

Lesson 1 - Victory Awaits

How To Ensure You Finish On Top

Objective

Tennis is a competition: as is any game where a score is kept. In such games there are winners and losers. The objective of this lesson is to help you understand that there are only two ways to emerge victorious: (1) you win the match, or (2) the opponents lose the match.

Opponents Trying To Win

Unless the opponents have some reason to believe it impossible, they will begin the match with the objective to BEAT you. All competitive teams want to feel that they have a chance of beating their opponents, so they will come out trying. As your team proves to be too formidable, they will attempt to raise their level of play to out-play you and your partner.

Opponents Hoping You'll Lose

When the opponents feel they can't beat you despite playing their best tennis, their only remaining recourse is to be consistent and hope you LOSE.

For instance: you and your partner are cruising along. You're up 5-2 in the set. Victory is just a matter of time. Suddenly you notice your opponents have changed their style of play. Now they're both hitting the ball more softly and clearing the net by a safe margin. Also, they've moved back toward the baseline. You and your partner find yourselves getting increasingly frustrated. Your opponents aren't "hitting the ball" anymore. Moonballs come drifting lazily toward you. Determined, your team tries harder. Yet the ball keeps coming back. Frustration builds and your errors increase. What happened? Why the reversal in fortunes?

What happened is that your opponents just paid you the ultimate compliment. They decided they couldn't BEAT you, so they asked you to LOSE to them. And you obliged. They simply knocked on a different tennis door and you opened it for them. Remember: your ability and desire to win has to be matched by your ability and desire to AVOID LOSING.

Honesty Pays Off

You are an unusual tennis player if you have never lost a match to a lesser player. And, if you're like most people I've talked to after this type of match, you'll recognize the following:

I approach the player who lost and smile. "What happened?"

"Oh, I just couldn't get it together today, my serve let me down and I kept hitting the tape. Volleys into the net. Just not a good day."

"Would it be fair to say that you gave the match away?"

"No question. Normally, I'd walk all over the guy."

Then I get his opponent aside.

"How'd your match go?"

"Great! I won. I never thought for a moment that I could beat him, but I really played steadily, ran down everything and beat him 6-3."

But from my unbiased viewpoint as a coach, the results are seen in another way. In this hypothetical match, though the lesser player feels he actually won, he'd be on firmer ground if his "win" stemmed from forcing errors and hitting winners, rather than from depending on points he got from his opponent's unforced errors, points lost for no tactical reason. The lesson here is that you must make and accept, for the sake of your growth as a player, the honest distinction between matches where you won and matches where your opponents lost. To do otherwise is to slow your development.

Beating Your Opponents

Beating your opponents begins with the intention to do so and then you develop the means. To truly "beat" your opponents you must force errors. It may seem obvious, but that's what the Point Control System is teaching you... how to beat opponents you weren't able to beat before. Paradoxically, to truly grasp this concept you need to know its opposite as well.

“Please Lose to Us”

The tactical opposite to beating your opponents is to ask them to lose. For right now, know that you do this by taking less risk. To ask the opponents to lose to you, you must be more consistent than they are. You know they’re losing when they make unforced errors.

When you take less risk, instead of attacking, it often frustrates and wreaks emotional havoc with opponents who haven’t yet learned to handle changing roles. Their egos begin to overcome reason. They can’t believe a player like you (perceived “junkie”) is even on the same court with them. They begin to lose points, then they begin to lose control. Angry with themselves, they try harder and sink faster. Fortunately for you, they haven’t stopped to realize that your team is just hanging on by a thread; if they won’t lose to you there’s nothing else you can do.

Giving Yourself Options

Although you cannot simultaneously play to beat your opponents and ask them to lose to you, you can and should learn to use both approaches. Then, assess and make the choice that’s appropriate. Most teams that get blind-sided by the “please lose to me” tactic never use this tactic themselves. Once you’re familiar with this option and able to recognize it, you shouldn’t lose to opponents using it against you. If you’re out-playing them, expect them to test your consistency and patience. It’s all they have left if your other tactics are trouncing them.

Recognition that change has occurred is critical to your response. Therefore: **PAY ATTENTION!** Watch for a change in tactics when you’re winning handily. Against a smart team, you should expect this. It’s just a matter of time until they check to see if you’ll lose to them. At the pre-4.0 level the change is usually obvious. Maybe the opponents will huddle and converse and when they resume play the net man has joined his partner on the baseline and the lobbing begins. Above 4.0, however, the transition is less obvious and the superior skills of the players permit them to refine the change. They reduce their risk by starting to clear the net by an additional foot or so, and are more conservative on important points. Still, although more difficult to detect, the change in tactics reflects a change in attitude. It is important that you recognize the route your opponents are now taking to claim victory in order to respond effectively.

Note: there will be times when even the strongest players will need to slow down overwhelming opponents. This is being smart, not wimpy.

To Summarize

There are two ways to emerge the victor in a tennis match: beat the opponents by forcing errors, or let them lose to you through unforced errors. Determine which means your opponents are using against you. Then decide upon a tactic. If you're far ahead in the match, expect your opponents to test your complacency and, maybe, your flexibility. They'll ask you to lose to them. Smile. It's both their last resort and the ultimate compliment.

Point Control System Drill

This drill requires four players. It is one of the most valuable you'll ever work on. In fact, it is the foundation of tactics. The drill begins with two players on each baseline. One team is the now-familiar "please lose to me" team. The other is the aggressive team. Games are played to five points. Each begins with the "lose to me" team feeding the ball as a groundstroke to one of the aggressors. The feeding team's objective is to keep the ball in play, returning it steadily, avoiding errors that give away points. Regardless of the court position necessary to stay in the rally, their intention is to be consistent and not "lose" any points. The aggressive team should try to break through this tactic by attacking to win the points. Done this way, the drill results in one side trying to beat its opponents, while the other "asks them to lose." By rotating positions each player will get an opportunity to switch roles.

Congratulations!

You've completed the first building block. Proceed to the next lesson.