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The Parent's thoughts

The serve

The serve is one of the most important shot techniques and also one of the most difficult. It is the only technique on the performance of which the opponent has no, or small influence.

Introducing the ball into play and the way we do it often determines the winning point. In particular, men's serve gives aggression to the play, and in most cases allows the control of the rally.

You could say that it is the essence of tennis.

First, it must be reliable and regular.

Secondly - aggressive to give an advantage to the server, not the opponent.

Thirdly - fast or accurate, and preferably both, to be effective.

The statistical average of number of shots in the tournament rally is 4, including the serve, return and two shots.

It follows that it should then be devoted about 25% of the training time. However, in practice it is trained much shorter time. It's a little boring to toss the ball around an hour a day. It is much better and more dynamic to hit the ball from the baseline.

Very tall, that is taller than 1.90 cm players display a different approach to this technique. They know that this may be their dominant technique and, of course, they are right.

The serves look very different. These differences among different players perhaps are most apparent in the serve as compared to other shot techniques. This diversity stems from two different schools of training.

The first allows for a large amount of intuition and the most natural reflexes. This allows for relatively easy entering into a fairly reliable technique of serving. A threat here are some limitations, especially at the stage of professionalism, which may later not be liberated from.

The second is based on choosing the most appropriate serving technique for the physique and predisposition of the player, but rather based on the optimal bio-mechanics of the shot.

I am rather for the other way because I think that no one was born with the serve and trained long and accurately, based on the analysis of the optimal efficiency of individual components, after a long time, and it becomes a natural habit.

As already has been said, the need is to train a lot and well. In the service you can

see it perfectly. Thousands of repetitive shots are needed to learn a proper technique. Here, however, as is clearly visible that if training is not very precise and one serve is different from another we do not only acquire the habits, but break them regularly.

Another threat is the learning of bad habits for wrong decisions as to the technique of serving or method of training. By regular bad practice, bad habits are developed and perpetuated and you could even restrict the fast, accurate, efficient and regular serve.

Getting rid of bad habits is very difficult. Sometimes it is impossible according to principle, that bad habits are got rid of, at least as long as they are acquired.

Based on this example, I highlight here my opinion about the difference between coaching a professional, and master.

The first one will be satisfied with a good, or even very good technique even being aware of their shortcomings.

The second one - the master - will not allow any, detected errors or limitations - will train much longer and perhaps will much longer bear the consequences of training and brushing-up techniques, at the expense of athletic performance.

Before analyzing the serving technique, and the training methods here is another remark of a general nature.

There is a widespread belief that training techniques, and in particular the serve is the development of as though unconditioned reflexes, it is to teach the brain a certain coordination.

There's a lot of truth in it. It is hard to imagine the brain processing the movement dynamics every time as though from the start. The serve, even according to what I said above, is a technique trained for years by repetition. However, there is also a trap in this way of thinking.

The brain for so long can cope with the coordination of movements as long as it does not get a strong incentive to destroy it. This stimulus may be, for example, the match stress, or a strong wind, the sun in the eyes, the rain, loud talking next to the court etc. The hand gets "wooden" and the serve is spoilt.

In the final match of Masters at London's O2 Arena in 2015 I noticed this even in Federer in the last game, when he was serving the last match game won by Djokovic. Double fault !!

I clearly noticed the numbing stress even in the Master. In such situations Djokovic is doing a lot better.

It is clearly seen in him that when he needs an ace serve there is an ace. He gets more concentrated when necessary and takes control of the stress. I call it **"the consciousness of the shot"**.

Now, a bit of the elements of the technique of the serve that needs to be controlled and coordinated in the so-called right timing to make the serve work properly.

1. Placing the foot at the line; it's better to put it a little further from the baseline in order to avoid foot fault in the future; placing it more parallel to the line can, but does not have to mean more rotation in hitting.

2. Bouncing ball calmly before the proper action service.

3. A look at the opponent, choosing the method of serve.

4. Covering the opponent with the shoulder, and really getting longer possible position to rotate the torso and the shoulders.

5. Holding the racket the specific way for themselves.

6. The ball toss with parallel lowering of the position and elevation of the hand throwing the ball up.

7. In some techniques the hitting arm raises in parallel with the racket in the position of so-called "eagle" so it is like the wings raised.

8. The toss of the ball should be slight and the least burdened with stress, so possibly without the participation of the fingers. The mere hand moved as if the elevator that is, maintaining a horizontal position. The arm had better be straight, than bent in the elbow. John McEnroe was known for his toss lightness.

9. The toss of the ball depending on the chosen shot technique may be:

- ahead of themselves,
- above themselves,
- beside
- next with the circular motion, but in the final stage ahead
- and so on



10. The ball should rather not rotate because it's a sign that the fingers had a greater participation in the service; This is not a problem as long as the stress does not paralyze them, and worsen the precision of the toss; all elements of the serve are important, but at the stage of training it's better to take care of the toss and establish a toss tolerance at which the serve action is worth continuing, and where it is better to interrupt it, so as not to spoil the precision.

11. It is worth holding the raised arm suspended in the air as long as possible, to get later the fastest possible torque on the other, hitting arm - as if performing "a grinder".

12. The next few steps take place almost simultaneously like charging energy to the bent legs to get as large a dynamic of the jump up, like a spring.

13. We observe the ball in flight to hit it as high as possible, but it is good to watch the opponent with the angle of the eye; the last moment to react or to change the direction or to concentrate on the defense against the return; it is already a challenge for the best.

14. The tosses are different, but you should not toss it rather too high, because waiting for the rise up will destroy the elasticity of the legs.

15. The arm with the racket should be as high as possible to allow rapid clumping down. the so-called "high elbow" helps it that; some, however, with considerable success turn into a high spin clump with a slice down, and do not go up high, as once did Mansour Bahrami

16. The key part of the serve is the speed of the arm holding the racket and it really is in turn: the speed of the torso, shoulder, arm, forearm, wrist; in obtaining the highest possible torque of the head of the racket the rotation of the body is helpful.

17. At a higher stage of professionalism appears a greater role wrist, which extra twists the ball and helps to achieve the intended direction.

18. Timing is an important element of the serve; the preparatory phase and the shot phase can be performed in a cycle of two or three; there are also some who serve almost at once such as Oleksandr Dolgoplov; the preparatory phase should be as calm and relaxed as possible, the shot phase - fast, dynamic.

19. Setting the body and the ball toss are the two most important factors for recognition by the enemy of the type and direction of the serve; so it is worth at the beginning of training setting these elements as universal and more difficult to recognize.

20. The shot itself can be performed flat, spin, slice or kick.

21. A flat shot is very strong because the whole energy is consumed on the direction of the shot; then there is a big impact on the arm, so it is better to avoid this kind of impact in one's youth; it is also risky, because the ball does not get the rotation belying the direction.

22. Hitting the spin with the so-called pronation or progressive rotation is the shot hard for younger, but necessary because the best belays the closing of the ball in the court; "Combing" the ball from the top provides that with a relatively high speed the ball will not "run"; in practice, i.e. the shots are mixed spin-slice but in different proportions.

23. A slice shot is a relatively safe shot with the side rotation; it allows for angular ball and a quite safe flight.

24. A kick shot is a spin shot of the other serve, as much as possible from the top; the ball bounces high and prevents the opponent from attacking.

25. To the above techniques, we added one more nicely called it *"trained rag"*; This shot

very slight cut on throwing off the side lines of the service box; it's like second serve (even third) instead of first serve

26. None of these techniques is in itself dangerous; the most dangerous are:

- mixing techniques while serving
- changes of direction
- ball speed

27. We wrote that the receiver has no or little impact on the serve action; how big is the impact depends on the server, for example:

- if on the second serve the receiver enters more deeply into the court he gives the server a sign that he wants to attack
- If the receiver stands on the second serve on the balance side closer to T it means that he protects his backhand (right-handed) more
- If he regularly returns aggressively it takes the server his confidence a lot.

28. After execution of the shot action occurs a jump on the front foot and there should be return jump on two feet and back towards the baseline (unless the action is service-net); the lack of this habit can expose to the difficulty in receiving a deep return such a habit also increases the after serve concentration.

This would be all as regards the elements of the serve, which is worth looking at before setting themselves correctly and safely for the appropriate serve action; you can also omit it, and serve in the so-called intuitive way.

At the end - an anecdote concerning Novak Djokovic serve. At the end of 2012, along with my son I was at the Masters Finals at the O2 Arena.

Djokovic played against Del Potro. I read the program and interviews with trainers.

Marian Wajda, Djokovic coach, described their "struggle" with the service. Without going in detail at some time he used the term that has become the key to their, and later also to ours, serve philosophy *"smooth and simplify"*.

I watched Djokovic just serving and wondered what Wajda had in mind.

After a few days I began to change Filip's serve once again, maybe the 17th time.

Smooth - so that it would be nice to look at, that is possibly natural and light.

Simplify - to eliminate any unnecessary movements, gestures, and to spare him as much energy that in more than a 3-hour match can make a difference. In my son's serve technique I got involved in February 2011, when the coach could not deal with it. I remember I said that I need three months of daily practice to set it for him. Since that time, exactly five years have passed and we are still struggling, we are setting it, and adjusting.

Good luck with the serve.

