

## Game Based Approach Applied to Training High Performance Players

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Using a game based approach for training high performance players seems pretty obvious. The coaches observe the players competing and propose mental, physical, tactical, technical objectives in order to win more points or to lose fewer points.

The game based approach is not so much challenging for the private coaching but for group training. If the leader of the program does not see all the players competing or if he regroups several players just for a camp, how does he know how they play? How can he individualise the coaching? How will he do about developing their game styles? How will he improve their understanding of the game especially if he does basket drills in the morning and unsupervised matches in the afternoon?

Hopefully this presentation will provide ideas on what to focus for a game based approach with group training.

First let start to identify who are these High Performance Tennis Players (from top juniors to professionals). They are competitive athletes using effective tactics and strokes in order to win matches against different opponents and different conditions. Therefore, the game based approach needs to have a global focus (mental, physical, tactical, technique) when designing the training content....

The order is meaningful i.e. that the training needs to:

- Provide a competitive environment to allow the proper competitive behaviour. This is done by either by challenging the player against an opponent (playing points) or by challenging him against standards of performance (drills)
- Develop/maintain the motoric skills of the players (perception, footwork, timing...) and the overall energy system required by the game style of the player.

Note: Therefore, even before we get into the refinement of tactics and technique, each training requires that the player has a focus/competitive look and an athletic effort, as a premise to train. Spain and Argentina have this “**vamos**” attitude installed in their training and this represents a good part of their success (25% of the top 100ATP). In fact, we are not only teaching tennis, we are coaching how to perform.

Furthermore, the training needs to address

- Tactical development in order to groove their game style; play smarter against different opponents with proper anticipation and patterns; use the environment

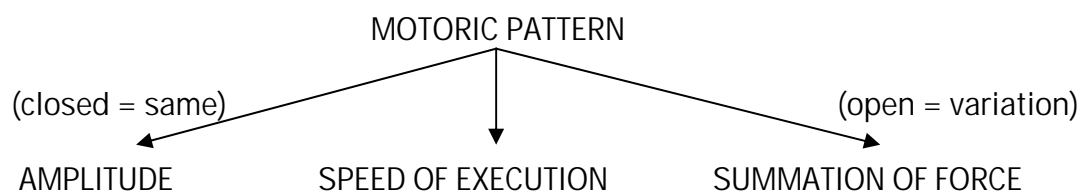
to their advantage; understand the momentum of the match and how to play the score. Even if there is a tactical philosophy of playing the ball and not to take into consideration the score and the opponent, many high performance players do consider these elements. Consequently, coaches who want to individualise their coaching should be able to work with these two philosophies i.e. to be tactical or not too tactical in their coaching. Nevertheless, regardless of the philosophy, everyone agrees on developing a game style in order to automate both the tactics and the corresponding technique.

- Technical refinement especially to improve the implementation of the frequent tactical patterns they will use in the matches.

During this hour presentation, we will focus on providing a game based approach when dealing with technique and tactics for group training.

## 1. TECHNICAL TRAINING:

### a. Definition of Technique in Motor Learning



### b. In my Opinion, the Basic Motoric Skill for Technique is the Rallying Stroke

- Rallying speed (tempo) is the line allowing one to identify if the ball received is easier (slower) to be attacked or more difficult (faster) to be defended.
- In matter of fact there are lots of variation with technical skills as something needs to be done differently when receiving different balls and when sending different shots.
- There are biomechanical principals (efficiency or conformity) and ballistic principles (effectiveness, ball control)
- AND we should be able to explain why the person misses and why what we propose will improve their game.

### c. Example of a Technical Correction:

- Ball received:
  - shoulder height
  - rallying speed
  - near the sideline (forehand side)
- Forehand volley:

- intention: hit angle
- problem: always too long
- iii. Coach observes the PAS of the racquet
  - P: Path of racquet: level back to front
  - A: Angle of racquet: open
  - S: Medium speed with a follow-through
- iv. Outcome:
  - Ball goes upward and wide (too far)
- v. Solution:
  - to hit shorter, to keep it in (3 options)
    - i. More spin
    - ii. Less speed
    - iii. Trajectory straight or down (not up)
- vi. Which one will we choose:
  - it depends of the game situation i.e. what is his intention
    - i. If he mentions that he wants to do a drop shot
    - ii. Or that he wants to hit harder
    - iii. This will influences our technical intervention
  - Then only can we explain why he misses
  - And we can explain the solution

**d. Even the Technical Warm-up can be Game Based Approach:**

- i. Lets take a rally
- ii. What is the norm for a rally? And this could provide a specific task (outcome) helping the focus and helping the refinement of their technique (process) as it will be associated with a specific effectiveness

**e. Framework Providing Technical Variations:**

- i. Of course every tactical pattern offers a chance to work on the technique
- ii. But to understand more the necessity of having a tactical framework when training the technique, lets imagine that you are requested to demonstrate a forehand. You would probably ask which forehand? and you would need to clarify some tactical considerations before executing the stroke:

Once you've specified the player's skill level and the environment, you'll need to use five variables to define the specific situation and task to be trained. The following table lists the possibilities.

The first three columns provide general information that is primarily *tactical* in nature; the last two columns provide the level of detail that is required for *technical*

training. This again illustrates the strong linkage between tactics and technique and why the game based approach is proposed from beginners to high performance players. What to do needs to precede how to do.

Phase of Play Select one of:	Zone Select one of:	Focus Select one of:	Ball received Specify:	Ball sent Specify:
Rally	Backcourt	No-risk	Direction	Direction
Attack	3/4-court	Precision	Height	Height
Defend	Mid-court	Power	Speed	Speed
Counterattack	Net	On the rise	Spin	Spin
			Distance	Distance

## 2. TACTICAL TRAINING:

It is often mentioned that it is difficult to develop tactics in group lessons and they need private lessons to develop their game style.... It is indeed easier but it is possible to enrich their understanding of the game in group training.

The process proposed will be the following:

- **Evaluate** by charting their tactics when competing
- **Plan, select** the tactical patterns they need to develop in relation with the charting
- **Train:** the tactical patterns in an *open way* (for decision-making) and *through point construction* where the core pattern (example: running around the backhand to hit a forehand) will be seen with the shot after (deciding to follow to the net or stay back) and the shot before (the set-up of the big forehand: moonball to backhand, down-line backhand, kick serve, ...)
- **Monitor:** the progress and the retention of the tactical/technical skill developed

### a. Evaluate Players While Competing

- i. As for any skill, we need to evaluate before teaching
- ii. Unknown: It is better if the players don't know what they are evaluated in order to not modify their behaviour. For example, if they know that we are charting if they attack the return of 2<sup>nd</sup> serve, then it may influence the way they play. It is better to see their normal behaviour.
- iii. Measure the performance
  - Regardless if you evaluate the outcome or the process, it is important to have facts, measures, related to the performance, which can be used to present our

objectives and track the progress.

- It is always important anyway to know where we are to know where we are going and how to get there

iv. Evaluate when:

- Peak Tournaments
  - i. So you can plan your next preparatory phase. In group training this could be possible if players are assigned to coaches responsible to supervise them in tournaments.
- Before and end of any macro-cycle
  - i. But if you run a camp, a new program in September and that you don't know the players yet.
  - ii. Evaluate them by having some kind of tournaments or at least by setting competitive play (like king of the court) to chart the objectives of your first macrocycle
  - iii. Repeat the same evaluation at the end of the macro-cycle and at times later on to verify progress and retention of tactical development.

I will use the return of 2<sup>nd</sup> serve to present one example of charting the outcome of a specific playing situation and a different chart to analyse the process implemented by the player.

In group training, one coach can chart the outcome on two courts as the other coach can chart the process on the same two courts, as it is difficult to address both charts at the same time.

### Return of 2<sup>nd</sup> Serve (Outcome Evaluation)

One possibility to chart the effectiveness of the return is to identify how the points are starting from the return. It can show the attitude and/or the level of play of your player in this specific situation. We rate only the quality of the return, regardless of the shot selection of the server.

In each column write down F or B to identify if it was a forehand or backhand return.

Important circle your code at every break point opportunity.

If you want, you can add elements like x (for crosscourt), // (for down-the-line)

On the last line just write down if the point was won or lost to see the % of pts won when returning 2<sup>nd</sup> serve in order to observe eventually if the change of tactics will lead to win more points.

	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	Tie-break
Winner							
Difficult							
Neutral							
Easy							
Error							
Server Doub.falt							
W/L pts							

*2<sup>nd</sup> serve return*

## Global Observation Checklist (Excluding the technical elements)

### Before The Return

RITUALS (Body language)	o reaction phase to previous point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- keep mental and emotional control</li> <li>- positive reaction to great shots</li> </ul>
	o relaxation phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observe the walk, the eyes, the breathing....</li> </ul>
	o preparation phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- getting ready physically (after a big effort) and mentally (in the present, focused)</li> </ul>
	o rituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strong presence; intimidating</li> <li>- does the player dictate the tempo between the points?</li> </ul>
POSITIONING	o according to game style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- net player: more forward movement</li> <li>- big forehand: more to the backhand</li> <li>- others....</li> </ul>
	o according to strength and weakness of server	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- taking in account the lefty serve</li> <li>- if server can't serve T or wide</li> <li>- favour one side to either force the best serve or make him try his second best.</li> </ul>
	o vary positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- to make the server think</li> <li>- to avoid being an easy jam target                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. move at a time to be seen, or during the toss</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
MOVEMENT	o modify positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- during the toss when anticipating the serve</li> </ul>
	o move forward and split	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- for proper momentum                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. staying still or backing up could be appropriate at times</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	o position properly for the hit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- balance and timing to create the tactical possibilities</li> </ul>

## The Shot Making

GOING FOR IT	o looking for their best shot	- should be obvious through the positioning and movement
	o fearlessness	- observe body language <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. face: expression and focus</li> <li>. legs: activation</li> <li>. arm: grip: loose and arm speed</li> </ul>
	o courage, desire	- all qualities that show a dominating intention
PATTERNS	o Minimise server's strengths	- shot selection when server stays back or comes in
	o Maximise server's weaknesses	- shot selection when server stays back or comes in
	o Own patterns	- is he maximising his strengths? - what is his best return? - what are his variations? - against which type of serve is he more effective?
	o Choice of targets	- proper percentage shots
	o Overall does he <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- give initiative to server</li> <li>- neutralise the server</li> <li>- dominate the server</li> </ul>	- should at least neutralise the server and look for opportunity to dominate - does he hide weakness and exhibit strengths
RECOVERY	o Tactical recovery	- based on tactical anticipation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>. too many scenarios to list options</li> </ul>

As you provide awareness through your charting of the outcome (facts), you can use a problem-solving approach with your players to find in which way they will improve their performance. Having noticed their process, you could also have leading questions to ensure their awareness about how they were behaving before, doing and after the return.

Second example of an evaluation: Look at specific patterns to see if they are part of the game styles and how they are performing with it.

**Player: A Net Rusher**

PATTERNS	USE OR NOT	CONSISTENT	EFFECTIVE	COMMENTS
Intercepting moonball	Y,Y,Y,N,N,Y	Y,Y,Y,Y	Y,N,N,N	Recognises 4/6 when to intercept, very consistent 4/4 but not very effective as won only 1/4 pts because the volley is not solid or placed well enough
Chip and charge	Y,Y,Y,N,Y,Y, Y,Y,	N,Y,N,N,Y,N ,Y	Y,Y,Y	Used it well, not consistent but wins the point all the time when making the shot
Drive and volley	N, N, N, N, N, N, N, N,			Does not take the ball early enough. It would help if he could hit inside the baseline, then he may be more motivated to come in.... Note should tell him that he needs only to go to service line as in a serve and volley.

3<sup>rd</sup> and last example: Point construction for an aggressive baseliner who should look to attack. How is the shot itself (the attacking shot); how is the following shot (recovery and look to attack again); the shot before which sets-up the ball to attack...

**Player: Baseline Attacking Game**

Patterns (to attack)	Decision	Consistent	Effective	Comments
Receiving a slower ball which would drop before the player if not moving forward to hit on the rise	To attack: YNYNYNYN YNYNYNYN	YNYNYNYN	YNYN	Decision: Either does not recognise the ball quickly enough or is afraid to attack as inconsistent....  Not enough volume to see how effective he would be with his shot but does not seem to generate enough pace.
Patterns (shot after)	Recovery	2 <sup>nd</sup> shot consistent	Win/lose	Comments
Maintain the attack, finish the point	Did not recover inside the baseline after attacking	Does not look to maintain the attack	LLLWLLWL	On the 8 decisions to attack, he ended up winning only 2 points as he misses 4 attacking shots and did not maintain the pressure enough
<b>Patterns (set-up)</b> - tempo - change rhythm - move player - .....	His tempo is pretty high and should provide lots of opportunity to attack His crosscourt are very precise and will lead also to opportunity to attack Change of rhythm should be considered when playing on slower courts			
What is great? What can improve?	His tempo is great and he needs now to learn to take advantage of the slower and shorter balls to attack and finish the point.			

### 3. PLAN AND SELECT THE GAME BASED SITUATIONS: TACTICAL PATTERNS

Even if you are planning your academy program without having evaluated your players, it is important in your planning to continually ask yourself these important questions:

“Am I choosing”:

- the playing **situations** that occur most frequently for my students?" (These are the ones that will have the biggest impact on their development.)
- the playing **situations** that are the most important for the outcome of the match (important in the competitive season)
- the tactical **responses** that are most likely to bring my students immediate success?" (When there are several good tactical responses for a situation, you should train the easiest ones first.)

Group training.... It is difficult to individualise the game styles of the players if we are planning tactical responses. In fact it is better to plan tactical situations in a group training to allow proper game based coaching

- When planning tactical responses i.e. what the players need to do
  - For example:
    - Running around the backhand to hit a forehand
    - Serve and volley
  - Then everyone needs to do it, even if it is not their game style
- When planning a tactical situation i.e. what shot they are receiving from their opponent
  - For example
    - Receiving a moonball to the backhand
    - Receiving a 2<sup>nd</sup> serve jam on deuce side....
  - Then we can individualise our coaching and let the players with:
    - Big forehand: to run around the moonball or 2<sup>nd</sup> serve jam,
    - Net rusher or all-round: to take ball early on the backhand or to intercept the moonball
    - Counter-puncher: to start with aggressive high topspin ball to the backhand...

#### 4. TRAIN PATTERNS:

3 main aspects of training patterns have to be addressed:

- Open training: with decision-making.
- 5 game situations.
- Point construction: shot, shot after, shot before.

#### Closed and Open Patterns:

In order to provide more volume when learning a new pattern it is normal to close the pattern to groove the stroke associated with it.

But as someone would ask, should I always do this? and the experienced answer being: "it depends" .... It is important to open the training through decision-making for when to do or not the pattern.

For example: if you want to train the tactic to change the direction of the shot:

Closed training: 1st you train the pattern you want to develop with the proper conditions:

For example:

Changing a slower or shorter crosscourt ball into a down-the-line drive forehand.

#### 5 Game Situations:

This particular theme has application in all five game situations. (This is not true for all tactical themes.) The following table lists some of the common patterns of play that emerge.

*Note:* The examples below assume that you're working with a right-handed player.

<b>Game situation</b>	<b>Ball received</b> (a slower or shorter crosscourt ball hit from the deuce side of the court)	<b>Ball to be sent</b> (using the forehand)
Serving	Crosscourt return	Down-the-line drive
Returning serve	Wide 2 <sup>nd</sup> serve	Down-the-line return
Both players back	Crosscourt groundstroke	Down-the-line groundstroke
Approaching/at net	Crosscourt passing shot Short angle crosscourt	Down-the-line volley Down-the-line approach shot

Opponent approaching/at net	Crosscourt approach shot	Down-the-line passing shot
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All these situations can be trained with basket feed; live feed; specific game situation with cooperation.

**Point Construction:**

- Train shot itself: hitting down-the-line forehand
- Train shot before: the set-up shot could be a good serve, a great crosscourt which provides the slower or shorter ball crosscourt
- Train shot after: will the player follow the shot at the net or quickly recover to the left to look for another forehand

**Open Training:**

- In order to be able to use these patterns in real game situations, they need to be able to recognise when to change direction or not.
- Therefore decision-making is required and it could be done at the end or at each step of a progression with basket feed, live feed, and cooperative play.

**5. MONITOR PROGRESS AND RETENTION OVER THE NEXT FEW MONTHS**

We need to keep track of the progress, especially during the “king of the court” moments and to monitor at times in the following macro-cycles to observe the retention of what was learned previously.