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The Parent's thoughts

Statistics

Statistics play greater role in tennis than you might think. Thanks to it we know: which strokes are risky, which should be polished, what are the strengths of the opponent and how much our match game differs from our training game. After reading statistics a skilled analyst will be able to determine the strengths and weaknesses of players in each set and even its dramaturgy. ITF, ATP, WTA or domestic ranking is also statistics.

Let's begin with the fact that the statistical average number of strokes in tennis tournaments equals to 4. It results from that we have a serve, return and two other shots.

In practice there are more than two shots because statistics understates serve aces and effective returns. Nevertheless, it is clearly seen how important a serve and return are. Despite such obvious knowledge we do not pay enough attention to them. Of course, tall players know the importance of their serve and focus more on their training, but for example they ignore the returns a bit. Such observations can be confirmed during tournaments. The first conclusion, though it is difficult to implement as it is seen in practice, is the increase such strokes' number during trainings.

Other interesting statistics refer to assessment of essentials moments during a match. Tennis player's concentration is one of the most

important skills. However, it consumes a lot of energy and oxygen. The loss of concentration in important moments may lead to match loss. On the other hand, one cannot be concentrated in full on and on because our organism cannot withstand it. Brad Gilbert has noticed that 30 point in game, that is 30:0, 30:15, 30:30, 0:30, 15:30 is worth more concentration.

I agree with it. That's still not the end of the game, but improvement of concentration at this moment will give us whether small mental advantage and it will lead us to the lead or it will protect us from predicament. A score 30:30 is especially interesting. If we win a point at 40:30, then we need just one point to win a game, whereas an opponent needs three points to do the same.

It is good to know which strokes are more risky and which are not. Of course, one can feel it intuitively, but it is much better to do tests. If a

given shot technique fails and is performed below 50% it is better to stop them during the match and polish during trainings. Not too well trained stroke can cause more damage than benefits. For example winners down the line belong to such risky shots.

Further we are going to carry out an analysis the usefulness of statistics with the use of an example of a serve. Already in the process of training a statistical control will help a lot with faster and confident master of this complex technique.

For example – a ball toss influences a good serve. It is better to determine a certain, narrow tolerance of a ball toss and perform a serve if we can make this ball toss in a correct way.

The attempt to extend tolerance will give us greater flexibility of serve, but it will also deteriorate its repeatability and therefore the consistency - which is essential in tennis.

Keeping an eye on a correct toss will allow faster gain and achieve correct habits. It will also allow to better control a toss technique because it demands an evaluation of toss and drive every time.

A match serve differs from the training one in a significant way. Additionally, we have to deal with stress, the desire to win, fear of return – in short, colloquially speaking – during the match serve "hand is getting wooden".

Statistics will help here. If during trainings we make a serve at a level of 90%, it means that is a very well trained and we can expect a match serve at the level around 60%. Of course, it is an individual feature, that is why the percentage will differ for different players. The percentage of effectiveness is reduced by the match pressure.

If we want to, and in general we must improve the percentage of the match serves – there is one very good way to do it – let us train serve aces. They give the most similar pressure to match conditions and enforce concentration.

There is no good way to avoid it and on the contrary, it always occurs in so many ways that it is better to accept it rather than fight.

The above principle refers not only to technique or serve dynamics, but also to directions as well. After learning the correct serve technique and speed, we should learn directions. The concentration on

aces and directions can lower quality of the technique, that is why we should return to it from time to time in a periodical way. By analysing the percentage of correct serves and increasing it during pressures and impediments imposed on ourselves we will improve the effectiveness of this essential technique during a match.

Statistics in the assessment of risky shots, for example: return or winner down the line does not lead to eliminate these shots during a tough match. It should rather serve to assess how much time we should dedicate it during training time.

A separate issue is the ability to assess an opponent after analysing his/her match statistics.

- The speed of the first and second serve will give us estimation of opponent's power (comparison of serves in consecutive sets), the serve reliability, the possible domination of this technique, etc.

*Stress
is a constant
companion of
tennis player.*

- The number of winning balls for example, received from the second serve of the opponent will tell us how the player is disposed to the returns.
- Small amount of our opponent's win second serve gives us a chance to have the advantage in the game with the aggressive return.
- If the first serve is not very fast and yet this is a big percentage of won points after his/her serve it means that the opponent feels good and is confident in the rally.
- The analysis of breakpoints will also give us mental assessment of the opponent. If he wins them much more than 50%, this means that he is mentally strong.

Of course such an analysis is best if applied to larger amount of matches. It can be build up more, for example by evaluation of slice backhand, reaction to the shortened ball, abilities of direction and rhythm changes and acceleration skills.

Statistics in combination with motorics give a tennis player and his/her coach the perfect view of training and also a possible overtraining. Performing tests and their recording gives the above view. By performing for example Cooper test or Spider test we can assess our progress and the condition of our body.

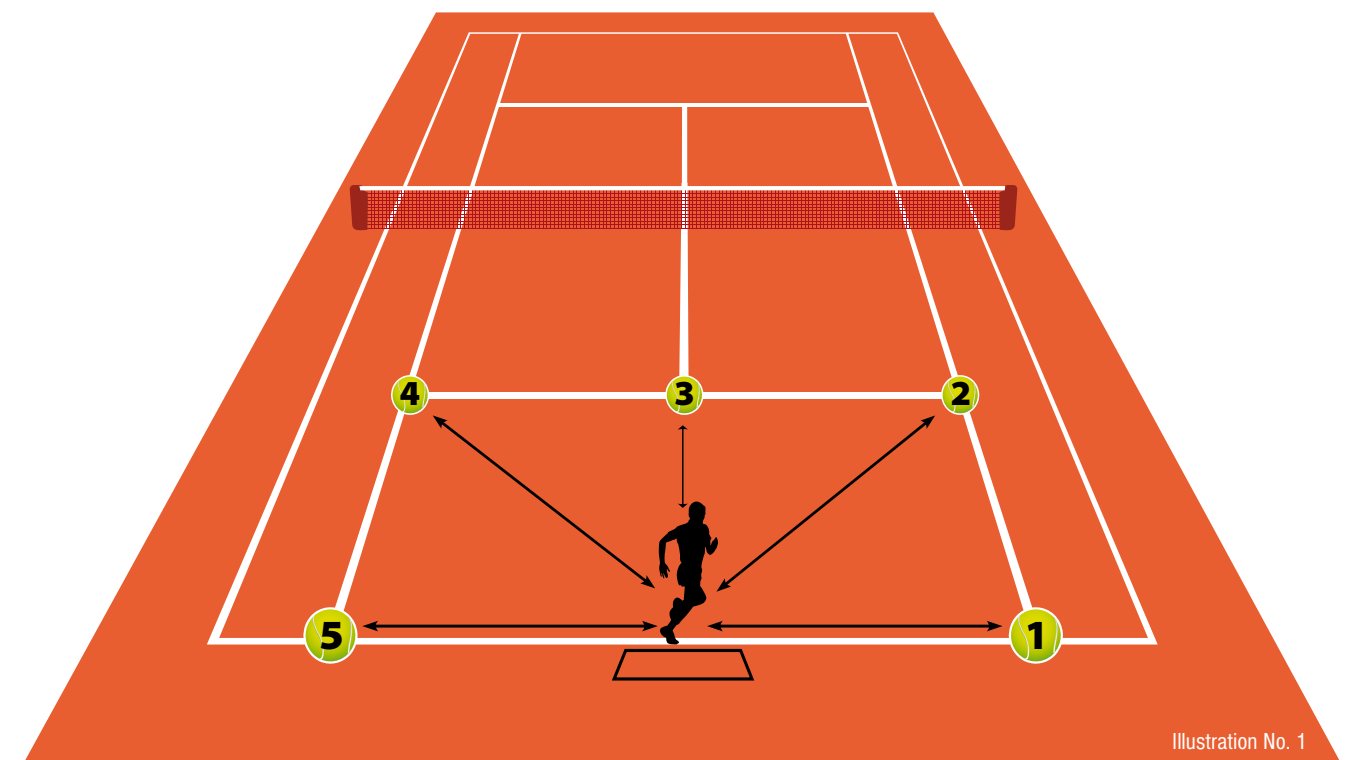


Illustration No. 1

Cooper test is an uninterrupted run for 12 minutes with a time control, preferably every 100m.

For the junior achievement the distance of 2800-3000 meters is a good proof of training. Spider test is running back and forth from inside of the baseline to connections points of the baseline with the sidelines, the sidelines with the serve line and the point T on the serve box with the transfer of five tennis balls from these points to the starting point (illustration No. 1).

For a well-trained tennis player Spider test result should be less than 15 seconds. Time will be different for different surfaces. Moreover, the test may be useful for the assessment of tennis shoes.

An analysis and calculation of various elements of training will give us a kind of "journey in time". If we can jump both feet through the net back and forth 100 times, then we could face Ilje Nastase. If we can perform 2,000 rope jumps at the same time counting them with no mistake, we can compare ourself to Jimmy Connors.

If someday we will be able to hit around 2.5 thousand balls then we can imagine Andre Agassi's training input (about a million balls per year).

Statistics can also help with the selection of match tactics. If the opponent's serve is fast, reliable and efficiently allows winning his/her serve sets, statistically we can risk more in these games, play more relaxed because the chance of winning a point is less, so maybe it is better to torture the opponent, to knock out of the rhythm with non-standard shots. Similarly, if our serve is reliable and confident, then we can afford harder returns with his/her serves and try to give ourselves more chance to break through the opponent.

Statistics of ITF tournaments and quantities of won matches of different players are also interesting. It is important what conclusions we draw out of them. When we realize that most of current champions had champion titles of their own countries, for example in the age group of 14U Andy Murray was even champion of Great Britain at the age of 12, one may think they had the talent but one can also think that simply through their achievements they facilitated their parents to make a decision about their career and professionalism.

They found the motivation and awoken dreams in themselves. Roger Federer played in 16 Grand Slam before he started winning them - and so it happens variously with this talent.

So it is better to concentrate on work than wait for the talent to flow in and do everything for us. One can accept the "blind" principle that the second, younger brother is always genetically better disposed to tennis, but one can also interpret this fact that he has always had greater motivation and opportunities of frequent sparring with an older, stronger brother.

Andy Murray has admitted that he not only wanted to win with his brother but he always wanted to destroy him. Rather than believe in genetic theories it is better to find a possibly stronger sparring partner. To be able to make use of the benefits of statistics you first need to establish in yourself the skill of observation and conducting various records.

The ability to use statistics makes a tennis player more analytical, more focused and conscious of his/her and opponent's game.

There are a number of gadgets that enable today's more accurate and sophisticated statistics such as: Polar devices, racket Babolat Play or Coach's Eye application.

