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**Palm Creek Resort and Residencies, Casa Grande, Arizona**

**And Terre Haute, Indiana – 12/17/2024**

**1. Hit 60% of First Serves In The Court**

Actually keep a concise count of your service percentage. Hitting 60% of the first services will gain you an average of two points per service game. In real terms you only have to win two more points to win the game. Much less work than going for the long bomb every time you're out. If you hit up in the 80% range you aren't hitting hard enough and anything less than 40% you aren't hitting hard enough.

**2. Check the Grip of your Opponent**

Check the grip of your opponent immediately to see what type of shots least favor the style of play used by players with a forehand, backhand, serve, and volley grip. You can actually establish a simple strategy to play just against this type of player.

**3. Try to Serve First In the Last Set**

It's important to get that edge in the last set. With an early break, you're ahead 2-0, then can hold for 3-0. That means your opponent will be serving at 1-4 and 2-5, which is a big psychological disadvantage, particularly in the last set. If you've won the first set and your opponent is serving at 5-2 in the second on a grass or fast hard court, you might think about letting that last game go in the second set to serve first in the third, especially if your serve is good. But don't just throw that last game away; make your opponent work for it. Move him around, and make the points longer than normal by staying in the defensive zone and keeping balls high and deep.

**4. Analyze Your Opponent's Serve**

If you know your opponent has a bigger serve than you, then serve first. That should give you the lead, and your opponent will have to play catch-up. If you happen to be lucky to break first, which is the reason you serve first, that will increase your chances of winning the first set.

**5. Play The First Two Points on Your Serve**

How many games can you win from 0-30 on your serve? I doubt more than two or three in a match. Intense concentration when you serve, and getting that first serve in, will start you in that direction. But you need to play those first two points well to build a 30-0 lead; don't get careless. Two points a game can be won easily by hitting a medium to hard first serve.

**6. Look Forward to A Short Ball**

The idea in tennis is to make your opponent play short. A short ball means a ball landing inside the service line within your short ball range. (Short ball range must be determined by you.) Anticipating that shot means you have made your opponent hit short by running him or her laterally, or forcing a change of motion by extending his arm away from his body so he can't pivot or change weight. The player who hits short first will lose most points because his opponent is in the winning zone of the court. (Zonal Tennis)

**7. Decrease the Bullet**

In a tight match, serving at 5-4, 40-30, forget the ace and get your first serve in. Go right at your opponent, nothing to the left and nothing to the right. Hit right at 'em! Make them guess what return to hit and look to score big.

**8. Doubles Strength**

In doubles, the strongest server and overall player should serve first and receive first. (That's right receive first in the deuce court!) This is a normal mixed doubles set-up.

**9. Return Crosscourt Or To The Middle**

I prefer the return of serve crosscourt more than anything else. You have more room and you prevent your opponent from coming to the net. If it's a crucial point and you play short down the line, your opponent can play behind you with his approach shot or angle you out of the court. In the deuce court, if you go crosscourt, your opponent will probably return down the line with his forehand because he doesn't have the time to play back behind you.

**10. Play Low On The Approach**

If you're near the net or closing out a game, slice your approach shot. The ball will stay low at your opponent's feet. How is he going to pass you or lob effectively? If he uses topspin, he's worse off. Once the ball is between his knees and shoes, there is no topspin that can work. A lot of player's today approach with excessive topspin, which makes the ball bounce up and allows too much time for the opponent to hit a good passing shot or lob.

**11. Force Lefties On Second Serves**

Left-handers can short-angle you with a serve to your backhand at 30-15 or 40-30. Position yourself in the alley when your opponent is serving to anticipate that short serve, especially if you know your opponent's tendencies.

**12. Never Lose The Score**

Good players squander 30-0 leads and lose sets 6-1 because they're not in complete control of the score. If you miss a first serve, don't get careless or overly aggressive on the point by trying to penetrate from behind the baseline. You have the lead, so play your way into the rally. Don't beat yourself.

**13. Don't Forget Formations In Doubles**

If you're playing against an opponent with a big forehand crosscourt shot, don't be afraid to use the so-called "Australian formation." Make the receiver hit that forehand down the line. That formation can nullify the effect of a crosscourt forehand and also keep the receivers partner from poaching. One-reason club players seldom use the Australian formation is because they never practice it. Conversely, receivers seldom see it. Try it you'll like it!

**14. Lob When You Are Behind The Baseline**

This is especially true if you are behind in points. Hana Mandlikova tries to make passing shots when she is two feet behind the baseline. Even Henri Leconte, with his agility, tries to pass Jimmy Conners when he is running laterally two fee behind the baseline. It's tough to recover if you don't make that passing shot; with the lob, you might be able to recover and get to play the overhead. Everybody claims the lob is a defensive shot; if you master it, it can become an offensive weapon.

**15. Drop Shot Inside The Serviceline**

If you are in need of a point, are moving forward, and lead 30-0, use the drop shot no matter the surface. But check the score because you don't want to be set up; because of your forward momentum on that shot, if you don't put the ball away, your opponent has the lob or pass available. Preferably don't drop shot when you're serving. Your on the offensive side of the net anyway.

**16. Play Two Shots, Not One**

Think about your shot and the consequences it may have. When someone is bunting in baseball, the opposing team is ready and waiting. For example, when you hit a passing shot at full strength, move inside the baseline as if you expect a miss-hit volley from your opponent.

**17. Use Your Strength, Protect Your Weakness**

If your opponent doesn't like low balls, play low. If he doesn't like high balls, play high. If he doesn't like to play the net, bring him in with low returns or low angles, preferably a slice. But watch for the drop shot.

**18. Be Prepared For Lousy Calls**

The game of tennis is a game of cycles and momentum. for two minutes, you win 10 points, then lose 6. It goes up and down. Seldom do players of equal ability play equally ell at the same time. Be aware that you might go off for a second, but don't let it bother you. Don't let that become an obsession, and above all, don't leave an expression of dissatisfaction on the court. Unhappiness on the court enhances the other guy's spirit and chances of winning.

**19. How To Hold That Lead**

If you have trouble holding a lead after winning an opening set, you're not keeping the right tempo, emotionally or physically. Work on holding your serve, getting in your first serves, and keeping your returns deep. If you serve and return well, you're controlling the tempo and graphics of the court.

**20. Anticipate Your Opponent's Second Serve**

Most players follow an unconscious pattern of serving on key points. There is a fraction of a second when the server tosses the ball and cannot see his opponent. You can move to the area where his is serving when the ball is tossed, which allows you more time. If your opponent aces you wide or down the middle, good luck. You can't have it both ways.

**21. Strategy Versus Talent**

You can win more points than your opponent in a set and still lose the set. If that's the case in some of your matches, you're not winning the key points. It also means you've got to zero in on 15-30 and 30-15 points. Play the score; don't be generous. Keep your strategy simple. (Practice No-Add Scoring. It does miracles for your first serve.)

**22. Play 15-30 Points Smartly**

Even great players like Mats Wilander try to play aggressively when they are behind, and it often doesn't work. If you're down 15-30, don't play the net unless you have a fantastic serve. Show aggressiveness when you're ahead. Many coaches believe you should gamble when you're behind; I don't believe it. If you're at 30-0, fine. But if you're returning serve at 15-30, don't miss that return of serve on the second serve by trying to go for winners. Hit the return hard, but right at your opponent or crosscourt, and make sure your opponent earns the point. Don't make unforced errors. The game of tennis is often lost on unforced errors.

**23. Play the Way you Practice - And Play the Same**

If you are a lousy practice player your matches will most likely end up the way to practiced. Conversely, if you play poorly you may want to take a more careful look at the quality of the practice.

**24. Know who your Playing/Get the Edge on the Opposition**

Scouting, Charting, and scrutinize your opponent prior to any match. The style of play that your opponent exhibits may be one that you can adjust to prior to competition. Keep notes and a secret notebook on your opponents.

**25. Dwenger- Sunny Khorana (Terre Haute South 1990) Way**

After losing the first set 6-7 (5), player wins 6-0, 6-0 by playing the middle on overheads. Attack the net and play all midcourt overheads to the middle thus cutting off any angles.

**26. Playing T-Tennis for better passing shots**

Bring a weak volleyer to the "T" then hit the passing shot easy. The only thing the other player will be able to do is give you another chance to put it away or a high shot that will be put away.

**27. Dancing Footwork**

Prior to hitting any shot perform a hop or ritual dance step to prepare to hit the next shot. The ritual is turned to habit during practice sessions. Short court practice which is good for over emphasizing strokes can also be good for footwork practice.

**28. Keep the Racquet on Edge - Volleys and Groundstokes**

Never let the racquet head fall below the wrist during volleys and ground strokes. Keeping the racquet on edge will increase the chances of the ball falling in the court, somewhere!

**29. Racquet Preparation is Everything**

Get your racquet back early on every shot. Good preparation will give you seconds on setting up on shots and will cut down on the total errors of the match. Practice off a wall to help train racquet preparation.

**30. The Ronald McDonald One Hour Lunch**

Stay away from eating between matches unless you have at least three hours between matches. A good breakfast two hour prior to the first match and plenty of water through the day will get you through three matches.

**31. The Lob Monster**

When in a neutral situation at the baseline use the lob to wear down your opponent. Upper body strength only lasts so long. Prolonged hitting with the upper body will destroy the physical conditioning of the average athlete.

**32. The Short Angle Cross Court Killer**

During the average point in singles look for a short ball at the service line to through in a short angle crosscourt. After running the opponent off the side court hit to the open court. This works much better than trying to win with a corner to corner approach.

**33. Pattern Tennis**

Using patterns of two forehands and one backhand allows you to get to your opponents weakness. Combinations also help you concentrate on consistency for each point. Keep running that play as long as it works. (Thanks Bob Love "USPTA"!) Terminology - Square, Late, and Early. Verbal Queues make for perfect execution of the pattern. Practice patterns out loud.

**34. Match Concentration and Focus**

Find an object to focus on between points to allow you to think of only the next situation or point. Make a design in your racquet that you enjoy to focus and vision the next point. Play on terms with this pointer. Concentration is the major reason for the loss of momentum.

**35. Player to Player Compliments**

Good doubles teams will set a ritual of talking to each other between each and every point. In many cases a simple "lets go" or "all right" is enough to keep the focus of both players. Although talking during points can be considered a distraction to the other team most players do it to a limited extent with success.

**36. Early Season Crosscourts**

When coming off a long layoff utilize the crosscourt as often as possible. Make the opponent change up the shots. You'll find that changing angles early can cause an opponent to make a lot of unforced errors. Give yourself the greatest margin to win the rally.

**37. Establish your Margin of Error**

Most players' margin of error is ten square feet. Allow for more hitting area by hitting (aiming) at lines with a margin of error of five feet. The better the player the less the margin. Use rope zones to help you with the zones.

**38. Freezing the Net Man - Tom West Theory**

On the first shot of every doubles match (win or loose) aim the first shot for your opponent's doubles alley. You may cause the net man to freeze or even over cover the alley for the entire match. This will give you a crosscourt heaven for the rest of the match. (Tom West - Indiana High School Tennis Coaches Association - Hall of Fame 1991)

**39. Beating a Double Back in Doubles**

When playing against a double back in doubles take all short shots (Volley's and Overheads) to a short angle. Hit the ball soft then look for the kill shot between the opponents. If you can't volley you can't win unless you're more patient than your opponents. (10 and under Doubles can kill a non-volleying team)

**40. Looking Good is Everything**

Proper dress and uniforms can psyche the opposing team out prior to ever playing a point. Make sure you or the team talk about uniforms and dress prior to playing competitively. Doubles teams should always compliment each other by wearing matching styles of clothing. Professionals look professional! In college nationals everyone must wear the same outfit or uniform. Dress like you are going to play the nationals.

**41. Knowing the Rules**

Take an hour to read the "Code" and the Rules of Tennis. A general understanding of the rules will afford you the advantage of being able to handle any situation that might arise during the match. Showing your opponent your knowledge and having an official verify your knowledge will always leave your opponent bewildered.

**42. Warm-up before you Play**

One hour prior to your first match warm up and play at least one set. This will give you the advantage of being ready to play without warm-up and a chance to emotionally prepare yourself for competition.

**43. The "Winning Edge Tennis" Way (Dr. Gary Sailes)**

Try playing (pissed off) during your match - I know, with control. Anger is stronger emotion than that of fear and will help keep you from choking during crucial points and times. (See Dr. Gary Sailes - Winning Edge Tennis - Indpls, IN)

**44. Don't just listen, ask for a demonstration!**

Sometimes what you think you heard may be exactly the opposite of what is intended by the presenter. Listen carefully to the instructor/presenter and make sure you understand what you're being told. If you don't understand ask them to explain it in a different way. Then have them demonstrate the proper way! Then practice it!

**45. First Service to the Backhand to Increase Percentage**

A well placed and significantly hit service the backhand can win you an average of two points per game with either a weak return or an outright missed return.

**46. Hitting Counter Flow**

When hitting into a rally, double your shot to the backhand before changing the ball direction or angle. Keep the hitter guessing where the next shot is going. Tennis is a game of rhythm thus hitting counter flow never guarantees the hitter a consistent pattern of shots or rhythm.

**47. Short Court Practice**

Take the first ten minutes of practice to drill short court singles. This improves control and is great practice for those specialty shots that win matches. Work especially hard on the crosscourt backhands and forehands.

**48. "Tennis practice is like writing a good theme!"**

Practice is like writing a good theme. It has an introduction, body, and conclusion all present. Start every practice with a good ritual or habit. Develop skills of consistency within the body of the practice. At the conclusion of a practice evaluate and re-write what needs to be developed for the next day. Simple but it works!

**49. Don't talk it unless you can walk it!**

Giving your opponent any reason to win is foolish. Don't say anything bad about your opponent or his style of game EVER! You may have to play them again some day and you don't want to let them in on what you already know. Be a good sport.

**50. Double Back Doubles - Sneak Attack From the Back**

This is literally a developed art. The first step of this game is to understand the purpose for playing this style. You are basically conceding the fact that you don't have the skills to win with conventional doubles strategy. Secondly, this style allows you to use your best strokes (i.e. Forehand and Backhand). Thirdly, this style forces your opponent to hit two to three times the amount of volleys and overheads that they would normally hit in a match. This is difficult to accomplish with 8 game pro-sets, as it requires several games to wear the opponents down.

**51. You Can't Win Unless They Hit Your Ball**

We once played two games where my team hit every ball over the net an in the court but lost both games. The other team was forced to win the points. They also had to play many more than eight points to accomplish this feat. You have to let the opponent hit so that you afford them a chance to loose.

**52. Outside / Inside / 90**

Paul Wardlaw at Iowa, now Brown, came up with this one. When hit cross body to the outside on either the forehand or backhand you automatically hit back crosscourt. When hit to the inside or not cross body you automatically change the direction of the next shot. When hit a short ball to the outside you hit 90 down the line to the baseline. Interesting…….. This is commonly called directional.

**53. Two On One**

Are we trying to gain a two on one advantage at the net? Draw the service team in after the return and isolate on one of the players with both you and your partner at the net together. By the player being in the middle of the court you virtually eliminate the lob.

**54. Breaking Double Back Doubles**

Breaking a two back doubles combination when you don’t have the best volley and overhead skills can be tough. Try this one. Hit short to the weakest player and draw them in to the playing court area. Upon their return to you or your partner, hit the ball right back to the same player who should still be in the court. I call this a double.

**55. Where Are The Wheels?**

How could you ever expect to defeat a challenging opponent without being able to run down those tough shots. This game requires skills, brains, and most of all wheels. You have to work on the footwork to be able to tackle the best of opponents.

**56. Other Considerations**

Acting mad, panicking, or negative talk never wins in tennis. Nobody feels sorry for a crybaby. Besides, why would you want people to know that you made a mistake or are careless? Here's what to do instead:

a. Act more confident than ever! Your opponents love to see you panic; don't let them.

b. Determine why your opponent is playing well. Do the shots you are presenting suit your opponent's game? If so, adjust your game style to present more of a challenge to your opponent. Is it because your opponent is grooved in a certain rhythm? If so, break the rhythm. Hit softer/harder, slice/topspin, drop shot/lob, etc.

c. When in trouble concentrate on the three basics:

i. Footwork

ii. Watching the ball.

iii. Keeping the ball in play.

**57. Momentum Change**

Momentum can change like the wind! Be ready when it changes in your direction!

Five Characteristics of the Mentally Tough Competitor

A. The Mentally Tough Competitor exhibits positive body language.

B. The Mentally Tough Competitor always gives 100% effort.

C. The Mentally Tough Competitor willing to make the adjustments necessary to win.

D. The Mentally Tough Competitor is not distracted by the surface, weather, crowd, and officiating.

E. The Mentally Tough Competitor does not fear the outcome, but rather enjoys the battle. Give me third set tiebreaker!!

F. The Mentally Tough Competitor always feels like they have a chance to win.

**58. Listen To The Coach**

When playing team tennis your best helper might be your team coach. It doesn’t necessarily take a professional to analyze a game. To be successful you and win advice given is called coaching. Being non or un-coachable is a major problem in today’s world. If your coach isn’t talking to you it might be that you don’t listen or take advice well. Talking while the coach is talking or challenging his advice just means that you most likely won’t get mor advice. Age and wisdom are sometimes the best secret you may have in your arsenal.

**59. Call Your Lines**

Nothing is more frustrating for a coach than watching their players cheat themselves by missing out ball calls. The rules don’t require you to cheat yourself to be fair to your opponent. In officiated matches the umpire may overrule your erroneous out call. Allow the process to work for itself and don’t cheat yourself.

**60. Height to the Weakness** - Use height and depth to the backhand corner to break down the backhand. Hit your best shot to this location.

**61. Herb**

**Situational Improvement 2024**