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The Parent's thoughts

Tactics and routines of behaviour

It may seem that tactics are top secret topic and it shouldn't be discussed in public. It is good to keep your tactics secret before the given match in order to take your opponent by surprise, without revealing your secrets too soon. However, there are some basic rules concerning the tactics of the play that are commonly known; it is good to acquaint with them and implement them, better sooner than later.

In the tactics I will include different types of shots, as well as some types of behaviour that can't be classified as shot types, some of them are partly connected with the mental sphere. I would like to start with them – routines of behaviour:

- 1.** Eyes are, just like hands or legs, very important parts of the tennis player's body – not many of us are aware of this fact; where and when to look is a crucial part of the play; to look only in front of you is a bad idea; it is better to work on good habits when it comes to looking
 - Before your serve – look at your opponent
 - During your serve – look at the ball and, out of the corner of your eye, try to observe your opponent's movement and anticipate his actions

- Before your opponent's serve – try to anticipate where he is going to pass the ball on the basis of the way he positions and tosses the ball
 - During a rally – look at your opponent's position and evaluate the possible ways of hitting the ball
 - Keep your eyes on the ball – the way it had been struck, its rotation – whether it is a topspin or backspin or if it is heavy
 - Look confidently straight ahead and don't stare at the ground like a loser during the breaks
 - Work on the ability of remembering the last ball bounce in case of an arguable out
- opponent's abilities. I mean here the following:
- Is the player right- or left-handed?
 - Does he have a good forehand
 - Does he have a good backhand or he rather uses forehand?
 - Does he often hit a backhand slice?
 - How does his first and, more importantly, second service look like?
 - Where does he position himself in order to receive the first and the second serve?
 - Does he return the second serve in an aggressive manner?
 - How does he usually play?
 - Where is his comfort zone?
 - Is he rather a defensive or offensive player?
 - Does he often play deep behind the baseline?
 - Does he often come to the net?

- 2.** "Reading" your opponent's way of playing that is to identify, as soon as possible, your

- 3.** In relation to the above-mentioned analysis it is very important to be aware of the general rule – no to play what my opponent likes to play; no to play what my opponent has been practicing whole life – even if it is our playing style; therefore you have to be versatile and not focus on few super-tactics; in 2014 I've watched matches between Poland and Spain during the women's equivalent of the Davis Cup – the Fed Cup – in Barcelona; Agnieszka Radwańska won two singles and Urszula lost; I was watching the match from the court stands and I was wondering why Tomasz Wiktorowski hadn't change Urszula's tactic?: playing aggressively, from the baseline with Spanish opponent is all grist to her mill; Agnieszka has defeated her because she plays in a differentiated way using the whole court and such a way of play is a slog for the Spanish player who plays offensively; it is why Agnieszka wins; she plays in a way that other players don't like and don't play in such a way very often.

- 4.** Remember about the statistics:
 - If you don't have often-played techniques that are at least 60%-70 % effective – it is better to not use them during the match – their efficiency will drop under 50 % so you will get more losses than gains

- There is no one solution when it comes to the way of playing in difficult moments, e.g. advantage opponent or tiebreak; sometimes acting cautiously will work and sometimes acting brave turns out to be a good solution – just choose what you consider as the best option at the moment and stick to it

- 5.** Brad Gilbert, a tennis player and Andre Agassi's coach described a very interesting tip. Namely, he said that the crucial point in a game was a thirty; such a result requires an exceptional level of concentration from both the winning and the losing player which means that winning my point by forty provides me with the feeling of mini-comfort and losing it provides you with mini-discomfort; so it is better to stay focused during this still safe point of thirty.

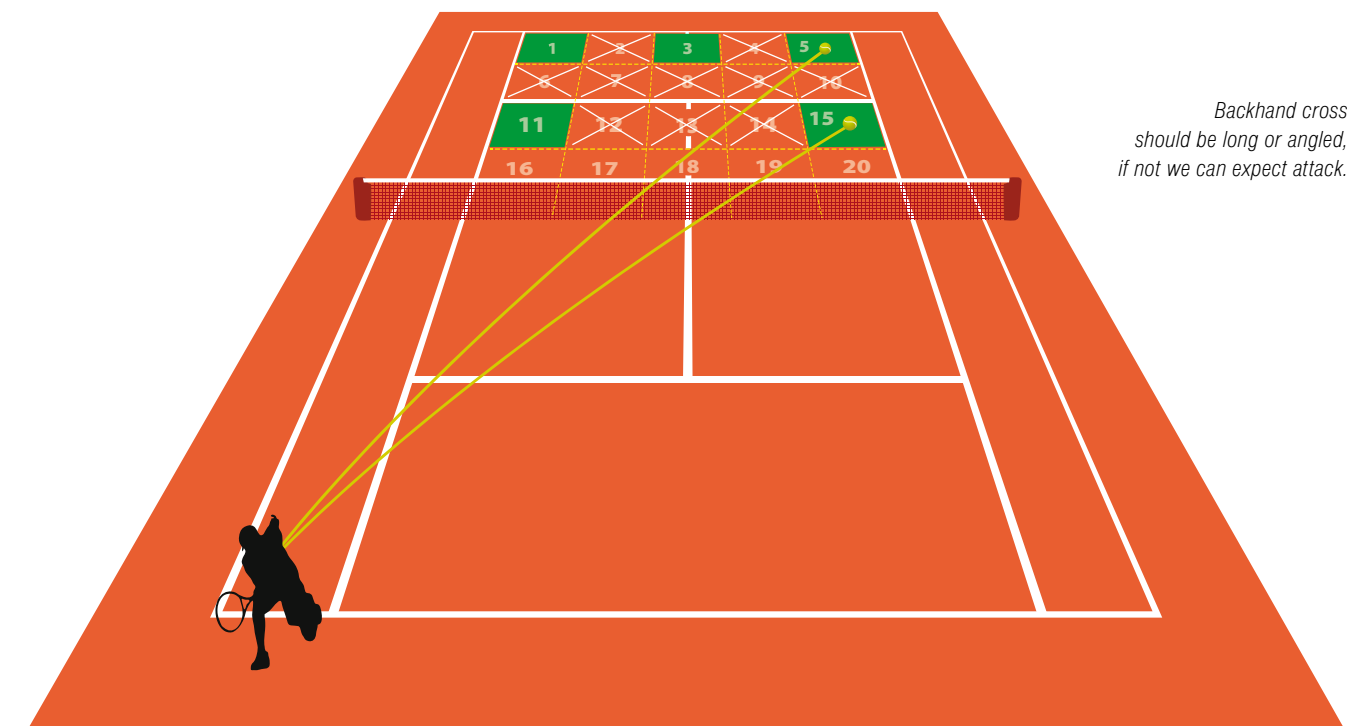
- 6.** It is good to observe yourself and the way you play
 - Do I play in my own way or do I "mirror"? – I've completely surrender to the way of my opponent play?
 - If your opponent is doing too good, you should correct the way you play very quickly
 - You should evaluate the proper serve

technique, e.g. proper way of tossing the ball in the air, its height and direction, the speed of the last stage of hitting the ball, the slice quality, etc.

- Don't hold your breath
- Take your time to start the play, to take the ball and to get off the bench during a break; every second of regeneration or slowing your heart rate down is advisable

- 7.** Changing of rhythms, directions and spins seems to be an obvious characteristic of a play but in order to use it, we have to practice it a lot. Otherwise we will get stuck in a play that is comfortable to us; the basis of such an analysis is to be aware of the fact that changing the play rhythms, that were trained insufficiently, could destroy your own play before it influences our opponent's mistakes; so there can be only one conclusion – we have to practice a lot

- 8.** The next main principle is to return a shot deeply at the baseline in order to prevent the opponent from an attack – it seems to be so obvious but more than 50 % of all balls land not too much behind the service line; the one reason for it is that it is safer but the other is that the different technique is not trained very well.



9. It looks similar when it comes to angle shots; if a ball in the backhand hasn't a proper angle, the opponent can bypass it and attack with a very dangerous reverse forehand

10. It is important to differ "defensive" and "offensive" shots; it seems very obvious and quite easy until we realise how many shots we didn't attack though it was needed and how many shots we hit as winners unnecessarily

11. Cold calculation of biological laws.

- Every player – "not a robot" – has mood swings, swings of optimism and pessimism, concentration, tiredness, oxygenation of the body, etc., which means:
- If I'm doing well than it could get worse in a moment so it is better to attack the other player right now
- And the other way round, if my opponent is doing better, I have to survive his attack, in a moment the situation will change
- Don't draw conclusion on the basis of her/his advantage, don't praise her/him in your mind
- Before the match one should remember that the opponent isn't better; at some level of professionalism there are no dominant abilities (or at least it is good to think so)

12. To stay clearheaded and to keep your so called "strike awareness"; it is better not to get use to the thought that I have a bad day today or I don't play well; a Polish boxer – Jerzy Kulej said: "There are no people resistant to blows, only poorly hit"; this is true, the reason for errors made e.g. in connection with the stress during a match is a worse technique; a much better idea is to make sure if the ball has been tossed up in the air high enough and at the right place in front of you, if the right timing is kept; if the speed of the last stage of the stroke and slice are correct etc. Because we can change those things still and we won't manage to change this, so to say, "bad day in our mind"

13. Take the expected direction of the attack; when you unintentionally make a short return and play the midcourt you can expect a ruthless attack; to helplessly stay at the middle of the baseline is a bad solution; it is better to choose one direction of the attack, which usually is made at a certain angle – this would give you 51 % chances to receive the ball, instead of 50 %.

And now something about shot tactics.

14. By your own crosscourt backhand that forces your opponent to go behind the lines of the court, in particular backhand slice, it is necessary to go towards the net; an aggressive return of such a shot by the opponent is very difficult and it gives us a chance to finish the rally by smashing the ball close to the net; not smashing the ball will restart the rally

General rule – no to play what my opponent likes to play ...

15. Coming close to the net by the opponent is an aggressive part of the game, and one should be prepared for it mentally, technically and tactically:

- Try to see rather "free passages" than attacking opponent
- Passing shots should not be rather directed at the opponent, although it is not a rule
- When there is no free passage try to smash straight into your opponent's body
- When there is a swing volley and the opponent is deep on the net, you can use topspin lob

16. Drop shot is a very difficult type of stroke because:

- it significantly changes the rhythm of the game
- it is very often made in an unintended manner so it is good to determine when it is worth to use
- as an aggressive player you can use it only after few defensive hits when the opponent is already behind the baseline and expects the next attack
- try not to show that you want to hit the ball in such a way by suggesting the intention of another attack

17. "Brazilian style" is our own name borrowed from football; in this technique you wait awhile before the hit, until your opponent will take the expected direction and then you change the shot direction to the opposite

18. Try to avoid playing the ball on the forehand of the opponent in rally and in serve as well; it is the dominant side so your own stroke in this direction shouldn't be weak or short

19. Feints – they are similar to "Brazilian style" but without the ball; you suggest the intention in order to make your opponent take a wrong direction, e.g. during a volley that is: to block down the line passage to make the opponent do a crosscourt return and then change the direction to block the crosscourt return at the last moment

20. Return is an aggressive attack on the opponent; I think that it is worth to attack almost every second serve and why? Because "it counts twice" even if it doesn't work out; by attacking on a regular basis you weaken the self-confidence of our opponent, especially when it comes to a less experienced player you force double error or weaker, uncertain serve

21. Attack from the crosscourt shot that forces the player to go behind the side line of the

court; it is a characteristic tactic used by Andy Murray; for a long time it was a defensive tactic but when the opponent came to the net it ended in a bad way; a change from the defence to even more crosscourt offence surprises the opponent; slowly it becomes a tactic which is easy to anticipate and therefore is less effective

22. Two first serves – no one plays it of course because the second serve is safer than the first one; but if our second serve is weak and the op-

ponent attacks it aggressively and effectively than it is good to break the general rule and surprise him/her by hitting the ball as "two first serves"; it should distract the opponent and make him not want to return the shot

23. Tactics used while playing with a left-handed player:

- Be aware of the serve and its advantage. It can be strongly aimed at backhand
- Return not to the crosscourt but rather to the middle in order to avoid a crosscourt
- Play your backhand down the line on his backhand
- Play reverse forehand inside in
- Play backhand slice

There are of course much more routines and tactics. You can notice them by every player, that is why they are routines. So it is important, if it possible, to observe them before a match in order to make them neutral.

