

THE ON-COURT GUIDE TO TENNIS

# STRATEGY

HOW TO BEAT EVERY STYLE OF PLAYER

By Jorge Capestany - USPTA Master Professional

**"Becoming a 'complete' player should be the goal of all tennis players. I hope this booklet will assist players in becoming strategically mature and increase their enjoyment of this great sport"**

**Jorge Capestany, USPTA Master Professional**

**I would also like to thank my awesome wife, Marti, who is a fellow teaching pro, for her help and patience in the creating of this book.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to "The On-court Guide to Tennis Strategy". This book is designed to take onto the court with you and serve as a quick reference guide to strategies and tactics for every kind of player and style you may face. I have intentionally made this a smaller sized booklet so it would easily be kept in your racket cover or racket bag. At the very beginning, I would like to state the for the rest of this book, the word "He" will be used to refer to both male and female players. If you are a singles player, you will really enjoy the tips and tactics on how to sabotage your opponent's game plan during a match. This booklet can serve as your on-court "coach" for tennis matches when you may not be able to receive coaching.

If you are a doubles player, you will enjoy the strategies & tactics outlined to use against a variety of different doubles opponents and styles of play. I suggest that both you and your partner review this manual and carry it in your racket cover at all times so it will always be available to you during a match.

The idea for this book came to me after I had some success in giving my students 3 x 5 index cards with tactics to try during their next match. They referred to the cards on the change-overs and it was like having me coach them during the match. I tried this because it seemed so many of my players were unable to play "smart" tennis during the match but always seemed able to tell me after the match what they should have done. This is a common problem for many players who play competitive tennis.

I have included a section on "Mental Toughness" which deals with how to handle gamesmanship, such as players who cheat and players who always want to talk to you during the match. I also cover how to deal with players that are rude to you and how to survive a slump when you have one. This section can also be referred to during a match.

The last section is entitled "Quick Tips for Success". In this section, I have shared several tips that I have learned over the years that will increase your understanding about what it takes to win in competitive tennis.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jorge Capestany has been teaching tennis full time for over 15 years and has had the privilege of working with great players that have won national junior championships and even played professionally. He has also been blessed to have worked with several innovative and leading edge professionals that have taught him a lot over the years. Jorge has had especially good luck in developing top ranked junior players and has also worked with numerous club level players that have competed in travel teams at the clubs where he has worked.

Jorge has been active at all levels of the tennis industry and was named as the United States Professional Tennis Association's Michigan Pro of the Year on 5 separate occasions. In 1992 and 1998, Jorge was also named the USPTA's Midwest Professional of the Year, and was also honored as the USPTA's youngest Master Professional at that time. Jorge has served on several boards and has been the president of both the USPTA Midwest Division and the USTA Western Michigan district. Jorge has spoken at many sectional and national conventions and workshops and has written many articles for industry publications and newsletters.

He has also watched countless hours of match play while his students competed in matches. It is mostly from these coaching experiences, that his ideas about "The On-Court Guide To Tennis Strategy" have evolved.

The tactics outlined in this booklet are universal and most coaches or teaching pros would offer the same or similar advice. All the tactics and ideas in this book have been developed over Jorge's 20,000 hours of teaching tennis and from the many great tennis professionals and coaches that he has had the privilege with whom to have worked.

**To visit Jorge's personal web site go to [www.usptapro.org](http://www.usptapro.org)  
Then type in the pass word "JC0207".**

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK & CUSTOMIZE IT FOR YOU

This book should be used as an on-court tactics guide that you can refer to during side changes. To use it, you simply need to look up the style of player that you are playing against in the table of contents. Then turn to that page and read the brief description that is given about that style of player. If you agree that this sounds like your opponent, then read on. You will find that each page has 6-7 different tactics to try against that particular style of player. Below those tactics I have listed 2-3 things to always avoid against that style of player. It takes only seconds to flip to the correct page and have the correct strategy and tactics to implement for any style of player.

The doubles section is set up in the same manner and can be used just like the singles section. Be certain that you and your partner are in agreement as to which tactics you will use.

It is very important that each of you take the time to "Customize" your booklet. To do this you should review each of the styles of player and make an honest assessment about

which of the suggested tactics are really within your arsenal to execute. A good test to determine if you have a skill at your disposal is to ask yourself if you would be likely to try that skill if the score was **4 all in the third set**. Once you have identified which tactics are "usable" to you in a match, you should circle that number on the page. This will make them easy to find during change-overs of a match. This is a very important step. If you do not correctly identify which tactics are available to you, then you may make some critical mistakes when playing a match. One of the most common reasons people lose a match is because they try to use tactics and shots that are not within their capabilities.

After you have customized your book, you should review the tactics that are **not** available to you and use that information to decide what tactics you should be adding to your game in the future. If you have a coach or a pro, you should get their help in determining what to pursue and what to ignore. If you have less than three "usable" tactics for any one style of player, you are at risk for losing to that player. This booklet should serve as a means for you to discover what to spend your time working on during practice sessions. If you properly customize this book, you will have a clear road map for what to work on in your game.

## A NOTE TO COACHES & TEACHING PROFESSIONALS

If you are a teaching pro or coach, I think you will find that this booklet can serve as an endless source of lesson plans for you and your students. I have spent years working with students helping them to master all of the tactics and shots that are mentioned in this booklet. The fact is, that this book has allowed me to stay fresh and always have a purpose and a specific skill to work on during each of my lessons.

I recommend that you work with your students on the tactics needed to beat all of the playing styles listed. I have found it useful to spend 3 - 4 weeks working on the tactics for one style of player and then move on. I'm sure you will find creating specific drills very easy because this booklet already identifies the tactics to be worked on.

I would also recommend that you take the time to assist each of your students when they customize their own books. My experiences show that many times our players believe they can do a certain skill, but we as coaches know they would not likely to try those tactics in a competitive tennis match. It will be very helpful for you to be a part of the customizing of your student's books because you will both be able to see what areas and what styles of players they will have the most difficulty with. If a player can only implement one of the suggested tactics mentioned for a certain style of player, you can be sure that this is the style of player they will have the most difficulty with. Our jobs as coaches is to arm each of our players with as many tactics as possible so they will be able to compete well against a variety of styles of play.

Lastly, be certain that each of your students is working towards the skills that will make them great players "in the long run". One question I always ask myself when trying to determine whether something is right for my students is "will this make them better in the long run". This is a particularly important concept to teach all junior players, or they can make several wrong decisions about their own games and diminish their enjoyment of this great game.

## **HOW TO BEAT SINGLES PLAYERS**



## THE ALL COURTER

In my opinion, this player is the most difficult style of player to play against. He can play from anywhere on the court and consequently provides us with the biggest challenge in terms of tactics to implement. Keep in mind that even though he can do it all, he almost assuredly will execute some things better than others.

### **Six tactics to try:**

- 1) Even if they seem comfortable with all their shots, look closely to discover their weaknesses and then play your shots to that side.
- 2) Concentrate on using your own strengths against this type of player.
- 3) Change your style of play several times during the match as you adjust and discover their weaknesses.
- 4) Keep the ball deep. These players have the net skills to finish the point.
- 5) Vary the pace and spin of your groundstrokes. These players play best when they have a chance to groove their shots off of a hard groundstroke.
- 6) Challenge and attack this opponent at every opportunity.

### **Three things to always avoid:**

- 1) Do not allow them to use their strengths during the match, even if it plays well against your strength.
- 2) Do not be lured into trying shots that you don't own. Be patient until you solve this tricky puzzle.
- 3) Don't get frustrated. This is a talented player and you will need all of your mental firepower to beat him.

## THE WIMPY SERVER

This player has a serve that is very weak and difficult to return because they supply you with no power to use. After several missed easy returns, players can get nervous and start to become unraveled against the Wimpy Server. The Wimpy Server can not hurt you, he is banking on you hurting yourself. Minimizing errors is the key to beating a Wimpy Server.

### **Six tactics to try:**

- 1) Use more topspin on your return, you will need the added safety because you will be standing further inside the court and have less court space to use.
- 2) Return mostly cross court. You will gain 4.5 extra feet of court space as opposed to hitting down-the-line. This is important because they are relying on you to over-hit and return the ball long.
- 3) Treat the return as an approach shot by minimizing your swing and approaching the net after the return. This works especially well against players that do not pass or lob well.
- 4) Use the "matching" method. Whatever speed the serve comes to you, send it back at the same speed. This is particularly helpful if you are over-hitting and giving away freebies.
- 5) Align yourself to favor your stronger side. This is possible with the Wimpy Server because he allows us the time to move around our weakness. Take advantage of that.
- 6) Try a drop shot off of your return. The ball is already short and soft, two things needed before you attempt a drop shot. This will also decrease your chances of over-hitting and making errors.

### **Three things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't get lured into trying for winners. It is the easiest way to make errors and is what most Wimpy Servers want.
- 2) Don't underestimate the counter-punching ability of a Wimpy Server. They get a lot of practice at this because they are always being "wounded" off of their serves.
- 3) Don't get "flat-footed" on the return. These players can lull you to sleep because you know they can't hit a service winner.

## THE BIG SERVER

The Big Server's game is built around their serve which is usually their biggest weapon. They are accustomed to short points. They are usually good at putting away mid-court balls because they often get them after their big serves. They also tend to be good at net as they have to come in a lot to deal with the weak returns that people make against them.

### **Seven tactics to try:**

- 1) Stand back a step or two so you can have time to swing at the ball.
- 2) Use a shorter backswing and **not a faster swing**, to handle the lack of time.
- 3) Increase your footwork rituals, don't freeze because of the fast pace of the serve.
- 4) Constantly change where you stand to return. You may lure him into serving into your strength and give him something to think about.
- 5) Try chipping or slicing the return. This will take the power off the return and help you to control it.
- 6) Move way in on the return. Many big servers look at this as a lack of respect and you may get them to start to over-hit their serve and begin to miss it.
- 7) Go after their second serve and pressure it.

### **Three things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't get lured into a slugfest. Chances are, you will hit some great returns, but you will probably miss more in the long run.
- 2) Don't "fall back" as you are making the return. Stand in a position that will allow you to move foreword into the return.
- 3) Don't show a negative body posture when they hit an ace or service winner.

## THE DROP SHOT - LOBBER

This player will try to wear you out by running you up and back all day. They generally do not have a lot of offense in their game, but are experts in ball control and working the point. Their gameplan is to rely on their opponents getting tired and frustrated. This player attempts to exploit players that have a weak net game and mid-court skills.

### **Seven tactics to try:**

- 1) Stand on or inside the baseline and look for the drop shot before it happens.
- 2) If you get dropped, play the ball back with another drop shot so they can not lob you as easily on the next shot.
- 3) Study their racket face when they take it back. Quite often they will let you know when they are going to hit a drop shot by opening their racket face.
- 4) Serve and volley more than usual so you will already be at the net.
- 5) Use more moonballs (high loopy groundstrokes that push the opponent back towards the fence). These shots give them no power and are very difficult to hit a drop shot off of.
- 6) Hit your groundstrokes harder so they will have a more difficult time using a drop shot.
- 7) Increase your net clearance (and consequently your depth). This will also make it more difficult for them to hit a drop shot.

### **Three Things to avoid:**

- 1) Do not close in too tight after you get drawn to the net. The lob is almost a certainty.
- 2) Do not try a spectacular shot when you get to the drop shot.
- 3) Don't show your frustration. These players thrive on seeing their opponents run and getting angry with themselves.

## THE RUNNER - PUSHER

The Runner - Pusher has great speed and endurance. They usually do not have a lot of firepower and beat most of their opponents by hustling down shots and making them miss. This player also relies on us to hurt ourselves and quite often lures us into overplaying shots because we are frustrated at our inability to put them away. They are generally very fit and are accustomed to playing long matches.

### **Six tactics to try:**

- 1) Work the point. Do not try for a winner until you have made at least 4 shots over the net.
- 2) Look for opportunities to get to the net and finish the point. This will keep you from getting drawn into a marathon match.
- 3) Try to hit behind this player more than usual. These players often commit early to the open court and can be wrong-footed more than other players.
- 4) Use drop shots and short balls to bring them in. These players do not like to play at the net. If they retreat when they get pulled in, then consider using a drop shot and following it to the net so you can catch them as they retreat towards the baseline.
- 5) Hit to the middle of the court so you do not let them use their speed to their advantage. This will also reduce the angles coming back against you.
- 6) Use more angles and touch on your volleys as they are very good at running down shots that are deep into the corners and then lobbing them back.

### **Three Things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't get lured into trying to hit winners. This is a common mistake against these players because we get impatient. It's what they are banking on us to do.
- 2) Don't get discouraged if they run down what would normally be a winner. I've seen a lot of players throw up their hands in disgust and say, "I just can't put this guy away".
- 3) Don't rush to finish the point by trying shots that you have not mastered. No matter how bad you may want to finish the point, make sure you are making sound decisions about what to implement.

## THE COUNTER-PUNCHER

The Counter-Puncher is similar to the Runner - Pusher, but he would rather have us at the net and prefers more pace to work with. They generally like to play from the baseline and can be consistent and patient, but when you "wound" them or come to the net, they choose to go for an aggressive shot rather than just lob it back. Many of the tactics that work against a Runner - Pusher will also work against a Counter-Puncher.

### **Seven tactics to try:**

- 1) Close in tight when you get to the net. Make them prove they can beat you with a lob.
- 2) Be very selective on what you follow into the net. Most Counter-Punchers like to have a target and hit their best shots when you press them into a corner.
- 3) Do not supply them with a lot of pace from the ground. They prefer to have the ball coming with some speed so they can use it against you.
- 4) Use drop shots and short balls to bring them to the net. Most Counter-Punchers would prefer to have you at the net rather than being at the net themselves.
- 5) Approach down the middle so you minimize the angles they can hit on their passing shots.
- 6) Use more angles and touch on your volleys as they are very good at running down shots into the corners and passing you.
- 7) Mix up the pace of your serve. These players love hard serves into their strike zone.

### **Three Things to always avoid:**

- 1) Do not "over-protect" the lob, you are better off getting in close to the net as these players would rather pass you than lob you.
- 2) Minimize how much you serve and volley. Serve & Volleyers are the Counter Punchers dream opponent because they are always supplying them with a lot of pace and a target at the net.
- 3) Do not try to bang your serve through a Counter-Puncher. They will use the power against you and they are very hard to "wound" with a serve.

## THE SERVE AND VOLLEYER

This player likes to hurt you with a serve and follow it to the net. They are accustomed to hitting a lot of winners and like to play quickly with short points. This player uses a "frontal attack" and relies on his weapons more than your weaknesses. The key to beating this type of player is having a good return strategy and understanding that they will hit their share of winners.

### **Seven tactics to try:**

- 1) Return cross-court and low to allow for the best possible angles coming back to you on the next shot. (If you return down the line, his volley will be angling away from you as you chase it)
- 2) Move in and take the return early with a shorter backswing. This is critical so they will get more half-volleys and volley from deeper in the court. (Agassi has mastered this technique)
- 3) Chip and charge the net on second serves so you can get to the net before they do and therefore take away their game plan.
- 4) Move around a lot on the return to get them to serve to your strength.
- 5) Increase the amount of topspin you use on the return of serve. This will make the ball dip and force them to volley from below the level of the net.
- 6) Lob some returns. Many serve and volleyers have solid volleys, but are not accustomed to playing an overhead as they move **forward** towards the net (they hit them best when they are backing up).
- 7) Chip some soft returns that land at their feet as they charge the net.

### **Three Things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't get lured into staying back and smashing hard returns. These shots tend to stay high above the net and are easy to volley, even if they are coming fast.
- 2) Don't use a lot of hard slices on the return as they tend to float and stay up in the strike-zone for an easy volley.
- 3) Don't miss returns just because they are coming to the net. Your first priority should be to make them play a volley, not to pass them outright.

## THE HUGE FOREHAND

This player has a huge forehand that his game is built around. The good news is that if you can neutralize this weapon, you can usually find a way to win the match. Advanced tactics are needed as playing wide balls to his forehand side will open up his weaker backhand. These players are common in today's "modern" tennis.

### Seven tactics to try:

- 1) Slice low to the corners and keep the ball out of his strike zone. Most Huge Forehanders love the ball waist high.
- 2) Open up his weaker backhand by hitting the ball wide to his forehand.
- 3) Keep the ball to the far corner when giving him backhands, these players make a living out of hitting winners from the middle or slightly backhand side of the court. They move very well towards their backhand side because they are always running around their backhands.
- 4) Mix up the pace of your shots. The worst thing to do is supply this player with a steady stream of similarly paced balls. They can groove too easily.
- 5) Serve and volley more often. This will minimize their time to run around their backhand.
- 6) Play drop shots to their backhand side. Having to run up **and** over will make it difficult for them to hit a forehand and the lowness of the ball will force them to play a more conservative shot.
- 7) Loop groundstrokes to their backhand side and "sneak" in behind them. If they choose to run around their backhand, you will have a wide open court in which to volley.

### Three things to always avoid:

- 1) Don't get discouraged if they hit a lot of winners, that comes with the territory and they will also hit a lot of errors.
- 2) Don't get lured into a forehand slugfest. Even if you think you are hitting great forehands, they will hit more of them in the long run. Remember, this is **their** favorite plan.
- 3) Don't underestimate how frustrated you can make them by getting a lot of their "winners" back.



## THE MOONBALLER

The Moonballer likes to use your pace and give you nothing back in return. They are experts at hitting high arcing shots that push you back off the baseline. They use a low risk game plan and are banking on you getting frustrated and using shots that you do not have in your arsenal. A typical Moonballer may have no weapons and moonballing may be the **only** thing they can do better than us. These players are responsible for more tennis players quitting the sport than any other style of player.

### **Seven tactics to try:**

- 1) Don't panic. Be willing to exchange a few moonballs from the baseline until you get a shot you can finish off.
- 2) After you moonball a few groundstrokes, sneak in and pick off a volley. This is easy to do because their shots take longer to develop because of the high arc.
- 3) Use a drop shot and follow it to the net. They will be caught trying to retreat to the baseline where they love to be. This also gets them off of the baseline where they can hit their favorite shots.
- 4) Serve and Volley more than usual. If you are not at the baseline, you can not be lured into a moonball rally. Be prepared to hit a lot of overheads and do not "close" too aggressively.
- 5) Use a "chip and charge" return of serve so you can stay away from the moonball rallies.
- 6) Hold your ground at the baseline and refuse to back up towards the fence (take the ball on the rise). Moonballers love to push us back into the fence where our shots become shorter and we have no chance of hurting them.
- 7) Play more underspin balls that land short. This will make it more difficult for them to hit a moonball in the first place.

### **Three things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't get lured into playing moonball tennis with these players. It is probably the only thing that they can do better than you and is their only chance to win.
- 2) Don't get impatient and start trying shots that you do not have. That is what they are hoping for.
- 3) Don't beat yourself up if you have a hard time beating these players. The added pressure you put on yourself (to win easily) will only hurt your chances of winning.

## THE AGGRESSIVE BASELINER

This player likes to stay back and bang the ball. They have average patience and like to hit a lot of winners. They usually have one side that is a real weapon and the other side is usually very reliable and steady. They will come in to the net, but usually only after they have wounded you with a big shot and have an easy ball to put away.

### Seven tactics to try:

- 1) Use more moonballs. This forces them to create their own power. These players play their best when you supply them with a lot of power.
- 2) Use slices from the baseline. This will keep the ball low and out of their "strike-zone".
- 3) Commit to increasing your hustle and footwork. If you become a "Runner", you can frustrate this player and cause them to over-hit.
- 4) Even though one side is usually not a big weakness, you should identify and play the weaker side as much as possible. These players love to groove their favorite shots.
- 5) Consider coming to the net more. These players usually hit their passing shots with a lot of pace and therefore will tend to keep the ball up high so you get a lot of easy volleys.
- 6) Mix up the pace from the baseline. These players play their best when the incoming pace of the ball is always the same.
- 7) Serve into their body more than usual. These players hit their best returns when they step **towards** the ball. Making them step away from the ball will decrease their power.

### Three things to avoid:

- 1) Don't get lured into a slugfest from the baseline with this player. Even though you will inevitably hit a lot of great shots, you would be playing **their** best game plan.
- 2) Don't get discouraged about the number of winners they hit. This is part of the territory when playing these players and should be expected.
- 3) Don't play the match at a fast pace. Use all the time you are allotted between points and on the change-overs. If you let them get on a roll, they are tough to beat.

## THE STEADY BASELINER

This player is common at all levels. They win by keeping the ball in play and luring their opponents into over-hitting shots and forcing them to become impatient. They have the most success with players that have average to weak finishing skills in their games. They would prefer the match be played at the baseline where they are the most comfortable.

### **Seven Tactics to Try:**

- 1) Be patient and work the point. Make 5 shots before you try to hit any winners.
- 2) Look for chances to come into the net and finish the point. These players don't "give" you much so you have to be prepared to go "take it".
- 3) Use a drop shot to get them off the baseline. That is where they love to be.
- 4) Serve and Volley more than usual. This will keep you from getting lured into a marathon baseline match.
- 5) Step up and attack all second serves.
- 6) Mix up the pace of your groundstrokes from the baseline. These players can easily get grooved if the pace is always the same.
- 7) Work this player up and back, not side to side. They are accustomed to moving side to side, and do it well.

### **Three things to avoid:**

- 1) Don't become impatient and over-hit. This is what they are banking on and how they win most of their matches.
- 2) Don't get lured into a baseline battle. As soon as it is apparent that they can beat you from the baseline, you must try an alternate strategy.
- 3) Don't get lured into using a game plan you do not own. Many people get frustrated and serve & volley against these players, even though they do it poorly.

## THE SLICER - HACKER

This player has limited weapons and wins mostly by frustrating other players. In this regard, they are similar to a moonballer. You will need to have good finishing skills to beat these players. They usually do not give anything away, so you have to be prepared to go and "take it".

### Seven tactics to try:

- 1) Get to the net more often so you can take their shots out of the air, **before** they hit the ground and take a funny bounce.
- 2) Stay low to the ground when you are at the baseline. Sliced balls do not come up as high and are easy to hit into the net if you don't bend your knees.
- 3) Slice the ball back if it is very low to the ground. Hitting topspin on a ball below your knees is a classic mistake people make against this type of player.
- 4) Be prepared and willing to play ugly. Many players insist on hitting their same hard shots against these players and eventually make too many errors to overcome.
- 5) Use moonballs from the baseline. A slice is harder to hit when it is up out of the strike-zone.
- 6) Use more dropshots from the baseline. These players would prefer to stay back and hack you to death. Bringing them to the net will decrease their chances of doing so.
- 7) Serve and Volley more than usual. Their sliced ball will "float" and is easier to volley than a topspin ball that is dipping at your feet.

### Three things to always avoid:

- 1) Do not rip topspin groundstrokes on a ball that is very low to the ground.
- 2) Beware of closing too tight at the net. These players usually have a great defensive lob and can disguise it well.
- 3) Don't supply this player with a lot of power. They are naturally adept at taking power off the ball and controlling it with underspin.

## THE LEFT HANDED PLAYER

These players are uncommon and therefore pose a threat because so many players never get to see them. The biggest problems they can cause are on their serves as their spins curve the opposite way. The rest of their game should not pose any significant difference or problem. The key to winning is to have a good return strategy.

### **Six tactics to try:**

- 1) Move to your left when returning serve so they won't be able to run you off the court.
- 2) Move in on the return so that you can hit it before it curves way off the court.
- 3) Use more slice returns when you are reaching for the ball. It is better than hitting hard if you are off-balance.
- 4) Stand just behind the service line to return a couple of serves. This can un-nerve many servers and should only be used when you are having trouble.
- 5) Make sure you hit most of your returns cross-court. If you don't, their next shot to the open side of the court will be traveling "away" from you.
- 6) Use more lobs off the return. It will buy you time to recover into the court.

### **Three things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't get caught flat-footed on the return. You must have great footwork to succeed.
- 2) Don't let them see you get discouraged. They thrive on it.
- 3) Don't hit hard returns. It will just decrease your chances to recover after they have pulled you wide off the court.

## HOW TO BEAT DOUBLES TEAMS

## TEAMS THAT USE SIGNALS AND POACH A LOT

These teams have at least one partner that is very active at the net and poaches or fakes a lot. This is a sound tactic to use so you need to be prepared to defend against it. Good defensive skills can also be helpful when playing these teams.

### **Six tactics to try:**

- 1) Lob the return over the net player more often. This will nullify a great poacher and force them to hang back a bit. Then, the cross-court return is easier to execute.
- 2) Hit the return at the net player. Most good poachers like to be on the move when they volley. This makes them play the volley on your terms and often causes an error.
- 3) Pick a visual target and go for it. If you are "thinking" about trying to keep the ball away from the net player, chances are you will miss a lot. Make up your mind to hit the return at a certain target and go for it regardless of what the net player does.
- 4) Have the returner's partner drop back to the baseline. This will take the pressure off the returner to not "set up" his partner and will also make it tougher for the poacher to put away the volley since he will have no "close" player at which to hit.
- 5) Move in and take the return earlier. This will give the poacher less time to react to your shot because it will be originating from inside the baseline instead of behind the baseline.
- 6) Go into the "Defensive Mode" where you and your partner stay back and lob them to death. This works very well against these teams.

### **Three things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't stop trying to control the net as a team. A classic error is to become positionally passive and allow the opposing team to take command of the net.
- 2) Don't try to trick the poacher. Effective poachers cause their opponents to change their minds in the middle of a stroke which causes a lot of errors.
- 3) Don't continue returning serve from the same side if you are having a bad return day.

## TEAMS THAT RUSH & CRUSH

These types of teams are common at every level. They employ the best strategy for doubles, which is to take the net. They not only come in behind their serves, but also take the net after they return. The key to beating these teams is hitting smarter, not harder.

### Seven tactics to try:

- 1) Use more topspin when they are at the net. Hitting flatter and harder will only guarantee that the ball will stay up and be easy to volley.
- 2) Isolate the weaker player and make him play most of the volleys and overheads.
- 3) Get to the net first. These teams are best when they get to the net first and keep you pinned back. Follow all serves and most returns to the net.
- 4) Obey the "Butts & Elbows" rule, which says anytime you successfully lob this team (you will see their butts and elbows as they chase down your lob), both you and your partner should come to the service line and expect a lob in return.
- 5) Have the returner take the ball earlier so that he can get to the net and join his partner. This is a variation of tactic #3 and also has the added benefit of negating a good poacher.
- 6) Go into the "Defense Mode". This means that you and your partner agree to simply stay back and dig out so many balls that they will eventually miss. You will force them to try more difficult shots to put you away.
- 7) Serve into their bodies often. It is harder for them to follow a return to the net if they have to "step away" from the return.

### Three things to always avoid:

- 1) Never play with the one up and one back formation. This is the dream situation for these types of teams.
- 2) Don't get lured into trying hard passing shots. These teams usually are good volleyers and can not be beat by attempting to over-power them.
- 3) Don't miss a lot of first serves. These teams love to attack second serves.



## TEAMS THAT STAY BACK & LOB

These teams have little offense and can only win a match if the other team gives it away. The reality is that many teams do not have as good of an "offense" as these teams have a "defense". When this is the case, it can cause what is perceived to be some of the biggest upsets in doubles.

### Seven tactics to try:

- 1) Use angled overheads so you do not hit back to this team. These teams are experts at digging out shots and sending back an endless stream of lobs.
- 2) Be sure you play overheads as overheads and volleys as volleys. These teams often win points because players tend to hit overheads on everything they send back. If the ball is flying low, you should hit a volley, not an overhead.
- 3) Use a drop shot or short angle return to get them off the baseline.
- 4) Have the server's partner stand back a few feet. These teams often lob the return well.
- 5) Use more drop and touch volleys. Hitting a firm volley may feel better, but it invites a nasty lob as a response and is what these teams prefer.
- 6) Take some pace off your overheads and spin a few. Missed overheads are the #1 reason that teams lose to these players.
- 7) Identify the weaker lobber and play your shots to that player.

### Three things to always avoid:

- 1) Avoid hitting hard overheads right at the team at the baseline. They are experts at digging these shots out and you are taking all the risk compared to them.
- 2) Don't underestimate this team. I've seen players create pressure for themselves because they show these teams no respect (before the match). Then, they choke during the match because they are losing or the match is very close.
- 3) Avoid making mistakes and giving these teams a lot of free points. Remember, this team relies on your errors, and not their great shots, to win matches.

## TEAMS THAT PLAY ONE UP & ONE BACK

If you play smart, this team is the easiest team to beat. The fact that they play one up and one back creates a big hole between them and also allows for the opposing net player to pick off the "close" player when they are volleying. This team will quite often have the server stay back after they serve.

### **Six tactics to try:**

- 1) ) Get to the net at all costs against this team. If you can get in, you will have several positional and tactical advantages .
- 2) Hit your volleys and overheads between the players or at the player closest to the net. That player will have the least time to react to your shot.
- 3) If you are pinned back, make sure that you hit to the opponent that is also back. If you do not, you could be setting up your partner.
- 4) Increase your net player's area of coverage. If your partner has returned and stayed back, it is O.K. to be a ball hog when you are the net player. The net player will be in the best position to put away the ball and your increased net movement will cause their "back" player to miss more.
- 5) Try lobbing the return more often. Even though their server has stayed back and can cover your lob, you will be able to easily take the net and almost always will receive an overhead as your next shot.
- 6) Return cross-court, more so than normal. This is smart, because the server stays back and poses no threat. As soon as the return passes their net player, both you and your partner should close tight to the net. You'll have a free trip to the net with no opposition.

### **Three things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't get lulled into playing one up and one back with them. Take the many opportunities that they give you to charge the net.
- 2) Don't over-hit the return. The server stays back anyway and has plenty of time to react to a hard return. Hitting hard returns will only make you miss more.
- 3) Don't over-hit your volleys. When you have a sitter and a target at the net, it's easy to get too excited and use an "elephant gun to kill a squirrel".

## TEAMS THAT USE THE AUSTRALIAN FORMATION

These teams use the effective "Australian" formation, by putting their net player in the cross-court position from the returner instead of the down-the-line position. This formation works very well and should be used more by all teams. The main reason it works is because most returns are played cross-court. Therefore, we get very grooved and master that shot quickly. The Australian formation team takes away the returner's most common shot and forces them to try the lower percentage down-the-line return.

### **Seven tactics to try:**

- 1) Lob the return cross-court. This is a classic response to this formation and if executed properly, can really cause a lot of switching and confusion to your opponents.
- 2) Pick a target and stick to it. One reason that this formation works so well is because the returner often attempts to "outsmart" the net player and changes his mind in mid stroke.
- 3) Reposition where you stand to return serve. Their server has moved right next to the center mark and you should adjust your positioning as well.
- 4) Try to nail a few returns cross-court at the net player. This works because they expect that you will always try the down-the-line return. It also lets you hit the shot that you hit the most and are the best at --- the cross-court return.
- 5) If you are having trouble, have your partner drop back to the baseline. Being stubborn and not changing, are what these teams want you to do.
- 6) Tell your partner where you intend to hit the return. This is a good idea anyway, but is really a necessity when playing against this formation.
- 7) Look excited about facing this formation. When a team uses this, they are having trouble with the normal alignment.

### **Three things to always avoid:**

- 1) Don't panic. Relaxing and re-targeting are the keys to beating these teams.
- 2) Avoid trying to trick the returner and changing your return target in mid stroke. This is a classic error when playing these teams.
- 3) Don't forget to practice against this formation. If you let your first experience against this formation be a competitive match, you are asking for trouble.

## **JOB DESCRIPTIONS FOR DOUBLES PLAYERS**

### **The Server's Job Description:**

- Call out the score before every point.
- Identify and serve to the opponent's weakness.
- Tell your partner where you are going to serve.
- Get to the service line for your first volley.
- Put 70 % of your first serves in play.

### **The Server's Partner's Job Description:**

- Be moving your feet **before** the serve is struck.
- Move around a lot so the returner has to worry about you.
- If the return goes past you cross-court, "release back" two steps.
- Play your volleys at the other net player. He will have the least time to react.
- Help your partner choose a target for his serve.

### **The Returner's Job Description:**

- Put the return in play at all costs.
- Position yourself in the center of the server's possible angles.
- Attack weak serves with your body and not by simply swinging harder.
- Make sure your second shot is a volley.
- Use your return to set up your partner. Do not try to hit a winner.

### **The Returner's Partner's Job Description:**

- Help call serves that are close to the line.
- Move in and poach, when the server has to hit a low volley.
- Do not move in until the return has gone past the opposing net player.
- If your partner is struggling with his returns, start back at the baseline.
- If the return goes to the opposing net player, stay put and cover the middle.
- Keep the returner pumped up and confident.

## MENTAL TOUGHNESS SECTION

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### HOW TO HANDLE CHEATERS

Unfortunately, there **are** players that cheat in tennis. The most common type of cheating is on line calls. There are also players that play a lot of head games that can be equally as frustrating.

- Make sure you question a cheater on the first bad call. He will rarely change his call, but you will have at least notified him that you are on to him. When cheating happens, have rehearsed statements to use such as:

On the first offense, say "Are you sure? It looked good from here"

The second offense could be: "Are you sure about that call? That's two that looked in to me". Follow up with, "how far out was it?"

The third offense could be: "I thought that ball was in. I'll get an official so that we can both just concentrate on playing good tennis"

- When you are certain that you are being cheated, make sure you call for a line judge. If you fail to use the system that is already in place to handle cheaters, then I think you give up all rights to complain after the match about how badly you were cheated.

- Don't let cheaters get to you. These players quite often use cheating as a way to sabotage your good play and momentum. Arguing will only make you play worse.

- Create an environment of fair play by changing your own calls that were wrong.

The worst things you can do are:

- 1) Challenge them and start an argument.
- 2) Use retaliatory calls to get even.
- 3) Get mad and let it affect your play.
- 4) Give up and let them win because "they have to cheat to do it".
- 5) Take it personally.

## HOW TO SURVIVE A SLUMP:

All competitive athletes experience a slump from time to time. The key to surviving a slump is to have a plan to end it. The good news is that all slumps eventually do end.

- When you are in a slump, limit the amount of competition you experience . Playing more competitive matches during a slump just invites a poor performance and loss of confidence.
- Consider taking some time off. Most players do not want to do this because they assume they need to be working very hard to end the slump. Many times, a break from tennis, can re-energize a player and make him eager to play again.
- Learn to go on "Auto Pilot". Most players in a slump are "thinking" about their shots and technique. Over-thinking can cause "paralysis by analysis". Sometimes, the best advice is to turn your "mind off" and use the auto pilot mode to let your body do what it has always been able to do before.
- Play players that are weaker or have a style of play that you like. This will help you get your confidence back and can shorten a slump.

## HOW TO HANDLE PLAYERS THAT TALK ALL THE TIME:

Whether they do it intentionally or unintentionally, playing a player that always wants to talk to you during a match can be very frustrating and makes it difficult to concentrate. The following tips should be helpful:

- Don't engage in small talk even during the warm-ups. You may be sending the message that you like to talk as well.
- Put your gear at the opposite net post so you don't have to go near the player on every change-over. Change-overs are when most of the talking can start.
- If you are really distracted, simply ask the player not talk to you any more. It may make you feel uncomfortable to say something, but it is better than the alternative.
- Use good eye control. If you do not look at your opponent, it will be more difficult for them to start talking to you.
- Use one word answers when asked questions. If it is not necessary, do not answer at all.

## HOW TO HANDLE THE RUDE OPPONENT:

These players also exist in the tennis world. The following tips will help you deal with rude opponents:

- Ignore their rudeness. These players are usually looking to get under your skin and hoping to frustrate you into playing poorly.
- Stick to your gameplan. These players have the most success when you abandon your gameplan and are lured into smashing balls because of your anger.
- Ask for a line judge. If you ask for a judge simply because they are being rude, you probably will not be given one. To get a judge, you may need to imply that there are problems with line calls. These players tend to be less rude when there is a third party present.
- Make them aware of how you feel. Sometimes, just telling them **what** they are doing that is rude will help the situation a lot.

## HOW TO PLAY IN THE WIND, SUN & HEAT

Playing in various conditions is one of the many things that make tennis so challenging. The wind, sun and heat can be particularly troublesome if you do not have a plan to deal with the changing conditions. Keep in mind the following ideas for success:

**WIND:** - The wind is not an equalizer. It favors the player with the most tactics available to use. This is usually the stronger and mentally tougher player.

- You need to accept the fact that you will make more errors in the wind. Being willing to "play ugly" is a key tactic.
- You should increase your "footwork" for last second adjustments to the ball.
- Increase the pace of your groundstrokes so that the wind does not affect them as much as it might a slower hit ball.
- Use less lobs as these shots are in the air the longest and are most affected by the wind. Be especially careful when lobbing with the wind at your back.

**SUN:** - Put more first serves into play so that you only need to look up into the sun once.

- Stay back more when the sun is in your face. That way you will not be forced to hit overheads while looking into the sun.

- Adjust your service stance or positioning along the baseline to keep the toss out of the line of the sun.

- Lob more frequently than normal, so your opponent has to hit overheads looking into the sun. Use drop shots and lobs as a gameplan.

- Be mentally tough. Do not let your opponent know that the sun is bothering you.

- Make sure you stay out of the sun as much as possible before and after matches.

**HEAT:** - Make sure you are properly hydrated before the match begins. Then, drink at least 4-8 ounces on every changeover. Waiting until you feel thirsty, is too late.

- Use the full 25 seconds between points to recover and towel off.

- Play with aggressive tactics that will ensure shorter points. Realize that your opponent is also very hot and exhausted.

- Always use the 90-second change-over to sit down and recover. You should never walk directly to the other side and start play without a rest.

- If you feel you are the more fit player, be prepared to play long points.

- Wear a wet and cool bandanna around your neck to help you stay cool.



## QUICK TIPS FOR SUCCESS

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### BAD STRATEGY vs. BAD EXECUTION:

A crucial concept to understand is the difference between bad execution and bad strategy. Bad execution is forgivable because we all make physical mistakes. Bad strategy is less forgivable because what strategies we choose to use are 100% within our control. A classic example is a player that drives a ball deep into the corner and "wounds" his opponent who returns the ball with a moonball so he can buy time to recover into the court. The correct strategy would be to move in behind the offensive shot and as soon as you see that the opponent has lobbed to buy time, move in and pick off an "approach volley" thus, keep him wounded and unable to get back into the point. However, many people that do this correct strategy, miss the shot and immediately criticize themselves for doing the wrong thing. The reality is, their **strategy** was fine. It was their **execution**, that failed them. If you do not understand the difference between bad strategy and bad execution, you may sabotage your own game by not continuing to make the correct strategical decisions.

### IT ONLY TAKES ONE THING

Tennis is different than other sports where the team or player with the most assets usually wins. Tennis is unique because you only need to do **one** thing better than your opponent, to have a chance to win, even if your opponent does everything else better than you.

The most common example of this is the player that has all the shots and is playing a moonballer. Moonballers are experts at getting others to play their game. When this happens, it does not matter that you can do nine of ten things better than the moonballer. The only thing that matters is that they are doing the **only** thing that they are better at doing than you. Moonballers in particular, succeed this way because many of their opponents don't have the finishing skills needed to put them away.

This can also be good news if you are playing an opponent that has a deeper arsenal of weapons than you. If you can find just one thing that you do better, **then use it!** You too, can pull off an upset!

## PLAN YOUR TENNIS CALENDAR

Just like the touring professionals, all tennis players should plan their yearly tennis and tournament schedules in advance. A good calendar will include scheduled breaks from tennis, times for making technical changes and times for peaking at tournaments. This concept of intelligently planning your tennis calendar is called "periodization". If you fail to do this, you could minimize your improvement by making technical changes in your game too close to a tournament.

It is also important that you avoid the trap of taking no time off. Even Pete Sampras has 8-10 weeks totally away from tennis in every calendar year. Many club level players feel that taking time off will allow others to "pass them" in ability. This is not true. Failing to take time off, can lead to boredom and burnout.

## SUICIDE QUOTE

When training singles players, one of my favorite sayings is, "before you try to kill them, see if they will commit suicide first". An amazing number of players can be beaten by simply keeping the ball in play and minimizing errors. Whether you hit a winner or they make a mistake doesn't matter, you still only get **one** point.

A good idea is to strive for a performance where you have low errors **and low winners**. This will ensure that you are playing percentage tennis and makes it easier to avoid the trap of going for winners too often.

## TRAIN IN ALL AREAS

A proper tennis training program includes training in all four areas of tennis. These are: technique, movement, mental toughness & strategy. Many players make the mistake of spending their practice time working only in one or two areas, usually the technique area. The reality is, that **all** areas must be addressed in order to achieve maximum results. A missed return is not always caused by faulty technique. It could be a movement problem or perhaps a wrong strategical attempt. Look closely at your mistakes and try to trace the reason back to one of these areas. You will find that most mistakes in tennis are due to lack of good movement.

## HOW TO ANALYZE AN OPPONENT

To be successful, it will be necessary to isolate your opponent's weaknesses and to attack them. You need to know what those weaknesses are first. Many players insist on concentrating only on what they do best and ignore finding out what their opponents do poorly. The problem with this type of thinking is that inevitably, what you do best will not always allow you to win the match.

The warm-up is a great time to analyze your opponent. Try these tips to help:

- Hit a lot of balls down the middle of the court and pay attention to what stroke they chose to hit. Many players will naturally step to one side to allow themselves to hit their favorite shot.
  
- Take notice of their racket. Most baseliners prefer a thin racket that allows them to take a full swing at the ball. Many net players prefer the widebodies, which are better for net play.
  
- How much net practice do they take during warm-up? Many pure baseliners don't even bother to take volleys or overheads in the warm-ups!!
  
- When you are at the net, do they tend to slice the ball or hit it with topspin?
  
- How many serves do they take? Many times the big servers need to take a lot of serve practice before they are ready to start.
  
- You should also try to "scout" as many opponents as possible. This is easy to do at tournaments or when they are in a league. The pro players have a very extensive scouting report on everyone they play.
  
- Lastly, use the information you have. Many matches have been lost because players simply think about their strengths and ignore the opponent's weaknesses. **The best players are willing to use their second or third most favorite gameplan if it will help them win the match.**

## TOP TEN FASTEST WAYS TO LOSE A MATCH

- 1) Attempting to hit winners when you are behind the baseline.
- 2) Trying to put away overheads when you are behind the service line.
- 3) Swinging on high floating volleys. ("Sucker Balls")
- 4) Hitting your first serve with the same pace for the entire match.
- 5) Hitting groundstrokes into the net when you are at the baseline.
- 6) Changing a game plan that is working.
- 7) Having only one game plan that is usable in a match.
- 8) Trying drop shots from behind the baseline.
- 9) Insisting on playing how you like, instead of what will win.
- 10) Using a game plan or tactics that you really don't own yet.

### **Check out the above list if you are struggling in a match.**

The last thing that I want all the readers to do, is to identify at least 5 tactics that they would like to add to their games. I hope by now, that you can see the importance of having many "usable" tactics in your game. Eventually, you will need to do things that are uncomfortable to win certain matches. If you have a personal coach or work with a teaching pro, they should be a part of deciding what should be added to your game.

I hope that you have found this book useful and wish you the best of luck in your tennis endeavors.

**Action List - The 5 tactics that I want to add to my game this year:**

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_

5) \_\_\_\_\_

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