

White Paper

The importance of Coaching and Practicing 'Serve Plus One' in today's game

This paper gathers research, analysis and commentary from academics, tennis coaches and other sports professionals looking into the importance of short points in tennis today.

Summary

Research and analysis from tennis tournaments around the world show including the Australian Open and Wimbledon, show that the first 4 shots of a rally are increasingly important in today's game. Players that win more points in their first two shots (known as **serve plus one**) are far more likely to win matches than players that dominate longer rallies.

Research

'Investigating the most important aspect of elite grass court tennis: Short points'

In their 2021 research paper facilitated by the LTA, Anna Fitzpatrick et al. found players that won more short points (0-4 shots) than their opponent won the match in over 90% of cases. The short point is the dominating factor in success. These results support findings by other researchers and tennis practitioners who suggest that short points are crucial in tennis success and should be a key interest for coaches.

Anna Fitzpatrick et al. 2021

'Coaching analysis from the experts: First four shots are the key'

The new analytics that are coming into our sport shatter a lot of old myths and help define a new way of understanding the game.

Less than 30 per cent of rallies go to five or more shots, yet players spend most of their practice sessions grinding out forehands and backhands. Players all over the world typically spend around 90 per cent of their time on the practice court grinding forehands and backhands into oblivion, thinking this style of practice is tailor-made to win matches.

The match court looks nothing like this. The match court is filled with short rallies dominated by serves and returns – two specific elements that get very little love on a practice court.

Craig O'Shannessy. Strategy analyst for Wimbledon, Australian Open, ATP World Tour.

'Serve Plus One and Return of Serve Plus One'

"Today's best players focus on and try to execute a good serve and a good first shot following the serve. Most of the points are won with one of these shots and the player who successfully hits the first two balls well more often is almost always the winner of the match. This idea seems extremely simple. However, pay attention next time you play a match and keep track of the number of points that you are able to execute the serve plus one or return of serve plus one as you had planned."

Steve Annacone, USPTA Elite Pro, Director of Annacone Tennis

'The advantages of Serve Plus One'

The serve is the first shot that opens the game but most of the time we work it with serving buckets at the end of the training. We usually do a lot of tactical work on the baseline, but rarely link it to the serve. Thinking of game patterns as Serve plus One opens up the

possibility of seeing certain important details to take into account.

- We pay attention to the footwork and the recovery from the serve. We optimize the preparation for the next shot. That is important since it is very different from recovery between groundstrokes.
- We visualize patterns of 2 shots before starting the point. We start the points having a higher order.

Creating simple sequences of plays and having them very clear, increases your effectiveness on the court. Working them in practice you will start the points by having a plan, a scheme, and also you will train in a smarter way.

George Margi Founder & CEO – Global Agent Academy

'Tennis Tips From A High Performance Workshop At Mcc'

Most everyone has a lot of practice with baseline rallies, but good game play works on Serve +1. This type of practice prepares you for match play, not just aimlessly rallying and because so much of tennis is about the serve and return of serve, it will give you reps on these vital strokes that rallying or even regular match play cannot duplicate.

Gene Desrochers' Tennis Coaching

‘Tennishead insight: The simple but incredible tactic that makes Roger Federer so great’

“Serve +1 is a specific serve tactic that combines the serve and the first groundstroke after the serve into... One.Devastating.Unit. Hit a serve. Immediately follow it up with a forehand. Win the point. That’s how it typically goes for the Swiss legend Roger Federer. Analysis of Federer’s Serve +1 strategy from 28 matches at the Australian Open including winning the title in 2017 shows just how dominant this lethal one-two combination really is.

In short, the earlier in the point the better, before opponents can extend the point to a neutral battleground. As you can clearly see, the Serve +1 forehand strategy is a supercharged tactic – that can absolutely be used by players at all levels of our sport – even you!”

Craig O’Shannessy. Strategy analyst for Wimbledon, Australian Open, ATP World Tour.

Combine the Serve & the 1st shot after the serve into 1 unit.

Don’t think of the serve as just a one-way weapon. Too often we think of the primary role of the serve is to crush aces. Well, when you look at the top 14 ace totals on the ATP Tour 8 of those players lost the match. Hitting aces is not all it’s cracked up to be because you still have to have a plan for the majority of the points that still have to be played in the match.

BrainGame Tennis

‘How To Use The Serve Plus One As A Weapon’

Most points end within what, 4 shots. People practice their serves, but they just practice the serve and then they stand there. Work on practicing your serve and the recovery, the one-two punch.

Tom Avery, Tennis Coach for over 40 years