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The Parent's thoughts

Play's philosophy

Play's philosophy. Sounds pompous and grandiose. I've never been a fan of such over-thought expressions like philosophy, mission, etc. They are full of excessive pathos. After years of training however, I cannot find a better word to describe the collection of techniques and behaviours which characterise a style of play of a tennis player, a style which each player develops themselves.

During the training process, it's good to realise what your strengths are, what is the dominant style of your play, what style is effective, and most importantly, how you like to play.

This knowledge is not aimed for historians, analysts or biographers.

This knowledge will prove very helpful in training and in achieving control of the game.

Let's imagine the following situation. It's 1:1 in

sets and in the third, last set in tiebreak we have an unfavourable score of 5:6, the opponent has the lead. Let us imagine we are the player. It's our service.

A question emerges. How should I play? One lost point and it's game over. Once I was in a similar situation, I decided to take the risk and play aggressively and I won. And then this other time I did exactly the same and I lost. If I'll be calm and careful no one will accuse me of playing like an idiot. But then if I'll play too carefully, the aggressive opponent will attack faster and I'll blame myself for not doing everything I could, for chickening out.

There's more such questions which a tennis player could ask themselves before an important, deciding point. Even though there's no time for such questions, dilemmas fill one's head anyway. A moment of inattention, or fear, and one can become someone else, a completely different person.

And that's when a developed philosophy of play comes to the rescue.

If our philosophy of play includes aggression, total domination in the game, trained speedy reactions etc., then the calm and careful option,

although suitable for others, would in this case become a weakness and lack of confidence instead of carefulness - it would mean acting in opposition to oneself. Moreover, such behaviour would be wrong since its untrained - after all we train in accordance with our chosen philosophy of play. This is why we determine this philosophy.

Playing in accordance with chosen philosophy is not the inadvisable predictability, it's repetitiveness - the fundamental element of tennis.

And now let us bring this philosophy down to earth. What does it actually mean?

I shall describe our case. We chose the following rules for game and training:

- Aggressive game - it has to be more aggressive than that of an opponent, otherwise it will turn into a defensive game.
- Putting constant pressure on an opponent
- Always playing the most aggressive ball, e.g. attempting to play drive volley whenever possible instead of letting the ball fall
- Ability to attack from nearly any ball
- Calmness, confidence and speed instead of forceful aggression

- Training fast reactions in place of uncontrolled movements, especially when playing close to the net

What does it mean in particular techniques?

1. *In serve*

In the first serve, in important situations such as a return with possible break, we always try to serve an ace. Especially an aggressive one. Why? To avoid doubt and lack of confidence in the future. To have it trained. If we'll be trying out 20 different solutions, we won't master any of them. If we'll lack the confidence to serve aces in difficult situations, this anxiety will be with us too often and instead we'll develop a habit of being too scared to serve an ace.

2. *During the return of the first serve*

- instead of attacking we introduce the ball into the game; attacking the fast number one is often a crash, too often. Here, we have to avoid the temptation which tells us that twice in a row we hit the ball so hard that the opponent had zero chances, that he got scared and messed the following two hits - it could be true but statistics and common

sense advise us that successful tennis is repetitive tennis. Opponent's first serve is very fast and aggressive and we usually lose it. Conclusion: make a note in your philosophy of play - do not attack first serves!

3. *If we like to attack serve so much then fine - let's attack every second serve.*

It's usually weaker, with a lower speed and a higher but not dangerous rotation (only perfect rotation combined with speed is dangerous but that is very rare). The only thing that could be dangerous here is the kick, but if our philosophy says "attack every second serve" than after a while even the kick will become harmless. Attacking every second serve is, of course, impossible due to the impossible level of constant, increased concentration; the expression "attack every second serve" is to be understood as 'as often as possible'. Such philosophy will allow us to perfect our return, otherwise this stroke will always be a lottery.

4. *The ability to attack from nearly any ball and from any place on the court.*

It is of course a philosophy of play of an all

court player, and the very aggressive one too. This philosophy is led by a bitter analysis: why run 10 meters to receive a drop shot and barely hit it over the net and risk a shattering counter-attack with our loss of energy and breath being an additional satisfaction to our opponent? Of course the version suggested by our second self (the one that's scared) is to play an intelligent crosscourt passing game. Well okay, but while running after the ball we have to know what we have perfected, what we have always trained, what our statistical strengths are, and finally, what will be worse for the opponent.

A moment of doubt, hesitation, split second of delay and we won't do anything.

In this case it's easier for players of an aggressive nature - they will always attack because it's in their blood.

If they can, they will attack. There's plenty of highly rated players who despite their poor general technique are very aggressive and trained at being aggressive and therefore successful.

5. *to play and train balls with possibly highest technical purity*

- even though it's a banality, I shall try to explain the deeply rooted thought.





Let us reflect on our backhand again.

If the ball falls, we'll approach it from underneath with our legs so that our arms will just in time be positioned to hit, which will probably result in a beautiful spin, an electrifying kind which will throw our opponent off the court.

Second option is to beautifully enter into a slight drop shot with a rising position supported by walking step, hopping step or drive - you name it. Either way, the stroke will be a shattering attack, most favourably a down the line attack.

Okay then, but what if the ball falls straight onto us making it impossible to perfectly position ourselves and our legs won't balance the body in time? That's when we get neither this nor that. Nevertheless, such hit can still be successful although a little mixed - a bit of spin and a bit of

drive. It could even be the winning hit - although not a clean one.

What's the meaning of sticking to chosen philosophy in here? To aim for a clean hit at any cost. To faster approach with legs, go backwards if necessary, enter very hard into a rising ball and attack, not "half-attack", forcing yourself to retract your arms faster when preparing for the stroke. Do not give in to your laziness which tells you that you will hit it pretty good anyway. It's not about pretty good, it has to be done correctly - in the best way possible.

6. volley - has to be an attack; it is very, very difficult but keeping it safe can develop inadvisable, delayed reactions which change the at-

tacking technique into a defensive one even when it's much better to attack

7. If our philosophy includes putting constant pressure on our opponent then also our **passing shot cannot be defensive** not the first one, and especially not the second one - it has to be as fast as possible, low above the net and very aggressive, and it shouldn't be a slice because that could turn the attacking technique lazy, delayed and weak. Sometimes a passing shot made with a down the line slice is very good; exactly - sometimes. Majority of passing shots should be very aggressive and fast

You have to agree with the philosophy of play! It has to be analysed and confronted with the

tennis player themselves, with how they like to play, what's their nature, and what they like.

It can and should be revised in order not to flatten the game, so that it doesn't become a rigid corset. Chosen philosophy of play shall make the game easier, eliminate dilemmas, give the player confidence and enable them to train their techniques in a better way and ... bring joy.

Tennis, just like any other sport, is a spectacle. It's played not only to compete but also to please the eye and the audience. It's a good idea to include some spectacular aggressive play in this philosophy, for interesting and effective strokes.

And one more thing. It is not always possible to play in accordance with one's philosophy, in fact, one can even play in an entirely different way.

The eternal tennis battle is the one between two different types of tennis players: the offensive type, e.g. Andre Agassi, and the defensive one, e.g. Pete Sampras.

Sometimes one is better, another time the other one is in the lead.

In the case of an offensive player, departing from the rules of the play (the philosophy) which dictates the dynamics can often prove tactically successful.

A defender on the other hand, prides themselves in an effective defence and loves it when an aggressive player repeatedly attempts to strike a winner, failing time after time.

Correcting the style of play in order to regain control, following the rules, will be quickly de-

bunked by a defensive player and then their satisfaction from unsuccessful attack and negative emotions of the attacker will turn into dreading the game of 'who can last longer'.

Philosophy of play however, is a direction and a way of play which we would like for ourselves or for the player being trained.

You need to hold a firm decision and be consequent in order for the philosophy of play to be useful.

If after some time you discover that you prefer playing in a different way than you initially thought, then it's time to re-analyse and revise the philosophy.

Constantly playing in contradiction to chosen philosophy should set you thinking if maybe it's not better to become... a spectator.

During the WTA tournament in Katowice, the editor asked the Italian player Camila Giorgi how she is going to play in her next match. Her answer was short - I'll play my way.

Yes, that's what it's about.

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