



# Improving performance.

Keith Reynolds.

International Tennis Federation.

## ABSTRACT

The ideas presented in this article are applicable to all levels of play. The advice is offered as a result of personal experience and not as a result of a long-term scientific study. The author's views on tennis coaching have been formed as a result of the interaction of several influences but, as a worldwide network of coaches have by definition a worldwide network of different factors affecting them, one coaching viewpoint (the one of the author) cannot be accurate for everybody or even many.

**Key words:** Coaching, Matchplay, Practice, Player responsibility.

**Received:** 10 June 2013

**Accepted:** 10 July 2013

**Corresponding author:** Keith Reynolds, International Tennis Federation.

**Email:** [ksrwtc@btinternet.com](mailto:ksrwtc@btinternet.com)

## INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE SCENE

I have never come across anybody who plays tennis, whether at recreational or tournament level, who does not want to improve their tennis performance. This is the same as saying that the player would want to win more tennis matches or win their tennis matches more easily.

There is one commonality that we all share, and that is the 'game' of tennis. When I write 'game' I am referring to 'matchplay' which has the same rules, scoring systems, tactical, physical and emotional demands worldwide. If we therefore look at the game and understand its challenges, then we can also share common features that are important within our coaching practice and delivery (Reynolds, 2012).

### In simple terms

- The game (matchplay) promotes independence because there are very strict rules about what help a player can receive while performing.
- The game (matchplay) is an extraordinarily open skill that is played without a time limit.
- Insert improve your coaching abilities and YOUR performance.

In other words, matchplay is a really difficult task that has to be performed by the player and frequently for very long periods of time.

Understanding this is for me, is the key to great coaching. The title of this article is 'improving performance' and this refers to the tennis player. However the quickest way to improve the

tennis player's performance is to improve your coaching abilities and performance.

## ACTIONS STEPS FOR IMPROVING OUR TENNIS LESSONS

Matchplay is a demonstration of skills, which is a combination of;

- attitude
- information gathering
- decision-making
- action and execution
- evaluation

Therefore a great tennis lesson is one which helps improve all of those five factors and a poor tennis lesson is one which only focuses on action and execution as dictated and commanded by the coach.

It should always be remembered that the tennis player's relationship to the tennis ball is far more important than their relationship to you, the coach. The ball is a ballistic missile; it can only be programmed at the moment of contact. The player is required to understand the relationship between 'cause and effect'. Wherever the ball is destined to go will be the consequence of the program the player writes onto it at the moment when strings (hopefully!) meet the ball.

This statement is vital for the player to understand in order to be able to take personal responsibility for what happens.



The coach, independent of how much advice they would like to give or how much they are being paid or pressurised by parents or associations, is never the one that actually hits the ball for the player. It is a player's responsibility to be mentally present at the moment of contact so they understand and learn from the rule of 'cause and effect' (Dent, 2012c).

The ball, in flight, may travel 20 or 30 metres. A variation at the moment of contact, too small and happening too quick to be observable can miss the target zone by a wide margin. The coach cannot correct these minuscule contact errors, only the pupil can and then only if they are mentally 'in the present moment' when contact is made (Reynolds, 2012).

The pupil needs to be mentally ready to learn before they start the lesson, as ready as they would like to be before match they are about to play. Educate the pupil about this great mindset and only start coaching when they are committed to learning. Stop the lesson and rest until the pupil mentally re-engages if they lose focus (Dent & Reynolds, 2009). Remember that in circumstances when the pupil 'switches off' you would have substituted them if you had been a football manager because they were no longer of much value on the field.

If you ask your pupil questions about their attitude in matchplay you will get answers that show how keen they are to do everything right, correct, efficiently and first time, commencing at the very beginning of the match. This is the same attitude that they should be carrying on to the practice and training court. If your player wishes to have a 'switched on' attitude in matchplay then don't settle for anything less (switched off) on the training court. For example;



Coach - "what would you love to be able to rely on as soon as the match starts?"

Player- "delivering my first serve consistently."

Coach- "Ok then, before our lesson starts take a few practice serves, by yourself, to warm up and before you call me over, challenge your- self to have a mindset which is primed and ready."

Pupils who have a clear, positive vision of the player they want to become will be much easier people to coach and work with. When coaching, keep asking the player about this motivational, realistic picture. If the vision doesn't make good sense to you it's your job to educate and develop the 'story they wish to become.' Vision statements are most powerful when they are written (Dent, 2012b).

Player - "By the time I get out of the juniors I will be a player who is very fit and can last in three set matches, as well as having a very reliable serve with a lot of topspin on my second. I will enjoy coming to the net, but only after I have hit some good grounds, which have got my opponent in the corner. My volleys will be simple but I will have learned how to play the ball short angled crosscourt with them. I will never lose my temper and always take plenty of time between points."

The best tennis coaching lessons build confidence and belief that the future will be better than the past. Belief and confidence are enhanced when the coach emphasises and trains the player to remember the improvements the player has made or is making. This then allows the coach to challenge the player to do it even a little better. This is how relentless progress is made (Reynolds, 2012).

Poor coaching is when the player is forever being made to focus on what they can't do. Many will give up the game through disappointment and fear of further failure.

To encourage the fastest possible retention and deep learning of the player it is best to have several themes running through the lesson. When the pupil is switching between lesson themes their memory and recall has to work very hard to re-establish how and when to perform the action or tactic. Lessons that just focus on monotonous one theme content do not promote matchplay quality minds efficiently (Dent, 2012a).

Smart coaches will group the themes together for less experienced players. For example;

- Volleys.
- Chipped return serves from fast/wide serves.
- Short angle slices.
- Drop shots.
- Defending from hard hit ground strokes.

Because all the above require the same 'family of coordination movement.'

For more experienced players the grouping would be more demanding and this then begins to replicate matchplay. For example;

- Inside-out forehand (power shot) - Drop shot (control shot).
- Overhead (power shot) - Drop volley (control shot).
- Down line (power shot) - Short angle cross court (control shot).

Whenever you, the coach, are organising drills, actions, activity which is 'closed' make sure the pupils are as fully aware as you are about how it fits into the 'open play' of matches. There have to be (and it is possible) very good reasons why something in the coaching lesson is not serving the purpose of improving matchplay (fun and relaxation after a demanding tournament). Therefore keep referring to Matchplay as much as possible even when doing a closed skill (Dent, 2012d).

Coaches and pupils should write their definitions of what is 'matchplay'. This will reveal the top priorities to be remembered during lessons. If the coach and the player have very different and even worse, conflicting views of matchplay, there is bound to be difficulties during their working relationship. For example;

Player - "matchplay is a physical contest to see who hits the hardest."

Coach- "matchplay is a mental contest to see who the best tactician is."

## CONCLUSION

Tennis lessons need to promote independence because players are required by the rules to be independent when playing matches.

Poor quality tennis lessons only focus on technique, which has been taken out of context of the tennis match, and technique is often only a reflection of the coach's personal prejudice in

how a ball should be hit and not an application of quality, simple biomechanics personalised for the individual.

## REFERENCES

- Dent, P. (2012a). Steepening the Player's Learning Curve. Presentation at the 7th ITF Central American and Caribbean Regional Coaches Conference by BNP Paribas, León Guanajuato, México 19 – 22 September.
- Dent, P. (2012b). Coaching motivation. Presentation at the 7th ITF Central American and Caribbean Regional Coaches Conference by BNP Paribas, León Guanajuato, México 19 – 22 September.
- Dent, P. (2012c). Mental match preparation. Presentation at the 7th ITF Central American and Caribbean Regional Coaches Conference by BNP Paribas, León Guanajuato, México 19 – 22 September.
- Dent, P. (2012d). Every second counts. Presentation at the 7th ITF Central American and Caribbean Regional Coaches Conference by BNP Paribas, León Guanajuato, México 19 – 22 September.
- Dent, P. & Reynolds, K. (2009). The tennis coach's toolkit. A pathway for super coaching. Volume 1.
- Reynolds, K. (2012). Coaches' toolkit. Presentation at the Tennis Europe European Coaches Symposium, October 25-27, Helsinki, Finland.

RECOMMENDED ITF TENNIS ACADEMY CONTENT (CLICK BELOW)



Copyright (c) 2013 Keith Reynolds



This text is under a [Creative Commons BY 4.0 license](#)

You are free to Share - copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format - and Adapt the content - remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially under the following terms:

Attribution: You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

[CC BY 4.0 license terms summary](#) [CC BY 4.0 license terms](#)