

SINGLES TENNIS STRATEGY

Before developing a game dependent on strategy first a player must have the strokes that will get the ball over the net. **Hitting with depth is the second necessity. Limiting the number of options is the third.** Overall strategy and point-to-point tactics are over rated for most players.

There are basic five things that a player can do to his opponent from the baseline;

1. hit to your opponent's left
2. to his right
3. over his head
4. at his feet, and
5. through him

Strategy means devising a realistic game plan which forces you to evaluate your own game and to learn how to scout and play your opponent. For a **beginner the first and most basic rule is to get it "Down the middle and deep"**. This works on any type of surface or conditions. It helps you win by (1)(Keeping your opponent hitting from behind the baseline; (2) the net is 5 1/2" lower in the middle than at the singles sideline giving you less chance for error; (3) you can concentrate more confidently on the stroke because you are not gambling with the sidelines; (4) By hitting down the middle you reduce the length of the diagonal available to your opponent if he wants to hit crosscourt. The problem with hitting down the middle is an opponent with a strong shot can step around and hit from his strength every time. It is important to remember if you can keep it going deep enough you will still come out ahead. ***Once you get better at this strategy you can play slightly to his weaker side.***

Most players do not own any shot, one that they can hit consistently from anywhere on the court to any position, so worrying about a strategy complicates their game. They must deal with stroke production and not having the shot to fulfill the strategy. **It is better for the beginner to just hit the ball correctly.**

I. ATTACK THE NET AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY

No matter how good you get, hitting DOWN the MIDDLE and DEEP should remain a fundamental aspect of your strategy. A basic law in the jungle is that the advanced player will attack the net at every opportunity and the intermediate will wait for the first short ball before going in. Anticipation is a key element in the development of an advanced player. An intermediate will often hit and back up or hesitate too long when getting his opponent in trouble or sensing when a ball will be short. **The average player is average because he seldom hits the ball deep.** In fact against most players the odds are that the next ball or every other ball will be short so you should anticipate this probability and be inside the baseline expecting a short ball.

Good tennis is a game of opportunities, it is a game of closing out a point and not letting your opponent keep playing. This means you must fight to get to the net. **The best shot to come in behind is a deep shot that keeps your opponent pinned behind the**

baseline. If you can develop the confidence to take the short ball and hit an approach shot and volley and come in, then you will find you anticipate always moving forward rather than naturally staying back. Your opponent will feel this pressure and this will affect his concentration and rhythm of his swing and he will produce errors.

2. PLAY THE PERCENTAGES

The advanced player strives for consistency and to reduce errors understanding that more points are lost than won in a match. When points are combined of both players errors always out number winners. Understanding this percentage the one who produces more errors always loses. **To reduce errors you must simplify your strategy. Keep the ball deep and safe and stay ready and in anticipation for short balls.**

Your opponent can only hit to a few areas as can you. The more creative you get the more chance for errors. Statistics show that someone is about to make an error, limit your chances by following the percentages, deep and down the middle.

When forced by a tough shot hit a ball that has the highest percentage of staying in the court and keeping you in the point. When behind find a way to stay in the point by getting ball back over the net and deep. Trying for a winner to get you out of trouble is not a percentage play, it is a gamble and not a good one. **If you are winning keep winning by doing exactly the same thing that produced your advantage.** Trying something new or something you do not own will only allow the momentum to switch. When the momentum switches sometimes all you can do is watch it go right out from under you. Don't let this happen by testing your skill with fancy circus shots in a match. Follow the Just Win Strategy, practice the new shots tomorrow.

3. UNDER PRESSURE PLAY THE RIGHT SHOT

Pressure has a way of making any player play a SAFE ball. What generally happens is it throws off his entire bio-mechanics of stroke production and control. This causes the ball to SIT UP and boom the point is over because your opponent is generally playing from behind and thus more aggressively. This is called "CHOKING" knowing what to do but not doing because of the courage to hit the right shot. Instead of thinking about winning the match and knowing the pressure of the point or the game the advanced player must **remember** what will get him to victory, and that is **consistency and aggressiveness.**

4. WHEN FORCED GET THE BALL UP

On a baseline rally one player will get pulled wide which forces him to either try to blast the ball back hoping for a winner or produce an error. **The best way to buy time and to get back into the point is to elevate this shot 10 to 12 feet above the net** to get you back in to the point and change the momentum. Even if the player has is attacking the net which he should do making sure that at least you force him to hit a good volley. By elevating your shot you naturally increase the top spin and unless your opponent is at the net he may have to hit up and over the net which is the most difficult volley. If you see him coming to the net it is not a difficult adjustment to lift the ball even higher for a topspin lob which is your next best option. If he stays on the baseline he will have to wait

for the ball and see his opportunity diminish get frustrated and most likely try for too much and miss the ball long or into the net. By getting the ball back without the pace it also forces his mechanics to be better along with his concentration. By him not advancing on this opportunity he will feel aggravated by your ability to return his best shot.

5. BREAKDOWN YOUR OPPONENT'S RHYTHM

If you are playing someone who likes pace hit them soft high balls that they have to prepare for differently. It is not necessary to play a pretty game to win. For example most two handers like the ball in the strike zone where they can use the natural fluid body movement and hit solid ground strokes. If you can avoid this area by hitting short and low and then hit topspin deep and high it forces them to adjust to the variances and thus gets them out of their natural rhythm. **The basic idea is hit shots that your opponent does not want to hit. Determining what your opponent does not like is quite easy, what produces errors and what makes him angry and frustrated.** Understand what shots produce power and which ones do not. Balls hit deep and high to either side with topspin are difficult to return because they re out of the power zone of the body. The player must hit them with almost all arm or take them on the rise both of which shots are physically tough to execute and return deep and strong.

6. OVERPLAY TO YOUR OPPONENT'S STRONG SHOT.

When your opponent has a great forehand and a weak backhand do not let him win with his strength. Anticipate the shot and force him to hit it better than he is capable of by overplaying to the appropriate side. In this case if he hits flat forehands overplay to cross court side forcing him to hit closer to the line or down the line over a higher net. A flat forehand is hit with a horizontal swing which is more difficult to execute down the line for many reasons. Understanding this you can also frustrate this shot by **sending him backhand slice to his forehand that stays low and pulls away.** This will cause him more difficulty and produce more errors on his better side and thus frustrate him and open up his weaker side for any order of shot.

7. HIT CROSS COURT GROUND STROKES

On the forehand the tendency is to hit down the line to the backhand corner for the right handers from the baseline. It is much safer to go cross court for these reasons; the net is lower in the middle than on the sides, the court is longer, you give yourself more time, and you tempt your opponent to hit the tougher return. The net is 5 1/2 inches lower than on the singles sideline and the court is 78 lf down the line where as it is 82 1/2 lf on the diagonal cross court shot. This depending upon the speed, spin and angle of the shot cause the probability of error to go up proportionately. In addition based upon the law of incident and reflective angles it requires less control to return a ball back upon the path of its origin. This is because when a ball is arriving at the racquet on a diagonal it tends to deflect off the racquet at an angle in direct relation to the angle of its approach.

There is no margin for safety when you go down the line; what looks to be an easy shot is not. It is a lower percentage play and must be hit with more control. Any deficiency will

produce an error wide because of the angle of reflection, into the net because of the force of gravity and the height of the net, and long because of the shorter distance and the need for a more precise impact and topspin to control the flight of the ball.

If your opponent hits the ball to the backhand corner the easiest shot in the game is to hit a straight ball cross-court. It is a natural tendency to pull across the body and hit the ball on the diagonal. It takes a more talented player to hit a straight ball straight. Unless this tougher shot is executed perfectly you are now forcing yourself to move a larger number of steps in a shorter amount of time to cover a return. This is first caused because your momentum holds you on the sideline or out of the court when you hit down the line. Secondly you must be aware that any return will keep you dangerously far behind the baseline and out of position if you are unable to advance to the net in the form of an approach shot. Percentage play dictates that you work to get the short ball and come into the net and close out the point not hit tough winners from the baseline through a more difficult window.

8. HIT WITH PURPOSE

Advanced players understand that more shots are lost than won. Understanding this enables them to avoid the high risk shots while hitting strong and consistent with a purpose. On a high level it is very difficult to have an open court to hit into. What seems open is only there for an instance. **The more important strategy is being able to hit the right shot at the right time and it does not matter if the opponent is out of position or not.** The shot itself will either produce an error or lead to a short ball and thus an opportunity to close out the point.

9. PLAY WITH A GAME PLAN

A match is a long arduous struggle that has a momentum and changes. Seldom does a match result in the complete destruction of an opponent if they are of equal ability. Generally play is determined by subtle strengths and weaknesses in mental toughness or physical fitness. Being evenly matched in ability at the beginning of a match does not always mean by the end of the match it will be the same. Some especially junior players will hit out until they are worn out physically. Other players will run their opponents into the ground until they are unable to lift their arms. This is the essence of strategy. Most great offensive players have exception serves, volleys overheads and approach shots. To meet such an adversary is formidable and you must work to get the points to last. The defensive player in this scenario is working to stay in the game and tire this offensive opponent. Keeping the ball in play and keeping a player like this away from the net will allow the defensive player to make a game of it. Trying for return winners and clean passing shots will only make the loss quicker. By getting each serve back into play you increase your chances of breaking him and keeping him working and using up his energy. Hitting hard returns may be exactly what you should not do. Find away to get the ball over the net and below it before he hits his approach or first volley. This will make him hit up and allow you the time you need to hit a offensive lob or passing shots. It is also imperative that you come to the net to keep this player honest and to keep

aggressive. An opponent that knows you will not come into the net has a built in advantage that will result in an unfair advantage. No player has unlimited energy and in a 3 to 4 hour match many things can happen, much more than in a 1 hour match.

With a defensive player it sometimes is amazing the length they will go to to stay in a point. They run down everything and everything comes back. It can be very frustrating to have opportunity after opportunity lost by a player that digs out a ball and sends it by you or over you. Going for winners, aces and hitting harder is what this player is hoping you will do. Generally a defensive player is well conditioned and willing to stay out and hit all day. They thrive on your pace and power and like a target to hit at. If you have the shots from the baseline to relax and hit deep high bouncing lobs or ground strokes it can totally unnerve many of these defensive wizards as they lose the concept of what they are meant to do. By changing from a hard hitter to a moon baller you can get more short balls and find that the topspin that was so effective as passing shots are now sitters awaiting your approach and put away volleys.

What works at the beginning of the match may not be the ultimate source of winning or losing. During the course of the match players find certain shots that were unavailable at the beginning of the match or lose some that were. The advanced player watches what his opponent does and keeps a record as to what he is avoiding. If the player is running around the backhand and hitting winners that gives him two options keep hitting to the backhand corner or start to work the forehand more even though this player may have a much better forehand.

The serve may fade and most of the time a big server will lose the punch he had in the first and second sets. This allows you to be more aggressive on return. On your serve you may find that just spinning the ball deep is more effective than a flat serve. Your physical conditioning may require you to go for winners because you must or you will lose because of cramps or exhaustion.

A player may stop hitting topspin backhands and return slices cross-court. This will allow a player to come to the net more. A slice must go slower through the air because of the spin of the shot. Under pressure it will generally sit up a bit and is an easy volley at a close net position. So the defensive player can attack if he is aware of this change in play by his opponent. A player may also lose his feel for the forehand sitting back on the back foot hitting long or to the net. The pressures of trying to close out points quickly can produce mental errors and as the match wears on deficiencies will become much clearer and more evident.

10. BASICS OF SOUND STRATEGY

- A. Every shot is very important because it could be your last.
- B. Anticipate opportunities and hit the first short ball.
- C. Instinctively want to move forward not back.
- D. Mentally know that you are here for the whole match.
- E. Forget the winners that your opponent hit just play.
- F. Buy time at every opportunity so you can be prepared to hit.
- G. Get all your serves in deep. The first puts pressure on the returner the second on the Server
- H. Keep the ball down the middle and deep consistently
- I. Swing through your shots don't shorten your swing if you hit long at first.
- J. Keep moving and aware of your balance.
- K. Strive to hit technically correct shots during the match.
- L. Visualize your shots as you hit them, mental pictures produce physical results.

The percentages below are realistic levels of stroke production of an Advanced player.

CONSISTENCY, DEPTH, PLACEMENT AND POWER.

	Serve	2nd S	Forh	Back	For-A	Bac-A	ForV	B-Volley
Consistency	60%	90%	90%	85%	90%	80%	90%	85%
Depth	83%	83%	75%	70%	80%	70%	75%	70%
Placement	67%	67%	75%	65%	70%	60%	75%	65%
Power	40%	50%	65%	50%	60%	50%	65%	50%