practice matches with Krishna). He wonders if Krishna had hit his first serves confidently because Krishna has that serve (the kick serve). He concludes that Krishna definitely presents a different face when he's playing in an official match.

Krishna notices Ei-chan's tennis notebook on Ei-chan's bench and remembers he'd been surprised the first time he'd seen it—because it had the same things that he'd always done in his head. Everyone had acknowledged Ei-chan because of it, and Krishna realized it was also one way of self-assertion. For the first time, Krishna conveyed the feelings he wanted to convey along with his actions. He'd been hesitating because he couldn't assert himself, but that (being able to convey his feelings) turned into the ability to decide he would do what he wanted to do.

In the start of Ei-chan's service, Ei-chan decides he'll also hold his serve for sure in the start of the match. He serves wide. Krishna considers it a good serve, but... Ei-chan notes that Krishna's return is also high level. He thinks it would be impossible to take the point with just his serve if he doesn't take any risks. He wonders how to hold on until his down-the-line (strong). Krishna thinks that shallow balls halfway to either side would make it impossible for Ei-chan to aim for a down-the-line. Ei-chan, on the other hand, wonders when he can use the down-the-line...if he's risking his life. However, he also reminds himself he mustn't force things too much.

Given the circumstances, Krishna then decides to hit a fast forward slice, surprising Ei-chan. Ei-chan manages to return it, but he acknowledges that Krishna has taken the initiative. Krishna easily puts the ball away with a cross: 0-15.

Ei-chan notes that he'd had that shot in mind, but it was sharper than he'd imagined. He hadn't expected Krishna to suddenly use it when Ei-chan had the upper hand.

Krishna remembers that he'd heard from Atsushi that Ei-chan had adopted the fast forward slice from beach tennis and made it into a weapon. Krishna had thought it was a great idea, so he'd gotten Atsushi to let him adopt it too. Krishna thinks he really respects the side of Ei-chan that does that—producing ideas from unexpected places that can be applied to tennis.

Ei-chan serves to the center, and Krishna returns the ball. A rally ensues. Ei-chan thinks he wants to make an attack with his down-the-line succeed early on. However, he notes that with Krishna countering with slices (Krishna hits another forward slice), the ball is low, so it's hard to go for a down-the-line. As the rally continues, Aoi thinks that it's a stroke (the forward slice) that's clearly planned because Krishna is wary of Ei-chan's down-the-line. It's obvious that Krishna has fully checked out Ei-chan's match with Watanabe because he recognizes Ei-chan is a tough opponent.

Krishna hits a cross. Ei-chan thinks it will be a bit tight but... Krishna's eyes widen slightly as he notices something. Then Ei-chan hits a down-the-line (strong). However, Krishna's already getting in position to return the ball. Ei-chan's surprised that the ball was returned, but he manages to put the ball away: 15-15.

Ei-chan notes he'd take the point with a winner. However, he hadn't been able to make Krishna recognize it was a strong weapon at the start. When he'd noticed, Krishna was already reacting to the ball. He has a short flashback to the strategy discussion when Natchan suggested Krishna relies more on intuition, and reminds himself that Krishna spends a short time watching the ball and a long time watching his opponent. So Ei-chan calculates backward the timing of his moves, and realizes that Krishna had started moving the instant Ei-chan had taken a step forward for his down-the-line (strong). Ei-chan concludes that Krishna is probably wary of Ei-chan's down-the-line; however, Krishna doesn't just play by completely learning his opponent's tactics, he also responds intuitively, giving priority to the visual info he's able to get. This is the stronger Krishna. End of chapter.

Ch. 437

The title of ch.437 is "The Two Wheels" (or "Inseparable" or "The Close Connection"); the title apparently refers to Krishna's approach to tennis and business, since he applies business strategy to tennis.

Play continues. Ei-chan suspects Krishna moved because he'd confirmed Ei-chan's one step—which means not only Krishna's reaction but also his response (dealing with the shot) is fast. The art divides the opponent's movements into 3 stages: 1) the back swing, 2) the swing, and 3) the follow-through. In Ei-chan's case, in 1) he can't move until this point, against an opponent who doesn't have any quirks; when it gets to 2), he's able to start moving because he can generally predict the shot based his opponent's form; and by 3), he can accelerate toward the ball, so his reaction is fast. In Krishna's case, if his opponent (Ei-chan) takes a step forward, Krishna's all prepared to start moving because it's a point that risks the match, so he puts the big possibility of a down-the-line at the top of his list (of possibilities?); and by 2), Krishna's able to predict most of it, therefore he can consider even the next development, so his response (dealing with the shot) is fast.

Based on this comparison, Ei-chan concludes it won't be easy to maintain his advantage. Krishna sees the strategy that had been worked out in theory...basically, his performance responds to the situation while prioritizing his intuition... Krishna can do accurately in his head what Ei-chan does frantically with his written notes. So it would be better (for Ei-chan) to take some measures ahead of time. If Krishna expects a down-the-line when Ei-chan takes a step forward, then from a posture where he takes a step forward when going for a down-the-line (strong) ... (at this point Krishna cocks his knee apparently to sprint for the corner) Ei-chan hits a cross instead. Ei-chan thinks it was close, but Krishna had reached the ball. However, Ei-chan believes he'd turned it to his advantage to a certain extent, so he decides to go to the net to make it a contest of reactions, which would be to Ei-chan's favor. Seeing Ei-chan dash forward, Krishna hits a down-the-line and gets the ball past Ei-chan: 15-30.

Krishna notes that Ei-chan's weapons are his strong shot down the line and a reaction contest where he shortens the distance (to the net), so Krishna can't allow him to use them.

Ei-chan's dad comments that the attacks that worked yesterday aren't effective at all. Aoi silently notes that Krishna can judge the situation that well in an instant, and wonders how smart Krishna is.

Ei-chan thinks he'd rushed the match because he wanted to establish his weapon. He should have wielded his weapon after he'd built up more of an advantage. So he wonders what he should do to bring things to that point. He serves to the center. Krishna manages to return the ball with a backhand. Then Ei-chan decides to go for a stroke with a fast tempo and aim with 2/64...then while using the fast tempo, he'll expand his advantage through a change of pace.

The rally continues. Krishna thinks that Ei-chan suddenly got stronger by moving his defensive position a step forward. Krishna sees the basis of this offensive power to be Ei-chan's ability to react (fast reactions) and lack of technical weaknesses.

As play continues, the view point switches to Miyamoto, the Tennis Times reporter. He notes that Ei-chan and Krishna are both dark horses and their level (of play?) is considerably high. He tells himself he should feature Ei-chan's rapid flourishing in a big way. Then looking at his notebook, he thinks Krishna is evidently the real deal. He's glad he was able to interview Krishna before the match, noting that Krishna is an athlete who'd said some interesting things. He remembers Krishna telling him that the foundation of his play is defense. It's the same basis as business, which he's studying: first of all is the elimination of risk.

Back in the game, Krishna thinks the situation is unfavorable...so if Ei-chan's about to wield his weapon, he (Krishna) will resist with a slice so the ball doesn't bounce (that high). Krishna hits a backhand slice that Ei-chan is forced to scoop up to return. Ei-chan had expected to turn it into the critical moment (when he could use the down-the-line?) but Krishna was able to escape using the slice—it's like Krishna is reading Ei-chan's mind.

Miyamoto's flashback: Krishna tells him, however, that in business, simply defending isn't practical. It's also necessary to attack in order to allow the business to expand. Options and concentration are vital to that.

Back in the game, Krishna thinks his strongest shot is the forehand cross. It typically makes his opponent focus on a difficult two-handed backhand with a high and distant impact point. He hits a forehand cross, and Ei-chan does look like he has some difficulty returning the ball, especially since Ei-chan notes the ball has a strong spin. Krishna surprises Ei-chan by countering with a straight, again to Ei-chan's backhand. Ei-chan notes that Krishna has been gradually increasing the power of his shots. Anyhow, he returns the ball deep, not intending to give up his advantage.

Krishna hits another forehand cross. Ei-chan notes Krishna is persistently aiming for Ei-chan's backhand. (In this case, I think Ei-chan ought to take a page from Asano's book and cut in front of the ball so that he can return it with a forehand. Or maybe counter it with a rising shot.) Ei-chan thinks that if this situation continues, it will serve to slowly erode his advantage. (I can't help but think this logic sounds like he's running away again. Wouldn't the most difficult option be to bear with it?) Anyhow, Ei-chan decides to hit a strong backhand in order to firm up his advantage once again. However, he's surprised to see that Krishna had cut in front of the ball.

Miyamoto's flashback: Krishna tells him that if he can detect a means of escape/survival at

that point, he'll go get a speedy victory with all his strength. He believes the compatibility/coexistence of his tennis with business is very important.

Krishna sends the ball to the open court with a strong forehand to take the point: 15-40.

Ei-chan acknowledges that Krishna had gotten him. He notes that if Krishna had continued to concentrate that forehand at that point (the high and distant impact point), it would have been tough. Ei-chan wonders if Krishna had predicted that Ei-chan would have to rearrange (his play) if Ei-chan is doing that (returning the forehand cross with his backhand). He opts for a difficult serve to avoid the one (what happened) just now. He serves wide but it's outside: Fault!

Krishna thinks that if it's Ei-chan, as a second serve, he'll... Ei-chan thinks that if he doesn't do something unexpected, he'll be attacked, so he decides to push with power in his second serve. He sends the ball straight at Krishna. However, although Krishna is surprised by the body shot, he was expecting Ei-chan to push with power in the second serve, so he's ready to counter power with power, sending the ball down the line.

Ei-chan chases the ball, realizing he's suddenly at a disadvantage. He decides to return the ball deep to counterattack. However, he notices Krishna rushing to the net. The distraction apparently throws Ei-chan off; his posture is definitely off when he returns the ball. Krishna volleys to take the point: Game, Krishna, 2-0.

The audience is stunned that Krishna broke Ei-chan's serve so quickly. Ei-chan thinks that he'd planned to send the ball deep, and wonders if Krishna had also predicted Ei-chan would float (end up floating?) the ball. (Aoi also gets the impression Krishna is moving as if Krishna had somehow calculated everything.) Ei-chan thinks that if that's the case, Krishna is amazing: he's smart with an excellent memory, his decision-making is exactly right, he can respond accurately, his intuition is keen, and he's also excellent when thinking theoretically. He has technique, and a body that performs well, capable of countering power with power. Moreover, he has the advantage of being left-handed. He's practically Ei-chan's conception of the perfect all-rounder.

Ei-chan acknowledges that he doesn't know how to defeat such an ideal player. However, he reminds himself that Krishna isn't yet among the world's best, so there should be a way to survive. As Ei-chan prepares to receive, he notes that Krishna responds quickly because Krishna's smart, so if Ei-chan throws that off balance... If so, how to do that? End of chapter.

The blurb for the next chapter says "The means to hold his own against an inestimable intellect is?!" The title of the next chapter is "One Step Ahead."

Ch. 438

So ch.438 opens with the score at 2-0 in favor of Krishna. As Ei-chan sets himself to receive, he wants to break back right away and plans on taking a risk and attacking with a shot he's confident in. Krishna serves to the center. Ei-chan returns the ball strongly, then rushes to the net for a reaction contest. Seeing him come forward, Krishna moves his defensive position back, then hits a slow ball that sinks close to the net. Ei-chan's forced to bend down

to volley. He notes that it's a shot that's hard to return with a fast ball and it's hard to control, so he decides to just return it deep and contest the next ball. (Really, I don't see why Ei-chan returned the ball deep—and in Krishna's direction, at that; I mean, if it's a slow ball, couldn't Ei-chan have returned it short, just gotten it over the net, and force Krishna to chase the ball?) Anyhow, Krishna goes for a sharp cross, which Ei-chan fails to touch: 15-0.
Cursing silently, Ei-chan wonders if he'd fallen in with Krishna's prediction. Coach Aoi thinks the contest just now had started with what followed after the return.
Play continues. Ei-chan forces a down-the-line. However, Krishna counters with a fast backhand slice. Ei-chan thinks that if Krishna can withstand it when Ei-chan's already forcing things, he (Ei-chan) will vary the risk in the previous shot—so he decides to hit a cross to create an open court. He then notes that Krishna responded to it fast. Krishna's straight is a winner: 30-0. Ei-chan thinks it's no good. This time it's a counter that looked like Krishna had waited for a cross to hit.
Play continues. Krishna hits a cross. Ei-chan recognizes it as the concentrated attack to a high and distant impact point for his backhand. He notes it's his opponent's best shot, and because it tends to be an impact point where Ei-chan has difficulty applying strength, he wants to avoid exchanging shots that way. (The diagram explains that Krishna hits a powerful left-handed forehand with a strong spin, while Ei-chan uses a two-handed backhand and the high and distant impact point makes it hard to apply power.) He wants to reorganize so that it's like before when he can't be predicted. He hits a down-the-line. However, Krishna overtakes the ball and hits a forehand cross: 40-0. Ei-chan feels that Krishna had predicted that one just now, which Ei-chan hoped to force Krishna to hit with a backhand.
Krishna's next serve is to the center, taking Ei-chan by surprise: Game, Krishna, 3-0.
Ei-chan heads to the bench and scribbles in his notebook, cursing silently and thinking he'd lost the initiative strategically speaking, though it's only one break. Looking at his notes, he wants a clue to somehow change the situation. Something catches his eye. He thinks that when he visually compares the second and third games this way (as drawn in his notes)... he'd thought he'd found a means of survival in the return dash he did at the start of the third game, because Krishna avoided a reaction contest in the second game. However, Krishna blocked that with his countermeasure: moving back and hitting a slow ball. The same went for the next point: because Krishna had escaped Ei-chan's down-the-line by using a slice until now, Ei-chan took the risk of hitting a cross before it came to that (the slice?), but Krishna had predicted that and was able to clinch the point with a single shot. And that's not all. Looking at his notes for the second and third games, Ei-chan realizes that when Krishna was hitting the cross to Ei-chan's backhand with a high and distant impact point, Ei-chan hadn't been able to return it with a strong cross. While the impact point is difficult, the courses he'd chosen had become mediocre because he'd been afraid a strong shot would be counterattacked with a strong shot. As a result, he'd moved to avoid getting Krishna's forehand with his backhand in the third game. He'd vaguely realized it in his head, but with his notes, he understood it clearly. He wonders if Krishna realized this on the court...and that's why Krishna could so easily overtake the ball to return it with a forehand. Looking over to Krishna, Ei-chan concludes this is why he's always losing the initiative—no, Krishna's been a step ahead. A chill runs through Ei-chan.
Krishna thinks Ei-chan doesn't have that many weaknesses in when it comes to technique. It doesn't mean Ei-chan is strong physically, but he's not much different from Krishna. Krishna also feels that Ei-chan is stronger mentally overall. However, Krishna thinks that it's easy to tell what Ei-chan is planning in tennis—which might be a weakness.

The Tennis Times reporter, Miyamoto, concludes Krishna is the type who attacks while efficiently managing the risk: he switches between offense and defense with surprisingly little wasted effort. That means he's naturally an "excellent manager" who'll continue to decide appropriately while dealing with a large quantity of information.
The chair umpire calls time, and the two players return to court. Play continues. Ei-chan thinks that if Krishna is predicting the destination of Ei-chan's ball, then Ei-chan will plan for the destination after that (plan one step ahead?)—at least he wants to fire back, but he didn't have enough time to devise such tactics. Ei-chan hits a down-the-line that gets past Krishna. As Ei-chan prepares to serve, he thinks there are also times when it's okay not to think, if Krishna can tell what he's thinking. Ei-chan serves wide, then tells himself to look only at the shot in front of him, like when he's in the zone. However, he ends up hitting the ball short, which gives Krishna a chance for a strong down-the-line—and Krishna takes it to clinch the point.
Ei-chan realizes his thinking was optimistic: mimicking the zone only at inconvenient times is simply suspending his thoughts. Play continues. Ei-chan hits a down-the-line that goes out: Game, Krishna, 4-0. Someone in the audience comments that this is the second break, and wonders whether it (the match?) will be settled in one burst (like straight sets?).
Fiddling with the gut of his racket, Ei-chan reminds himself that there's a limit to increasing the risk for his down-the-line. He thinks that when things come to this, the option of "moving back" always comes to mind. He immediately tries to run away when he feels timid...even though he knows that moving back when he doesn't have a winning vision is practically a decision to lose because he'll be forestalled even further. As Krishna prepares to serve, Ei-chan remembers that he'd intentionally moved back during the match with Yoshimichi. At that time, he'd been trying to increase his offensive options. If that's the case, what kind of attacks are possible if he moves back this time? But it somehow feels like it's turning into an assumption that he'll move back... Krishna eyes Ei-chan's back as Ei-chan racks his brain for ideas. Still fiddling with his racket's strings, Ei-chan reminds himself that moving back when he had a winning vision had produced results. He's beaten when he goes to the net and if his own (ideal?) defensive position is difficult, he wants to move back. If he can derive a way of playing from the back where he can win by using the data he's gathered up to now...it should be okay to move back. End of chapter.

Ch. 439

Okay, ch.439, titled "The Far Range," opens with Ei-chan thinking that if he has a winning vision, then even if he gives up his defensive position... Turning around to face Krishna, Ei-chan concludes that it's worth trying. He prepares to receive, and Asano notes Ei-chan's position is way behind the baseline. The development is within Krishna's expectations, but it's one Krishna doesn't welcome.
Krishna serves to the center. Ei-chan considers it a good serve, but since he's moved back, he can take it. However, as he returns it deep, he acknowledges that he's only compensating by returning the ball from the back this way and he can't take the advantage away from Krishna. Krishna hits his usual forehand cross with a strong spin to Ei-chan's backhand, but with Ei-chan's new position, the impact point is at the usual level, so Ei-chan can get it. However, since there's a limit to Ei-chan's decisive power, he aims to send the ball to a deep, narrow spot to minimize the risk of a counterattack—while widening the breadth of the ball's course within a range of 1.5 meters (in front of the baseline). Krishna concludes that the development means there's no longer any point in targeting Ei-chan's backhand. Ei-chan

notes that his target is narrow but broad, so if his shot goes into that area, he won't lose the point, even if he can't take the advantage. He continues aiming for that strip in front of Krishna's baseline. Hitting that sort of ball continuously isn't easy, but it's progress compared to how he's been playing up to now, so it should be significant, especially against Krishna.
A rally ensues. Ei-chan's analysis of the significance goes this way: first, the breadth of his target area makes it difficult for Krishna to predict his shots unlike before; second, since the power Ei-chan's using is less prescribed than before, he suppresses Krishna's fast balls, which is one of Krishna's strengths. With this, Ei-chan won't allow Krishna to play the way Krishna has until now.
Krishna tells himself it's better not to rush at this point. The game has turned troublesome, but it doesn't mean he's lost the upper hand.
Ei-chan concludes he still hasn't escaped the unfavorable situation, so he decides to increase the precision of his shot to 1/81, before he's attacked. He aims for the spot that would be the most delicate and difficult for Krishna while reducing his own risk as much as possible. The shot takes Krishna by surprise, but he manages to return it. Ei-chan concludes it's reasonable that he won't steal the upper hand even with this. However, it doesn't mean he'll be beaten, either. If he won't be beaten, there's a chance his opponent will commit an error. This is totally better compared to how it's been up to now, when he kept on getting beaten. He goes for another ball controlled at a stable 1/81. An onlooker comments that the rallies have gotten longer.
Krishna goes for a risky sharp cross to the corner of the forecourt, as Ei-chan hoped.
Ei-chan mentally tells it to go out. Unfortunately, the ball is in: 15-0. Ei-chan wonder if it's no good, but he notes that Krishna had taken quite a high risk with the shot just now. Krishna's doing that much might mean Ei-chan might be able to do what he has to.
Krishna serves again to the center. As Ei-chan swings back to receive the ball, he reminds himself that what's important is mixing up his shots from here (way behind the baseline). Even if the shots don't clinch the point, he won't neglect change of pace. A rally ensues.
Ei-chan thinks that what Krishna will definitely aim for when Ei-chan is behind the baseline...is a drop shot. From Krishna's posture, Ei-chan realizes the drop shot is coming, and rushes to the net, surprising Krishna. He manages to volley, thinking that if he permits this, his strategy here (after this) will collapse. Krishna lobs. Watching the ball, Ei-chan thinks he absolutely can't give up this point. He smashes the ball and puts it away: 15-15.
Ei-chan thinks he'll have Krishna understand Krishna is at a disadvantage if Ei-chan goes to the net because it will turn into a reaction contest. Krishna notes it's what he'd expect of Ei-chan.
Play continues. Krishna moves forward to the baseline, thinking that now that it's come to this, he has no choice but to ramp up the decisive power of his shots. Ei-chan notes Krishna's move has shortened the distance (between them?), so he return to his usual (ideal) defensive position—because the game will turn into a reaction contest where Ei-chan has an edge.
Coach Aoi thinks that at close range, Ei-chan has the advantage; at a certain set distance, the advantage is Krishna's; and if the range is opened farther, Krishna's advantage steadily decreases. He wonders if Ei-chan had noticed that, and thinks Ei-chan had analyzed his notes thoroughly. (The art shows that when Ei-chan and Krishna are at their respective baselines (the close range), Ei-chan with his fast reactions has the advantage; at their usual defensive positions, Krishna has the advantage; and when they're both behind the baseline, neither has the advantage.)
Krishna moves back to his usual defensive position. Noting this, Ei-chan thinks that if

Krishna moves back, he (Ei-chan) also has to move back. Ei-chan goes for another 1/81 shot. He thinks that if Krishna won't allow him to play at close range (Ei-chan's forte), he won't let Krishna play at the dangerous range. In the farther range, Ei-chan still can't tell who has the advantage, but first he'll play at more than the usual range.
The rally continues. Krishna thinks he's not at a disadvantage, but he senses danger. He realizes that Ei-chan has discovered a nasty distance (for Krishna)—which is what Krishna would expect of Ei-chan's analytical ability. He believes he's probably better than Ei-chan at grasping a situation and comprehending the information in an instant. However, the analysis and design of tactics using that data requires imagination. If Krishna is inferior there, he'll lose everything (in business terms, he'll lose the interest and the principal). Krishna's shot goes into the net: 15-30.
Ei-chan thinks the error just now was due to his strategy. Even if he can't win in brain speed, when it comes to a sense of stability, it will turn into a contest. He also realizes that being able to continue this will be quite tough. However, he hasn't hit upon any plan that can throw Krishna off balance other than this. But he believes this situation is totally different from the past (the match with Oobayashi) where he (Ei-chan) had no option but to move back and return the ball. Anyhow, he'd implemented his winning vision as he'd hoped and made a point. If he's taken a step forward, he'll take another step. End of chapter.

Ch. 440
Ch.440, titled "Artisan," opens with Krishna serving wide. Ei-chan manages to return it from his position way behind the baseline, then he heads to a more central position. However, Krishna sends the ball back to the corner. Ei-chan decides to aim for the area 1.5 meters in front of Krishna's baseline and use just enough power so that his shot is stable and he won't be counterattacked. Having chosen his shot, he matches the impact point and controls the ball. He'll keep a constant watch for a drop shot, but he believes that if he can do this, he'll continue the contest even if he's at a disadvantage.
Krishna returns the ball, thinking that it's deep and he can't predict it, but if the course of the ball is on that standard, there's no problem. However, Ei-chan thinks that once the situation has come to a stalemate, the next step is to pinpoint the safest possible spot that would give Krishna difficulty—and control the ball to it with 1/81 precision. The ball lands right at the edge of the area Ei-chan targeted and bounces low. Krishna returns it, but he thinks that even though he has the upper hand, Ei-chan is attacking subtly, so Krishna isn't able to finish things, and because he's being driven that way, Ei-chan's attacks are turning into a stable shot mix.
The rally continues. Ei-chan thinks that when he's pinpointed the perfect spot, he'll match the impact point correctly and control the ball. He hits an arcing shot that bounces high. Krishna thinks that the pace of every single one changes, so he's using his sensitivity. As Ei-chan hits one controlled shot after another, Krishna wonders if Ei-chan is attacking as much as possible within his scope of stable shots. Noting the spots Ei-chan targeted, Krishna concludes that this approach allows Ei-chan to leave how to handle them to Krishna in Krishna's serve game. So Krishna decides that since Ei-chan's consistently on the lookout for a drop shot, and a strong shot won't be effective when Ei-chan's so far back, he'll go with a sharp angle shot to the corner of the forecourt.
However, Ei-chan reacts right away. Since he was enduring at the back and keeping an eye out for a drop shot, he could anticipate an angle shot. Unfortunately, he fails to reach the ball: 30-30. Krishna sighs with relief. Ei-chan notes that it was a finishing shot he couldn't get

even though he'd known it was coming. He concludes he'd been able to make Krishna force himself at this point.
Someone in the audience comments that it was quite a long rally and an impressive one. Oobayashi is reminded of his match with Ei-chan in the past, when Ei-chan was being persistent. Yukichi, however, disagrees, explaining there's a big difference between the Ei-chan now and back then. Back then, Ei-chan was just running away, but now Ei-chan has a target. Oobayashi admits there's a big difference even though it's the same pushing maneuver. Yukichi adds that if Ei-chan was a runaway back then, now he's a sniper: the cornerstones of Ei-chan's offensive are footwork and control. The reporter Miyamoto overhears their conversation, latching on to the "sniping" metaphor.
Play continues. Ei-chan continues to control the ball to low-risk points, using moderate power, from way behind the baseline. He thinks that the requirement is an opponent who doesn't rapidly hammer out one power shot after another, but this tennis has a peculiar rhythm, which is different from the one for his usual (forward) defensive position. When he's decided the shot he has to hit to a distant target, he determines the impact point and swings...and then repeats. There's a rhythmical succession of imagination and monotonic activity—and Ei-chan feels it suits him. He sends the ball toward Krishna's feet.
Miyamoto notes that Ei-chan is matter-of-factly hitting the ball to good spots from such a far distance. He concludes that it's certainly the technique of a sniping artist. Writing "Businessman vs. Artisan" in his notebook, Miyamoto thinks this might be good (probably as the theme for his article). He wonders which one will do a good job (match), the superior businessman or the simple and honest artisan?
Ei-chan continues deciding on his shot, matching the impact point, and controlling the ball. The rally continues, and then Ei-chan's shot goes out: 40-30. Ei-chan silently curses, telling himself he mustn't commit errors. Then Krishna's sharp angle shot goes out: Deuce. Then: Advantage, Krishna. Then: Deuce. Miyamoto thinks Krishna went up a gear.
The rally continues. Krishna finally goes to the net. Ei-chan thinks he's finally drawn Krishna into a reaction contest. However, Krishna successfully volleys to take the point: Game, Krishna, 5-0.
Ei-chan wonders if it's no good. However, he also thinks he's almost—but not quite—there. Ei-chan's dad expresses regret when Ei-chan had gotten as far as a good point. Coach Aoi counters that Ei-chan had brought the match to deuce twice during the serve of his opponent who had defeated him roundly all along. This game could be said to have suddenly brought them to more than par. Plus, it's change court, when Ei-chan can look at his notes, so this is where it begins.
Writing in his notebook, Ei-chan thinks he needs extremely fine control, but it's unexpectedly safe with little urgent pressure. Plus, he's just repeating the same thing, but it also requires imagination and needs concentration—and he's compatible with this very indescribable rhythm. (The diagram shows that first, there's the deep but wide target, then closer to the net (forward of the target area), there's the pinpoint targeting for low-risk, hard-to-get shots when possible, keeping an eye out for a drop shot, and finally, when his opponent goes forward, Ei-chan also goes forward.) Ei-chan concludes that he also wants to make this defensive position his.
The chair umpire calls time. Returning to the court, Ei-chan notes that at 0-5, he's still in a big pinch. How much he can do during his serve will decide what he will do after this. As Krishna prepares to receive the serve, he thinks he can't continue as he has been doing. This is the time to capitalize on his two breaks.
Ei-chan serves wide. Krishna returns the ball. From way back behind the baseline, Ei-chan

notes it's a good return. But since he's also moved back, he'll leverage the advantage of his serve. Once he's decided the ball he'll hit offensively, on a stable course with stable power, he'll control it with 1/81 precision. Ei-chan hits a forehand down the line, and the ball bounces at the edge of his target area. Krishna's return crosscourt is short, and Ei-chan considers it a chance. He returns the ball and rushes to the net to volley and take the point: 15-0.
Audience reaction: Ooooh! Somehow the flow from 0-5 has changed!
Staring at the ball in his hand, Ei-chan thinks that if he manages to reach the ball, match the impact point, and use pinpoint control for all the balls...this is certainly the first step in his tennis. Then he remembers Coach Miura's words: If you can reach all the balls and control them, theoretically, you can't lose. End of chapter.

Ch. 441
Ch.441, titled "Flow," opens with Ei-chan serving. He thinks course, rather than power, is an important consideration to improve the chances of the serve going in. He serves wide, then again moves way behind the baseline. Krishna returns the ball. Ei-chan thinks that from this point, it's basically the same as in a return game: guessing what spot would be even slightly difficult for Krishna. On the backswing, he eyes Krishna and considers his options: 1) attack in the opposite direction (to where Krishna is running?); 2) deep and to Krishna's body; and 3) the open court. Ei-chan notes that since the course of his serve was good, the open court (3) might be the best: he considers it safe, aside from the possibility of a counterattack, and a spin ball at 1/81... Once he's pinpointed his target and decided on the shot, he matches the impact point, and controls the ball, sending it down the line with a backhand shot.

Krishna thinks that it's difficult when it's a return game. Even if he can predict Ei-chan's shot, he needs to take on more risk to steal the advantage from Ei-chan. He returns the ball, thinking that Ei-chan's shots might be casual, but Ei-chan's actually keeping in mind a very fine balance between offense and defense.

Ei-chan considers his options: 1) once again to the open court, driving Krishna by increasing the power; 2) a fast forward slice to the center, attacking Krishna's legs; and 3) a slow spin ball with a high bounce in the opposite direction as Krishna is heading back, in order to throw off Krishna's timing. For the next pinpoint (1/81), he thinks a shot that he hasn't shown much until now would be good...in which case, he opts for 2). Krishna's shocked to face a fast forehand slice to the body at this point, and is off balance as he returns the ball. Ei-chan seizes on the opportunity presented by Krishna's momentary hesitation. Switching to attack mode, he rushes to the baseline and puts the ball away with a sharp angle shot: 30-0.

Ei-chan serves, thinking he understands quite well that he has some leeway because it's his serve game. As a rally ensues, he concludes that successive controlled shots from this far suits him. Pinpoint targeting from way behind is an attack that takes maximum advantage of his control. Sending another backhand down the line, he thinks it might be okay to make this place (way back behind the baseline) his second usual position; his usual position being his ideal defensive position right on the baseline. Krishna hits a sharp angle shot, but it goes out: 40-0. Krishna thinks he mustn't do that. It's better not to rush the match.

As Ei-chan tosses the ball for his serve, he tells himself he'll definitely hold his serve. He

serves wide. He notes that even though the pace of the shots he hits changes, his footwork has a certain rhythm. Watching Krishna closely, Ei-chan notes the angle of Krishna's wrist. Krishna hits another drop shot. As Ei-chan rushes to the net to intercept the ball, he thinks he knows Krishna wants to throw him off balance from there (forward). Krishna also goes forward, thinking he knows Ei-chan can get the ball. Ei-chan volleys, and Krishna counters with a high lob. Eyeing the ball, Ei-chan thinks that it's skillful and that Krishna has this technique. Krishna continues going forward as Ei-chan chases the ball. Ei-chan manages to return the ball, but Krishna is ready at the net and volleys at a sharp angle to take the point: 40-15.

Ei-chan acknowledges that Krishna got him. He'd been thrown off balance when he finally went forward as he'd been aiming for. However, if Krishna had made a mistake at one stage, it would have lead to an immediate turnaround (in the situation). Krishna hit 3 high-risk shots in rapid succession: drop shot, lob, angle shot. (The diagrams show that the drop and angle shots could have gone into the net or presented Ei-chan with a chance ball, while the lob could have gone out or been smashed.) Ei-chan wonders if that means Krishna had decided to make him yield even if he's somewhat forceful because of the difference in the score. Ei-chan concludes if that's the case, he needs to be ready to respond to any kind of ball from hereon. Since Krishna has high-level skills and is smart, Ei-chan can't eliminate any possibility. At the same time, Krishna's errors will slowly increase. Ei-chan decides to tie his wariness of an attack to his defense. He serves wide. Krishna returns. Play apparently continues, and at some point, Krishna hits another drop shot. Ei-chan tells himself he'll definitely get it. He rushes forward, but the ball hits the net cord and bounces closer to Ei-chan, who then puts away the ball with an angle shot: Game, Maruo, 5-1, Krishna leads.

Krishna considers the cord ball as unlucky at this point and that the flow is quite bad. Someone in the audience cheers that Ei-chan finally held his serve. Ei-chan's mom and Coach Aoi look relieved, while Ei-chan's dad is elated.

Ei-chan thinks that if he'd been beaten with the one just now, things would have become even more difficult. However, he'd managed to endure. He notes that he'd herded his opponent during his opponent's serve, and had held his own serve. From hereon, he can fight on an equal basis.

As Krishna tosses the ball, he thinks that starting in the final stage of the first set, the ratio of earned points has become almost even. He serves wide. Ei-chan notes that Krishna increased the power. He returns the ball crosscourt. Krishna concludes that if luck is starting to desert him, he doesn't have time to think. He sends a strong shot down the line with the ball bouncing really close to the sideline to take the point: 15-0. He's decided to shift up to top gear before Ei-chan does.

As Ei-chan prepares to receive, he wonders at that last ball. He doesn't believe that sort of ball will keep going in. Krishna serves wide. Ei-chan returns the ball, thinking he's never been suppressed (by Krishna) using power. A rally ensues. Ei-chan thinks that if he can reach all the balls and control them... (Ei-chan's shot goes into the net: 30-0. Ei-chan apparently hits a winner: 30-15. Ei-chan hits a sharp angle shot: 40-30.) theoretically, he can't lose.

Krishna tosses the ball, thinking that Ei-chan's creativity and mental strength are threats, but he can cope with those using the speed of his own decision-making. Using serve and volley, Krishna clinches the set: First set won by Krishna, 6-1. End of chapter.

Ch. 442

Ch.442, titled "Complete Data," opens with Oobayashi noting that Krishna took the first set with a score of 6-1. Yukichi argues that it's what comes after. Hearing this, Miyamoto thinks that Krishna went to a higher gear at the end of the first set, but it seemed to Miyamoto it could also be inferred just how much risk Krishna had to accept with Ei-chan's attacks from the rear. As a result of that unlucky cord ball, Krishna suddenly shifted several gears up when he'd been gearing up gradually. Miyamoto speculates that Krishna shifted to a forceful attack because if the game had gone longer, it would be easy to influence the luck, and it's dangerous. By sensitively reading the flow of the game and deciding swiftly, Krishna turns a pinch into a chance. Miyamoto concludes that Krishna is all the more a shrewd manager.

As Ei-chan writes furiously in his notebook, Coach Aoi thinks that just by finding a effective defensive position in the first set against Krishna, Ei-chan should consider that he'd gotten results. But after this is the second set, where Ei-chan will lose if he drops the set. Aoi is sure that an equal buildup will put pressure on Ei-chan first.

Krishna eyes Ei-chan, thinking he's leading score-wise, so everything had gone as he'd hoped. He'd been able to take the set, but the problem is what comes after. He can't simply increase the risk; doing so would be too dangerous. When he plays against Ei-chan, he always uses his mind, so it's difficult.

Looking at his notes, Ei-chan thinks he'd gotten quite close, but he was forcefully beaten at the critical moment. He also acknowledges that it was all his fault for allowing the gap to widen in the first half. He concludes that Krishna grasped the flow of the match, and his decision and execution based on that (the flow of the match) was fast and correct. Ei-chan speculates that Krishna's response is possible because Krishna has a lot of data in his head. However, Ei-chan reminds himself he was able to hold his serve in the final stage of the set and can play on par, so he should be able to get to the point where he can throw Krishna off balance with a little more effort.

The chair umpire calls time, and the two players return to court. The second set begins with Ei-chan's serve. Ei-chan decides that even at the start of his service, he'll also move way behind the baseline after the serve. He serves wide and moves back as planned. Krishna returns the ball and heads back to the center. However, Ei-chan sends the ball back crosscourt with a fast forehand slice using 1/81 control. Krishna stoops to return the ball, and it's short, so Ei-chan resumes his usual defensive position to contest the point. Krishna manages to reach the ball and return it, but Ei-chan counters with a backhand cross to put away the ball. Ei-chan thinks he can hold his serve. Play continues: Krishna's shot goes out, Ei-chan hits a winner down the line. Finally: "Game, Maruo, 1-0, second set."

As Krishna prepares to serve, he thinks he can't take the risks he had at the end of the first set. Nevertheless, he doesn't have time to defend against a proactive Ei-chan. What's important is the sense of setting up the minimum risk. Here he'll play while on the lookout for

a chance, without losing, rather than winning by attacking. He's fine with continuing to rally, believing that he'd cut off the unlucky flow in the previous set. He won't overlook even a moment of Ei-chan's movements when Ei-chan probably wants to break Krishna's serve even a little sooner. More than that, if there's a moment when he can clinch the point, he'll do it. And while preparing for action, he'll always continue to absorb Ei-chan's data.

Ei-chan thinks that the power Krishna had used earlier was missing, and speculates that Krishna had shifted to a lower gear. As he swings back to receive a shot, however, he notes that the ball is good.

Krishna notes that when Ei-chan hits the ball from over there, the backhand has a topspin and it goes deep. However, a slice from the same spot often has a slightly acute angle. Krishna returns the ball down the line. Ei-chan wonders if his last shot was also weak. Krishna believes the two of them are doing the same thing right now: gathering data and analyzing it while aiming for a chance...and then drawing up a strategy—Krishna doing so in his head, while Ei-chan does so with his notes. Naturally, he (Krishna) is more efficient. Krishna sends the ball down the line, and Ei-chan's crosscourt return goes into the net. Score: 6-1, 1-1.

Play continues. Ei-chan thinks that at a distance, pinpoint control and rhythm are both important. He can adapt the fast rhythm in the forward defensive position to the rear (defensive position). When he gets with the rhythm, his body moves naturally and he can make time to think. He produces ideas (tactics), and his accuracy increases. So thinking, he goes with 1/81 control and sends a backhand shot crosscourt that Krishna fails to touch.

Change court with the score at 6-1, 1-2. As Krishna watches Ei-chan writing in his notebook, he thinks there are too many patterns, so it's hard to grasp the overall picture. The deployment of attacks is that varied just by combining variations in speed, shot, course. He wonders if this is just one part of the overall picture...or if he can see the majority. He wants to look at the complete picture more and grasp it.

Play continues. Ei-chan controls a crosscourt shot; however, the ball bounces outside his target area. The rally continues, and in Ei-chan's next shot, the ball lands within his target. He thinks that if he really can get all the balls and control them...it's fun. He's getting closer and farther from the target (the art shows a ball missing the target area, and another ball landing inside), but overall he's been gradually getting closer. This feeling is good, and he can concentrate. It's a mysterious feeling when he's nervous at being just at the edge and hasn't had even one break. A lob gets past Ei-chan. He thinks his situation is good...if he can just break...

Krishna thinks Ei-chan is really amazing. As the data accumulates, Krishna realizes just how thoroughly imaginative and creative Ei-chan is. Up to now, the pattern in the first set has been go forward and down-the-line. But because Ei-chan can't use that from behind, Krishna can't detect any regularity that he can seek a consistent response to every time. (Krishna looks rather fatigued mentally.) He thinks it's hard to tell from outward appearance, but the substance of Ei-chan's tennis is growing to a surprising extent. However, he believes that he has in his head how and where Ei-chan has hit the ball today (the diagrams show where Ei-chan's shots have landed by type of shot (clockwise starting with the top left: forward

slice, forehand flat, forehand spin, backhand spin, backhand flat, and backhand slice) with the open circles indicating the shots where Krishna managed to overtake the ball). Picking out just the offensive balls from among these, Krishna concludes that the starting points of Ei-chan's attacks are often spin balls scattered deep on either side. Based on this, Krishna hits a forehand cross that catches Ei-chan by surprise: Game, Krishna, 4-4, second set. End of chapter.

Ch. 443

Ch.443, titled "Weapon and Weapon," opens with the score for the second set tied 4-4. Krishna thinks the problem is what comes after this, whether he can completely predict even Ei-chan's serve the way he'd predicted the shot just now, and clinch the point with one blow.

As Ei-chan prepares to serve, he ponders the last point. Krishna's response was unexpectedly fast to just that last shot. Krishna had suddenly predicted the ball and was able to put it away with one blow, as if the stalemate until that point had never happened. Ei-chan wonders why. If the stalemate continued as things were, the one who would have had difficulty first is Ei-chan who lost the first set. Furthermore, despite Krishna continuing to have the advantage of his serve, he'd tried to bring an end this set by moving first. Ei-chan speculates Krishna might actually be having difficulty. Ei-chan concludes he's correct: even though it appears at a glance to be a proactive plan, Krishna wanted to run away from a difficult stalemate. They're friends and Ei-chan has played against Krishna several times, so he can tell. Krishna's a player with lots of gifts that Ei-chan can't match, but Ei-chan is superior when it comes to strength of perseverance. More than anything else, Ei-chan has run away several times (remembering Monma's critique, Ei-chan blushes), so he understands.

Ei-chan decides that he'll challenge Krishna in this game without fail. Right now he has no doubt that that time (Krishna's last shot) should result in a hint. He considers why Krishna had predicted his (Ei-chan's) shot so perfectly at that point. He remembers that the shot he'd hit just now was a backhand spin ball crosscourt. He'd hit various balls up to now, but he'd hit a spin ball the most often with his backhand, and he actually feels he'd hit those balls toward that area (the art apparently shows the spots where he'd sent his backhand spin balls). Among the forehand shots that are Krishna's forte, his cross is particularly strong—which might mean Krishna's strongest shot matched a ball that had the highest probability of being used by Ei-chan. Ei-chan thinks that if that's true... (Ei-chan serves wide) he'll use pinpoint targeting on Krishna's backhand while maintaining his position way behind the baseline, and avoid a backhand spin ball crosscourt as much as possible. He hits a backhand down the line and rushes to the net. Krishna notes the change in position and hits a cross. Ei-chan volleys and puts away the ball: 15-0.

Ei-chan thinks he managed to get through one point well, but not hitting a backhand cross all the time would be unreasonable, so if Krishna is aiming for it, Ei-chan decides to include a slow, deep slice among his backhand crosses so that he won't be beaten.

Krishna wonders if Ei-chan is on the lookout against his forehand cross because of the shot a little while ago...because of just that one ball—as he'd expected of Ei-chan. Ei-chan thinks the limitation to his course options is difficult, but if it's one game, if it's just here, he can bear

with it. Play continues: Krishna hits a cross, and Ei-chan counters with a down-the-line; someone's shot goes out; Ei-chan volleys at a sharp angle. Then: Game, Maruo, 5-4. (Sounds like Ei-chan didn't give up a point this time.) Ei-chan clenches a fist in triumph: Getting through here is major!

Krishna thinks that during a game when he should have been on the offensive, his attacks were predicted and ended with incomplete combustion. He concludes that rushing the match that time backfired on him after all. Because he'd rushed just one point...this is Ei-chan.

During court change, Ei-chan scribbles rapidly in his notebook, thinking that if he breaks here, he'll catch up with Krishna. However, he wonders how to attack Krishna's serve, which he hasn't been able to get as things stand. He thinks he's held back (probably referring to his backhand spin ball crosscourt) up to now, so it should work.

The chair umpire calls time. As Krishna prepares to serve, he plans to capitalize on his reflection and endure when it's time to endure and attack when it's time to attack. He thinks Ei-chan will definitely attack in this game, and in competitions, he (probably Krishna) will make an opening—no matter what—when Ei-chan attacks, and he (probably Krishna) absolutely won't miss it.

Krishna serves wide. Ei-chan returns the ball, noting it was a strong serve, which will naturally turn into a major critical point in the match. Ei-chan then sprints to the baseline, surprising Krishna. Yukichi exclaims that Ei-chan has resumed his defensive position. Oobayashi points out that Ei-chan had moved back because that position was unfavorable before. Wondering at the shift, given the timing, Krishna hits a backhand down the line. As Ei-chan rushes to meet the ball, he remembers that he'd avoided a backhand spin ball to Krishna's forehand earlier, but he decides to dare to do it here. Krishna notes that the timing is faster than when Ei-chan had hit the backhand spin ball before; however, Krishna considers the change to be favorable—it's the range that's a match for his power—so he hits a forehand cross. However, Ei-chan runs farther forward to meet the ball and counter with a rising shot. Krishna is shocked that Ei-chan predicted his cross. Ei-chan takes the point with a winner down the line: 0-15.

Yukichi, Oobayashi, Coach Aoi, even Miyamoto look thrilled. The audience roars: There it is...! Maruo's down-the-line!; The tempo sped up suddenly, so I couldn't see it!

Krishna is shocked: That (the weapon) at this point...?! After further thought, Krishna realizes Ei-chan targeted his (Krishna's) forehand (weapon).

An elated Ei-chan thinks he'd gotten it perfectly right: he'd thought that chances were high that if he aimed for that spot with his backhand, it (probably Krishna's forehand cross) would come. Planting his feet at the baseline by corner with the doubles sideline, Ei-chan hunkers down to receive Krishna's serve, deciding that this is where he starts. Ei-chan's position surprises Krishna—as well as Ei-chan's dad, who comments that Ei-chan took such a forward stance from the return (start) (rather than hit the return from way behind the baseline and then rush forward, I guess).

Krishna wonders if Ei-chan intends to resume the same defensive position here as he'd had

at the start—that position where he'd been beaten so badly in the first set. Ei-chan thinks it's his usual spot, and he intends to take back his own defensive position. End of chapter.

The teaser says "Offense and defense in the second set, which will affect the outcome of the match. Ei-chan plugs in the data he'd gathered into his weapon." The title of the next chapter is "A Different Scene."

Ch. 444

Ch.444 opens with the score at 1-6, 5-4, and Ei-chan hunkering down to receive Krishna's serve. He thinks that returning to his forward defensive position involves some risk, but if he breaks Krishna in this game and catches up to him...

As Krishna prepares to serve, he muses that he didn't think Ei-chan would bring out his down-the-line (weapon) at this point, but he decides he won't allow Ei-chan to do so again. He'd already proved in the first set that he's better at this range. Krishna sends his serve wide. Ei-chan notes that its course escapes outward as is peculiar for lefthanders. Moreover, it has a strong spin—however, this is within the scope of the countermeasures for Sanchez that Ei-chan practiced, and he sends the ball crosscourt. Krishna's apparently surprised by Ei-chan's return, and he's off balance even though he manages to return the ball. Krishna's reaction confirms for Ei-chan that Krishna can't predict Ei-chan's shot and handle it the way Krishna had in the first set—also that Krishna can't easily adapt when he'd continued to have long rallies against an opponent who'd been over 2 meters behind the baseline for as many as 11 games. Ei-chan counters with a backhand cross, sending Krishna running back to the corner. Krishna thinks he understands the situation; all that's left if for his body to adapt.

Coach Aoi concludes that Ei-chan hadn't simply been enduring from behind the baseline; this (I guess the way Ei-chan is playing) is the result of continuing to watch what's in front of him without wavering, regardless of the situation.

Ei-chan returns another high-bouncing shot on the rise, right at the baseline. He notes that because of his position, he's more accustomed to this tempo. He acknowledges that Krishna has the advantage of his serve, but if it's this (probably referring to the forehand cross that Krishna hits right then), there's a way to handle it. Ei-chan thinks that while his opponent hasn't gotten used to the tempo... Ei-chan takes a step forward and takes the shot on the rise, sending a backhand down the line to take the point: 0-30.

Audience reaction: Whooooa, another sudden, strong down-the-line!; Amazing. Aoi notes that Ei-chan took back at the most crucial time the defensive position that had been taken from him. The diagram shows that Aoi is referring to when both Ei-chan and Krishna are at their usual defensive positions—Ei-chan right on the baseline, while Krishna is slightly (maybe 1 meter) behind the baseline—a range where Krishna has the advantage.

Play continues. Krishna hits a backhand cross, which Ei-chan returns down the line. Krishna remembers that what was effective in this situation in the first set was... At the same time, Ei-chan remembers that what Krishna had used to beat in the first set was... Krishna takes aim at a high and distant target. Ei-chan recalls his notes and the course of the spin balls with a high impact point he'd received with his backhand. As Krishna takes the shot,

Ei-chan's already running to intercept the ball. Ei-chan thinks that when this comes, he'll take a step forward and catch the impact point when he puts in the most power. Getting the ball on the rise, Ei-chan decides to hit a down-the-line (strong) without hesitation. Krishna fails to touch the ball: 0-40.

As Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose, the crowd cheers: Awesome...! Three consecutive winners down the line!; It's a triple set point!

Ei-chan thinks it's going well. Seeing his expression, Krishna wonders if it was within Ei-chan's estimates. He concludes that he'd completely relied on his success in the first set the instant he couldn't acquire the tempo. He'd been too optimistic, but predicting that and attacking without letting it pass is Ei-chan's boldness and decisiveness.

Fiddling with the gut of his racket, Ei-chan thinks that he can't tell how long this lag in Krishna's tempo will go on. When he thinks that, it's time to consider whether to continue as things are or to set some other trap. He again prepares to receive at the baseline at the corner with the doubles sideline.

Krishna thinks there's no shortcut for adapting his eyes and body in order to oppose Ei-chan. He understands that if he can restore even the sense of it right away, he has the advantage in this range. He serves to the center, and Ei-chan returns the ball. Krishna thinks that the serve is the first consideration. He decides to prioritize restoring his sense of distance rather than trying too hard. He thinks that after moving back a step (it looks like Krishna ends up around 2 meters behind the baseline), if he restores it (his sense of distance?) gradually, the fit will also be fast. Krishna lunges sideways, expecting that even if his opponent's down-the-line (weapon) comes without any warning, it would be easy to respond to it.

Right then, Ei-chan hits a drop shot, and Krishna freezes momentarily. Ei-chan thinks he won't let Krishna escape to the rear. The ball drops right behind the net, and Asano considers the drop shot to be skillful...and thinks that the down-the-lines that Ei-chan has been hitting until now are having an effect. Krishna fails to reach the ball before it bounces three times: Game, Maruo, 6-4, second set. Ei-chan strikes a triumphant pose.

Ei-chan's mom looks relieved. His dad and Aoi, even Miyamoto and Asano look elated. Audience reactions: Finally, Maruo recovered and it's one set all; Maruo enters the final set with the upper hand; It's an interesting development! Oobayashi apparently cheers Ei-chan on with "Maruo, clinch the championship from the qualifiers!" while Yukichi is all "ANIKIII!!"

As Ei-chan heads to his bench, he thinks he was able to do it because of the change of pace where he was forced to move his defensive position forward and backward in extremes...and because he was able to own both defensive positions. Remembering the difficult path to his ideal defensive position, he concludes he was able to get this far because he had played without running away.

Dripping with sweat, Krishna takes a headband out of his bag and ties it on. Reflecting on the second set, he acknowledges that he hadn't expected Ei-chan to take back at that point (the critical moment) the defensive position Ei-chan had already retreated from once. He'd lost the initiative and fallen into such a vicious cycle of being read first that he's struggling to

try to recover. He remembers that he'd thought Ei-chan's use of notes for analyzing data and drafting strategy was inefficient...but now he thinks that once the notes have been outputted, they might make envisioning the future easier. He ponders "envisioning the future"...and thinks that while he understands management, he doesn't want to be inferior there (probably referring to envisioning the future).

During all this reflection, Ei-chan has been scribbling in his notebook. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "Heading into the final set with a sudden reversal in advantage!" The title of the next chapter is "Envisioning the Future."

Incidentally, ch.445 will be in a double issue, so after next week, it will be two weeks before the next Baby Steps (ch.446).

Ch. 445

So ch.445 opens with the chair umpire calling "Time" and the two players returning on court for the final set. The audience comments that the score is tied at 1 set all and speculate that Ei-chan is heading into the final set with the upper hand. There's a shout urging Ei-chan to clinch the championship from the prelims.

Ei-chan serves first. He sends the ball wide and remains at the baseline, intending to play there since it's his service and he'd broken Krishna there. When he's attacking, he intends to do so with a readiness to die.

Krishna returns the ball, noting Ei-chan's position, which confirms his expectation that Ei-chan intends to remain forward. He thinks he hadn't been able to get a comprehensive image of Ei-chan's strategy when he'd moved back a step and was being targeted when Ei-chan was forward. He'd lacked a macro outlook because he'd been too focused responding to the danger at the micro level. He concludes it was a failure in management: the broad perspective that he should have had had been taken from him.

As Ei-chan prepares to return Krishna's next shot, he notes that he won't die, so he goes for a shot with 2/81 control down the line and it's a winner: 15-0. Ei-chan exults, thinking it still works. Krishna reminds himself to use the time in his return game to regain the sense (of distance) he'd lost.

Yukichi and Oobayashi cheer on Ei-chan, urging him to keep on going since this is a chance. Play continues. A shot of Krishna's is shown going out. Ei-chan volleys at a sharp angle crosscourt to take another point: Game, Maruo, 1-0.

Ei-chan thinks he'd overwhelmed Krishna during his service. He still has the advantage he got from playing for a long time at a wayback position, so he intends to continue this way while that hold true. Krishna, on the other hand, acknowledges he'd been completely dominated in this game, but it's a tempo that he'd experienced before and his sense (of distance) has continued to return.

Krishna serves to the center. Ei-chan returns the ball to a corner, and when Krishna sends

that crosscourt, Ei-chan goes for another down-the-line (strong). Krishna manages to return it, but the ball goes into the net. Play continues with Krishna getting a down-the-line past Ei-chan. The points rack up: 15-15, then after Ei-chan's drop shot 15-30, then 30-30. Krishna thinks he mustn't simply chase the ball before his eyes; he'll match his body to the ball while recalling the feeling from the first set. Ei-chan hits another down-the-line that Krishna fails to touch: 30-40. Play continues and Ei-chan swings back for another down-the-line (strong). Krishna's able to respond quickly to that one, and returns it with a strong forehand crosscourt way out of Ei-chan's range. However, the ball is out: Game, Maruo, 2-0.

Audience reactions: Whoa! Maruo breaks at the start of the important final set!; But Krishna's response has sped up...

Krishna concludes he was able to get a big part with this. Ei-chan, on the other hand, notes that his lead is big, but Krishna isn't an opponent he can relax on with one break. As Ei-chan tosses the ball for his serve, he tells himself to hold his serve without going on the defensive. He serves to the center, and Krishna returns. Ei-chan sends the ball crosscourt, noting that Krishna is starting to recover right away. Krishna hits a forehand cross, catching Ei-chan as Ei-chan is heading back to the center and taking him by surprise (ARGH! This scene looks identical to several scenes in the first set!): 0-15. Someone in the audience comments "Whoa...He's brilliant..."

Noting that his eyes and body have gotten it, Krishna plants himself at the corner of the baseline. He believes he'll do well with this. Facing him, Ei-chan gulps, thinking Krishna is perceptive and his response is fast: this is the essential Krishna. He reminds himself this is his service and he has the advantage. He serves to the center, and Krishna returns the ball. Ei-chan counters with a backhand slice, expecting to hold his serve with the way he fights. Rushing to the net, he plans to capitalize on the slow slice and his forward defensive position to suddenly shorten the distance after a fast volley. However, Krishna gets a forehand cross past Ei-chan: 0-30. Ei-chan's shocked that it didn't work and concludes that Krishna's sense of distance has fit in perfectly.

Preparing to receive, Krishna thinks this is it. Ei-chan serves wide. Krishna thinks that if he can respond to the change in pace at this distance, next is how far he can predict what comes after.

A rally ensues. Ei-chan tells himself this time is different from the first set, when he couldn't use his down-the-line well. If he can hold using his own tennis, he can go with the flow. Ei-chan puts away the ball with a cross. Play continues and Krishna volleys to take the point (AND Ei-chan DOESN'T dive for the ball! He's supposed to be playing as if his life is at stake! He dived for a ball in the match with Pete (and with someone else, Araya? Oobayashi?), and he'd scaled a fence while chasing a ball in a match with Araya—and those were before he decided to play as if he'd die! Geez, what inconsistency). Play continues, and Ei-chan's down-the-line goes out: Game, Krishna, 2-1. Maruo leads. As Krishna clenches a fist in triumph, someone in the audience shouts that Krishna broke back as expected.

During court change, Ei-chan scribbles in his notebook, noting that he'd been too enthusiastic (overly eager without being properly prepared) about being able to predict Krishna first because it was his serve and his own defensive position. He concludes it was a

mistake in judgment, but he wouldn't have understood if he hadn't tried it. He reminds himself it's impossible to judge everything without making mistakes, so it was a good challenge. He resolves to tie it to the next one.

The two players return to court. Krishna notices that Ei-chan's position is again way behind the baseline. So after he serves to the center, Krishna adjusts his defensive position a step forward to the baseline. Seeing this, Ei-chan also moves forward for a reaction contest. Play continues with Ei-chan on the baseline and Krishna again a step back. Coach Aoi notes that both players are continuing to make fine adjustments to their respective defensive positions. It's a battle for advantage: which side will read their opponent first and how far they can read. In Aoi's opinion, they're using fairly high-level tactics. He concludes that Ei-chan already can see the next level. He muses over the next stage as the players exchange shots (during which Krishna pulls off a backhand smash, which he's never been shown using before). The score continues to seesaw: Game, Krishna, 2-2; Advantage, Krishna; Game, Maruo, 3-4. (Note that the scoreboard shows Krishna at 4 while Ei-chan is 3; however, according to ch.446, it's Ei-chan who should be at 4, which would explain why the call isn't "Game, Maruo, 4-3. Krishna leads.")

The score continues: 30-15; 30-30; 30-40. Audience commentary: Isn't it Maruo has the advantage in long rallies at the rear?; It's doubtful... Both sides haven't been able to hold their serves easily; The circumstances that will decide the match has continued all along with only a little trouble.

Finally, Krishna hits a backhand cross to take a point: Game, Krishna, 6-6. The crowd erupts with "Tiebreak game" and "If you've come this far, it's probably the championship!" and chants of "Maruo!" End of chapter.

Ch. 446
titled "Field of Vision," opens with the score for the final set tied 6-6 and cheers from the audience of "Maruo" and encouragement to clinch victory from the prelims since he's come this far. Ei-chan thinks that whether he likes it or not, the one who gets 7 points first wins. He's finally gotten this far.

Krishna reminds himself that Ei-chan is strong at critical moments, and concludes that he can't play the same way as he has up to now. According to Krishna's analysis, he'd lacked a macro perspective during the second set because he'd been driven to deal with the crisis in front of him. That's why he'll make predictions using all the data from today's match so that it doesn't matter how Ei-chan will attack from hereon in the tiebreak. (Based on the art, Krishna apparently calls to mind where Ei-chan's various shots (grouped according to forehand and backhand flats, slices, and spin balls) during the match landed.) He decides that from hereon it will be contest of how well which side can correctly imagine the next moment (instant future).

Ei-chan sends his serve wide, then moves way behind the baseline—basically to his second defensive position. Krishna remembers that Ei-chan has started to contend for long rallies from behind the baseline most recently. (The art shows who won which game in the first, second, and final sets: M = Maruo and K = Krishna; the plain boxes indicate the games

Ei-chan played from his original defensive position; the shaded boxes (yes, it's very faint but most of the boxes are shaded) indicate the games Ei-chan played from his second defensive position. It's this art that shows Ei-chan got to 4 before Krishna did in the final set, despite the scoreboard in ch.445). Krishna returns the ball, telling himself he can take it as an omen that Ei-chan will come forward at some point and use the down-the-line (weapon).

Ei-chan suddenly dashes forward, intent on a complete change. Krishna realizes the down-the-line is coming already, and since he knows that... Ei-chan hits his down-the-line (strong). Krishna manages to return it, but the ball goes into the net: 1-0, Maruo.

Krishna notes his response hadn't worked, but he believes it will take him just a little more. Ei-chan exults that his shot had worked; however, he notes that the change is starting to lose its ability to perturb Krishna. Krishna plans to capitalize on having the next two serves. He thinks he can't win if he doesn't take the initiative before Ei-chan does.

Ei-chan sets himself to receive way behind the baseline, expecting Krishna to be more aggressive than before. While waiting for a chance to attack first, he plans to not fail to counterattack if he's attacked first. Krishna serves wide, and Ei-chan returns the ball, thinking he'll continue maintaining a posture where he can counterattack. Ei-chan returns to the center behind the baseline, setting it as his origin, and spreading his senses even farther in all directions. Noticing Krishna's grip on the racket, Ei-chan realizes a drop shot is coming and dashes to the net. Krishna mirrors him. Ei-chan manages to volley, but Krishna is ready to counter and takes the point: 1-1.

Krishna thinks that being able to get a point from the front is a big deal. Krishna's move confirms for Ei-chan that Krishna intends to take the match at top gear even if Krishna tries too hard: it's an all-out attack by Krishna who emphasizes low risk and defense.

Play continues and a rally ensues. Ei-chan concludes that he has to prepare to be able to counter that even if all (those shots) go in. He intends to surpass that by imagining the future of Krishna's tennis. Krishna thinks that if he has the upper hand because it's his serve, he can make predictions with a high probability of success, but that's not enough—so he decides to go with power. He hits a strong shot down the line. Ei-chan returns it and notes that it's the most powerful shot up to now. Then Krishna takes a step forward and counters with another strong shot to put away the ball: 2-1, Krishna leads.

Ei-chan grits his teeth at Krishna's starting to do that much. Tossing the ball to serve, he thinks that if those are going in, he needs countermeasures—attacks that surpass Krishna's expectations. With a forehand cross, he configures his shot, aiming for the edge of the line and using 1/81 control. Krishna manages to return the ball, but his shot goes out: 2-2.

Play continues. Ei-chan returns to the net to volley at a sharp angle, thinking that when he goes forward, he'll attack suddenly: 3-2. Krishna gets a strong forehand cross past Ei-chan: 3-3. The crowd marvel at Krishna's and Ei-chan's play.

Krishna's performance confirms Ei-chan's belief that Krishna intends to make correct predictions and increase his power. Ei-chan thinks that if this is the tennis that Krishna's aiming for, Krishna will imagine more realistically based on the data. Krishna plans to detect

the foundation of Ei-chan's next ball even a second sooner, working his eyes and intuition to the fullest without compromising power. Both players wonder how far he can predict the future correctly.

The points continue to rack up. Krishna serves wide, then gets a down-the-line past Ei-chan: 3-4. Then Ei-chan serves to the center, a rally ensues with Ei-chan finally going to the net to volley: 4-4. Next, Ei-chan serves wide, another rally, and then Ei-chan gets a forehand cross past Krishna: 5-4. Krishna aces a serve: 5-5.

Audience reactions: The one who gets the next point will seize match point; Finally...?; It wouldn't be strange no matter which side gets it. With Miyamoto, Oobayashi, Yukichi, and Asano looking on in suspense, Ei-chan thinks it will go well. End of chapter.

Ch. 447
titled "The Near Future," opens with Asano considering both players and thinking that while their methods differ, they're quite similar in predicting what the other will do next. Even if both put out everything they've got, neither is able to go the next step and take the lead. Having come this far, the one who gets to match point first will have an advantage, so he wonders what's needed to seize that.

As Krishna prepares to serve, he thinks that with a few more points, he'll reach victory or defeat. He notes that he doesn't have any problem with stamina, it's just that Ei-chan has been strong in this sort of moment even before. Krishna thinks there's no way he'll forget the fact that Ei-chan is that sort of player. However, this can also become material for predicting the future. He calls to mind the previous plays and guesses what kind of play is easy to deploy in this sort of situation, based on all the past data.

Ei-chan, on the other hand, remembers that 57% of Krishna's first serves were aimed wide (usually fast spin balls), 11% were to his body (usually fast flats), and 32% were to the center (usually slices with strong rotations). So he'll apportion his awareness accordingly between those three courses and the most frequent ball type and power. What's left is being able to return the serve from here (his second defensive position), so he's confident.

Krishna notes that with Ei-chan's return position in the rear, his shot is also limited. However, Krishna believes there's a high probability that Ei-chan will advance to his forward (normal) defensive position at the critical moment. So he plans to serve in a way that—first of all—will prevent Ei-chan from doing that...and will make sure of it even if Ei-chan does so. He'll dominate Ei-chan without allowing Ei-chan to predict his serve.

Ei-chan silently demands Krishna to serve wide. However, Krishna serves to the center, taking Ei-chan by surprise. Ei-chan fails to react in time, but the serve bounced in the wrong court, so it's judged a fault. Krishna's disappointed, especially since he'd won the prediction contest. Ei-chan acknowledges it had been dangerous; he orders himself to switch over: it's how much risk Krishna takes for second serves. He remembers that 42% of Krishna's second serves were aimed wide (usually slow spin balls with strong rotations), 7% were to his body (usually fast slices), and 51% were to the center (usually slow slices with strong rotations). Ei-chan wants to go confidently, but if he guesses wrong, he'll suddenly be in a

big pinch, so he decides to stay at the back, where he should manage to cover the range even if he's wrong. However, if he guesses right, he intends to attack right away.

Krishna notes Ei-chan's receive position remains in the rear even though it's Krishna's second serve. He wonders if Ei-chan's playing safe or if the position is for show. He thinks that Ei-chan's prediction will be wrong either way. Krishna serves to the center. Ei-chan's surprised that the power is similar to Krishna's first serve (not slow). However, since he predicted the course and shot correctly, he counters with a slow spin ball deep and rushes forward. The onlookers are surprised by his return dash. Krishna notices Ei-chan is moving even more forward than his usual position (at the baseline) and wonders if Ei-chan's going to the net.

Ei-chan expects Krishna to avoid a reaction contest, so he's ready for a shot toward his feet. Krishna thinks both of them were wrong in their predictions...if Ei-chan predicts his shot, Krishna will lose. So Krishna decides to overcome Ei-chan with power. Ei-chan realizes Krishna's going for a power shot and starts sprinting to intercept it. Praying he'll reach the ball, Ei-chan (finally! FINALLY!) dives for it, extending his arm. He thinks that with this much power (in Krishna's shot), he'll return the ball if he touches it. He does reach the ball and volleys at a sharp angle: 6-5, Maruo.

The audience roars: Whoooa! Even though his posture was completely off...; He drove it in just by touching it! Ei-chan's parents, even Coach Aoi look shocked.

Krishna takes a deep breath and exhales, thinking this is it, that Ei-chan has this. Even though Krishna had managed to have his own way with the advantage of his serve in their predicting each other just now...Ei-chan took the point from him. Krishna concludes that he wasn't able to take this most important point because of a difference of a few kph in ball speed...and a few centimeters in the ball's course. He tells himself he has to include that much in his calculations from hereon, and predict the future.

Ei-chan realizes that point just now is a big deal, but it was certainly an unfavorable situation. He believes reading each other's next shots will become tougher given the conditions leading up to this point. It suddenly strikes him that what he actually has to do is more of...a contest of ideas (imagination) rather than prediction. In which case...

As Ei-chan tosses the ball to serve, a chill runs through Krishna. He senses something is off and wonders what will come. Ei-chan hits a quick serve, taking everyone by surprise. Chasing the ball, Krishna throws himself forward and manages to counter with a lob despite being off balance. However, Ei-chan is rushing forward. He jumps and smashes, putting away the ball. Letting his racket fall, Ei-chan drops to his back on the court and clenches his fists in triumph as the chair umpire announces "Game, set, and match won by Maruo. Count: 1-6, 6-4, 7-6."

The audience goes wild: Maruo won!; His first Challenger championship! End of chapter.

The blurb says "Ei-chan's first pro championship!!" The title of the next chapter is "Impact."

Ch. 448
opens with Ei-chan lying on his back on court, remembering that he'd only gotten as far as the second round since he'd turned pro. Thinking that he'd stagnated for half a year but he'd finally done it, he extends his clenched hands to the sky in triumph.

The crowd roars: A...Amazing!; Maruo really won!; He came out of the qualifiers without any warning and made it to the championship?!

Ei-chan notices Krishna waiting at the net, so he quickly gets to his feet to accept Krishna's proffered handshake. With an earnest smile, Krishna shakes Ei-chan's hand, gripping Ei-chan's upper arm with his other hand congratulating him. Ei-chan thanks him.

Ei-chan's mom seems stunned, while his dad and Coach Aoi look elated, clasping each other's hand in congratulations. Yukichi comments that he'd expected Ei-chan to win a Challenger some day, but he hadn't expected it to be this soon. Oobayashi's rather incredulous, noting that it's just Ei-chan's first year. Yukichi counters that Ei-chan is a player who already has this much ability. Laughing, Oobayashi notes that could be said for either side (Ei-chan and Krishna).

Miyamoto scribbles in his notebook, thinking that the bodies of both players aren't mature yet. Their becoming strong enough to get this far is because of how they use their brains. Nevertheless, the way they were predicting each other's tactics was impressive. Ei-chan seemed to have been forced to retreat because he couldn't play at his usual defensive position. However, that wasn't a point of what Monma calls "running away" but a "sniping" tactic. That allowed Ei-chan to again feature his weapon (down-the-line), which had been sealed in the first half. Miyamoto opines that Krishna might be the better tennis player, but because of that, Ei-chan's choice to oppose him bore fruit.

As the dais is being prepared for the awards ceremony, Miyamoto's analysis continues: But it wouldn't have been unusual no matter which side won in the very end. Krishna entrapped Ei-chan, using his clear head and excellent technique. Even though Ei-chan had lost the initiative on every front, in that situation, he'd taken the point when the tiebreak was at 5-5—which was a point that had a totally different significance from the other points until then. And the final quick serve...even though they'd been predicting each other's strokes so much all throughout the match, to produce that idea and resolution at that point...the willpower and idea that decided the match in the end might be the difference (between Ei-chan and Krishna?) in their tenacity toward winning as a pro. (I have to say the mangaka seemed to make Miyamoto omniscient in this analysis. I mean, Miyamoto was referring to Monma's comment about "running away," and using Ei-chan's own terminology "idea" (the actual English word) when Miyamoto hasn't been shown interviewing Monma about Ei-chan or Ei-chan about Ei-chan's play style.)

The awards ceremony takes place: "The winner of the Keiryo Challenger men's singles is...Maruo Eiichirou. Congratulations!"

After the ceremony, Krishna and Ei-chan get together to analyze their match. As Aoi wonders aloud how long the two are going to do that, Krishna tells Ei-chan that he's sure a spin ball would have been better than the flat of that time. Ei-chan comments: "Was it a flat?

You remember everything quite well, even the type of shot, huh."

Ei-chan's dad tells Ei-chan's mom that he's glad they let him go to Florida. She agrees, adding that they seem to get along.

Krishna asks Ei-chan how long Ei-chan had been considering the quick serve at the end. He adds that it's awesome that Ei-chan had hidden that sort of thing and used it at that point. Ei-chan replies that he hadn't been hiding it; it had occurred to him then. There was a time, long ago (the match with Takagi?), when using it had saved him. Krishna comments that all things considered, he'd like to learn the boldness and the impulse to produce that from Ei-chan's example.

Krishna starts taking his leave of Ei-chan, hoping they meet again. Ei-chan agrees, then mentions that he'd heard Krishna is going to college, and asks if Krishna isn't turning pro yet. Krishna replies that he plans to, but that going to college comes first. Ei-chan then asks whether being a tennis player and a manager at the same time isn't tough when those are completely different things. Krishna explains that tennis and business aren't such different fields for him. Ei-chan's surprised to hear this.

Krishna elaborates that his dream is to build the largest sports facility in India, and finally to hold a Grand Slam tournament there, and win it. Ei-chan requests clarification: "You'll host a Grand Slam yourself and...win it? It's not just making the four major tournaments into five, but also taking part in it? Can you do something like that?!" Krishna points out that it's been 50 years since the Australian Open, the newest in history, was added. He's sure that the world will be different 5 years from now, that the tennis world will also change.

Ei-chan marvels at Krishna's ambition. Krishna counters that it's not somebody else's problem for Ei-chan, and points out there's talk of changing when the Davis Cup is held and the number of sets, as well as making a tour finals for 21 and under. The tennis world is changing rapidly, and they're players who'll be caught up in the middle of all that, after all. Krishna wants to take the opinions of other players seriously, so he learns all sorts of things. A surprised Ei-chan thinks that Krishna's ideas are unorthodox. Krishna shakes Ei-chan's hand again, telling him they'll both get far stronger, so that one day they'll participate in the tournament Krishna sets up. Krishna waves goodbye; Ei-chan waves back while his parents bow to Krishna. Ei-chan thinks that's what Krishna is focused on; then he considers what his own focus is.

Scene switch to Atlanta's airport. Natchan checks her phone and finds a message from Ei-chan telling her he won, and a pic of him with the winner's placard and Yukichi in the background. Right in the middle of the airport, she strikes a triumphant pose.

Other reactions to the news: Nabae apparently finds out online, and smiles; Takuma and Monma apparently hear the news during practice, and Takuma looks rather chagrined; Watanabe looks irritated; Wang Wei, stoic; the ellesse rep is elated (to his coworker's amusement); Okada looks shocked; Eric apparently finds out online and is satisfied; and Coach Maeda is apparently impressed after Asano maybe describes the finals?

With the Challenger win, Ei-chan's ranking skyrockets to 407 (world) and 17 (JTA). The news

reverberates through the Japanese tennis world. Ei-chan's surroundings suddenly start becoming boisterous. Negotiations for next year and after arrive from Prince, which Ei-chan already has a contract with. (The art has the Prince rep proposing they put their heads together to think of a racket for Ei-chan to win with.) There's an offer from ellesse, which already provides Ei-chan with sportswear, for a multi-year exclusive athlete contract. (The art has the ellesse rep telling Ei-chan they'd finally prepared a set-up where they can support Ei-chan.) And then Haleo, which had aided Ei-chan in his first overseas campaign, also delivers an offer for a formal, exclusive contract. (The art shows Eric telling Ei-chan that if they combine their efforts, they can do greater things. Ei-chan thanks him/them and says he'll do his very best.

Scene switch to STC. Aoi comments that it looks like Ei-chan can go to the next stage sooner than he'd expected. Ei-chan agrees, adding that he might have hope for funds to go around overseas for all of next year. He says he's glad he won but, on the other hand, he's also gotten a sense of the difficulty of standing at the starting line for the world tour. He explains that even if he's able to take part in the prelims of an ATP250, if he doesn't make it to the main draw, he can't say he's appeared in the world tour. The ATP250 will have players of the same level as the veterans he played against the recent Challenger, steadily showing up at the prelims. Even though this time the location was in Japan and his opponents were players he's familiar with and had data on, it was a very hard fight. In other words, if he can't continue winning against veterans he has no data on in places he's never been to, he can't make his appearance in the world tour. When he considers those, he thinks it's doubtful whether or not he can stand on the starting line as of now. At any rate, if he continues to compete in major tournaments at a higher level than this, he needs an all-around boost—physically, technically, mentally, strategically—in all those aspects, and more than he has up to now. Naturally, he also has to gather as much data as possible. But if it's an overseas campaign, he'll need to gather a large quantity of data in a short time on a lot of players he's not familiar with. He believes if he starts doing this, simply researching using his notes/notebook won't be enough. His notebook's shortage of data is a matter of life and death for him.

Ei-chan adds that his physical and mental conditions are also concerns from hereon. Last time, the location was in Japan, and Aoi took care of him and made arrangements, so Ei-chan managed to overcome the difficult times. However, when it comes to overseas when he's alone, there are too many things to do—traveling, eating, practicing—until he gets to the court. If he has someone keeping an eye on his training and his body, and someone gathering info on his opponent in advance, and analyzing it, if he has someone nearby who supports him physically and mentally...if possible, technically and strategically...

Aoi agrees and comments that it's already that phase. Various businesses are saying they'll support Ei-chan, so Aoi suggests they search for that sort of guy. Ei-chan asks for clarification: "By search...you mean a support member; in other words, I'll make a team, right?"

Aoi confirms this: "It means bringing together experts you can rely on for the things you need but can't do...a Team Maruo appropriate for the world tour." End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "A genuine start appropriate for the world tour!" The title of the next chapter is "Data Man.

Ch. 449

opens with Ei-chan and Coach Aoi continuing their conversation. Ei-chan asks Aoi if by "a Team Maruo appropriate for the world tour," Aoi will serve as his full-time coach. Aoi says he can't because he also has to keep an eye on the STC juniors in Court A. Aoi believes that what Ei-chan needs from hereon is a coach who's familiar with the world tour. Aoi won't stint in supporting Ei-chan when Ei-chan is in Japan, but it would be better is he's not the one supporting Ei-chan when Ei-chan competes abroad. On further thought, Aoi says it's impossible for it (the coach?) to be (chosen) at random, so he'll try to come up with someone likely. Ei-chan thanks Aoi and requests he do so. Aoi notes that the support personnel essential to Ei-chan, besides a coach and a trainer, is quite uncommon, but Ei-chan had said it's a guy for intelligence gathering. Aoi's mention of "intelligence gathering" reminds Ei-chan of Nabae, and he wonders how Nabae handles it. So he calls up Nabae.

It's Nabae who names what Ei-chan needs a "data man." He explains that he doesn't use data as much as Ei-chan does, so he relies on his coach and manages somehow. He suggests Ei-chan consult Asano because Asano has lots of personal connections. He adds that he goes on campaign with his coach and his trainer, which means 3 people; his coach and his trainer were from the NTC and had been arranged by the national team.

Ei-chan marvels at the benefits of being on the national B team. Nabae asks whether Ei-chan hasn't been approached about the B team; Nabae believes it's possible since Ei-chan has won a Challenger. Ei-chan says he hasn't. Nabae cautions Ei-chan that being on the national team doesn't mean all the players are accompanied by a coach and a trainer to all tournaments, so he thinks he'll also need his own team in the near future.

Right then, Ei-chan's phone beeps, alerting him to an incoming call, so he ends the conversation with Nabae. The new call is from Asano, who starts off congratulating Ei-chan on his Keiryo Challenger win. Then Asano raises the topic of induction into the national team; however, he says it can't happen right away. Ei-chan's only had one victory, so it was decided that they'll look at Ei-chan's results after one year and make up their minds next year. (I'm not sure if this one year includes the preceding months since Ei-chan turned pro, or if the year starts with the Keiryo.) Ei-chan's taken aback slightly on hearing this, but he rallies and thanks Asano, telling him that just being able to hear he has a chance if he works hard for one year was great. Asano apologizes and explains that he'd pushed to support Ei-chan right away but...

Anyhow, Asano asks Ei-chan to tell him if there's anything else he can do for Ei-chan. So Ei-chan mentions his need for a data man. Asano replies that he doesn't know whether it will be directly useful, but the NTC measures improvement in ability by gathering all sorts of data and sharing the data with a university research center. There's a research center where you can see the results of your training using data. Asano wants to introduce Ei-chan to that place. Ei-chan's surprised to hear this. He thanks Asano and requests that Asano do so. Asano adds that he thinks it's a place that's suited to Ei-chan.

At the Nihon Sports University, Ei-chan arrives at the "Precise Measurement Room." He knocks and is admitted by Kamishiro Kanji, a professor in the university's PE department. Ei-chan goggles at the setup, thinking this place is a research center that cooperates with the NTC. Kamishiro explains their primary research focus is the visualization of training results. To put it simply, they quantify exactly what sort of physique one has now using various equipment, then they calculate, based on those number, how much one can train which parts of one's body in order to realize one's ideal performance in the shortest time. Ei-chan pulls out a notebook at this point.

Right then a guy who Ei-chan takes for a sumo wrestler arrives. It turns out that guy has a prior appointment, so the professor hands Ei-chan off to Muroga (his assistant? his student?), who confirms that Ei-chan's sport is tennis. He instructs Ei-chan to go over there (indicating a curtained chamber) and strip—take everything off, well, except for his briefs. Once Ei-chan goes in, he's to stand there (a platform) at once. When Ei-chan does so, Muroga tells him he (Muroga) is closing it (the chamber) and not to move. A beam of light passes over Ei-chan's body, surprising him. Muroga tells him it's fine and asks him to come out.

Ei-chan sees an image on the screen and asks Muroga what it is. Muroga explains it's the quantification of Ei-chan's body shape. Next Muroga asks Ei-chan to enter what looks like a capsule for cold sleep. When Ei-chan asks what they'll learn if he does, Muroga replies his body composition—the main point is understanding the mass: body mass, body fat quantity, fat removal quantity, etc. Ei-chan enters the capsule and all that is measured.

After that, Muroga views the results, telling Ei-chan that with this, they've completed the quantification of Ei-chan's body shape and composition. Ei-chan asks what they'll do with this quantification. Muroga counters with his own question: before answering that, can he ask what sort of tennis player Ei-chan is? Ei-chan explains he's the type who uses tactics as a weapon. Essentially, tennis favors those who have more physical ability, though.

Muroga suggests they quantify and check Ei-chan's faculties, since they've quantified Ei-chan's body shape and composition. He explains that by "faculties," he means the power, speed, and stamina the body possesses—what Ei-chan termed "physical ability." Ei-chan marvels at the quantification of the shape, weight, and physical ability. Muroga clarifies that people each have different body shapes and compositions with different faculties (the art shows silhouettes of different body shapes), and there are shapes, compositions, and also faculties that are suited to each sport. Citing the sumo wrestler as an example, Muroga says the wrestler would naturally have difficulty handling a full marathon, but he can display considerable faculty in the wrestling ring.

Muroga explains that this research center gathers the numerical values of the bodies and faculties of top athletes from every sport, so they can hypothesize the ideal values (so based on the readings for the top tennis players, they can come up with a quantification of the ideal tennis player). If they compare Ei-chan's own readings to that, they can tell what's lacking and what sort of training to do. Conversely, they can tell what sport his current body is suited to. Since Ei-chan would know the numbers for his own body and faculties as well as the ideal, he'll know what he should do and how much based on the numbers. Muroga tells Ei-chan there was a tennis player who recently switched to long-distance running because

the numbers should he was suited to that.

So they proceed to quantify Ei-chan's faculties. (The art shows various tests: leg extensions, lung capacity (running), speed in tennis.) After all that, which apparently took the rest of the day, Muroga enters the data, telling Ei-chan that with this, they've quantified the power Ei-chan produced, and his reaction speed, cardiopulmonary faculty, swing speed, ball speed, ball rotation speed, etc. Muroga then assesses the data, muttering to himself "...Errr...I see...The important figures for tennis are explosive power, stamina, and reaction speed, however...but if control and footwork are also necessary, then especially muscle stamina for leg strength...then maybe also upper body...

Ei-chan interrupts him to inquire about the results. Muroga says his impression is that "it's worth doing." He tells Ei-chan he'll try to come up with a special training menu for Ei-chan, so he asks Ei-chan to come next week to pick it up. Ei-chan asks if that's okay. Muroga replies that in exchange, Ei-chan's to return regularly to let him get data. An excited Ei-chan agrees to this, thinking that he'd believed he was doing all the training he could, but it seems he can just do the ideal and necessary training. He thinks it's amazing support and is grateful to Asano.

Right then, Takagi enters wearing a track-and-field outfit. He grimaces on seeing Ei-chan, who's surprised to see him and in that outfit. Takagi explains he's attending that university. Muroga adds that Takagi is the tennis player he mentioned who switched to long-distance running. Ei-chan's shocked to her this. Takagi says that during training, he'd always done nothing but running; this was because he hadn't wanted to do less than Nabae, but he doesn't say that. Anyhow, he was told he has a body that's suited to it (running). He's starting again from square one, but he feels he can do it without worries. Ei-chan says he feels a bit sad (on hearing that).

Takagi asks why Ei-chan is there. Ei-chan replies that Asano recommended it because it has an interesting laboratory. Takagi recognizes Asano's name and clarifies that Ei-chan meant Asano Shin. Ei-chan confirms this, then explains he'd initially consulted Asano about a data man to help Ei-chan with his intelligence gathering. Takagi is daunted to hear that Ei-chan wants to use a person for intelligence gathering when Ei-chan already has those amazing notes.

The mention of notes and intelligence gathering catches Muroga's attention and he ends up looking through Ei-chan's Tennis 72 notebook. He comments that it's an amazing amount of information, but he asks if the tennis info is sufficient with this. Ei-chan replies that he'd like to consult him about that too, if possible. He then asks Muroga if Muroga is interested in data strategy. Muroga is taken aback by the question. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "The Sudden and Unexpected Inducement Activity?!" The title of the next chapter is "Team," so I very much suspect Muroga will answer in the positive.

Ch. 450

Ch.450 opens with Muroga asking Ei-chan for clarification, whether Ei-chan's mention of data strategy meant devising strategies by gathering data at tennis matches. Ei-chan

confirms this. He adds that of course he came to the research center today to quantify (digitalize) the data on his body and faculties in order to overcome his physical weaknesses. However, he also has to come up with ideas for tennis strategies on court by analyzing various information. He explains that's one of his own strong points, but he's looking for someone to support him there.

Muroga comments that tennis is also in the age of big data. Ei-chan isn't clear on big data, so Muroga explains that for tennis this would be quantifying ball speed, falling point, and various other data items, then using the enormous data obtain for strategy. This technique is already being utilized in business.

However, Muroga points out that he's new to tennis. Ei-chan replies that it's probably fine. What he wants is objective and accurate numbers, so he's looking for someone whose way of thinking isn't caught up in preconceived notions. Besides, he has a coach.

Muroga admits that discovering the reality from what's in the data is an interesting activity, so he is interested (in Ei-chan's proposal).

Ei-chan questions Muroga's use of reality in data, so Muroga explains that if everything is quantified, there are things that there are invisible truths that become visible. Muroga says that because they started quantifying Takagi's physical abilities, it became clear that Takagi is suited to long-distance track-and-field. Takagi had been fixated on his objective in tennis, but he'd exceeded it in his new challenge, which Muroga recommended. Muroga tells Ei-chan he'd like the results of this sort of interesting research to be useful in something, but...

Ei-chan insists it's a chance for that to be useful. He explains that he has often noticed facts after checking his notes that he hadn't noticed during a tennis match. He wants for discover that sort of reality...of course, he'll also provide fund, and it might be good value if Muroga can go abroad.

Muroga's surprised to hear Ei-chan mention money, and asks if it's work, plus where abroad? Ei-chan explains he's a pro, so it's work and abroad depends on the schedule, but he might be able to go all over the world. At Muroga's wide-eyed reaction, Ei-chan rushes to assure him that it's limited to what's possible for Muroga since Muroga is still a student; Ei-chan's just mentioning the possibility if Muroga is interested, but Ei-chan asks for Muroga's advice, and suggests they discuss it further when Ei-chan returns next week.

Muroga requests Ei-chan to give him some time to think about Ei-chan's proposal since he doesn't know what to make of it, and for Ei-chan to lend him these notebook. Ei-chan sets down a pile of notebooks, saying Muroga may borrow any number of them. They end up discussing his notes even further, then exchanging contact details. Finally, Ei-chan thanks him and takes his leave.

Right then Takagi speaks up, commenting that Ei-chan is also (maybe grouping him with Nabae) working steadily as a pro, enough that Ei-chan can hire someone. Ei-chan demurs, saying he's just starting out. Then he tells Takagi that during the recent Challenger finals, he was able to win because he'd remembered his match with Takagi. He thanks Takagi and urges him to do his best in track-and-field. After Ei-chan has left, Takagi comments that he doesn't really get it, but if his tennis then was useful, that that's great.

The next week Ei-chan gets a message from Coach Aoi informing him Aoi has found one candidate for Ei-chan's coach. It seems the candidate is in Germany but has said he'll come over once. Later, while Ei-chan is working out, Aoi calls him over to introduce Coach Eddie Holman, who'd helped Aoi for a short period while Aoi was a pro. Aoi explains that there's an agency in Germany that a lot of tennis coaches are affiliated with, and he (Eddie) is currently a member.

Taking off his shades, Eddie comments that he hadn't known Ryuuhei had become a coach, because he hadn't had any contact from him since then. Aoi apologizes and tells Eddie not to get mad because Eddie's face is scary.

Ei-chan introduces himself and says it's his first year as a pro. After that, he's at a loss for what else to say. Eddie informs him that he'd heard about Ei-chan from Ryuuhei. He has various things he wants to ask Ei-chan, but he wants to give his opinion after seeing Ei-chan's play and Ei-chan's training environment as they are first. He believes that's the fastest way for them to learn about each other.

At Eddie's statement, Ei-chan rushes off to bring out a notebook computer, and the screen displays a breakdown of his first serve by type of course (wide, body, center) and the respective percentage by type of shot (flat, spin, slice) for ad and deuce courts, as well as average ball speed, fastest speed, and percentage of success (looks like 72%). He explains it's data that a university student, Muroga, quantified, based on footage from video Aoi had recorded of the recent Challenger and the notes Ei-chan had taken during the match, which consolidated the characteristics of Ei-chan's tennis in an easily understandable format. He adds that it's broken down according to his first serve's course and the average speed, probability, and distribution of ball type...and there's also for the second serve. Next there's the stroke...ratio of forehand to backhand, respective speeds of rotation, distribution of falling point...proportion of aggressive shots, success ratio, proportion of normal shots, success ratio, figures for each particular course. Aoi silently marvels at this. Ei-chan continues, presenting next the data for the particular defensive positions...next...

Finally, Eddie tells Ei-chan to give him (Eddie) a little time, because he wants to look at this properly. Ei-chan agrees. While Eddie studies the data, Aoi assures Ei-chan that Eddie is a good guy, though he looks scary. Aoi adds that he'd been hasty and acted willfully, not listening that much to Eddie's instructions, so he'd gotten injured, but when he thinks about it now, there's a lot of things he considers from that time. Aoi tells Ei-chan that Eddie has plently of knowledge, personal connections, and achivements as a coach, and is an excellent person who is enthusiastic about and appreciates the Japanese. It's just that Eddie is an unsentimental, rational person, and is a bit lacking in social graces. Ei-chan silently wonders what kind of person Eddie is.

When Eddie's done, he informs Ei-chan that it's magnificent data. It's like he (Eddie) can see Ei-chan before he has seen him. Then he corrects himself, explaining that he wouldn't be able to understand this much about Ei-chan with one look, so he may know more about him than what's seen. Ei-chan has that physique, and he had won using tactics that shrewdly leveraged his special characteristics to be able to overcome everything. However, Eddie can tell that Ei-chan's forehand is more offensive than Eddie had thought, but it had a lot of errors, and Ei-chan's backhand is stable, but Ei-chan has been able to attack with it. Eddie concludes this might be a point.

Ei-chan agrees, adding that he'd noticed it with the recent data collection. Aoi thinks that Ei-chan is remarkable to have expedited the mutual understanding with this data, but Eddie is also shrewd in distilling data, as Aoi expected.

Eddie turns the conversation to the real issue: what is Ei-chan's objective? Ei-chan says his immediate objective is a world tour debut without one year, and after he achieves that, his objective is to participate in the main draw of the Grand Slam within a year after that (the world tour debut). Eddie compliments Ei-chan on his immediate and definite reply, and adds that it made Eddie want to see Ei-chan's tennis even more.

After that, Eddie signed on as Ei-chan's coach. It's a contract to accompany him on overseas campaigns and coach him for a fixed period for one year. Ei-chan can receive Eddie's coaching for just short of 3 weeks in the period, but even so, Ei-chan thinks Eddie will play a satisfactory role. Above all, Eddie's coaching experience and participation in the world tour is significant.

The former pro player Eddie supports Ei-chan even mentally with (developing?) a pro awareness, over and above the technical, tactical, and physical. And Muroga is responsible not only for optimizing Ei-chan's training but also for gathering data to draft tactics. The remaining unresolved problem of securing high-level practice partners...is something Ei-chan has to manage using his own power and capitalizing on his own experience, as he's been doing up to now. (The art shows Ei-chan on the phone with Takuma, thanking him and saying he'll go right away, and Ei-chan on his computer, commenting that the friend of Ike's friend (David) Miller is coming...his world rank is 120 and of course Ei-chan wants to practice with him.) By doing this, Ei-chan levels up measurably while managing to secure a setup outside the courts he uses around the world, and was ready for his next match.

Now while his world ranking is still too low for him to be sure of participating in the qualifiers of tournaments beyond ATP250, there are lots of lower-level tournaments he can take part in from this autumn to winter in the neighboring Asian countries. Ei-chan drafts a schedule to improve his ranking by winning here (lower-level tournaments), deliberately preserving his funds on the assumption of going on campaign in Europe and the US during or after spring next year. There are also times when the tournament venue is relatively close by, and Ei-chan takes Muroga along when it's convenient. (The art shows Muroga traveling with Ei-chan, taking notes with Ei-chan making comments, and recording Ei-chan's match.) Ei-chan doesn't readily make it to the championship the way he had in the Keiryo Challenger, but...he has clearly started winning in lower-level pro tournaments since then.

And in October is the All Japan Championship. This time Ei-chan goes straight in, having raised his JTA rank to 15. (The art shows that Ei-chan is seeded 13.) Unfortunately, Ike doesn't take part, but Kouno, the No.3 in Japan, who hadn't appeared here recently, takes part and becomes the talk of the tournament. (The art shows Monma, then Kanda and Ogata with Araya, Asano coaching Watanabe, Takuma and Nabae talking, Aki-chan with her coach Bernard, and Kouno with two women oohing in the background.)

Ei-chan goes up against Kouno in the quarterfinals—but even though he cornered him in the second set, he lost in straight sets with a score of 3-6, 6-7. This year he stopped at Best 8...but it's a match he can accept.

After that, Ei-chan spends quite a lot of time during the off season in December on physical makeover. (The art shows him doing physical training, then taking his protein supplement. He also has a video call with Natchan where she greets him Merry Christmas!)

Then the year-end—Ei-chan's world ranking, which was in the 400s after the Keiryo Challenger, has risen to 351, while his JTA ranking is 14. As Ei-chan checks his ranking online, he thinks he hasn't risen much from this area, after all...

Then the start of the year—the spring of Ei-chan's second year as a pro arrives, and Ei-chan's standing outside the venue where the world group first round for the Davis Cup will be held: Japan vs Argentina. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "The Davis Cup Starts...!!" The title of the next chapter is "Japan's Battle."

Ch. 451

Ch.451 opens with the Davis Cup world group first round in February. In the Team Japan locker room, the Japanese team is in a huddle. Monma says Argentina is higher ranked, but it's an opponent that they have to defeat now to get to the next level. He declares they'll definitely win, and everyone else shouts agreement. Ei-chan looks impressed at seeing this, thinking that the atmosphere is different from the usual. Even though everyone in the waiting room is a rival, there's such a sense of unity as fellow tennis players... Addressing Ei-chan and company, Asano calls them future national team candidates and saying they understand the meaning of their being here today. He tells them he wants them to burn into their memories these 3 days.

Scene switch to courtside with Ide, Ei-chan, Araya, and Kanda sitting in the bleachers.

The Davis Cup begins with two singles matches on the first day, pitting the teams' singles 2 vs the opposing teams' singles 1. The second day has the doubles match. And the final day has two singles matches with the respective singles 1 going up against each other, and then the respective singles 2 doing the same. The outcome is decided by the 5 matches during the 3 days.

During these 3 days, the 4 registered players can participate once a day. For example, Ike has the right to participate in 3 matches, but a match is a tough 5-set match. Three consecutive days of participation is nearly impossible for players on the world tour, so a strategy for winning 3 of the 5 matches becomes necessary.

Monma arrives on court, accompanied by Coach Maeda.

The first match of the first day pits Japan's S2, Monma (world rank: 55), against Argentina's S1, Ramon Redondo (world rank: 26). It's the match of Monma who has declared that the Davis Cup is everything.

Ei-chan wants to watch this match and absorb the whole of Monma.

The match was fierce. It began at top gear from the start of the match, it was improbable from Monma's style, which hinges on endurance. Without any change, Monma had steadily dragged his higher-ranked opponent into his own ground with a fierce attack that didn't drop the pace. However, it's said that there's yet another major barrier in the 30s level internationally. That barrier seemed like it would crumble after one more go. But it was a

defeat that gave the impression that "one more go" was a big one. (The art shows Monma hitting a cord ball and the ball bounces out.)

Then Ei-chan realized that the substance of the match itself influences even the players who will compete next. (The art shows a determined Ike.)

Ike (world rank: 30) goes up against Nicolas Perez (world rank: 40). Can the young ace save Japan whose mainstay had broken and fallen into trouble? It was a high-profile match broadcast throughout the country. Ike doesn't let this sort of moment get away. With enough impact to launch a tennis craze in Japan, he boosted the spirit of Japan, which was at a disadvantage, by winning overwhelmingly.

Ei-chan goggles at the result, marveling that Ike is a player who's the same age as himself.

And then the second day, which arrived with 1 win and 1 loss, is the doubles. Japan's Yoshimichi and Watanabe were clearly lower ranked than their opponents who are the No.5 pair in the world. Moreover, since his match with Ei-chan, Yoshimichi had also taken a break, so Ei-chan expected a hard fight. However, Yoshimichi is also a man who dedicates his all to the Davis Cup. Everyone watching could tell he'd finished up in perfect condition for today.

Watanabe didn't just inject fighting spirit. His power and movements had leveled up considerably. Ei-chan believes Watanabe himself has also matured, but Ei-chan thinks Yoshimichi has a big influence on Watanabe. The two definitely produced more power than the sum of their actual ability. Yoshimichi supported Watanabe psychologically, while Watanabe covered Yoshimichi's defensive range. Yoshimichi sets up the contest, while Watanabe decides it. (The art shows Watanabe putting away the ball down the line.) With this, they contended with the world's No.5 on equal ground. Ei-chan thought once again that the Davis Cup is a special battle where you compete by matching strengths. This match went a full set, but they couldn't seize victory.

And the last day of the competition with Argentina—the order was published and the venue was in an uproar for an instant. The plan was actually for Monma to appear, but because he was uneasy about his right wrist (and Monma is right-handed), the order was hurriedly amended. Everyone understood that Monma wanted to appear more than anyone else, but it seems (in other words, Ei-chan's going by secondhand info) Monma considered everything comprehensively—the fans, Japan's future, sponsors, officials, etc.—and he appealed to the coach.

Monma tells the team he's done everything he could up to now for Japan. That's why he wanted to speak with the coach and make the correct decision without wavering. Maeda instructs Ike to win. And he announces he's relying on Watanabe for the last, to Yoshimichi, Asano, and Nabae's surprise.

First is the showdown between the aces. The adversity of a last-ditch fight against a higher-ranked opponent lit a fire in Ike. Moreover, his opponent was the same player who'd faced Monma two days ago, and had expended a lot of stamina at that time. Ike dominated the match with a fierce attack from the start, and won with a set count of 3-1. Watching the match, Ei-chan notes that Ike is completely dominated an opponent who's ranked 26th in the world, and Ei-chan wonders if this is also team play (probably in the sense of Monma having worn out the Argentinian ace).

With this the competition score is 2-2. The outcome was left to the final match: Watanabe's singles. Watanabe is met on court with cheers of "Watanabe" and "Japan." Ei-chan marvels at the amazing pressure under which Watanabe will play. Right then, Yoshimichi shouts encouragement, reminding Watanabe they (the team) are with him. Watanabe sees Team Japan and seems to calm down.

For Ei-chan, it was unbelievable that Watanabe had played against him. Today's Watanabe was so powerful and careful he was like different person from that time (when he played against Ei-chan). Against a Watanabe who was powerful without overdoing things, the 40th in the world committed continuous errors. (The art shows a shot going out.) Ei-chan could clearly tell that if Watanabe is mentally prepared, he's one of the few players in Japan who has the physical ability to be able to compete internationally. Since he doesn't commit errors at important points, the balls he carefully hits are surprisingly powerful. The match proceeds with Watanabe having the upper hand. The set count is 2-1... Ei-chan thinks Watanabe might be the one closest to world level (in Team Japan?), excluding Ike and Monma. He could understand why the national team betted on Watanabe in the end.

Then, 2 sets up, Watanabe headed to the 4th set. If he lost this and went into the final set, there was a chance the home advantage would turn into pressure. At tiebreak, Watanabe kept attacking—and took it back! (The art shows Watanabe hitting a winner crosscourt.) The national team broke through the 1st round: "Japan advances to the 2nd round, the Best 8!!" The national team rushes on court to congratulate Watanabe, as an elated Ei-chan looks on. End of chapter.

The teaser blurb says "Experiencing the national team from up close..." The title of the next chapter is "In Georgia."