Tennis: Play the Mental Game

By David Ranney
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Introduction to the Mental Game

Hi, my name is David Ranney and welcome to the exciting world of playing the mental game. The simple fact is that what you are doing now isn’t working so well and you are searching for a better way. Am I right?

Are you ready to change? Are you ready to remake your game and become a phenomenally player? If you will do the things you hear on this CD, you will have to improve. Guaranteed. Not only will your tennis game improve but, guess what, you may even enjoy playing more.

In the next part, will tell you a little about me and how I got started teaching the mental game and the best lesson I ever received.

About David Ranney And The Best Lesson I Ever Received

Let me get started by telling you my story and how I got into playing and teaching the mental game.

- I started playing tournaments when I was 10 years old.
- I was ranked #2 in Southern, CA in the 15 & under. I was ranked #2 in Southern, CA in the 18 & under.
- I was nationally ranked #6 in Singles as a Junior
- I was nationally ranked #3 in Doubles as a Junior
• I had the honor of representing the U.S. at Junior Wimbledon where I got to the Semi-finals. I lost to the Russian, which was the last person I wanted to lose to. Can you guess why I maybe didn't play very well? If you don’t know, you will know after listening to these CDs. To give you a little hint, it was because I tried way too hard to win.

• I played on the Junior Davis Cup team

• I played on the USC tennis team and the three years I lettered varsity we were National Champions.

As you can see I was a pretty good player, but not a great one.

But, I had a big problem. My attitude stunk and I was very negative. I used to yell and scream on the tennis court because I would get so incredibly frustrated. I thought that if I could only stroke the ball perfectly I would never miss. But of course, I couldn’t do that every time. Also my attitude was horrible. I hated myself for getting so angry and frustrated, but I couldn’t stop. I had no idea why I played badly at times, and I didn’t have a clue as to how to turn my game around when I wasn’t playing well. I never beat players who were just a little better than I was. Remember I told you that I was ranked #2 in Southern California in the 15 and 18 and under. Well, a player named Jerry Cromwell was the one who was ranked #1 and I never ever beat him.

After college, I began teaching tennis the traditional way until my conversion to teaching the Inner Game of Tennis when I was in my 30s. What happened was that one day I was reading the LA Magazine about an instructor who was teaching the Inner Game of Tennis. His name was Tim Gallwey. I knew I had to have a lesson from this man, and I was determined to go to the ends of the earth to find him. As it turned out, he was right there in my hometown of Los Angeles.

To make a long story longer, I took two lessons from Tim, and he completely changed my life. In the first 10 minutes of the lesson, I felt that the weight of the world was taken off my back. He taught me to relax to the extent that I never got angry or yelled again – an amazing accomplishment since I had already spent all of my
tennis life getting upset with my play. It was the best lesson I ever received and it changed my life forever.

All of a sudden my tennis game was more consistent, and overnight my endurance increased and I wasn’t as tense. This shift kept my energy focused on mastering the mental game. For the first time, I was beating people I could never beat before. I was winning close matches and striking the ball better than anytime in my life.

My weekly doubles partner, Keith Nielson, said I wasn’t as much fun to play anymore because he couldn’t get me angry.

To sum it all up, I felt like a completely new person when I was on the court.

After just two lessons with Tim Gallwey, he not only completely changed my own tennis game but also gave me a whole new way of teaching. I asked Tim to come to the Jack Kramer Tennis Club, where I was an assistant teaching pro under Robert Lansdorp, so he could give clinics to all of my students. There I watched Tim in action. As a result, I adapted his ideas and modified them slightly to fit my own way of teaching.

I will be forever grateful to Tim Gallwey for showing me how to make this change. His book has been my "Tennis Bible" and is truly one of the best books ever written on the mental aspects of the game. You can find his book in most bookstores.

In the 25 plus years since then, I have been studying the mental game so that I could achieve the state of mind that would allow my body to play at its very best. I wanted to know how to play “out of my mind” every time I played. The concepts I will present to you here will show you how to do this. These concepts, as you will see, are easy to talk about, but it will take hard work and practice for you to get there.

I knew that these ideas worked for me, but I wasn’t sure if they would work for anybody else. Over the years, I have worked with many beginners, average players and good tournament players to see if these techniques could help any player.

I discovered that not only do they work for all ability levels, but you can use them for the rest of your tennis life. I am at an age where my game is supposed to be “over the hill” but my tennis game is actually getting better. Maybe, I can’t run as well, but if I can get to the ball and hit it, I just don’t miss very often.
In the next part, I will talk about what this audio CD series is all about and what you can expect to learn about playing the mental game of tennis.

What You Will Learn When You Listen To These CD’s

This CD series will spell out very precisely what playing the mental game looks like and how you will know if you are doing it right. You are going to learn some very helpful concepts about how to practice your strokes and practice the mental game that you won’t find anywhere else. These concepts are the result of over 25 years of studying, practicing, and teaching the inner game of tennis.

After you listen to this CD series and put these principles into play, you will be entering a whole different way of playing that will speed up your learning and help you enjoy the game more. However, there is a catch. You still have to listen to the whole CD Series more than once. You also will have to be willing to change the way you think and allow yourself to believe in the mental game. You have to practice it and truly play it. Only listening to this CD will not produce the change you want. You have to apply these techniques as soon as you learn them.

As you have noticed, I put on the 1st CD a PDF file that has the entire script of what I am presenting to you here. There will be times when you will want to refer to the written word. However, you may want to have a paper and pen handy now as I give you some web pages to go to from time to time, but if you download this PDF file to your computer, you can always find these web page addresses there.

I won’t get into the whole philosophy here behind the mental game. I feel you can get this information from reading Timothy Gallwey's *The Inner Game of Tennis*. In fact, Gallwey's book is really required reading, as it will give you the background to what I am trying to teach you. In my opinion, the other present-day books on sports psychology pretty much rehash what Tim Gallwey wrote over 30 years ago, only not as eloquently.

I have divided this CD series into four parts:
• Part 1: What the Mental Game Really is and How to Play It
• Part 2: Processes and Ideas To Improve Your Strokes
• Part 3: Strategies You Won’t Find Anywhere Else
• Part 4: How To Practice Both Your Strokes And Your Mental Game

But the mental part always comes first, because mastering the mental part of the game so you can play in the zone remains the ultimate goal. However, you also need to work on your strokes, strategies, and drills, in addition to the mental side.

In the next part, I am going to give you a psychic reading on your tennis game. You didn’t know I could do readings, did you? Listen to this next part and I will let you decide how good I am.

Your Psychic Reading

Did you know I am also a psychic? Well, I am and I am going to give you a reading concerning your tennis life.

I am now looking into my crystal ball which will tell all about your tennis game. Just give me a few seconds to get into my trance. Oum. I see that you love the game of tennis, but you feel that you are just not playing the best you can. At times (maybe most of the time), you are not enjoying yourself because you are getting more and more frustrated and you just don’t know why you are missing so many balls. You are trying so hard to stroke the ball correctly, trying so hard to play well, and trying so hard to win, and you just can’t seem to make it happen. You want more from tennis, and so you are searching for a different or better way of playing.

So, how did I do? Do you now believe I am psychic? Please check your mailbox in a couple of days for my $25 bill for this reading?
Why You Should Play the Mental Game

Here is a list of the reasons why you may want to play the mental game. How many do you think apply to you?

- Do you want to win more matches? We will talk about winning in a moment.
- What about so that you can play better.
- What about so that you will play more consistently.
- How about so that you will enjoy playing more.
- Maybe you want to know why you missed a shot and be able to fix things on the spot.
- Maybe you want some real solutions that work so that you won’t get angry or frustrated anymore.

These are some pretty good reasons, don’t you think?

Which of these reasons do you think I hear most often once my students start playing the mental game? If you guessed “Enjoyment of the game more” you would be correct.

I had a friend who I was coaching and she was ready to give up tennis. She was a very good player and was good enough to be ranked nationally in her age division. But she rediscovered her love for the game because she changed the way she thought and the way she played. I also have some husband and wife students who now sometimes talk for hours about tennis and what is going on with them when they play. Well, may not for hours, but they do talk a lot more and are really enjoying their conversations.

I will discuss what the Mental Game really is in the next part. Too many people just don’t have a clear idea what it is and how to play it.
What Is the Mental Game

Before I begin to explain what the mental game is with new students, I always ask them a few questions first to get an idea what they already know. So, let me ask you. What percentage of the game as you play it now do you think is mental?

Is it somewhere between 75 and 95 percent? My next question to you is “what percentage of the time do you actually practice the mental part of the game?” Did you answer "very little" or "not at all?" That is what most people say. My next question is, “if you were going to practice the mental game, how would you do it?” Again, most people don’t know.” Was that your answer? The good news is that after listening to this CD series, you will not only learn what the mental game is, but you will learn how to play so well your game will be transformed.

As I asked earlier, people don’t know what the mental game really is. Are you one of them? In a net shell, here is a description.

The mental game is the relationship between your “conscious mind,” your “other than conscious mind,” and your body. It is your “conscious mind” which sets the goals then it gets out of the way and lets the “other than conscious mind” direct the body, which then hits the ball and achieves the ideal play. The strength, direction, and quality of your outer tennis strokes are determined by this inner relationship. When you pursue and find this ideal mental state, you will be playing in the zone.

An example is to be found if you think about how you drive a car. Your conscious mind has a huge purpose as it has to see where you are going so that you don’t hit any other cars, people, bicycles, etc. It also has to see where the road goes and needs to read the road signs if you need to find a particular street. However, when you steer the car, hopefully you don’t think about how you move the steering wheel and I know you don’t think about how your foot presses the gas pedal or the brake pedal. You just do it.

Well, playing tennis is no different. It is just more complicated. Because we have been taught that we must control our bodies so that we can hit the ball correctly, you may not have even thought about just letting your body hit the ball without conscious control. Your conscious mind has a role to play but you need to learn how
to get it out of the way when it comes to hitting the ball. Please believe me when I tell you, your body is what hits the ball and it knows far better how to do it than the conscious mind telling it how.

As a natural by-product, your enjoyment will be enhanced. This is because you will be calmer and more relaxed, and of course, you will be playing better.

Before we get into the jobs of the conscious mind and how we figure out how to really let the body play, I want to talk a little about the ultimate goal and winning.

## The Ultimate Goal and About Winning

Do you think that winning is the ultimate goal? I hope not and if you do, I will try to change your mind.

In the mean time, would you like to learn how to win every time?

If this is your ultimate goal, then I have a deal for you. If I can tell you how you can win every time you play, and I can, will you pay me $10,000? No? OK, maybe winning is not that important so how about paying me only $1,000? Well, you can save your money because I will tell you how you can win every time anyway, and for free. In order to win every time, you just need to play a two year old. If you can’t beat a two year old every time, then you are in really big trouble.

Maybe now you can begin to see that winning may not be a goal that will bring you the most satisfaction or pleasure even though winning can be a lot of fun.

I have a trick question for you and let’s see if you can get the answer. I can tell you who has won every match that has ever been played, and I can tell you who will win every match that will be played in the future.

How can I make this statement?

Here is the answer: The player who plays better on that given day will be the winner. So, if you play better than your opponent today, you will win. Did you get the answer right?
The point is that winning will take care of itself, and if you strive and learn to play at the top of your game and that “top” is better than your opponent, guess what, you will automatically win. And if you play twice as well as you ever had but still lose the game, most likely you will still be a happy camper. Oops, I meant to say a happy tennis player.

If you don’t like how well you played (even though you played at the top of your game), then you need to figure out how you can play better in the future. This means that you will need to practice more of both the physical and the mental game.

So, how do you play at the top of your game? By spending more and more time figuring out how to get your conscious mind out of the way so your body can play its very best. You will also find that when you practice these concepts, your body will learn faster and more easily. I can’t describe to you what this state of being feels like, but I can guide you so that you can begin to discover for yourself what it feels like and how to get there. I will elaborate on how to play your very best in Lesson #24.

Let’s get back to the ultimate goal.

I believe the ultimate goal is for you to find out how to play your very best every time you play. This automatically will help you win more matches. This goal not only helps you accomplish the old goal of winning but it will happen automatically and without you thinking about it.

As I said earlier, the path to this state of being can be found in the Mental Game Core Principles. Mastering these Core Principles will be a lifelong process. You will be discovering things about yourself and your game for the rest of your life. And who knows, maybe you will find some of these principles useful in other areas of your life as well.

In the next part I will talk about an important issue that you will need to deal with if you want to be successful in playing the mental game.

A Huge Issue That Is Damaging Your Game
If you are going to be playing the mental game, there is one huge issue that will cause you to often lose. “Judgment”

If you judge yourself, your shots, how well you are doing etc, you will need to change your thoughts as they will interfere with you playing your best. One of the most important concepts you can learn is to let go of judgment. I am not saying you shouldn’t be aware of what is going on and what is working and not working. I mean judgments as to whether you are doing good or bad or whether you hit a good shot or bad shot. There are no bad shots. There are only shots that didn’t go where you wanted them to go. Likewise, there are no good shots. There are only shots that went where you wanted them to.

When you judge your shots, your strokes, how well you are playing, or anything else, it is unproductive and can even cause you to play worse.

The natural response to judgment is to try harder. For example, if you judge your last shot as being a bad one, what is your response? You may say to yourself, OK, I hit a bad shot last time and from now on I will only hit good shots. This leads to using your conscious mind to start controlling your body, thereby becoming more tense. The same thing happens when you hit good shots. You will try harder the next time to keep hitting good shots and your body will probably more get tense leading you to miss more balls. This is a vicious circle.

Although trying harder may seem to work in the short run, you will find that when the match gets tight or when it comes time to win, your game may break down.

The letting go of judgments is not easy, but even if you just begin to deal with them, you will see things happen to your game and maybe even immediately.

About 8 years ago and after working on my mental game for over 18 years, I thought I had really let go of judging things in my tennis. That was certainly true of winning and losing and in my strokes, but one day while I was playing, I realized I was judging every ball. Balls that didn’t go deep enough or didn’t go to where I wanted it to, or was hit too short. I even judged when other balls were good which is equally as bad.

I was really shocked and amazed that after all those years, I was still judging so much. As soon as I began to let go, I started to hit much better and hit so many more
what I call easy shots that without letting go I often missed. I was even hitting winners without trying or even thinking about them.

Though I had difficulty stopping my judgments completely, even letting go a little bit helped my play immensely and immediately. I still struggle with this at times and I have to monitor it, but to the degree I can let go of my judgments, my shots go ever so much better.

In the rest of this series, I am going to get into very specifically what the mental game really is and how to really play it.

The Core Principles of the Mental Game

There are four primary parts to the Core Principles of the mental game: Consciousness, Focus, Relaxation, and Judgment.

The Principle of Consciousness

We all have a “conscious mind” and an “other than conscious mind”. Tim Gallwey uses self one and self two to describe the two parts that must work together so that we can perform at our best. I have chosen to use “conscious mind” and “other than conscious mind” because my friend and Neural Linguistic Programming (NLP) master Dave Dobson coined this phrase and it seems to me to better describe what is going on in the body.

The mental game encourages you to keep your “conscious mind” calm and, clear., It will also focus on what it needs to and stay out of the way while letting your “other than conscious mind” emerge. You can and will learn to “program” this “other than conscious mind” with visualization and/or talking to yourself. I will teach you how later in this series.

The Principle of Focus

Focus lets your “conscious mind” continually notice or pay attention to some aspect of the game. You use focus to put your attention on things like seeing the ball,
breathing or some part of your body that you want your “other than conscious mind” to respond to. For example, when you are seeing the ball really well, this information is just what your body needs to have in order to time the hit perfectly.

**The Principle of Relaxation**

Although relaxation is the general principle, breathing is the most important and biggest component. Breathing supplies the rhythm of relaxation and proper breathing helps keep your upper body from getting tense, thereby allowing your “other than conscious mind” to use your body to its greatest potential. Relaxing other parts of your body when you hit makes up the complete principle of relaxation. An example would be when you have hit the ball and it absolutely feels effortless because you have turned over control of the shot to the part of your body that knows how to hit it.

**The Principle of Playing Without Judgment**

When you judge your shots, your strokes, how well you are playing, or anything else, it is unproductive and can even cause you to play worse. The natural response to your judgments is to try harder. This leads to using your “conscious mind” to start controlling your body, thereby becoming more tense. Although trying harder may seem to work in the short term, you will find that when the match gets tight or when it comes time to win, your game may break down. You can see this judgment in just about every player when they pump there fist when they make a good shot or when they get angry with themselves when they miss.

In the following sections of this CD series you will find the details of the Core Principles that should be anchored into your “other than conscious mind.” By activating these principles before you play and as needed during play, your “conscious mind”, your “other than conscious mind”, and your body will be in the best possible place to work together so that you can play at the top of your game.

**The Mental Game Core Principle Statements**

Remember that the idea here is to truly get your “conscious mind” out of the way and turn over your play to your “other than conscious mind.” The “conscious mind’s” role is also to help you focus on the ball and your breathing. By programming
yourself with these principles, you will be able to quickly and easily get into this state of mind. It just takes practice and discipline.

The following statements make up the Core Principles: Please go to www.maxtennis.com/core_principles.htm to print a copy of these Principles. This is absolutely essential.

Here are the Core Principle Statements

• Soon I will be able to pay attention and follow the ball all the way to my racket so that I can see the ball spinning. This is Core.

• As I follow the ball to the blur of the racket, I keep my focus on the contact point for a short period of time.

• As I learn to pay this kind of attention, I will soon be able to follow the ball and see it spinning to when it contacts my opponent's racket. This is Core.

• As I become more competent in paying attention to the ball, my breathing will become more natural, and I will learn to be exhaling with a sigh before making contact with the ball and exhaling through and long after contact with the ball. This is Core.

• I move for the ball and hit the ball “knowing” where I want it to go without effort and without judgment. Without judgment means truly letting the ball go where it goes, truly accepting how well I am seeing the ball, truly accepting how well I am breathing, and truly accepting anything else that is happening while I am playing. This is Core.

• I observe my breathing and I watch the ball even in between points. This is Core.

• After missing a ball, if I feel it’s necessary, I immediately visualize or talk to myself about hitting the ball into the court to the spot I would have liked it to go, using a perfect stroke, consciously seeing the ball perfectly, and consciously exhaling before and after contact with the ball. This is Core.
• My conscious mind stays calm and clear and I let my other than conscious mind direct my body to move to where I see the ball coming. This is Core.

• Between points, I sometimes inhale deeply and exhale slowly with a sigh to relax myself and clear my mind. This is Core.

• My strokes are smooth and relaxed through the entire stroke and my grip is very relaxed, especially at the point of contact. This is Core.

• My other than conscious mind is hitting the ball to where it “knows” to hit it while I am consciously seeing the ball and consciously exhaling before and after my hit. This is Core.

• When changing sides (always in tournaments) I sit down, clear my mind, relax my body and, if necessary, reprogram my other than conscious mind to do any of the above. This is Core.

• My other than conscious mind communicates to me any strategy changes to be made. If I am behind in the score, I will use the "wondering technique" This is Core.

• In doing all of the above I am letting my other than conscious mind figure out how to make it happen, rather than trying to force myself to do anything by using my conscious mind. This is Core.

Next I will discuss the specifics of what makes up the mental game and first in importance comes seeing the ball. After you listen to this lesson, you will know how the ball absolutely needs to be seen.

**Lesson # 1: Seeing the Ball**

As you may have noticed, I have divided the rest of the subjects I will talk about into Lessons so that you can more easily learn one part of playing the mental game at a time. Here is Lesson #1 on seeing the ball.
You know that you are supposed to watch the ball, right? Do you think you see the ball when you play? Of course you say you do. Otherwise you would not be able to hit the ball at all. But, do you really see it the way it needs to be seen? I will tell you that there is a 98% chance that you don’t and that percentage is based on giving “My test,” which absolutely demonstrates how to see the ball. I have given this test to hundreds of people and it is surprising to me how many people just don’t see the ball very well.

Here is the good news. When you really see the ball the way I know it should be seen, your tennis game will improve immediately and sometimes dramatically.

In case you haven’t guessed, seeing the ball is the single most important thing to do when playing and unfortunately, most people don’t see the ball properly, even after being shown how to do it and being told how important it is.

“See the ball.” “Watch the ball.” “Look at the ball.” Yes, I know you have heard this so many times. But do you really consciously see the ball all the way to and from your racket? It is not as easy as it sounds. And as you get into really seeing the ball, it becomes easy to think that you are seeing the ball well when you really aren’t.

When I talk about how important it is to really see the ball clearly, some of my students try so hard to focus on the ball that they tense up too much. Remember that you don’t need to try hard to read the words when you are reading, and likewise you don’t need to try hard to see things if you were to look up and around the room. The same principle applies to seeing the ball on the court. Don’t try, just see. What may be hard is to keep your focus on the ball for an entire point, game, or match, and this, like any other skill, will need practice.

How do you know if you are seeing the ball well? This requires awareness. When you are playing, are you able to answer the following questions with absolute certainty?

- Am I really consciously seeing the ball all the way from my opponent’s racket?
- Am I really focusing on the ball as my ball crosses the net and bounces up to my opponent’s racket?
- If someone were to ask, could I tell them whether the ball was spinning fast, slow, or medium as it was coming to me and after I hit?
• Have I ever seen a ball that has no spin? Those balls should stick out like a sore thumb because they are so different from the rest.

• Am I able to see the ball spinning all the way to the blur of my racket when it makes contact with the ball?

You need to be able to answer these questions beyond a shadow of a doubt. If you find yourself saying that “I think” the ball was spinning slowly, then you didn’t see it. If you really saw it you would say without a doubt, “Yes, I saw that one.”

When I am giving a student a lesson for the first time, I usually start out by having them just see the ball. I explain that I don’t want them to think about their strokes or to think about hitting the ball into the court or aiming. Instead, I want them to just focus on seeing the ball all the way to their racket and all the way back over the net to their opponent’s racket.

After rallying with them for a few minutes, I then ask them if they saw the ball very well. Most of them will say that they did, and many times they will say that they saw the ball better than they ever had in the past. The reason they say this is because I have taken away most of the things they normally think about and just had them watch the ball. And, many times they are aware that they are hitting the ball more consistently solid and in the court. It is then that I give them “my little test.” This test is the best way for me to tell if they are seeing the ball the way I want them to see it and it demonstrates to them beyond a shadow of a doubt how the ball needs to be seen.

Here is what I say before I do the test with them. I say that I am going to give them every hint in the book so that they can get the “correct” answer to this test. I will tell them that I will be hitting four balls to them, two to their forehand and two to their backhand. I will hit the balls as easy as I can and that I will stand at the net so that I can hit the ball really easy. I will tell them that all four balls will have the identical spin, and I want them to explain to me what direction the ball is spinning all the way from the time it hits my racket to the time it hits their racket. I tell them the three “key” words that practically give away the answer. Those words are “all the way” from my racket to your racket. I also tell them that there are three ways the ball can spin: Sidespin, topspin and underspin.
When I do the test, I always use new balls so it is easier to see the spin of the ball. Would you believe that 98 percent of my students can’t correctly tell how the ball is spinning? Sometimes I even give them another chance after explaining to them again the three key words, and they still don’t get it right. Once I tell them how the ball is spinning and I hit them more balls, they see it immediately.

I once had a student who got really mad when I told him he didn’t get the test correct because he was so sure he saw the ball correctly. The point I am making with this test is that people think they are seeing the ball well when they are really not. Almost 100% of those who got it correct had no idea that the ball did what it did.

A few years ago, I gave this test to a friend of mine named Ken Stuart who came up from California to play doubles with me in the National Indoor 60s tournament in Seattle. Back in the old days, Ken was a world-class player. He is still a great player today, even though we have both aged a little. After I told Ken about watching the ball all the way to his racket and after we hit a few balls so he could get somewhat comfortable with focusing on the ball, I gave him the test. Well, he was one of the 2 percent who got it right the first time.

Because it was so easy for him, I was sure he thought I was lying about how many people got this test wrong just to make him feel good. About three weeks later he called me and said that he gave my test to 10 or so other players and all of them got it wrong. I told him, see, I wasn’t just trying to make you feel good. He now knows how special it was that he was able on the first try to see how the ball was spinning the way it needs to be seen. Did I tell you that when he could see the ball well, he really noticed the difference in how well he played?

Ken also told me another story about seeing the ball this way. He was invited to play doubles with 3 other 6.0 players. Ken told them that he wasn’t good enough anymore to play with them. They all said that they didn’t care, they needed a 4th and they really wanted him to play with them. Because Ken felt the pressure of playing well, he really focused on the ball. After the match was over, Ken said that he was the best player on the court. When you see the ball this way, it really can have a dramatic effect on the way you play.

Ken is the owner of the Palisades Tennis Club in Newport Beach, California, so if you ever get down there, give him a call and tell him I sent you and that you would
like to play at his club. His staff has a terrific way of matching you up with players of your own level. If you get a chance to play there, you will see one of the best-run tennis clubs in America. They also host one of the largest senior tournaments their called the Pacific Southwest Senior Tournament.

Are you wondering by now what the correct answer to my test is? Since I am not there to give you the test in person, I want you to try to give yourself the test. It won’t be the same, but I am hoping that you will get the idea, not only about how you may not be seeing the ball as well as you could, but how really, really critical seeing the ball accurately is to your playing.

Here is what I want you to do. The next time you play, really work on seeing the ball as it comes to you, and notice which way it is spinning. After you get home, go to the super secret page on my web site and read about the test. Here is the web address: www.maxtennis.com/secret_answer.htm. In case you didn’t get it here is the web address again: www.maxtennis.com/secret_answer.htm.

On this page you will get all the answers to how the ball is really spinning as well as all the answers to the universe. It is absolutely critical that you go to this secret page because you will find information there about seeing the ball that you won't find in this CD series or anywhere else for that matter.

Please stop this CD now and do the test I just described.

If you can’t wait until the next time you play, ask a friend or family member to throw a ball to you. Have them throw it so that it bounces so that you can then catch it after it bounces. Don’t forget to see the ball spinning from the throw, to the bounce and then all the way to your hands as you catch it. Have your friend toss it with any spin they want 4 times. If you cheat and just play the CD without doing this exercise, you will miss much of these techniques. When you see the spin start the CD again and I will tell you the secret. Now stop the CD and do the little throwing test.

In the scheme of things, it doesn’t matter if you cheated and just kept the CD playing. What does matter is that you learn the answer to the test and how the balls are spinning. Here is the answer to how the ball was spinning as you were catching it.

The secret is that no matter what the spin is before the ball bounces, the ball will always have top spin on it after the bounce. Did you know this? Did you know that
even when your opponent hits an underspin, the ball will still have top spin on it after the bounce?

Whether you played first as I asked or did the little throwing test, you still absolutely must go to the secret page on my web site as it has critical information that you must have in order to fully understand about seeing the ball. Again that web address is: www.maxtennis.com/secret_answer.htm.

Seeing the ball the way I have described on my secret page may be a challenge for you. It took me years to get good at it, but when you really know you are seeing the ball, you will absolutely see a difference in your game. Some of the benefits of seeing the ball really well will be fewer miss-hits, more consistency, and more relaxed strokes. You will also begin to experience what it means to get your “conscious mind” out of the way and let your “other than conscious mind” direct your body.

Here are some games you can play that will help you to focus on the ball.

In Tim Gallwey’s book, *The Inner Game of Tennis*, he talks about a game called “bounce hit”. Every time the ball hits your racket or your opponent’s racket, say out loud or to yourself “hit.” Every time the ball bounces on the ground, say out loud or to yourself “bounce.” Check to see if you are saying “hit” with a relaxed voice or a tense one. And check to make sure that you are saying these words exactly when it is happening and not before or after. You may not be able to do this very well at first, but please challenge yourself until you can do it even in a game situation. The benefits will be worth it.

If you are already familiar with this bounce-hit exercise, I have developed what I call the 2nd Generation Bounce-hit exercise. You will find it in Drill #11 on the Drill CD. This is a more advanced exercise and if you can do it, you will see big things happen to your game.

Another game to play is to say out loud or to yourself what direction the ball is spinning. When you hit the ball, say what direction it is spinning as it is going over the net and again when the ball is coming back toward you. Don’t forget to consciously see the spin after the bounce. And we all should know what direction the ball is spinning then, right?
Here is one more game to play. Watch the trajectory of the ball as it comes to you and as it goes back to the other side. Ask yourself whether the ball is still rising, has reached its peak, or is dropping when you hit it. Do the same when your opponent is hitting the ball.

As you learn to let go and just see the ball the way I describe above, on my secret web page and in the Mental Game Core Principles, you will see amazing things begin to happen. If nothing much happens, then maybe you are just not seeing the ball properly. Please contact me so we can figure out what is going on with you.

If you want to get a visual picture of what it looks like when someone sees the ball all the way to contact, watch Roger Federer’s head as he makes contact with the ball. He sees the ball better than any professional I know of. I use this visual picture when I am playing and am having difficulty seeing the ball. I just remember how Roger’s head moves when he hits the ball and immediately I begin to see the ball better.

The final thing to understand about seeing the ball is that even though it is your “conscious mind” that is seeing the ball, you want to have your “other than conscious mind” make it happen. This means that, for example, when you read, you are not trying hard to read, you just do it. Do the same for seeing the ball. Just see it.

One more final thing. Anytime you read or hear me say see the ball, I am talking about seeing the ball the way I described it in the answer to the test. If you have not gone there yet, you must turn off this CD and do it. If there is one thing in my book and in this CD series that is a must, this is it. Again, that web page is www.maxtennis.com/secret_answer.htm

Below are some more drills for you to do now so that you know what to see when you are working on your focus on the ball. Please spend some serious time doing them as seeing the ball is the most important and critical part of the mental game. Who knows, you might see a dramatic improvement to your game.

I have numbered these drills the same as you will find on the Drills CD. This way you can easily find and print them after listening to them.

**Drill # 1: Seeing the Ball**

Here is Drill #1 which will help you really learn to see the ball.
The next time you play spend it just seeing the ball. Seeing the ball means focusing on the ball and being able to tell yourself at all times what direction the ball is spinning. Seeing the ball means consciously seeing what direction the ball is spinning as the ball comes over the net, after the ball bounces, all the way to the blur of your racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time and as your ball bounces to your opponent's racket. It also means consciously seeing the ball spinning when you miss the shot long, wide, or into the net. You may want to listen again and again to Lesson #1 on seeing the ball.

In order to see the ball completely, keep thoughts about your stroke or hitting the ball into the court out of your head. Just focus on seeing the ball spinning. In addition, make seeing the ball easy. Relax your eyes. Just think about when you read. You don’t try hard to see the words, you just do.

As you do this drill, pay attention to the different balls that you are hitting. Are there any balls that “make” you lose your focus? These will be the balls you really need to work on as you get beyond seeing a normal ball. For example, you might have difficulty seeing a really deep ball to the blur of your racket, or maybe you have trouble seeing the ball when you hit the ball out.

Anyway, once you get good at seeing the ball, you will constantly need to refine it. If you are anything like me, there will be times when you think you are seeing the ball, but you just really aren’t.

Here are some more questions to ask yourself after a point or rally is over so that you can make sure you are seeing the ball correctly:

- Am I seeing the ball spinning all the way to my racket?
- Am I seeing the blur of the racket as the ball hits the strings, in other words, am I seeing the ball to the presence of the racket?
- Am I seeing the ball spinning after the bounce?
- Am I keeping my eyes on the contact point after I see the ball to the blur?
- Am I seeing the ball spinning after it crosses the net and to the other side of the court?
- Am I seeing the ball spinning, even when I hit the ball long, wide, or into the net?
Any "no" answer means that you have some more practicing and letting go to do.

Here are a few more questions.

- Am I worrying about hitting the ball into the court?
- Am I trying to hit the ball into the court?
- Am I worrying about stroking the ball correctly?
- Am I trying to stroke the ball correctly?
- Am I trying to direct the ball to a certain spot on the court?

Any "yes" answer means that you have some more practicing and letting go to do.

Here are two more drills that will help you see the ball well. By the way, all these drills will help you experience what it means to separate the conscious mind from controlling the body.

**Drill #12: The Spinning Game**

Here is Drill #12 which I call The Spinning Game Drill

Another game to play is to say out loud or to yourself what direction the ball is spinning. When you hit the ball, say what direction it is spinning as it is going over the net and again when the ball is coming back toward you. Don’t forget to consciously see the spin after the bounce. And you know what direction that is, right? If you don’t then you have not done your homework in Lesson #1.

**Drill #13: The Trajectory Drill**

This next Drill is Drill #13 and it is called the Trajectory Drill.

Here is another game to play. Watch the trajectory of the ball as it comes to you and as it goes back to the other side. Ask yourself whether the ball is still rising, has reached its peak, or is dropping when you hit it. Do the same when your opponent is hitting the ball.

This drill can be an eye opener when you do this when you are volleying. Did you know that probably 99% of balls you hit when you volley are dropping before you hit it. The other 1% is at the peak. If you hit a ball that is rising, then you need to
know that the ball would be going long if you didn’t hit it. So, let all rising balls go so you will win the point.

Now that you have mastered the seeing of the ball, in the next lesson, I will take you into the world of relaxation starting with your breathing patterns. This will be another eye opener for you as most players don’t have a very good idea on how to breathe or even what relaxation really means. Maybe I should have said this will be a mouth opener as I hope that you will learn to breathe through your mouth and not through your eyes.

**Lesson # 2: Breathing**

In Lesson #2, I am going to discuss how to breathe and why it is so important.

After seeing the ball as described earlier, the second most important thing to focus on is your breathing. This is because focusing on your breathing keeps the upper body more relaxed, thereby allowing your body to hit the ball better.

Have you ever taken a yoga class? What is one of the important things the instructor tells you while you are doing the postures? You quickly learn that breathing is a big part of getting the full benefit from it. Tennis is no different except that you will be using the breathing to stay in the here and now, as well as using it to help you learn how to keep your “conscious mind” out of the way. And, like yoga, working with your breathing, helps you relax properly.

Since breathing is the most important part of the relaxation package, you will need to work on it as much as you do on seeing the ball. I will discuss the full relaxation package in a later session. In the Mental Game Core Principles, I talked a little about how to breathe but not about some of the practical ways to work on it. Here I will go into more detail.

Up until I wrote my book, I have always told my students that the jury was still out as far as the “best” way to breathe, because I have always had difficulty allowing my breathing to be the way I felt it should be. Well, the jury has arrived at a verdict. I
had experimented with just about every possible way to breathe and I believe the way I will describe to you now is the easiest and most beneficial way to do it while hitting.

Do you think you hold your breath when you hit? Have you ever been out of breath and realized that you didn’t really run anywhere? If you have, then you are holding my breath.

Early in my days of working on my mental game and trying to find out how to play my very best, there was a time when I was playing doubles, and after most points, I found myself out of breath. I thought that this was very strange because, as you know, there is not a lot of running in doubles and I was only a few feet away from where I started. I said to myself, “How can I be out of breath when I didn’t run anywhere?” This was when I realized that I was holding my breath and when I began to discover what the best way to breathe was when hitting the ball. And, as I said earlier, I experimented with many ways of breathing. The thing I found was that no matter how I breathed, I felt so much more relaxed.

The next time you play, begin by just being aware of your inhales and exhales as you are hitting the ball back and forth. Check to see if you are holding your breath when you make contact with the ball. Without this ability to consciously pay attention to yourself breathing, it will be difficult to work on changing your breathing patterns in the way I describe next.

Once you have the ability to pay attention to your breathing, you can start working on the quality and rhythm of it. Here is what I consider to be the most effective and natural breathing pattern while hitting the ball.

When you are hitting from the backcourt, start your exhale before, as, or just after the ball bounces on your side as the ball is coming to you. This exhale should be a sigh that is long, slow, and relaxed and should continue well through contact with the ball. At the same time, of course, you are consciously seeing the ball all the way to the blur of your racket. You don’t have to concern yourself with your inhales as I guarantee that you will do it. Your sigh should sound like this. (Do a sighing exhale).
Exhaling as you hit is a very natural way to breathe, so all you have to do is start your exhale before you hit the ball, make it smooth and relaxed, and make it longer than usual. It doesn’t get any easier than that.

When you watch the pros play, you will hear some of them actually grunt out loud as they hit the ball. Especially Sharapova. If you notice closely you will hear that they start this grunt or forced exhale as or after their racket makes contact with the ball. I don’t think this way of breathing is very helpful since it does little to relax their upper body.

If you listen to Nadal’s breathing, it will be closer to what I am describing as the optimum way to breathe. He does sometimes start his breathing before he hits the ball, but he still exhales after hitting the ball. From my way of thinking, he is exhaling too tensely, but I believe it has great value anyway.

When you are at the net, you will notice that your breathing will have to be a little quicker. You will need to start your exhale just before, as, or just after the ball hits your opponent’s racket and allow it to continue well through your hit. Do this, and you may see some amazing things happen with your volleys.

Like when you are at net, when your opponent is at net, it is also a little trickier because the ball is also coming back sooner than normal, and you will have to start your exhale before you make contact with the ball. You might need to start your exhale just as your opponent hits the ball or you can still start the exhale when the ball bounces. Again, the important thing is to start the exhale before you make contact with the ball.

Again, while you are working with your breathing, it is ideal to also be focusing on the ball all the way to the blur of the racket. However, you may want to forget about focusing on the ball for a while and just work on the breathing part. After you have spent some time with the breathing, you must then see if you can do both at the same time. Achieving both the correct breathing and seeing the ball at the same time, and without judgment, is the ultimate focus and leads to playing in the zone.

One of the ways I help myself pay attention to my breathing is to make a little sound as I exhale. It is not a grunt, and no one else can hear me, but I can hear it
inside my head. This way I can stay more aware of what is going on with my breathing.

The breathing will be a little different on your return of serve. I will be discussing the return of serve in more detail later. Until you get to that part, here is what you need to do. You should be starting to exhale just as or before your opponent hits the ball. But the exhale is still a long, relaxed sigh and continues well through your hit. This way your upper body has a better chance to stay relaxed even when your body has to move quickly. This is especially important when playing someone with a big serve.

When you are serving, you will also start the long, relaxed exhale before you make contact with the ball. And again, continue to exhale well through contact. You may also find that you will be able to see the ball to the blur of the racket that much easier.

The important point to remember is that no matter what shot you are hitting, the exhale should always be like a very relaxed sigh and that you start it before making contact with the ball and continue it long past contact.

This may be a good time to let you know that there will be no shot that you will ever hit where you won’t want to see the ball and breathe. This includes drop shots, lobs, overheads, behind the back shot, every shot. Every ball you hit. Again, this is easy to talk about, but may be hard to do. When you can do this, have you seen how much better you play?

Breathing was the last part of the inner game that I worked on. I didn’t work on it very much in the early years because I just couldn’t let go enough to focus on both breathing and seeing the ball. However, once I did get serious about doing both, my game started to really improve.

Doing both is not easy. It takes a lot of work and a lot of letting go. Please don’t let that keep you from working on your breathing.

The obvious way to work on it is to just hit balls and see if you can pay attention to your breathing and for the moment forget about focusing on seeing the ball. If you are just playing a practice match, you can do it then also. However, if you are playing a match that is important to you and can’t yet focus on both the ball and
your breathing, I would rather have you just focus on the ball. I guess what I am trying to say is that when playing an important match, it is not the time to practice the way you breathe, but it is the time to have your breathing be as relaxed as possible, even if you can’t consciously focus on it.

Another way to work on breathing and you can even do this in a game, is to play two points or rallies just paying attention to yourself exhaling. This means from the time the first point starts to when the second point ends and includes the time in between points. And, of course, any thought of trying to see the ball, trying to hit the ball into the court, or trying to stroke it a certain way needs to be eliminated. If you happen to see the ball well at the same time, that would be wonderful and an added bonus.

Then play two points just seeing the ball. Again, make sure that you are focusing on the ball from the time the first point starts to the time the second point ends. Likewise, if you happen to feel yourself breathing at the same time, that is better.

Then see if you can pay attention to both your exhaling and seeing the ball for two points.

The ultimate goal here is to program the “other than conscious mind” to have the breathing be very relaxed. Just as when you are seeing the ball and the time comes to play the game, you need to get the “conscious mind” out of the way and again let your “other than conscious mind” keep your breathing relaxed.

Here is Drill #2 that I call Paying Attention To Your Breathing Drill. It will help you work on your breathing. Please spend as much time as you can with your breathing as you will absolutely see and feel the difference in your game.

**Drill # 2: Paying Attention To Your Breathing**

In this drill, you will be working primarily on your breathing. Many of my students tell me that the breathing part is the hardest. Please don’t let this keep you from working on it. Even if you are not able to do it very well, it will still have huge benefits and will lead you to the next level. You may want to listen again to Lesson #2 on the breathing. Here is how you can practice it.
Spend five minutes or any period of time you want just paying attention to your breathing.

The ideal breathing pattern is to allow your breathing to be very relaxed, to use a long exhale with a sigh before you make contact with the ball and to continue exhaling through the hit. Paying attention to your breathing means consciously feeling your breathing, even after the point or rally is over. The idea is to be able to do this over an extended period of time.

To do this exercise properly, you will have to keep thoughts about your stroke or about hitting the ball into the court out of your head. Focus only on your breathing.

You also need to know that you may or may not hit the ball very well, and you need to let go of this. This exercise is not designed to maximize hitting the ball into the court. It is an exercise of relaxing and letting go. However, you may just find yourself hitting better. My point is that you are not to worry or even pay attention to this aspect.

Here are some questions to ask yourself after a point or rally is over:

- Am I consciously feeling myself exhaling?
- Is my breathing very relaxed?
- Am I sighing before the hit and continuing it after?
- Am I consciously and continuously aware of my breathing even in between points and into the next point or rally?
- Am I able to stay focused on my breathing, even when I hit the ball long, wide, or into the net?

Any "no" answer means that you have some more practicing and letting go to do.

Here are some more questions for you to ask yourself.

- Am I worrying about hitting the ball into the court?
- Am I worrying about stroking the ball correctly?
- Am I trying to direct the ball to a certain spot on the court?

A "yes" answer means that you have some more practicing and letting go to do.
Once you have worked with the seeing of the ball and your breathing, you need to work on combining them. This is really the ultimate thing to do when you play if you want to really play well. This next drill is Drill #3 which is for learning to combine seeing the ball and breathing.

**Drill # 3: Combining Seeing the Ball And Breathing**

After spending some time just watching the ball and then working on just your breathing, now you need to do the ultimate. Here is what you want to do.

Spend five minutes or any period of time you want working on consciously seeing the ball and consciously feeling your breathing at the same time. Again, you must keep your mind free of thoughts about hitting the ball into the court or about your stroke or you won’t be able to do this. Focus only on the ball spinning and your breathing. Refer to the questions to ask yourself in Drills #1 and #2.

This next drill is Drill #11. When you do this drill you will learn how to play using what I call the second generation bounce hit game.

**Drill # 11: The Second Generation Bounce Hit Game**

Caution: This Exercise may be hazardous to your Conscious Mind.

This is the most advance of the “letting go” exercises. Use at your own risk. When you do this exercise, your conscious mind will not be able to try, think, judge, or do. At least, not very much.

You should be familiar with the normal Bounce-Hit Exercise, as I talked about it Lesson #1 on the Seeing the Ball.

If you are not already familiar with this Bounce Hit drill, this 2nd Generation Bounce Hit drill may not make complete sense to you. If you haven’t worked with the bounce-hit exercise yet you may just want to do the original one first in practice until it is familiar before trying to do this advanced one.
Many years ago, when I learned from Tim Gallwey about the Bounce-Hit exercise for seeing the ball, I used it when I was rallying or practicing. However, when I used it during a game, I found I couldn’t do it. I then proceeded to give it up and forgot about doing it in a match for all these years.

I had been struggling with my conscious mind for a while because it kept interfering with my game. It wanted to get involved with hitting the ball in the court. I have visualized letting go many times. I have reprogrammed letting go over and over again and still my conscious mind just kept interfering. When I say interfering, it means that I was choking.

So, over the few months that I was finding myself choking, I was searching for ways to keep my focus on the ball and my breathing for the entire point, especially when the point and the match got tight. I was really good at seeing the ball and breathing during a match, except when it came to the “crunch” time when all I had to do was hit the ball in to win the point. I would then try to hit the ball how and where I wanted to and ended up missing the ball.

As it happens, when I work on a problem, the answer comes. This time it took months. For some reason, I thought about and started to do the bounce-hit during my practice. The thought came to me that I should try it when I played a match, as I had not done it for years and years. I wanted to see if I could do it now that I was so good at seeing the ball and breathing. I felt that I was now sufficiently “mentally developed,” that I would be able to actually do it right.

It was amazing. Not only was I able to do it even though it was not perfect at first but I found I did not miss the balls I was missing before. When I played 3 days later, I did the bounce-hit method when I served and volleyed. I found that for the first time in my tennis life, I did not panic on a hard half volley and my other volleys were so much more relaxed. I still missed some balls, but they were ones that I was still too tight on.

But, here are the “kickers” I discovered while practicing this exercise and why I call it the “second generation.”

When you say the word “hit” it is a hard sound. I noticed that when I was saying it, my voice was at a higher octave than normal and it was a tense sound. I
began to soften the saying of “hit” and it made a lot of difference. I also noticed that I was doing the same thing when my opponent was hitting the ball, especially when he was serving and when I was serving. I began to soften the word “hit” again when my opponent was hitting the ball as well as on my serve. I saw a big difference in the way I felt and how well I hit. Lo and behold, my conscious mind could not get control of my body. At least not very easily.

By the way, I would say the bounce-hit out loud, but very softly so only I could hear myself saying it. You would not be able to hear me say it from the other side but you could hear me say it if you were standing close to me. I suggest doing this as it helps you be aware of how you are saying the bounce-hit and whether or not you are relaxed when you say it.

Here is the other “kicker.” At the same time as I was saying “bounce-hit,” I started to really see the ball to my racket like I normally would do when not doing the bounce-hit and that added the icing on the cake.

To sum up, make sure that you are saying the word “hit” softly with a very relaxed voice as the ball travels to both sides. This, of course, includes when you serve and when your opponent serves. At the same time you are doing this “bounce-hit” exercise, see the ball all the way until you say “hit.” Make sure you are still keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time. And, again, see the ball and say “bounce-hit” as the ball is going to the other side of the net.

If you can’t do this very well at first, all it means is that you have some more “letting go” to do. You may need to work on what I call the “foundational place” of the mental game, which is truly letting go of everything. I talked about this in Lesson #31. This means letting go of hitting the ball into the court, letting go of any strategy, letting go of aiming, and letting go of trying to do anything else that you may be thinking of when you are playing. Thinking about these things is your conscious mind getting involved. Once you get to this place, you will find doing the bound-hit exercise, seeing the ball and breathing much easier.

And, the dirty little secret is that this is the place you are searching for. This is where you need to be when you play. It is the ultimate place to be so that you play your very best every time you play.
Don’t believe me on how amazing this Second Generation Bounce-Hit is. See and do it for yourself.

Now that you have the first part of the relaxation package nailed, we need to discuss the rest of the relaxation part. I will now get more into what relaxation really means and how you can know if you are relaxed properly in the other areas of your body.

**Lesson # 3: Relaxation**

This Lesson is Lesson #3 and is all about Relaxation.

Do you ever hit a shot that feels “wrong” or awkward? How about a shot that felt really hard to do? I believe that the “wrong”, hard, or awkward shots are the result of being tense somewhere in your body.

Also, have you ever hit a shot that felt absolutely effortless and you wondered how come your ball when so hard and well? If you have, then you know what perfect relaxation means. And, you can learn to hit these kinds of shots more often.

So, what do I mean by relaxation? When playing tennis, being relaxed properly means using only those muscles that are needed to execute the shot and using the right amount of tension. The problem is that there is no person on this earth who knows exactly which muscles those are and how to use the perfect tension every time when hitting. The good news is that your “other than conscious mind” does, know. And if you can relax and let it hit the shot, you will be able to produce shots that really are effortless.

One day when talking to one of my students about relaxation, she realized perfect relaxation did not mean being relaxed the way you feel during a massage. You can observe the proper amount of relaxation and tension demonstrated when you watch the professionals in any sport and you say, “They make it look so easy.”

When we try hard to do something and especially the first time and when learning any new physical skills, we use so many more muscles than we need to and
often with much more tension. And we wonder why it takes so long for that new skill to become easy and second nature.

When I teach a student a different way to stroke the ball, they will often have a death grip on the racket. I tell them this is not a weight-lifting class and the racket does not weigh 1,000 pounds. The student also often feels that this new way of stroking is not natural or feels funny because they are so used to trying very hard.

I try to help my students discover only the muscles that are needed when hitting a particular stroke. I accomplish this by having them experience relaxation in some part of their body starting with their grip and wrist.

Here is one of the little secrets of why relaxation works so well. When you are relaxing and not trying to control your body with your conscious mind, your body falls under the supervision of your “other than conscious mind” and it can then take control of your stroke using only the necessary muscles and tension. Your “other than conscious mind” will also figure out exactly how to time the ball perfectly and what angle the racket must be at to hit the ball the way you want. If the body doesn’t know, by keeping your “conscious mind” out of the way and keeping it from trying to control your body, your body will learn that much faster.

Let’s say for example, that you are hitting the ball too high and it goes long. Do you know what angle of the racket that is needed to make the ball go lower? I don’t think so. But some part of your body knows. So, by relaxing your grip and wrist, your “other than conscious mind” can take over and adjust the angle of the racket. This principle applies to every part of your game.

So, how do you work on using only the muscles you need, and how do you know if you are doing this? There are some signs that you can watch for.

When you hit a ball and you feel awkward or the stroke feels hard to do, it means you are too tense somewhere in your body. As I told you earlier, if you are hitting a lot of balls long especially when running for a ball, then your grip and wrist are too tense. If you have ever paid attention to what your face is doing when you hit the ball, you may notice that it is not relaxed and you are “making a face”. That means you are too tense and maybe even holding your breath from trying too hard.
Speaking of the face, let me tell you about Roger Federer. He does two things better than any other top pro that I am aware of. The first is that he must be seeing the ball all the way to his racket as I discuss in the watching the ball section. You can see his head follow the ball to his racket, and his head stays at that point for a period of time longer than any other player I have seen. You will see most other pros move their head to their racket, but not even close to how well Federer does it. If you will take a look how often other players miss the ball, and I am talking about the pros also, you will see that often their head and eyes don’t follow the ball all the way to their racket.

The second thing that Roger does that no other top pro even comes close to doing is what he does with his face. Or maybe I should say what he doesn’t do with his face. In every picture I have seen of Roger hitting the ball, his face looks very relaxed, and sometimes it looks like he may be exhaling gently. Even in pictures where he is obviously straining to get to the ball, his face is relaxed. In every picture I have seen of other pros (male or female), you can see tension in their faces. This means that Roger is truly allowing his body to hit the ball and is not using any other muscles or trying to control his body consciously when he hits the ball. This is why Roger will be, and maybe already is, the greatest player the world has ever seen and will be on top for a long time to come.

By the way, do you know what stroke Roger hits without a relaxed face? The next time you watch Roger play, look at his face when he serves. Is it relaxed like the rest of his shots?

OK, back to how to work on the relaxation issue. When you feel you are too tense somewhere, you first have to isolate where the tension is located.

Other than the breathing, the most common place is in the grip and the wrist.

Tim Gallwey says that when you hold the racket you should hold it like you are holding a bird. You want to hold it tight enough so that the bird can’t get away, but not so tight that you squash the poor bird. Do you think you are squashing the poor bird when you hit the ball?

Many of my students think that if they hold the racket this loose the racket will turn in their hand. The racket will only turn in your hand if you hit the ball off center.
Here is the irony of this. If you hold the racket too tight, you will find yourself hitting more balls off center thereby having the racket turn in your hand more. By holding your racket looser and combined with seeing the ball, your body will be able to find the center of your racket easier and more often.

Here is a pretty complete list of the areas of tension, in order of importance, that seem to be common to most players.

- Your breathing — holding the breath as you hit the ball or a tense exhalation
- Your grip and/or your wrist
- Your face
- Your arm at the shoulder
- Your elbow when you are serving
- Your legs
- Your left hand if you hit right handed
- Your left ear. OK, maybe I am getting a carried away and being a little ridiculous but you get the idea
- And lastly, any other place in your body

Once you have determined what area you think may be tense, all you need to do is pay attention to that area when you are hitting the ball.

For example, if you think that your grip or your wrist is too tight, pay attention to your five fingers as you hit the ball. If you use a two-handed backhand, pay attention to all 10 fingers as you hit. With this awareness you will discover how not to squash the poor bird.

At the same time you are working on relaxing by paying attention to some part of your body, it is critical that you refrain from trying to do anything about the tension. The trying leads to more tension. Let your “other than conscious mind” figure out how to hit the ball into the court using only the muscles that are truly needed, and get your conscious mind out of the way.

As you begin to let go of all the other muscles you don’t need when you are hitting the ball, your strokes will become natural and so much easier. Your game will
improve, and you will find that you have more endurance because you are using so much less physical effort.

When I was a junior and I played the number 1 ranked player in S. Calif. Jerry Cromwell, I always felt that I was in terrible condition. This was because after the match, I was absolutely exhausted. Only after my lesson with Tim Gallwey did I realize what was going on so many years ago. I was tensing up every muscle in my body for the entire time I was hitting the ball. No wonder I was so tired afterwards and no wonder I never ever beat Jerry.

As you work on relaxing, you will experience more shots that feel absolutely effortless. When this happens, you will know that you are in the state of perfect relaxation. You need to remember those times so that you can begin to duplicate them on every shot. This is what you are striving for. And, all this “letting go” leads to “playing in the zone.”

Here is a good way to start working on experiencing what proper relaxing really means. Along with the seeing and breathing drills, you must work with this relaxing drill to get the most from playing the mental game.

**Drill # 4: Feeling And Relaxing Your Strokes**

Here is Drill #4 which I call the Feeling and relaxing your strokes drill.

This drill helps you develop the proper amount of relaxation when you hit the ball and works on really grooving your strokes. Actually, this is a bunch of small drills because you will be doing this drill with every stroke and paying attention to different parts of your stroke.

If you feel like your strokes are not consistent, then you will want to spend more time with this drill.

While you are doing all of these exercises, you need to make the movements as relaxed as possible. Remember that when you relax your body, you are turning control over to your other than conscious mind. This leads to much faster learning. The other reason to make each stroke as relaxed as possible and with as little conscious control as possible is so that when you actually play in your matches that your body will still be stroking the ball the same way even though you are not thinking about it.
Have you heard me say that the follow through is the most important part of the stroke? When you work on the follow through, sometimes good things happen in other areas of your stroke and you probably won’t even know about it.

Here is what you are to do.

You will want to spend five minutes holding the follow-through until it comes to a complete stop. This means stopping and holding the footwork also. Spend some time combining holding the follow-through with consciously seeing the ball spinning or consciously feeling your breathing. When you do this, it becomes an extremely powerful exercise.

Spend five minutes on each stroke doing the following: without controlling or judging, consciously feel your complete forehand stroke from the time you are in the ready position to the time you recover back to the ready position. Then spend five minutes with the backhand, five minutes with the forehand volley, and five minutes with the backhand volley or any other stroke you want.

While you are consciously feeling the stroke, keep thoughts about hitting the ball in the court out of your head. In case you were wondering, feeling the stroke means that you are able to absolutely describe the exact movement of your arm, wrist and the racket as you are moving it through the stroke.

For example, do you know if your racket is going up, down, or straight back when you are taking the racket back on your forehand? Since so many of my students have difficulty with being accurately aware of their swings, you may want to take some videos of your swing so that you can be really sure you are swinging the way you think you are. When you get comfortable with feeling your stroke, add either seeing the ball spinning or your breathing, but not both at the same time.

Here are some specific mini drills that you may want to work on. If you know that you are having difficulty with a stroke, by paying attention to and feeling the different parts of the stroke it will help a lot. If you have not done these awareness exercises, then it will be very helpful in improving your strokes. Even if you don’t know how to fix a particular stroke, it won’t matter. By paying attention and feeling your strokes, changes happen for the better even if you are not aware of any changes.
Please remember to let your body be as relaxed as possible while doing these drills.

Mini Drill #1: Spend some time consciously feeling the direction the arm and racket travels on the backswing from the ready position.

Mini Drill #2: Spend some time consciously feeling the direction the arm and racket travels as the racket starts forward.

Mini Drill #3: Spend some time consciously feeling the direction the arm and racket travels as the racket goes forward and makes contact with the ball.

Mini Drill #4: Spend some time consciously feeling the path of the arm and racket after the racket makes contact with the ball.

Mini Drill #5: Spend some time consciously feeling and knowing exactly where your follow-through ends. Remember that the follow-through is the most important part of the swing.

The key to doing these drills is to absolutely know what is going on with your stroke during these specific parts of the stroke. In order to do this, you must be letting go of where your ball goes and even trying to make your stroke “right.” Your only job is to just feel what the arm and racket are doing and relaxing as much as possible.

When you get really good at this drill, you can begin to feel the entire stroke all at once.

Have you ever listened to the ball when it bounces and when it makes contact with a racket? In the next lesson I will tell you all about it.

Lesson # 4: Listening

This is Lesson #4 on Listening where I will be telling about another way to focus on the ball.

Let me tell you a story. I have a good friend who is a Buddhist. One day I asked him how he practiced being one. He said he did a lot of mediations and I asked
him to give me an example. He said that he would just meditate and listen to all the
sounds around him with no thoughts or judgments, but just being aware of them.

I thought that would be an interesting idea for when I am playing tennis as it
would keep me in the here and now and keep my mind calm and clear. I had not done
any listening on the court before. I had not been able to play for about 4 months
because of an elbow injury, but I thought that I would just listen for the ball hitting
the ground and hitting my racket when I got back into playing.

Before I was able to play again, I read Ron Waite’s latest article on the Tennis
Server web site (www.tennisserver.com) and lo and behold he talks about listening on
the court. Go to my web site www.maxtennis.com and click on the Articles button to
read his article called “Listen to Your Game”. I would strongly suggest that you read
it. He has already had a lot of experience in listening. It is all about letting go and
having a calm mind when you play, and I really believe listening will help when you
play.

After I started playing again, I began to listen to the sound of the ball hitting
the ground and the ball hitting the racket on both sides of the court. If you have done
the bounce-hit exercise that I explained in the Seeing the Ball section, then this
concept of listening is very similar except that you are hearing the ball instead of
saying “bounce” or “hit”. Of course, you will want to focus on the ball at the same
time. Anyway, I have found it a very calming way to stay in the here and now. This
will help you further let go of consciously trying to control your play.

As with some of the other drills and ideas that work on letting go, you may not
want to do this right away in a match that is important. You can use it when you are
playing practice matches as it will be a good test for you to see if you can let go of
your strokes and everything else enough to still hear the ball and see the ball at the
same time. As always, the ultimate way to play the mental game is to use the “Core
Principles.”

Here is Drill #14 that I call the Listening Game drill which will give you
specific ideas on how to listen to the ball when you hit.

In the coming lessons, I will be discussing some very specific things that may
happen when you play. For example, I discuss choking, how to play a tie breaker,
getting angry, how to fix your shots on the spot, how to return serves, how to aim the 
serve and many more situations.

Lesson # 5: What To Do When You Are Nervous

This is lesson #5 and is about what to do when you are nervous before playing.

Have you ever tried really hard to stop being nervous before a tournament or 
before playing an important match and just couldn’t relax and calm yourself?

Well, you just can’t stop being nervous until you deal with the cause. People get 
nervous for a reason.

See if any of these possible reasons apply to you:

- Are you worried about losing?
- Are you making the match too important?
- Are you worried about playing badly?
- Are you worried about letting someone else down or maybe letting your 
school team down if you don’t win?
- Are you worried about any other issue?

All of these possible reasons boil down to wanting to win. Remember winning 
will take care of itself. You don’t have to worry about winning or losing, because if 
you play better than your opponent, you will win. Just focus on the “Core” principles 
and you will be playing as well as you are able to.

You have to let go of making the match important. When you make the match 
important, you will tense up, probably try too hard and therefore not play as well as 
you could. Remember, this is not life or death. It’s just a game. Enjoy it.

When you use the Mental Game Core Principles it will be impossible for you to 
be nervous when you are on the court because you will be playing a different game. 
You will be playing an inner game, which will help you play your best, and if that best 
is better than your opponent, then you will win.
If you don’t win, you will need to practice more on your weaknesses and maybe even on letting go. But being nervous because you are worrying about winning, won’t lead you to playing your best. You may still win, but you probably won’t feel so good about it.

On the other hand, if you go out and have some fun, play the mental game, and let winning take care of itself, you just may find yourself playing very well. If you didn’t win, most likely you will still feel pretty good about your game.

Next, let’s talk about getting angry on the court. It’s a close relative to being nervous.

Lesson # 6: What To Do When You Get Angry With Yourself

Here is Lesson #6 where I will tell you what to do when you get angry with yourself when you play

Do you think that getting angry helps you play better? Do you think that getting angry is a good thing? Does getting angry ever make you feel good?

I am assuming that your answer to these questions is no and that you know that getting angry with yourself is usually unproductive. Why you get angry with yourself is pretty easy to understand. You get angry because you have tried to do something over and over again and you still are making the same mistakes or you are expecting a different outcome.

When you miss an easy shot, for example, you tell yourself that you should have been able to hit that ball into the court, especially because it was so easy. So the next time you get an easy ball, you try even harder, using your conscious mind to get it in, and because you have tensed up more by trying harder, you miss it again and get even more upset with yourself.

However, the really big question is “How do you stop getting angry?”
The obvious answer to this is for you to let go of trying to hit the ball into the court and let go of judging yourself or caring if you miss. I know this may be a little difficult to accept and even counterproductive, but letting go of judgments will help you hit more balls into the court. It really does work, and it is a really important part of the mental game. And, guess what? By letting go of these things, you will not get angry.

Do you know who is hitting the ball when you play? You probably answered, “I do.” Trust me, it is not you. It is your body that is being directed by your “other than conscious mind.” If you think about it, if I cut off one of your arms, you are still completely there. It is just part of your body that isn’t there.

When you allow your conscious mind to control your body, your body most likely won’t function properly all the time, especially when the match gets tight. This is because your conscious mind does not know exactly what muscles to use, what the angle of the racket must be, what the perfect timing of the shot is, etc.

Your body, however, knows far more than your conscious mind about how the ball needs to be hit. And if it doesn’t, it will learn better and faster without you or your conscious mind trying to control it. You must work on getting your conscious mind out of the way.

The job of your conscious mind is to set the goals for your body and then step aside. We accomplish this by relaxing, seeing the ball, breathing, and letting go of everything else. In other words you will use the Mental Game Core Principles.

There are many ways to quickly release your anger and here are a couple of them. However, the main goal is to not get angry in the first place.

Just remember to lighten up and have fun. Remember that tennis is supposed to be a fun game, and no matter how good you get, you will still miss some balls. Even easy ones. I wonder sometimes why players think that they should never miss a ball. It’s just part of the game.

Put your game in perspective and don’t make it so important. Because, guess what? It really isn’t that important, is it? Even if you are playing at a professional level, making it important when you are on the court, will not help you play better.
When you play the mental game, you will miss fewer balls, which should make it easier for you win more matches and to enhance your enjoyment of the game.

In the next lesson, I will talk about Choking. I know you probably never choke so feel free to bypass this next lesson. Just in case you ever have experienced choking, I will give you some ideas as to how you can reduce or eliminate it.

**Lesson # 7: What To Do When You Choke**

Here in Lesson #7, I will talk about choking and what you can do about it.

Any time you are in a close match or set and then you lose, you need to take a look at what happened as the end of the match approached. You need to ask yourself, “Did I lose the match or set because I missed easy balls, or did my opponent win by hitting winners or forcing me into errors?”

If you lost because your opponent played better than you at the end and you didn’t miss balls that you were hitting earlier, then the only conclusion as to why you lost is that he or she played better than you did on that day. You may want to figure out how your opponent played better, where he or she was hurting you, and where your weaknesses were, and then work on them.

On the other hand, if you missed easy shots or played worse than you did earlier, then you “choked.”

The good news is that you can learn to not choke.

Here are some questions you need to ask yourself so you can begin to learn about why you choked:

- As the match got closer, did I think about winning?
- Did I have any thoughts about losing?
- Did I have thoughts that said, “All I have to do is hold serve” or “If I win this next game I will win the set or match”? 

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• Did I have thoughts that said, “I better not lose my serve” or “If I lose this next game I will lose the set or match”?

• Did I try hard to win or to hit the ball in the court?

• Did I try hard to “not lose”?

Did I hear any “yes” answers? Did you answer yes to all of them? If you answered yes to all of them, you are in serious trouble and we will need to do a frontal lobotomy. Please make an appointment.

Here is the ultimate answer to choking. It is one that must be taken very seriously if you want to control your choking or eliminate it all together. So, here it is.

**Any thought of winning or losing when the match or set is close is death.**
**Any thought of winning or losing at any time of the match is death.**
**Trying hard to do anything, especially at this time of the match, is death.**

Again, what happens at this time is that you start to try harder, and therefore you start tensing up. As you miss more, you try even harder, you get more tense, and the cycle continues.

So, what do you do? You do the opposite.

First of all, as soon as you are aware of any of the unproductive thoughts I just talked about, you must stop these thoughts in their tracks. One good technique is to say “Cancel, Cancel” and then reprogram as follows.

You relax more. This means that you will take a deep breath and do a complete relaxing sigh. Then trust your body to hit the shots, focus on the ball better, without trying hard, of course, while you exhale properly and let your body play.

The closer the match, the more you want to trust your “other than conscious mind” to make your shots. This means that you focus well, keep your conscious mind out of the way and keep it from controlling your shots. And, of course, this happens when your body is relaxed.

At the same time, your opponent is doing what you used to do. He or she is trying harder because at this time of the match he or she is thinking that winning every point
is very important and therefore will most likely be the one tensing up and choking. I can’t tell you how many times I have seen this happen when I get into a close match, and especially in a tie-breaker situation.

I was playing in a league match a few years ago. It was a pretty close match and I had won the first set. I am not exaggerating when I say that when I went to the net, and my opponent lobed, he hit the lob within a foot of the baseline every time.

Likewise, when he went to the net, and I lobed, he didn’t miss one overhead and hit winners every time. Ok, here we are in the tie breaker in the second set. The score was 5 – 5. I get a short ball so I hit my approach shot well enough so that I force my opponent to hit a lob. Guess what. His lob was a set up for me. Now it is match point for me. He is serving and he comes to the net and forces me to hit a lob and I hit a short one. I say to myself that the point is over and I start walking to receive the next serve. Well, to my surprise, he actually shanked the overhead and missed it. I couldn’t believe it. Here he had hit winners all day long but on match point for me he missed it. I see this kind of play all day long in players of all levels, including the professionals. He was trying so hard not to lose or thinking some other unproductive thought and because this was a tie breaker where in his mind he made every point so important, that he just couldn’t play like he did the rest of the match.

Keep on listening and I will tell you about what can happen when you are ahead in a match.

**Lesson # 8: What To Do When You Are Ahead In A Game Or Set**

In this lesson which is Lesson #8, I will tell you what to do when you are ahead in a game or set.

Have you ever been ahead in a match, and started thinking about how close you are to winning the set or match? Join the club. I think all of us have done that. The next question is, “Did you end up actually winning the set or match easily or did
your opponent close the gap and you either squeaked the win out or you ended up losing?"

When you find yourself losing after you have been ahead, you will need to ask yourself this question: "Is my opponent winning the points by hitting winners or forcing me into errors, or am I just missing shots?" If your opponent is winning the points, there is little you can do except to hit better balls so that he or she can’t hit those winning shots. You may need to change your strategy.

However, if you are just missing shots, then there is something you can do. Here are some questions you need to ask yourself:

- Did I think about “winning”?
- Did I think about “losing”?
- Did I have thoughts that said, “All I have to do is win this next point" and/or “If I win this next point I will win the game, set, or match”?
- Did I have thoughts that said, “I better not lose my serve” or “If I lose this next game I will lose the set or match”?
- Did I try hard to win or to hit the ball in the court?

Any thought of winning or losing at this time of the match is death. Any thought of winning or losing at any time of the match is death. Trying hard to do anything, especially at these times of the match, is death.

Did that just sound familiar?

Again, what happens when these thoughts occur is that you start to try harder, and therefore you start tensing up, and as you miss more, you try even harder and get more tense, and the cycle continues.

So, what do you do? You do the opposite.
First of all, as soon as you are aware of any of the unproductive thoughts I just talked about, you must stop these thoughts in their tracks. One good technique is to say “Cancel, Cancel” and then reprogram as follows.

You relax more. This means that you will take a deep breath and do a complete relaxing sigh. Then trust your body to hit the shots, focus on the ball better, without trying hard, of course, while you exhale properly and let your body play.

The closer you are to winning the match, the more you want to trust your “other than conscious mind” to make your shots. This means that you will focus well yet keep your conscious mind out of the way so that it does not control your shots. And, of course, this happens when you keep your body relaxed.

If you have just listened to the previous session on choking, you may have noticed that the solutions to both of these problems are the same. In fact, you may have noticed that I keep repeating the same things over and over.

I am hoping that by my emphasizing these points, you can see how to overcome the unproductive patterns you have developed over the years. You would not be needing these ideas had your solution, if any, worked. You need to reprogram your mind and adopt a different approach to these situations. When you are able to incorporate these ideas into your play, you will see that they really work.

The next part will deal with tie breakers and how you need to deal with them. As you will see, the solution will be almost identical to the last two dealing with choking and when you are ahead in the score. Please don’t skip this one and say to yourself, “I know this already.” Your conscious mind just may not be telling you the truth. And, even if you know this already, the really big question is, “Are you able to use this information when you are on the court and in these situations.

**Lesson # 9: What To Do When You Play A Tie Breaker**

This is Lesson #9 where I talk about what to do when you play a tie breaker.
Do you change the way you play when you are in a tie breaker? If so, what direction do you go? Do you go in the direction of thinking that because every point is so important now that you try harder? Or do you go in the direction of relaxing more so that your body can play maybe even better than you were playing earlier in the set?

In a tie-breaker, all of a sudden each point becomes very important. So, what do we normally do? We try harder. When you start to try harder, you start tensing up, and as you miss more, you try even harder and get more and more tense, and the cycle continues.

So, what do you do? You do the opposite.

You relax more. This means that you will take a deep breath and do a complete relaxing sigh. Then trust your body to hit the shots, focus on the ball better, without trying hard, of course, while you exhale properly and let your body play.

The closer the match, the more you want to trust “your other than conscious mind” to make your shots. This means that you focus well yet keep your conscious mind out of the way so that it does not control your shots. And, of course, this happens when your body is relaxed. Your opponent will still be doing what you used to do. He or she will be trying harder because winning every point is now very important and will most likely be the one tensing up and choking.

Here is what I actually say to myself when I start a tie breaker. Because I have a strong auditory sense, I talk to myself but if you are the visual type, you can translate this into a picture in your mind.

I say to myself, “Body, I can’t win this so you will have to do it and hit the shots. I will get out of your way and just focus on the ball for you, breathe very relaxed for you and just let you play.” Sometimes, I hit some no-brainer winners or I will hit some shots that I had not been able to hit earlier.

I remember one time, I was playing this guy who had a really big serve and I was struggling to just get it back. In the tie breaker in the third set after I gave my body the idea that it would have to win for me, I hit an unbelievable return of serve for a winner on one of his big first serves. I had not come anywhere close to hitting a return like that up until that tie breaker. Unfortunately, it doesn’t happen in every tie
breaker and believe it or not, even I choke and lose some tie breakers, but if I can get my conscious mind to cooperate, playing better in a tie breaker happens way too many times for me to believe that it is just a fluke.

I find that I will win most of the tie-breakers I play when I can really relax and let go more at this time. When I lose a tie-breaker, my opponent wins it. I don’t lose it very often by missing "nothing" balls. And it is amazing how many times my opponent loses points that by all rights should be theirs.

Do you ever get distracted? In the next lesson, I will be telling you how to overcome any and all distractions.

Lesson # 10: What To Do When There Are Visual And/Or Noise Distractions

Here is Lesson #10 where I tell you what to do when there are visual and/or noise distractions.

Have you ever let the noise of an airplane distract you? How about a car horn honking or someone yelling about a missed ball on the next court? What about seeing a ball rolling in the back of the court and because you didn’t see it in time to call a let, you lost the point because you let it distract you? All of these and any other distractions can really play havoc with your tennis if you let it.

Again, as in many of my lessons, the concept is pretty simple but it may take some time and practice. Here is what you do. Just acknowledge the distraction.

Know that it is part of life and no one is out to get you, and without judgment just let it go and go back to seeing the ball and feeling your breathing. Remember also, these distractions happen to both of you, but now you know how to deal with them. You can only hope that your opponent will still be bothered by them.

I can’t tell you how many times in the past I have lost the point because I was distracted by a ball that rolled onto the back of either my side or my opponent’s side. One day I thought enough is enough so when I played practice matches, I would
never call a let if a ball came into the court. The only exception was if the ball actually rolled in front of us or if there was a danger of either of us stepping on it. With a little practice of letting it be OK for the ball to be there, staying with my breathing and seeing the ball, I found that I wasn’t losing those points anymore. Do the same for any distraction that comes up. Remember, these distractions are also a part of the game.

Next I will focus on how you can play the same or better once you finish the warm up and begin to play.

**Lesson # 11: What to Do When You Play Better In Your Warm-Up Than You Do When the Game Starts**

In this lesson which is Lesson #11, I will talk about what to do when you play better in your warm up than you do when the game starts.

Have you ever played better than you did when you warmed up? I think most of us have experienced playing worse. Do you know what the real differences are between the warm-up and the game? Once you know these differences you can begin to deal with them and you can learn how to play as well or better once the game starts.

First of all, you must understand what is so different. There are three differences when the game starts. One difference is that you will now want to do something with the ball other than hit it down the middle. The second is that your opponent will not be hitting the ball down the middle any more either, and what he or she does with the ball affects your shots. And the third is that all of a sudden everything is more important. When you were just warming up, it didn’t matter if you missed the ball. You were not trying to aim your shots or even trying to hit the balls into the court (I hope). You were just hitting the ball down the middle.

If you really think about it, making the game important all of a sudden just because the game has started is the main cause of playing differently and usually worse. Once the game starts, if you can “trick” yourself into thinking that the game is
not any more important than the warm-up, then you will have a better chance to play the same or better.

Stop trying to aim or hit the ball into the court. Your body already knows how to do this. You did it in the warm-up. Stop trying to hit a perfect stroke. This is not the time for working on your strokes. Stop trying to win. Reprogram any thoughts you may have about losing. Remember, if you play better than your opponent, winning will take care of itself. And, most importantly, use the Mental Game Core Principles. They work. If you can do this, the only difference between the warm-up and when you start the game will be what your opponent does with the ball and the effect that has on your ability to play well.

On a later CD, you will learn how to get to what I call, “Your Foundational Place.” This will also help in your quest to find out how to play better once the game has started.

In the meantime, you will learn some more of “what to do whens” like what to do when you miss a shot and what to do when you start to play worse. So, keep listening as there is a lot more to learn.

Lesson # 12: What to Do When You Miss Shots And How to Fix Them

Here in Lesson #12, you will learn what to do when you miss shots and how you can fix them.

Are you like most players who don’t have a clue as to why you miss a particular shot? If you do know why you missed the shot, do you know how to fix it on the spot? If you don’t know why you missed a shot or if you don’t know how to fix it, I am going to tell you how in this lesson. And, I am talking about a technique that really works and not one in that you just try harder to hit the ball in. This is a very powerful technique, but it is a little involved and it will take a little time to learn.
When you miss a shot, you usually miss it in one of three ways: long, wide, or into the net. All three of these can and should be addressed as a non-stroke issue. If you miss when you are practicing your strokes, there may be a stroke component in why you miss, but if you miss when you are playing points which means you are in a match, the following concepts should be applied.

These corrections may be done when you miss only once and you may want to make these corrections on every miss so that you can get into the habit of doing it. However, if there is a pattern as to where you are missing the ball and two times missing the ball in the same place is a pattern, then you must address the issue immediately.

If you miss a ball in the same place three times, then you have to go into overkill and absolutely make these corrections. Don’t wait until the match is over and then say, “Boy, I sure missed a lot of shots long.” Or “My backhand down the line wasn’t working today.” These need to be addressed on the spot.

**What to Do When the Shot Goes Long**

Here is what you are to do when your shot goes long.

Before you can really do justice to correcting a ball that goes long you must first ask yourself this question. Did my ball go long because I hit it too hard or did it go long because it went too high over the net?

There are times when you hit the ball that no matter how low over the net you have hit it, the ball will go out because it was simply hit too hard. These are usually low, short balls and because the distance is shorter to the base line, the ball needs to be hit easy enough for it to travel up over the net and then down again into the court. Yes, a ball can go long because it is not only hit too high but also hit too hard and there can be a fine line as to which is which, but you should be able to determine the overriding reason as to why your ball went long.

If you determine that your ball went long because you hit it too hard, you will need to re-program by visualizing or talking to yourself so that the next time you get that particular shot, you will hit it easier. Hitting a ball easier is a code word for being
more relaxed. In this case, you will need to relax the muscles that you use to swing your arm at the shoulder so that it moves slower the next time.

While you are reprogramming your ball to go slower, you will also reprogram yourself to hit the ball over the net at the proper distance. By the way, do you know how high over the net your ball needs to go, on average, in order to go into the court and bounce where you want it to? Depending on how hard you hit the ball this will be about 1 to 4 feet over the net. The way I hit the ball, I program it to go 1 to 2 feet over the net and I would say it will be 2 to 3 feet over the net for most players.

And, the last part of the reprogramming technique is that you will visualize or talk to yourself about seeing the ball perfectly to the blur of your racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, having perfect breathing, and seeing where you would have liked the ball to bounce.

If you determine that your ball went long because it went too high over the net, the first and easiest thing to do is imagine or visualize that from now on you will relax your grip and your wrist a little bit more when you make contact with the ball.

Secondly, because your ball cleared the net too high, then along with the first correction, take the time to imagine or that from now on your ball will clear the net by two to three feet.

And thirdly, since it is a relaxation issue, you may want to check your breathing to make sure you are not holding your breath at contact with the ball and that your exhalation is very relaxed.

And again, the last part of the reprogramming technique is that you will visualize or talk to yourself seeing the ball perfectly to the blur of your racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, having perfect breathing, and seeing where you would have liked the ball to bounce.

In both of the processes I have just described and after you have “reprogrammed” yourself, you must let it go and get back to seeing the ball and exhaling before and after you hit the ball. This forgetting about and letting it go is a huge part of the process of reprogramming. So many times when reprogramming doesn’t work it is because after you visualize, you then try hard to make it happen. Please don’t let this happen to you.
What to Do When the Shot Goes Into the Net

When your shot goes into the net, this is what you want to do

Missing the ball in the net is also a relaxation issue and not a stroke issue. The way to fix this is to relax your arm and wrist so that your backswing can get lower automatically and without effort. This will allow your arm and racket head to swing up to the ball so that the ball goes over the net. In addition, imagine or visualize your ball going two to three feet over the net. After you have reprogrammed yourself, let it go and get back to seeing the ball and exhaling before and after you hit the ball.

What to Do When the Shot Goes Wide

Here is what you want to do when your shot goes wide.

I have found that when I hit the ball wide, it is because I have tried too hard to hit the ball down the line or cross-court, and as a result, I was unable to see the ball to the blur of my racket and keep my focus on the contact point for a short time. So, in this case, you may need to let go of your effort to direct the ball and make seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and your breathing more important. The way you stop directing the ball is by relaxing your arm and letting the stroke go its natural way on the follow through. As in the previous situations, imagine or visualize your ball landing on the spot you want it to, and after you have reprogrammed yourself, let it go and get back to seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and exhaling before and after you hit the ball. In other words, do the core principles.

Now that you have learned how to fix the various errors, the big thing now will be for you to remember to use these techniques. You will need to develop a strategy so that you can remember to do these things on the spot. It is too late to do them after the match is over.

What should you do if your whole game takes a turn for the worse? In the next lesson, I will give you a one minute method that will help you turn your game around.
Lesson # 13: What to Do When Your Whole Game Starts to Go Badly: The One Minute Method

This is Lesson #13 on what you can do when your whole game starts to go badly. It just takes a minute.

Have you ever found yourself playing good one minute and then all of a sudden your game fell apart? Do you know how to get it back on track, and in one minute?

Why do you think so many of the players out there get angry with their shots? It is because they just don’t have a clue as to how to fix their game much less how to make the ball go into the court. This one technique, when you learn it, will set you apart from all the other players out there.

Here is what you are to do. When you change sides and you are sitting down, take a deep breath, do a relaxing exhale, clear your mind, and reprogram what you want to do. Pretty easy, eh? This, of course, means letting go of all other thoughts like trying to hit the ball into the court, your strategy, winning or losing etc and then refocusing on using and only using the Mental Game Core Principles. This technique actually takes less than a minute but then again, you have to remember to use it.

When I was in Victoria, B.C. working with one of the top players there, I saw over and over this technique work with him. He was far better than I was, but there were times he would begin to miss balls he should have been making. One day, when we were playing and he started to miss again, I would talk to him about seeing the ball, breathing etc, but nothing really seemed to get him out of this metal lapse. So, I had him sit down on the bench and take a deep relaxing breath, calm his mind and reprogram his whole approach to playing. This, of course, was what I was telling him before but now it was much more formal. This took about 30 seconds. When he got up to play, again, he hit four winners in a row and completely turned his game around and I was lucky to get a point thereafter. You can do this also, but you must remember and take the time to do it.
Next we will explore what you should be doing in between points. This is an important lesson as this is where your conscious mind can really try to intrude where it does not belong.

Lesson #14: What to Do When You are In Between Points

Here is Lesson #14 where you will learn what to do when you are in between points.

Do you know what the pros do in between points? Have you ever observed the body language of players as soon as the point is over? What you do in between points can really make a difference in how you play. Here are the different components of what you should be doing to encourage your body to play better.

If you did not miss the shot or you have won the point and are doing what I suggest in the Mental Game Core Principles, ideally you would continue seeing the ball, and being aware of your breathing when the point is over and until the next point starts. This will keep you focused and in the here and now.

Some instructors say to focus on something neutral like the strings on your racket. You will see a lot of players as well as the pros doing this. There is nothing really wrong with doing this, but I say why waste time focusing on something that is not going to help you play better? By keeping your focus on the ball and your breathing in between points, you will be ready to see the ball, and your body will have a chance to be relaxed and ready for the next point.

In between points and in between games is the time you may be thinking destructive thoughts like thinking about winning or losing, or your conscious mind may be trying to get involved with your play in some way. If you become aware of any negative or unproductive thoughts, just say, “cancel, cancel,” and then change the thought into something more productive and focus again on the ball and your breathing. If you have hit a good shot, it is OK to thank your body. After all, it is your body who hit it. Be sure to ask your “other than conscious mind” to keep those shots
coming. However, if you have missed the shot, then you may want to encourage your body to do better by doing the following.

If a thought comes to you about your stroke, then you can mentally reprogram the stroke by visualizing how you want to hit it. This does not mean that you think about what you are doing wrong. You can even take a practice swing doing the stroke correctly. This practice swing must be absolutely correct and must be a complete swing. This practice swing must include not only the perfect swing but also seeing the imaginary ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, breathing properly, and hitting the ball into the court. **Please don’t do what I see some people do. They actually take a practice swing using the incorrect stroke they just used when they missed the shot.**

After you have done this, let go and forget about your stroke. Go back to seeing the ball and breathing, and let your “other than conscious mind” figure out how to make the stroke change.

If you are aware of missing a certain shot more than once, immediately visualize hitting the ball going into the court to the spot you would have liked it to go, using a perfectly relaxed stroke, consciously seeing the ball perfectly, and having your body breathe properly. After you have done this, go back to seeing the ball and breathing as the next point begins.

If you are aware of missing the shot because of an error in seeing the ball or in breathing, again imagine or visualize yourself seeing the ball perfectly all the way to your racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and all the way to your opponent's racket with perfect breathing.

If you find that you are having difficulty with your focus, then you must begin to address the causes.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Was I trying to hit the ball into the court?
- Was I thinking about hitting the ball to a particular place on the court?
- Was I trying to hit a winner?
• Was there anything else going on that would have kept me from seeing the ball all the way to my racket?

If your answer was "yes" to any of the above questions, just be aware that this way of thinking is going to interfere with you playing your best. So make your mental correction, let it go, and get back to focusing on the ball, breathing, and letting your other than conscious mind direct your body when you hit your shots.

In the next lesson, you will learn about another common issue that I see in many players and that is what to do when you hit the ball off center.

Lesson # 15: What to Do When You Hit the Ball Off Center

In lesson #15, I will talk about what to do when you hit the ball off Center.

Do you think that you hit more of your share of miss hits? Maybe I should ask first, “Are you even aware of when you miss hit a ball?

Do you think you know how to hit the ball on the center of your racket? If you answered yes, then you are the only person on this earth who does. So, who does know? Remember when I asked earlier about who hits the ball and I told you it was not you but your body? Well, it is your body who knows how to hit the ball in the center of the racket and if it is having trouble learning, the good news is that there are some things you can do to help it.

One or all of the following can cause you to hit the ball off-center:

• Your grip and your wrist are too tight, usually at impact.

• You are not seeing the ball all the way to the blur of your racket.

• Maybe your breathing is too tense or you are holding it.

If you think that you are miss hitting often, you will need to spend some time paying attention to your grip and your wrist at impact and know that you want them
to be more relaxed. Remember what Tim Gallwey said about how you should hold your racket. Hold it like you would hold a bird -- tight enough that the bird can’t get away, but not so tight that you would squash it? Check your grip out and see what happens when you relax it even more.

Seeing the ball and breathing relaxed is critical, but if you still try hard to hit the ball in the center of the racket, you may still be hitting it off-center. Trust that your body knows how to hit the center of your racket. Or, it will learn how to do so if given the chance. That is why the grip and the wrist must be relaxed at the same time as you see the ball and as you are breathing properly so that you are not consciously controlling your body. The more you relax, the more you are giving your body the chance to learn where the center of your racket is.

I am sure that you would like to learn how to hit more accurately. In the next lesson, I do just that.

**Lesson # 16: How to Help Your Body Learn to Hit Accurately**

Here in Lesson #16, I will tell you how to help you body learn to hit more accurately.

Don’t you think it is amazing how talented the body is when it can learn how to do something without you even knowing how? Do you know that your body can actually learn to hit the ball with extreme accuracy? Here is how you can help it to do just that.

There is a process that I have developed for learning to do anything physical. I will give you the generic steps of this process in Lesson #33. For now, I will use this process to show you how to hit your shots very accurately when you play tennis. Hopefully, you realize that this ability to hit accurately will take time, but it will take a lot less time than if you were to keep doing it the traditional way. Don’t believe me? Do it and see for yourself.
I am going to use hitting forehands cross court for the purpose of this discussion. You can, of course, substitute any place on the court or any stroke that you want.

The first step in the process is to know where you want to hit the ball. I am not just talking about saying to yourself that you want the ball to go cross court or over there. I am talking about a very specific place.

The example I like to use to demonstrate this concept is this. If you asked me to come over to your house today and I had not been to your house before, I would ask you where you lived. If you said, “I just live over there”, it would take me a long time for me to find your house. Because I am a smart guy, I bet you I could eventually find your house, but I would really have to work at it and it would take me much much longer to get there. Give me your address and I will go to map quest on the Internet and I will get very specific directions.

It is the same with hitting the ball cross court. You must have very specific directions. So, the first thing you need to do is to see the spot on the court where you want your ball to bounce. I like to place a small bright orange road cone on the court so that the spot really stands out. Then you need to see and know where the ball will pass over the net. On a stroke other than the serve, the spot over the net will be a whole range of places because it will depend on where you are on the court when you hit the ball.

Then you will need to know how high over the net your ball must go in order to hit your spot. Have you ever thought about that? Maybe you have now because I talked about it in an earlier lesson. But, most likely you haven’t thought about it until now. You will want your ball to travel about 2 to 3 feet over the net for your average ball. These distances may change depending on the particular shot and how hard you hit.

Now that you have the goal down, you will just visualize your ball going over the net two to three feet and landing on the spot you picked out. This is step number 2 in the process. The first step was determining your goal.

Step number 3 is when you actually hit the ball. You want to turn over control to your “other than conscious mind” so that it will direct your body to learn how to
hit your target. You do this, of course, by seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, breathing, and proper relaxation. Please don’t try to hit the target. Let your “other than conscious mind” direct your body so that it can do it.

If you see that the patterns of your balls are not very close to your target or that your body is not learning very well, then you need to go back to step #2 and reprogram how and where you want your body to hit the ball.

This is all there is to it. By just working over and over with this process, you will see your body becoming so much more accurate.

I can’t tell you how many times when I am working with a new student on developing their accuracy that it amazes even me how accurate the body can be when hitting a tennis ball. Here is a short scenario that I see over and over. I start by explaining to my student how to make the ball go the direction they want and to hit the target.

When they start hitting balls I usually begin to see more of a pattern of the balls going closer to the target but no balls actually hit the road cone. They come close but always miss. I then stop them from hitting and I ask my student if they see that their patterns are better and they usually say yes. Then I ask them if they are trying to hit the target. Because this is so normal for the conscious mind to get involved and because my student has not yet assimilated what letting go really means, my student usually tells me that he/she is trying hard to hit the target. Even in spite of this trying the balls begin to go better. However, as soon as I remind my student to let go of trying to hit the target, it is amazing how many times within the next 10 hits that the target is actually hit. Sometimes it happens on the very next hit.

Once you have learned how to hit the balls cross court and down the line accurately, how do you do it in a match when you have to decide or think about where you want to hit the ball? The next lesson will tell you that simple process.
Lesson # 17: How to Decide And Then Hit the Ball Where You Want It to Go

In this lesson, which is Lesson #17, you will learn how to decide and then hit your balls where you want it to go.

When you are playing, how do you make the decision to hit the ball where you want it to? Do you really know how or is your idea just some vague process? Do you think that you do it by directing your racket in that direction or maybe it has something to do with your feet?

How you decide where to hit the ball where you want it to go is actually pretty simple. And, like most things I talk about here, it will take some time and practice to do it well.

Think about when you are warming up. You just “know” that you want to hit the ball down the middle, and without thinking very hard, if at all, you just do it. You even “know” this before you even get on the court.

The same applies when you are hitting your balls cross-court, down the line, or anywhere else. It is simply a “knowing” of where you want the ball to go and then just doing it. Trying hard, thinking hard, making it important, or trying to consciously direct the ball won’t work in the long run or when you are under pressure. The best way to achieve this knowing and therefore hit the ball where you want it to go is to see the ball all the way to the blur of your racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and trust that your “other than conscious mind” will direct your body.

Still, it does take practice figuring out what I mean by "knowing." Unfortunately, I can’t tell you what this “knowing” feels like. I can tell you that when you do learn to do it, you will be able to decide to hit the ball anywhere you want effortlessly. The more you work with all of these concepts I have been telling you about, the more it will become easier for you to understand what “knowing” means.
Obviously, if you have not developed the skill of accurately hitting the ball to the corners (or anywhere else) to your satisfaction, then you must spend more time practicing using the drills found in the Drill CD Section. And, of course, you will be using the concepts I talked about in the previous lesson. Please keep in mind this concept of knowing when you are practicing.

OK, what about your return of serve? Do you know how to develop and practice it? We will discuss it next.

Lesson # 18: How to Hit the Return of Serve Into the Court

Here in Lesson #18, I will tell how to hit your return of serve into the court much more often.

First of all, I will bet that 99% of tennis players don’t practice the return of serve. Is this true of you? So, why don’t you? I believe that one of the reasons is that it is not convenient. Before I get into how to hit returns, let me give you two terrific ways to practice your returns.

If you warm up your serve the way most players do when you are playing a practice match, you most likely will serve three balls, which your opponent catches and then they serve them back to you which you then catch. You do this back and forth until you feel that you have had enough serves.

If you are playing with a friend and it is not a tournament match, here is what you can do instead.

One of you will choose to warm up the serve. The other player will practice their return of serve. You will do this until the person serving has had enough serves. Then you change and the other person serves while you practice returning.

When you are practicing returning, you are to practice hitting your best return. You are not to hit the ball just back to the server.
When I started to do this, I noticed that I would serve more balls than when I warmed up the other way. I could really work on my focus so much better. It was like I was out hitting a mini bucket of balls. It also really helped my return of serve from the moment the game started.

This way you will be able to practice your return even if it is only for a short period of time. After warming up your serve and return of serve this way, you will be surprised how much better your serve and returns will be in a very short time.

You will also have a benchmark when you begin to play the points. You can ask yourself, “Am I returning serve as well, now that we are keeping score or am I tensing up and trying too hard to hit the serve back?”

I guess you can warm up this way when you play doubles but you will have to have the cooperation of all four of you. It is much easier to do this in singles. And, of course, if you are really working on improving, you need to play mostly singles. Doubles is a lot of fun, but not very helpful in improving your tennis game, unless your goal is just to improve your serve, volley and your returns.

Here is another way to practice your returns. This one you can do when you are actually playing. And, again, you must have a willing opponent and you can’t do it in a tournament match.

- The point cannot start until the return of serve has been returned into the court.

- If you missed the return on your backhand side, your practice partner must then serve all serves to your backhand until you get it back into the court. If you missed the return on their first serve, then your practice partner will serve another first serve. If that first serve is missed, then your practice partner will serve a second serve, but it still must be hit to the backhand side until you get it back. If your practice partner misses the second serve, he or she will keep serving second serves until the ball is in play. This means that he or she cannot double fault and this way both of you get to practice until you get it right.
• If your practice partner serves an ace, then the challenge for him or her is to hit another ace. If you miss the return on the first serve, then the challenge for the server is to hit two first serves in a row. If the server double faults, he or she will have a chance to practice a second serve. That way the server gets to practice also.

This drill will allow you to do the return of serve over and over without worrying about losing the point and you get to hit the same return until you get it in the court. It also takes the advantage away from the server, as the server doesn’t get a free point just because he or she hit a good serve. It is a terrific way to work on one of the most important shots in tennis.

I also describe this drill in Drill #9 on the Drills CD. Now that you will be practicing your return from now on, let’s talk about how you should be hitting it so that you can do it much more consistently.

As you know, hitting the return of serve is a little different from hitting a normal ball. One reason is because you have the chance to get yourself together before you have to hit the ball. Once the point has started, you cannot stop and say you are not ready. Another reason is because the serve is usually hit harder than a regular shot and sometimes a lot harder so you must also prepare yourself to be able to react quickly.

If you find yourself not returning very well, here are some issues you may want to address. One of the best tools for learning and becoming aware of what is going on is to ask yourself questions. Here are some you can ask yourself about your return of serve while you are practicing or playing.

• Am I really, consciously seeing the ball come off the racket as my opponent hits the ball?

• Is my exhale starting before or as my opponent serves the ball and continuing through my hit?

• Am I consciously seeing the ball spinning after the ball bounces and keeping my eyes at the contact point for a moment, even if I miss?

• Is my body relaxed enough as I am waiting to hit the return?
If you answer "no" to any of the above, then you will have to let go of whatever it is that may be interfering with your ability to stay focused. You should also use the reprogramming method to help you focus properly.

- Am I hitting the ball long?
- Do I feel really rushed when hitting my returns

If your answer to either of these questions is yes, try hitting the ball just a little easier. This means relaxing your grip and wrist a little as you hit the ball as well as swinging a little slower from the shoulder. Do you remember that when I said to you earlier that hitting easier is a code word for being more relaxed?

Also, try standing back three to six feet if you are continuously hitting the ball long or you are feeling rushed. This will give you that much more distance for your ball to drop in. If you still are feeling rushed try standing back even farther. If you have watched some of the pros return, you will see some of them standing 8 to 15 feet behind the base line.

To further your education on the return of serve, be sure to read Ron Waite's article “Many Happy Returns.” You will find these if you go to my web site and click on Articles.

In the Strategy CD Series, I have a strategy for returning serve that you won’t find anywhere else. When you listen to it, see if you agree with my reasoning.

Let’s move on to how to warm up for a match. Doing the warm up properly will help to insure that when you start playing, you will really be ready.

Lesson # 19: How to Warm Up For a Match

Here in Lesson #19, you will learn how to warm up for a match.

Do you have a set method for warming yourself up? Does it work for you? Here I will present a method that I believe is as good as any for warming up. Please work on it and use it as it will really get you ready for when the real points start.
I will address the warm-up for only the following two situations: one situation is when you are just playing a match for fun, and the other will be when you are warming up for a tournament match. Let’s take the friendly match first, since you will most likely be playing more of these.

If you are going to play a friendly game, your warm-up time will be the foundation that you will build upon when the game actually starts. When the game does start, you will want to be able to continue playing as well as or better than you did when warming up.

If you are very comfortable with both the breathing and seeing the ball, then I would suggest that you start out on the very first ball doing both seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and the breathing. Otherwise, you should start by focusing only on the ball, making sure that you can really see it the way I have presented in Lesson #1. Once you have gotten comfortable with seeing the ball, add the breathing component and then work toward doing both.

If you need work on your strokes so that they can become more consistent, start out with also doing the Mother of All Tips. This exercise is found in Lesson #38. This is especially important if your strokes are feeling a little out of sorts.

After you get comfortable with seeing the ball and breathing, add some relaxation awareness. Start with feeling the grip and the wrist at impact to make sure they are relaxed. By now you should know the signs that tell you if the grip needs to be relaxed a little more. Be sure to also feel the arm at the shoulder to make sure you aren’t tensing up somewhere there during your swing.

All of these things should also be done with volleys, overheads and serves, and shouldn’t take much time. When warming up your overhead, if you are playing with a friend who is willing, use the lob and overhead exercise found in Drill #10 on the Drills CD.

When you warm up your serve, depending on how much time you have, use the following pattern:

- Hit a minimum of three first serves in a row to the backhand or the right corner.
• Hit a minimum of three first serves in a row to the forehand or the left corner.

• Hit a minimum of three second serves in a row to the backhand or the right side.

• Hit a minimum of three second serves in a row to the forehand or the left side.

• In your next three practice serves, hit one first serve to the right side, hit another first serve to the left side, and then hit a second serve to the right side. Do the opposite if you are playing against a left hander.

• If you have enough time, repeat this in the ad court.

And, of course, while you are serving, you are seeing the ball to the blur of the racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and exhaling properly. When your opponent is practicing serving, you can practice seeing the ball spinning after the bounce as you catch it. This way you will be used to seeing the ball when the match starts. Remember you can also use the serve and warm up method I talked about in Lesson #18.

When warming up for a tournament, there will be little difference from warming up for a practice match. You can do everything described in warming up for a practice match, except for two things. One of these is that you will do the warm up as described above for a practice match, only you will do it one to three hours earlier than your actual match. The second is that you may want to do a few easy placement drills like hitting cross-court, down-the-line drills, and you will want to serve a few more balls. You may even want to play a few points. Other than these additional items, this warm-up will be the same as the practice match warm-up. This practice should be only for 20 to 30 minutes.

When you actually get on the court to play your match, you usually get 5 to 10 minutes to warm up. During this warm-up, you will just be watching the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and working with your breathing as if you were playing the match. You will have no thought of the stroke, except to relax
it, and you will have the Core Principles in mind. This way, when the match starts, you will be ready.

We talked about how to warm up your serve, but what about how to actually hit your serve into the court? I will tell you not only how to hit your serve into the court but also how to aim in the next lesson.

Lesson # 20: How to Aim the Serve

Learn how to aim your serve here in Lesson #20.

In this lesson I will be talking more than just about how to aim. This lesson is really more about not missing your serve and/or about hitting a much higher percentage of your first serves into the court.

How many double faults do you hit in a set or in a match? And, what about your first serve? What is your percentage? Do you know how to hit your serve in the court other that just going out and hitting bucket after bucket of balls? You should be practicing your serve anyway, but here I will give you a terrific technique not only for aiming your serve but also for improving your serving percentages.

You won’t have to worry or think about double faulting because if you take the time to visualize properly, you will not double fault or if you do, you will do it very rarely. And you will find that you will be hitting many more first serves in, and with better accuracy.

There are going to be three parts to this section on the serve. I will first tell you about how to do the full visualization, then how you can visualize very quickly which is what you will be doing most of the time anyway and then what to do if your visualization is not working and you are still missing serves.

Here is the Full Visualization

The first thing to do is to pick out the exact spot, on the court where you want your ball to bounce. Again, I am not talking about a general area. I am talking about a very precise spot. Use a road cone or tennis ball can to mark your spot if you are just
hitting a bucket of balls. Then visualize and see with your eyes the trajectory back to where the ball would cross the net. When you look at the net, you will notice that it is made up of little squares. Look at the square where your serve must pass over and visualize and see with your eyes the ball passing over this square.

Do you know how high over the net your serve should pass on a first serve? So many people say about two feet and sometimes even higher. On most first serves you will need to hit the ball two to six inches and about a foot to a foot and a half for a second serve. After seeing how high over the net your ball must go, then visualize and see with your eyes the trajectory back to the place over your head where you are going to make contact with the ball.

Then starting from the beginning, visualize yourself starting your serve, seeing the ball on the toss, imagining or visualizing seeing the ball to the blur of the racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and with a perfect exhalation. Be sure you start the exhale before making contact with the ball and continuing long after.

Keep visualizing and seeing with your eyes the ball going two to six inches over the square in the net, and hitting the spot on the court you have picked out. What you are doing is starting your visualizing at the end of the serve, going back to the start of the serve and then going to the end again.

When you go to actually serve, just “know” where you want the ball to go, see the ball all the way to the blur of the racket and keep your focus on the impact point for a short time as we talked about earlier. Remember to start your breathing using a very relaxed exhale before you make contact with the ball and continue to exhale long after.

Trust your body to hit it to your target or let your body learn how. If you feel like you are doing everything right and the ball is not going where you want it to, or you notice that your body is not learning how to hit your target, then you may need to relax some part of your body more.

One of the biggest “errors” you may make when doing this technique, is that you may not take enough time before each serve to do the process of visualizing
justice. Remember, when you are serving, you have control of when you start the point. So, be sure to take enough time before you serve to do this technique properly.

Another “error” you may make is to forget to do any visualizing at all when you are playing. You have to become aware of the fact that your first serve is not going in enough or you are double faulting a lot and then have the presence of mind to stop and use this visualizing technique.

This is a very powerful technique and as you work with this visualizing process, you will see your serve become more and more consistent and accurate. You will begin to hit more first serves in, even during a match, but you have to remember to use this process. Don’t forget to go out and hit some buckets of balls as the more you practice the faster the improvement.

**Here is the Quick Visualization**

You will use this quick visualization most of the time, because you have served so many times and your body will already know how to serve accurately and consistently. You will use this all the time when you are serving, but you will go to the full visualization technique if your serve breaks down.

The quick version of aiming the serve is to just pick the exact spot on the court where you want the ball to hit. This means actually looking with your eyes at the spot. This is all you do.

When you go to serve, just “know” where you want the ball to go. Then just see the ball all the way to the blur of the racket, keeping your focus on the impact spot for a short time, starting your breathing using a very relaxed long exhale before you make contact with the ball, and continue to exhale long after.

Are you getting tired of hearing me tell you to see the ball and breathe? Hopefully, you know the reason by now. These ideas are the absolute key to playing your very best.

Trust that your body will hit it where you want it to go, or let your body learn how. If you feel like you are doing everything right and the ball is not going where you want it to, or you notice that your body is not learning how to hit your target, then
you may need to relax some part of your body. And, of course, check to see if you are seeing the ball properly and breathing properly.

If you miss the ball long or into the net, you may want to take a moment to more formally visualize seeing the ball going two to six inches over the net. If you feel like you are doing everything right and the ball is still not going where you want it to, or you notice that your body is not learning how to hit your target, then you will need to determine what part of your body is too tense or where your focus is off.

Use the following checklist to determine what is going on:

- Am I consciously seeing the ball to the blur of the racket?
- Am I consciously keeping my focus on the hitting point for a short time? When you do this properly, you will only be able to see the ball bounce and as it goes to your opponent’s racket.
- Am I following the ball as it goes to my opponent’s racket? You won't be able to see it spin, but you can focus on it.
- Have I visualized the serve, including seeing the ball, as well as the speed, the stroke, and the exact path of the ball going two to six inches over the net immediately before I serve? Part of this visualizing is that you will consciously look at the spot where you want the ball to go and consciously look at the point where you want your ball to cross the net.
- Am I allowing a long and relaxed exhalation just before and after I hit the ball?
- Am I relaxing my grip and/or my wrist enough as I make contact with the ball?
- Am I relaxing my elbow enough as it goes through the swing? Remember, your arm should be like a wet noodle.

A "no" answer to any of these questions means that you need to pay attention to that aspect, knowing that it needs to change and improve.
I want to put on my professor hat for a moment and give you a short lesson in physics. Some of you may know the answer to this, but for those who don’t it will be good to know as it will illustrate the importance of relaxation. Here is the question. Most, if not all of you have seen a Zorro movie and know that he uses a whip as one of his weapons. Do you know why his whip makes a snapping sound when he wields his whip? If you answered that the tip of his whip actually breaks the sound barrier, you would be correct. Did you know that?

So what does this have to do with tennis and the serve? There are actually two things. One is: Do you think Zorro’s whip would be breaking the sound barrier if it were stiff?

The second point is that if you really relax your arm at the elbow, not only will you get more power with less effort, but by letting your arm be like a wet noodle, you will be turning over to your other than conscious mind any control of your stroke and thereby allowing your body to hit a more consistent and accurate serve.

There have been many times once I have my student relax his arm like a wet noodle he or she would hit the target cone within 5 serves. Sometimes even on the first one. Using this technique when you serve is a very powerful one and it is that much more effective because you are always standing in the same place when you serve and you don’t have the variability of having to run and chase the ball like on a ground stroke.

Let me tell you a couple of fun stories that show how powerful this technique is.

I was playing in a 24 hour tennis event for charity one year at my club and one of the events was to serve and try to hit a cone. Everyone was trying so hard to hit the cone and there were so many balls that came very close. I, on the other hand, was doing the opposite. I was visualizing and just letting go. Guess who won the contest? If you guessed that I did, you would be correct. This technique works big time so please put it into your toolkit.

Here is the other fun story for you. When I am teaching this technique on how to aim the serve, at some point I will demonstrate to my student what this technique actually looks like. At this point I have not hit any serves so when I serve, I am pretty
cold. On one occasion of demonstrating this, I hit the cone twice in a row on the first two serves.

I don’t tell you this to brag, but to show you how powerful this technique is and how unbelievably accurate the body can become. I also don’t have a clue on how I did it, but my body knows. I will admit that this has only happened once, but I have hit the cone a few times after only one or two tries. Guess what? When you work with this technique, you and your body can do it also.

I have one last thought about aiming your first serve that you may want to do once you see how accurate your first serve can be using this technique. In the past when I chose the exact spot I wanted my first serve to go, I chose a spot about a foot inside the lines. I felt that extra foot would give me a margin of error. I found that I could hit the cone at least one out of ten times and sometimes more than that. I had the thought that if my serve was that accurate (thanks to my body), I would change my exact spot to right on the lines.

My serve became much more effective because I was now able to hit ever so much closer to the lines. Even if your serve is not that fast, that extra distance closer to the lines really makes a difference. Not having a very hard serve, I got tired of having players return my serve and this way they have to work just a little bit harder.

Now that you know how to be very accurate on your serve, I will talk about how to hit winners. If you already hit lots of winners and don’t need to hit any more, you can just skip this next section.

**Lesson # 21: How to Hit Winners**

Do you want to hit more winners? Here in Lesson #21, I will show you how to hit them.

Do you try hard to hit winners? Do you get frustrated when you either miss the ball or that you couldn’t hit the ball good enough so that it was a winner? When you understand about winners, you may just find yourself hitting more of them.
The concept of hitting winners is like the concept of winning. You are not to try to win. You are to find a way to play your very best and let winning take care of itself. Likewise, you are not to try to hit winners. You are to just hit the ball where you want it to go using the appropriate power, and if it is a winner, so much the better.

When you try to hit winners, you should know by now that most likely you will not be watching the ball very well, nor will your breathing be relaxed. I also hope that you know by now that I am not talking about never hitting the ball hard. I am talking about just knowing when you need to hit the ball hard. This is the same as knowing where you want the ball to go. If you place it well and your opponent can’t get to it, then by its very nature it will be a winner. You don’t have to try to do it.

And after you hit this great shot, do you pump your fist and say “Yes!” I hope not. Here is a much better way. Just pat yourself on the back, thank your body for hitting the great shot and say to your body. “Body, that was a great shot, please keep those great shots coming.” If you are playing doubles and your partner does not understand about who hits the ball like you do, then when you “high five” and he/she says “great shot”, “come on”, or “lets go”, “let’s get this point”, or any other comment that encourages you to try harder, you need to translate this. Just know that you want to keep letting your body keep playing without the control of your conscious mind. And, of course, you do this by staying focused on the ball and your breathing.

Please resist the thought that you did it, as this will lead to trying. Remember, the you I am talking about here is your conscious mind. Also, please resist the urge to start trying to hit more and more winners or more and more good shots. Just keep your conscious mind out of the way and know that your body will do it for you. Believe me, it can and it will.

Running and hitting is one of the weaknesses most players have, but it doesn’t need to be a weakness if you know how to do it and, of course, you practice it. The next lesson will spell out for you what happens when you run and hit and how you can really improve this part of your game.
Lesson # 22: How to Hit Running Balls

Here in Lesson #22, you will learn all you need to know when you hit running balls.

I admit that I have not ever done charting on where people miss the ball when they are running. What have you observed as to where other people miss the ball when they are running hard for a ball? And when you miss a ball when you are running, do you know whether you miss the ball wide, long, or in the net?

If you have observed yourself or other players when running hard for a ball, you may have seen a pattern when the ball is missed. I have observed in myself and others that most players miss the ball long. The next time you watch a game or when you play, take a look and see if this is true.

Anyway, the point is that when you run, you have the tendency to run hard with the lower body, and as a result the upper body follows suit. This fast moving upper body makes you swing at the ball faster, therefore you may be hitting the ball long if you miss. What must be learned is to run relaxed but hard with your legs, but allow the upper body to be as relaxed and swing at the ball as if you were standing still.

Easier said than done, you say? The way you can work on this is to really pay attention to your breathing when you are running fast for a ball, and make sure that you are not holding your breath and that your exhalation is as relaxed as possible before and after you hit the ball. You can also work on paying attention to your swing thereby allowing your swing to be slower and to be independent of your legs.

When I work on my running and hitting, I really work on relaxing my breathing. And, of course, seeing the ball to the blur of your racket and keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, is also very helpful in allowing the upper body to be relaxed. Did you know that if you are able to breathe properly on a running ball, your face will be as relaxed as Roger Federer’s? Just think. You can then say that you play just like he does.
When you are working on slowing down the swing when running hard, just feel your swing and let your arm at your shoulder be that much more relaxed. It just takes awareness and practice. You can practice running and hitting by playing two points or rallies paying attention to your breathing, two points seeing the ball, and then two points combining.

Another good way to practice running and hitting is to start with an easy run to the ball to see if you can still keep your breathing relaxed and swing speed relaxed through the hit. Then see if you can still do this on faster and faster runs to the ball. Pretty soon it will be easier. If you have access to a ball machine, you can set it up so that you can work on running faster and faster for balls.

As critical as breathing is when running and hitting, so is the skill of seeing the ball to the blur of the racket and keeping your eyes on the contact point for a short time, and it must be worked on until you have it mastered even on a ball that you must run very fast for.

If you really analyze how you have missed a ball when you have had to run hard for it, you will find out that you have made one or all of the classic errors: holding your breath, not seeing the ball to the racket and not keeping your eyes on the contact point for a short time, or having some part of your body being too tense.

Here are some running drills for you to do.

**Drill # 6: A Running Drill**

Here in Drill #6 is the basic drill for practicing running and hitting.

Hopefully, you have done Drills #1 through #4 that I have told you about earlier. Now do these drills again, but this time you will hit your balls to alternate sides while your practice partner will hit to one side only. When the person running gets tired, switch.

The purpose of this drill is twofold. The one hitting from side to side gets to practice seeing the ball and breathing while hitting a change-of-direction ball. The runner gets to practice seeing the ball and feeling his or her breathing while running and hitting. You may find that your focus will not be as good as when you were just
standing and hitting so here are some variations if you are having problems with your focus:

- Spend some time just consciously watching the ball spinning, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time and forget about your breathing.
- Spend some time just consciously feeling your breathing and forget about focusing on the ball.
- Combine seeing the ball and breathing.
- Pretend that someone will pay you $1 million for every time you can see the ball and breathe properly. This is just about how important you must make your focus.

When you are doing this running drill, again awareness is very important and again you will need to have these following questions handy so that you can ask yourself these awareness questions:

- On the balls that I have to run hard for, am I still able to see the ball spinning to the blur of my racket and keep my focus on the contact point for a short period of time. If your answer is no, you need to let go more and to make this more important.
- Am I still able to feel my breathing and do a long exhale just before and through hitting the ball? If your answer is no, you need to let go more and again make this more important.
- When I am aiming my ball, am I trying so hard to aim that I have not watched the ball and kept my focus on the contact point for a short period of time. If your answer is no, you need to learn to let go more and let your body do the aiming while you are busy seeing the ball.
- Was I able to keep my awareness on my breathing while I was thinking about aiming? If your answer is no, you need to learn to let go more and let your body do the aiming while you are busy breathing.

Here is another running drill.

**Drill # 7: Another Running Drill**

Here in Drill #7 is a variation to Drill #6 so I just call it “Another Running Drill.”
Do Drill #6 again, but this time one of you will hit your balls anywhere while the other will hit to one side only. When the person running gets tired, switch.

The purpose of this drill is again twofold. The one hitting anywhere gets to practice seeing the ball spinning, keeping their focus on the contact point for a short time, and breathing while deciding where to hit the ball for maximum effect. The runner gets to practice seeing the ball spinning, keeping their focus on the contact point for a short time, and feeling his or her breathing while running.

The real value of this drill is to find out what state of mind you must be in to choose where you want the ball to go. You do it by making sure that the thought of where you want the ball to go is just a knowing, and it must follow in fourth place behind seeing the ball spinning, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and being aware of your exhaling. And when you know where you want the ball to go, let your “other than conscious mind” direct your body.

Here are the awareness questions to ask yourself to make sure you are getting the most from this drill:

- When I miss the ball, am I really seeing the ball properly or am I putting aiming the ball first?
- When I miss the ball, am I feeling my breathing first, or am I putting aiming the ball first?
- When I miss the ball, am I keeping my focus on the contact point for a short time, or am I putting aiming the ball first?
- Am I trying too hard to hit the ball to where I want it to go? If your answer is yes, you need to relax more, starting with your grip, wrist, and arm at the shoulder when you make contact with the ball.
- On the balls that I have to run hard for, am I still seeing the ball spinning to my racket keeping my focus on the contact point for a short period of time?
- Am I still feeling my breathing and exhaling just before hitting the ball on the hard running balls?

Did you know that if you become the greatest player the world has ever seen, you will still miss balls? And there will always be a particular stroke or strokes that will be
weaker. If you deal with these weakness properly, they will begin to diminish. We will discuss how to think about and deal with your weaknesses in the next lesson.

Lesson # 23: How to Think About and Deal With Your Weaknesses

Here in Lesson #23 is the way I believe you should think about and deal with your weaknesses.

Do you acknowledge your weaknesses and spend time working on them? Or, do you try hard to sweep them under the rug or just don’t care that you have any?

When you can embrace your weaknesses, you will begin to see them diminish or even disappear. And guess what? Even the best players have weaknesses.

How you deal with them is always an interesting issue. I see a lot of people trying very hard to avoid their weaknesses. For example, the most obvious one is when I see players running around their backhands just for the sake of avoiding them. Or I see players practicing their forehands by the hour with no thought of hitting backhands.

From my way of thinking, if your backhand is weaker, you should be wishing that your opponent hits all the balls to your backhand. Likewise, if you have difficulty hitting down the line, you should be hitting down the line even if you miss and lose the point. Sometimes I even hit my weak shot when it is not the best time to do it from a strategy point of view just so I can hit more of them. I heard of an interesting phrase the other day. It was “practice the impossible.” What a concept. The point is that if there is something or some shot you can’t do very well, work on it until you can do it.

In the above discussion, I am not suggesting that you practice your weakness if you are playing for money, playing in a tournament, or playing in any match where it is critical to win. But when you change the way you feel about your weaknesses and deal with them head on, this approach will lead to a much faster strengthening of those weaknesses.
Let’s talk now about how you can play your very best every time you play. You want to do this, don’t you?

**Lesson # 24: How to Play at the Top of Your Game Every Time**

In Lesson #24, you will learn how to play at the top of your game every time you play.

Do you play your very best every time you go on the court? Why not? You have all the tools so that you can get into the zone. Obviously, it is not that easy to get into the zone and play your best every time, but there are many things you can do to turn things around for the better. If you find yourself not playing very well, do you know what some of them are?

There are some things that are out of your control that just happen that you must be aware of. There will be times when your body just doesn’t work very well. This can happen if you are tired, sick, or if your body is just out of sorts.

Have you ever heard of bio rhythms which used to be the rage in the old days and it measured your physical, mental, and emotional state on each day? Well, I believe that there are some days your body and your brain just works better than others.

But what you can expect is that whatever condition your body and your brain is in, you can play the very best in that moment. Even if you start at a lower than normal level of play, you can and should be able to improve as the match continues.

There are some specific things to be aware of that can creep into your mind and will need to be addressed. The first one is judgment of your play. Here is a really good way to know if you are judging something -- if at any time you react verbally, mentally, or physically to a missed shot, then that is the sign that you are judging your shots and trying too hard. Once you are aware of these judgments, just let go of them.
and get back to using the Core Principles. You may find yourself playing really well again and very quickly.

There also may be times that no matter how hard you try to let go of judgments or even focus very well as you have done in the past, that your conscious mind just won’t cooperate. When that happens, one really good way to get back into the here and now is to do a meditation on deep breathing. In between points and when you are changing sides, focus on deep breathing, slow it down and just let go of all other thoughts. During the point, however, just continue to work on letting go. You may find that your conscious mind will begin to release its grip on you.

You might even try to have a longer dialogue with your conscious mind and see if you can get it to cooperate and release control.

I have talked about breathing a lot, but breathing when you play doubles is not only harder, but is a little different. In this next lesson, I will discuss how to breathe when you are playing doubles.

Lesson # 25: How to Breathe When You are Playing Doubles

In this lesson, which is Lesson #25, I will talk about how to breathe when you are playing doubles.

Have you found that breathing in doubles is a little trickier than in singles? I am not sure there is any really good answer in how to do it the best way but, certainly getting into the rhythm of breathing in singles is a very good place to start. Here is what I do when I play doubles and I am working on my breathing.

When I am serving or returning serve, I do my breathing as I would normally do when I play singles. When my partner is serving I start my exhale as soon as my opponent, who is returning, hits the ball. That way I will be exhaling if the ball comes to me. Then I will attempt to keep my breathing as if I am hitting the ball even if the ball does not come to me. This helps me stay in the here and now during the point. I
do the same when my partner is returning serve. I will exhale when my partner is returning the ball so that I will be exhaling if my opponent who is at net hits the ball to me.

Have you listened to the lesson on the 2nd generation bounce hit technique which you will find in Drill #11? I am going to assume that you are familiar with it. If not, you will need to listen to it to get the most out of this next part.

Personally, I will not ever play again without using this technique. It has helped me big time with my reaction volleys and, of course, with all my other shots. The only time I don’t do the bounce hit is when I am serving or returning serve. So, when my partner is serving, I start the bounce hit when the serve bounces in the service box. When my partner is receiving, I start the bounce hit when the serve is hit.

The key to making this work, as in all cases, is that I really need to see the ball to my racket as I say hit and that I say hit with a relaxed tone. This is very hard for me to do in doubles but to the extent I can do it, I play extremely well. I have been able to hit more reaction volleys back in the court since I have been doing this than I have in my whole life. Even my regular volley has improved big time.

Let’s get back to working on just breathing on the volleys. It may be a good idea to work on just the breathing before going to the bounce hit technique. Or, work on both at different times.

When volleying, I make my exhales a little shorter while still making sure the exhale starts before contact. I will work on starting the exhale when my opponent hits the ball and keep exhaling until the ball hits the ground after I hit it. I do this when I am at net and my opponent is in the back court.

When both of you are in the back court and in order to work on the rhythm of the breathing, I recommend starting the exhale when the ball bounces as it comes to you. When I start my exhale then, I am assured of exhaling before contact. When I actually play, I don’t really think about this. This is just a way to get myself into the rhythm of exhaling before striking the ball.

If I am doing any reaction volley drills, I will just work on doing a very short exhale always starting just before contact.
In case you didn’t notice, both breathing and seeing the ball in doubles is so much more of a challenge than in singles. And again, that is not a good reason to not practice and master it.

Most of us have unproductive thoughts when we play. Are you aware of them and do you know how to change them? In the next lesson, I will address this issue.

Lesson # 26: How to change Unproductive Thoughts

In Lesson #26, I will teach you a technique on how you can change unproductive thoughts.

When unproductive thoughts come into your mind, do you know what to do to recover from them? Maybe the first question should be, “Are you even aware of your unproductive thoughts?” Because, only when you are aware of them can you begin to deal with them.

I just need to hold serve in order to win this set. I am playing terrible. I am ahead and I will just play safe so that I will win. These are examples of unproductive thoughts. The “official” definition of an unproductive thought is any thought that not only doesn’t help you play better but also thoughts that are destructive and will sabotage your play.

Here is how you can deal with these thoughts and you must deal with them immediately. Please don’t wait until the match is over.

The moment you are aware that you had an unproductive thought you say to yourself “Cancel Cancel”, take a sighing exhale and then make a statement that is productive. The kinds of statements that I am talking about are as follows: “OK, body, I can’t win this. You will have to do it and I will stay out of your way and I will just see the ball and breathe.” Or, “I am going to just let my body play and let the outcome be what it will.”

Please don’t use a negative like “I am not going to try to hit the ball into the court.” As they say in NLP circles your subconscious mind does not hear the “not.” It
just hears “I am going to try …” and hopefully by now you know trying doesn’t work very well.

The other thing you can do if you find yourself “thinking too much”, is to occupy your mind by watching a ball and listen to your breathing in between points. This will keep you in the “here and now” and it will be harder for “other thoughts” to intrude.

Do ever have an audience when you play? Did it bother you? In the next lesson, I will talk about how to play in front of crowds.

Lesson # 27: How to Play In Front Of Crowds

I will talk about how to play in front of crowds here in Lesson #27.

It’s fun to play in front of crowds, don’t you think?

But what if you don’t like it? What if you let the crowd affect your play? How do you deal with it?

The bottom line is that if you are bothered by crowds, then you are not focusing very well. Your focus needs to be on the ball and on your breathing. Sounds easy, doesn’t it? But when you are in that situation, everything changes and it can keep you from doing what you normally do.

Some people have a specific issue of wanting to look good in front of a crowd. If that applies to you, here are some ideas. Do you think wanting to play well for the crowd is going to actually help you play well? I don’t think so because as we have talked about, trying to do anything doesn’t work very well. However, I do believe that if the crowd is on your side, their energy will help you but you can’t depend on the crowd always being on your side.

I remember one time when I was in high school and one of the players on the team was practicing with me. He had a very hard serve but almost never got it in. Then along came his girl friend who stopped to watch for a while. The next time he
served, he hit two aces in a row and started to hit many more first serve in. He couldn’t keep that up, but you can see how even a crowd of one can affect your play.

When you have the feeling that you want to play well for a crowd, your family, your girlfriend, your spouse, your team, your country, or anyone, you must keep in mind what it is that you must do in order to actually play well. And, you now know that staying focused on the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and breathing with proper relaxation is the key. When you let any other thoughts of wanting to play well for anyone stay in your mind, it leads to trying which leads to being too tense, which in turn keeps you from focusing and playing as well as you could.

So, here is what you can do. As I have said to you a few times earlier, the moment you have these thoughts, you need to say to yourself, cancel, cancel, and replace the thoughts with more productive ones. And one of these thoughts, which you will say to yourself a million times, is “I am staying focused on the ball and I am focusing on the contact point for a short time. I am breathing with proper relaxation and letting my body play.”

As long as we are on crowds, I might as well talk a little about other distractions.

The first thing to do is to really focus on your breathing in between points. Almost like meditating on it. This means doing slow, deep inhales and exhales with the emphasis on relaxing when you exhale.

What this does is keep you in the here and now and helps to let go of “other thoughts” that may be distracting to you like the crowd etc. However, it could be an airplane going overhead or cars honking, or a player in the next court grunting. All of these and more will come into your universe at some time.

The other part to dealing with any of these distractions is to do what I learned in a yoga class many years ago. At the end of the class, the instructor always had us do the corpse posture. If you have ever taken yoga, you know what this is. You just lie down on your back and completely relax every muscle in your body. It really feels good.
As we were just starting to relax, the instructor would have us listen and pay attention to any noise that we heard. Since the class was near an airport and you could always hear cars go by etc, there was always something making noise. The instructor then said to hear this noise and understand that this noise is just part of life and to make it truly OK for it to be there because you have no control over it. Then the instructor said to just let this noise be in the background and now to focus on letting every muscle go and relax.

It really made a difference just to make these distractions a natural part of life. Likewise, make the crowd and what it is doing a natural part of your world and make it OK. Then, like I said earlier, just let it be there and continue to focus on your breathing in between points and, of course, seeing the ball and breathing when you are playing the point.

I hope this helps and in any case as you play in front of crowds more often, you will get used to it. However, once you get used to crowds, there will always be something else. This is why it would be a good idea to work on and practice these concepts on letting go of any distractions.

Do you know for sure if you are playing the mental game properly? In the next lesson, I will give you all of “the signs” so that you will know without a doubt.

Lesson # 28: How to Know If You Are Playing The Mental Game Properly

Here in Lesson #28, I will give you the information so that you will know if you are playing the mental game properly.

Do you think you are playing the mental game properly? How do you know?

I have heard from players who have said that they have read The Inner Game of Tennis and are playing the inner game. However, if you watch them play, they really aren’t playing the inner game at all. There must be some way to know if you are on the right track.
I assume that by now you have listened to all of the lessons on the mental part of tennis up to now and hopefully you have begun to put these lessons into practice. You may also be “sick to death” of hearing about seeing the ball, breathing, letting go, relaxing, and the core principles. I hope not.

I go over and over these so many times because we have learned all of our lives to try hard, make it happen, beat your opponent, etc and it will take some serious effort to “correct” these thought patterns. With repetition, I am re-enforcing these new patterns of thought.

You can see that there are not that many things you need to do to play the mental game. Using the Core principles when you play is really all there is to it. You just need to strip away all the unproductive thoughts that get in your way and it is always nice to know if you are playing the mental game properly, or at least making progress.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself which will give you the knowledge that you are on the right track.

- Does your play improve during a match?
- Have you seen at least one ball to the blur of your racket when you are playing sets or matches?
- Has your focus stayed on the contact point for at least one ball?
- Have you felt yourself exhaling properly for at least one ball during a match?
- Have you re-programmed any of your misses either in practice or in a match?
- Have you been aware of any unproductive thoughts and had the presence of mind to stop, say cancel, cancel, and re-program?
- Even if you are not able to focus very well, are you constantly re-programming yourself to see the ball on every point and working with letting go more and more?
• Are you making the mental game the most important thing to work on when you play? I am talking about using the Core Principles.

Any ‘yes’ answer to the above questions should tell you that you are on the path of playing the mental game. As I have said before, this is a lifelong process. Assuming that you are continuously working on it and are making it important, the improvement in focusing and letting go will continue until you retire from the game. When you work with this aspect of tennis, you will also find that your enjoyment of the game will be greatly enhanced.

In Lessons #29 through #37, I have some final thoughts on the mental game. Most of these are very powerful ideas, techniques and processes that you absolutely need to know about in order to play the mental game completely and most efficiently.

Lesson # 29: Secrets of Winning the Mental Game and the Steps You Need to Take

Here in Lesson #29, I will give you some long held secrets of the steps you need to take to win the mental game.

Are you doing everything you can to learn all there is to know about playing the mental game?

Being the compulsive tennis instructor that I am, I feel an obligation to you that just listening to this CD once, or taking a few lessons is not enough. Until you actually understand and are able to incorporate these ideas and concepts into your game, I feel that my job is not done. If you have taken lessons or have taken any of my seminars, you have a huge head start because of what you have already experienced and learned.

You will still need my Action Plan which is designed to give you a complete road map on all the steps you can take so that you can continue practicing the mental game.
Here are my ideas on the most efficient way. These ideas will also speed up your learning and the mastering of the mental game. You will want to have a pen and paper handy to write down the web addresses I am going to give you. Remember, you can print out the entire script to these CD’s, or just these web addresses, as I have given you the PDF file on the first CD.

1. If you are not already getting the FREE Mini Lessons I send out every two weeks, I strongly encourage you to do so. Just go to my web site, www.maxtennis.com and scroll down to the subscription box. These Mini Lessons are free and they will help keep you on the path of playing the mental game.

2. I now have a blog where I answer questions people have asked me on the mental game. You may want to check it out for the very latest information on the mental game and some interesting stories. That address is davidranney.typepad.com

3. Go to www.maxtennis.com/download.htm to get Dick Leach’s doubles booklet. Dick Leach was the coach at U.S.C. for a number of years. He is retired now, but he was and is a master of doubles strategy. He has given me permission to give out his booklet and you get it free with my book and my CD’s.

4. Listen to the entire CD series over and over. You will be re-enforcing what playing the mental game all is about and what you have already learned. My CD’s have a lot more information on the mental game that is not in my book. However, sometimes seeing the word in print helps with the learning so go to the first CD and download the script to all my CD’s.

5. Re-read or read for the first time, Tim Gallwey’s book, *The Inner game of Tennis*. If you haven’t read this book, it is required reading in order to get the most out of the mental game.

6. Read Ron Waite’s e-book *Perfect Tennis, 10 Steps to a Much Better Game*. This e-book compliments the information I give you on my CD’s and gives you easy and necessary steps for you to take to facilitate improving your game. It is only
$10.00 and it is absolutely a must if you are really serious about improving. Go here to order. [www.tennisserver.com/turbo/perfect-tennis.html](http://www.tennisserver.com/turbo/perfect-tennis.html)

7. Know that your ultimate goal is to find out what state your mind and body needs to be in to play your very best every time you play. My CDs will guide you to this place as you work through the Lessons.

8. Go back and re-read and review the “Core Principles” found on the first CD. These principles will be the foundation to everything you do when playing the mental game. Print them out if you have not already done so. The web address for printing them is [www.maxtennis.com/core_principles.htm](http://www.maxtennis.com/core_principles.htm)

9. Letting go of winning is a huge key to playing the mental game. Just knowing that winning takes care of itself and letting go of judgments on how you play are big first steps into discovering how to play your very best every time.

10. Listen to Lesson #1 and Lesson #2 all the way through again. I have given you “the test” talked about in Lesson #1. If you haven’t gone to the web page and gotten the answer to how the ball must be seen, then you must do it now. Here is the web page again. [www.maxtennis.com/secret_answer.htm](http://www.maxtennis.com/secret_answer.htm). This is an absolutely critical part of seeing the ball. Spend at least a week where all you are doing is seeing the ball as described in Lesson #1. Listen to this lesson at least three times during the week so that you don’t miss something important when you are working on seeing the ball. Also, make sure that you “play” the other little seeing the ball games as described in Lesson #1.

11. Spend the next week, working on your breathing. This is explained in Lesson #2. Again, listen to this lesson three times during this week. Just because you find the breathing difficult to do, please do not ignore working with it as it is a critical part of playing the mental game.

12. Spend week #3, working on the relaxing of your body. This is found in Lesson #3. Really work on relaxing your grip, your wrist, your arm at the shoulder, and any other part of your body that seem to be too tight. You do this by feeling or what I call “body awareness”.

13. Start doing the drills that are found on the Drills CD. Once you have worked on the seeing the ball, breathing, and relaxing, now is the time to work on
combining seeing the ball and breathing if you haven’t already. While you are doing this, pay attention to what is going on. Your mind will guide you to what you need to pay attention to. For example, if you are hitting a lot of balls long, you will need to focus on the corrections which are all found in other Lessons on my CD’s. This is why I want you to listen to my CDs over and over so when these issues come up you have all these “corrections” memorized and you can fix them immediately.

14. Spend a week doing The Mother of All Tips at least 10 or 15 minutes each time you drill or warm up. Remember this is not to be done in a match or game and only when you are warming up or drilling. This tip is found in Lesson #38. Really work on doing exactly what it says. Holding the follow through means having your whole body and racket come to an absolute and complete stop. While you are holding, check to see if the various parts of your body are relaxed being especially aware of your arm, wrist and fingers.

15. Go through the rest of the Lessons one at a time and spend as much time on them as you feel you need to.

16. I have a personal checklist that I use when practicing. You can use them and customize the checklist for your own needs. To print these checklists, go to www.maxtennis.com/my_check_list.htm.

17. Every 3 months listen to the complete CD series for the first year.

Realize that playing the mental game is a process and a lifelong endeavor. Give it a chance by making it the most important thing to do when you play. Contact me if you have any questions, I am here to help you.

So, there you have it. It is now up to you. I hope you are going for it, as it truly is a better way to play this wonderful game of tennis.

Do you know why these mental game techniques are so powerful and that you know things that other players just don’t know? In the next lesson, I will discuss what the difference is between you and the other players who have not studied the mental game.
Here in Lesson #30, I will talk about what the difference is between those who play the mental game and those who don’t.

I talked about playing at the top of your game in Lesson #24. This part will address another close issue but with a little different slant.

Ok, you are starting to play the match and you become aware that you are not playing as well as you would like. What do you do? What is going on in your mind is very interesting. When you begin to pay attention to it, as you are doing now that you are playing the mental game, you will be able to direct it to the place where it belongs so that you can begin to play better immediately.

I have been playing the mental game for over 25 years and still my mind tries to take control and won’t let my body play without interfering. Sometimes, I still have to struggle to let go. Sometimes even my body rebels and doesn’t function very well. However, there are two important differences between those who do not play the mental game and those of us who do play it.

The first difference is that you now know why you miss the ball. Most other players do not have a clue as to why they missed the ball and the only way they know how to do better is to try harder, yell at their body to hit the ball into the court or to blame something like the wind, or the other player, etc.

The second difference is that because you know why you miss, you can begin to make the changes in your mind which in turn helps your body play better. You don’t need to go home and practice for hours and hours before you can improve, like the non-mental game players. Practicing for hours and hours is a good thing, but in the middle of a match it is not possible.

But what happens if you know what to do, you “try” to do them, and as a result of your trying either your mind or your body just won’t co-operate? This happens to me a lot if I haven’t been playing much. Here is the answer. You just keep relaxing and letting go of that part that you think is interfering. You keep making your
play less and less important and just stay with the core principles. At some point, the mind will give up and let your body play. And nobody knows how long this will take. I will talk about going to your “foundational place” in Lesson #31 so that is something that I do big time to help me let go.

I will repeat what I said earlier. I said that there also may be times that no matter how hard you try to let go of judgments or even try to focus as well as you have done in the past that your conscious mind just won’t cooperate. When that happens, one really good way to get back into the here and now is to do a meditation on deep breathing. Just pay attention to your breathing in between points and see if you can make it slow way down and make it deep. When you are changing sides, you can also focus more on deep breathing. It should be easier while you are sitting to slow it down and just let go of all other thoughts. While you are hitting the ball, however, just continue to work on letting go. You may find that your conscious mind will begin to release its grip on you.

I know what some of you are going to say: “That letting go and making it less important doesn’t make sense. If I make it less important, I won’t run for the ball, I won’t move my feet, or hit the ball hard or I will only hit the ball down the middle.”

All I can say is that if you do it properly, it works, and here is how you can tell. No matter how well you play when you start the match, if your play doesn’t get better as the match progresses, then you need to change something. That doesn’t mean that you will always win, but you should be improving during the match. When this does happen, no matter how slightly, you can be sure you are playing and winning the mental game. See, I do want you to win.

After having listened to all the lessons on the mental game, you now know in more complete detail what I am talking about. In fact, all of the lessons on the mental game is about letting go and how to do it. However, the most important thing is to study, know and use the core principles. You are probably sick of hearing me say it, but these principles are where it is at if you really want to play the mental game.

Do you know where to find your foundational place? In the next lesson, I will tell you how to get there.
Lesson # 31: The Foundational Place

In this lesson, which is Lesson #31, you will know all about your “Foundational Place.”

What is a foundational place anyway and why would you want to go there? The foundational place is a new term I am using to describe the ultimate mental environment you need to be in to play at the top of your game. You can even call it the first and last place you need to be in order to let your body play its best.

When I am playing tournaments, I sometimes find myself missing balls that I thought I should not miss. And, of course, when I start missing balls, it usually means that I am getting behind in the score. As I always do, I begin to wonder what I can do to "fix" the errors I am making. Eventually, I get to what I am now calling my foundational place. When I am able to get there, my game improves, sometimes dramatically.

Here is what I say to myself to help me get there. I say, "I am going to let the ball go anywhere it wants to go. I am going to let go of any strategy that I am doing and I am not even going to try to hit the ball in the court. If all the balls go down the middle, I don't care. I am just going to see the ball spinning to the blur of my racket, keeping my focus on the contact point for a short time, breathe very relaxed, and let go of any judgments."

Of course, my balls do not go down the middle, my strategy is as good as or better than when I was thinking about it and I begin to make fewer errors. Being in my foundational place is an amazing place to be!

I have begun to think that if this foundational place is so good, why don’t I start being there at the beginning of the match? Well, that is a good question and I answered it by saying to myself, that this is what I will do from now on. Sometimes I forget to go to my foundational place in the beginning, but I am quick to remember if I find myself missing balls I really shouldn’t miss.

This brings me to another concept that, in the past, I have had a hard time describing. This is the concept of how you hit the ball to where you want it to go
without trying so hard that you miss it. I have discussed this “knowing” in Lesson #17.

In the meantime, I have become a little clearer what "knowing" where you want the ball to go really means and how it works. I will try to explain it to you here.

When you are hitting the ball to a particular place, your conscious mind is involved with deciding where you want the ball to go. Hopefully, you know by now, that you need to let your "other than conscious mind" actually execute the shot. Well, the conscious mind has a lot of trouble not getting involved so it then tries to control the body. Maybe you have experienced this and when the conscious mind tries to do the controlling, your body does not work very well, especially on important points.

The better way is what happens when you get to your foundational place. The analogy is like when you lose your car keys. Because you have to go somewhere in your car right away, you use your extra set of keys and then let go of thinking about where your other keys are for the time being. Then, when you are not thinking about it, your mind tells you, "Your keys are on your desk." The point is that the thought of where to hit the ball comes to your conscious mind rather than from your conscious mind. This way, it is so much easier to then let your body hit the ball to where your "other than conscious mind" directs it to go and many times your choice of where to hit the ball is better than if you were consciously trying to think about it.

I hope this is making some sense to you. In any case, the next time you play, see if you can get to your foundational place. It takes a lot of letting go and trust that your body and "other than conscious mind" can, in fact, play better than with your conscious mind in control.

When you do get there, you will see a big difference in your play. Guaranteed.

I have talked a lot about re-programming and visualization. In the next lesson, I will give you some more thoughts on the matter.
Lesson # 32: The Power of Visualization

Here in Lesson #32, I will discuss the power of visualizing.

How many of you are using visualization when you play? If you are not or if you are only doing so sporadically, I would like you to consider getting into the habit.

Visualization is a very powerful way to improve your game. It can be used to “fix” any and all issues you may have when you play.

Here are some of the situations where you may not have thought about using visualization, along with the obvious ones.

• When you miss a shot over and over.

• When you miss a shot that you may only get once in a while, like a running short ball that you try a drop shot on and you held your breath.

• When you use the inappropriate strategy in a given situation and you ask yourself, “Why did I do that?”

• When you have lapses in your focus under a specific situation. For example, when I get into a long rally, I find my focus wandering and I start trying harder to end the point.

• When you notice that your stroke is not working the way you want it to.

• When you are aware of any mental lapses at certain times of the match, like thinking about winning at 5-4 and all you have to do is hold serve.

• Before the match even starts, you can visualize your strategy, your strokes, your focus or anything else you feel needs attention.

• When you are missing easy balls.

• When you are missing balls you wanted to hit hard.
I am sure that you now get the idea. The sky is the limit on how or what you visualize. Of course, you need to know, that from my way of thinking, all these situations are mental issues and you must treat them as such. In addition, you must include in all your visualizations the core principles. All errors stem from some part of these principles not being done properly.

When I work with new students, I ask them to analyze every ball they miss and then visualize the correction. I have them do this until they remember to visualize when it is really important in their matches. Since I consider you one of my new students, I would like you to use visualization after every miss until you really can make it work for you.

Caution! After you have visualized and the match continues, make sure that you let go of trying to make whatever you visualized happen. Just get back into doing the core principles.

You can do a very thorough job of visualization when you change sides, but you can also spend a few seconds on it in between points. The more you practice visualizing, the more effective and easy it becomes.

In this next lesson, I am going to give you a summary of the basic process for learning. Learning this process is one of the most important and critical things you must do if you want to speed up the entire learning process. When you use it, you will be speeding up any changes you want to do in your game and anytime you are learning new things.

Lesson # 33: Some Powerful Processes

The Process for Learning

Here in Lesson #33, you will be learning “The Process for Learning” and a process for when you warm up and doing drills.

I have talked about the process on how to learn things from time to time throughout these CD’s. Are you really clear on how this process is used to learn just
about anything? Do you know that this process is one that can be used in just about any area of life and not just tennis?

For some reason, this process is really difficult for many to remember how to do. Maybe it is because I use it for so many different issues and it doesn’t seem like it is the same process.

Here I will give you a summary of what the generic process is. Please please learn it backwards and forewords so that you can use it effectively. It is probably the most powerful technique on the planet for learning not just physical movements but also mental thoughts and ideas.

Remember, this process can be used for working on, changing, or learning any new physical movements or mental behaviors. The full process for giving yourself a tennis lesson when you practice is found in Lesson #39. Remember: If you are applying this process to tennis and if you are able to, still keep focusing on the ball and/or your breathing while doing the process below. It will be more valuable to you but it is not critical. The important thing is no matter what area of life you are working on, keep relaxing and keep letting your body and/or mind learn.

**Step # 1: The Goal**

This goal must be very specific and you need to know exactly and in detail what you want to accomplish.

**Step # 2: Dry run practice and/or visualize**

If your goal is a physical one, you can actually do it using a practice movement before using it in the actual play. If you can’t do this practice movement correctly in real speed, then do it in slow motion building up to full speed. You should also visualize and/or feel the movement you are working on. This visualization and practice movement must be absolutely correct in every way.

If your goal is a mental one, you will only be able to visualize or talk to yourself accomplishing this goal. Again, you must visualize this goal perfectly and in every detail.

**Step # 3: Live practice**
If your goal is a physical movement, you will now just feel and be aware of what is happening in your body without a lot of trying hard to make it happen as you hit the ball or as you play whatever activity you are working on. Without a lot of trying is another way of saying that you want to be doing the movement with a lot of relaxation. This is critical. The biggest mistake people make after they visualize something is they then try hard to make it happen. Please guard against doing this.

If your goal is a mental one, you will need to be aware of your mental processes to determine if your goal is happening.

**Step # 4: Comparing your goal with the live practice**

If you are working on a physical movement and as you are being aware and feeling your body and what it is doing, you will need to now compare what you are actually doing with your ideal goal.

If your body is not learning and you are not making progress toward your goal, then you will need to go back to Step 2. Once you get to Step 3 again you must relax some part of your body more and/or stop trying so hard as the tension and trying is preventing your body from executing the physical movement the way you want it to. Pretty soon, as you relax properly, this new physical movement will begin to happen when you are not thinking about it.

If you are working on a mental concept or behavior, then be aware of your thoughts. Again, if the thoughts are not in accordance with your goal, then re-program your thought pattern by going back to Step 2.

You will do this process over and over again until it begins to happen automatically.

The next process is one that you can use when you are warming up or doing drills. It will give you a structure you can use when you practice.
The Process to Use When Warming Up and/or Doing Drills In Tennis

This is another process that you can use when warming up or doing drills.

As you warm up starting from the first ball you hit, you can begin to look for patterns if you miss. I still recommend that you warm up the way I talk about in lesson #19, but you can short circuit this process if you see big patterns of errors.

You should also use this process when you are doing your drills. It may be a good idea to always start the warm up and the drills with just seeing the ball and breathing. Then as patterns develop, move to correcting them.

If you are aware of a pattern of where you miss a ball, then begin to use “The Process” as I talked about a few minutes ago or in Lesson #12. Remember that 2 balls missed long or in the net within a short period of time is to be considered a pattern. If you miss 3 balls, you absolutely need to begin to “fix it” using “The Process”.

You can spend as much time as you want working on “fixing” the problem. If other issues come up, you can stop what you are doing and move on to the new issue.

You probably will think I am crazy to say that losing is a good thing. Learn why I may really be sane in the next lesson.

Lesson # 34: Why Losing is Good

In this lesson, which is Lesson #34, I talk about why losing is good.

When I'm working with a new student, their reaction to a loss is often comments like "I played terrible" or "I should have won." Have you ever heard yourself say either of these two statements or something similar?

My first response to "I played terrible" is to ask, "What did you do when you were on the court to turn your play around?" Did you re-program or visualize your shots going in? In my opinion, this is the difference between playing the mental game the way I see it and playing tennis the traditional way. 98% of the players do not have
a clue as to why they miss balls or how to fix their shots on the spot. No wonder these players get angry or frustrated.

So, let's say that you did play terrible. You need to ask yourself, "What part of my game was not working?" Usually, it was only one shot that was off that day or they played one "bad" game and the person translated that into "everything was terrible."

Once you have isolated where your game went wrong, I then ask, "Were you aware of this while you were playing?" and then, "What should you have done about it?" And finally, I will ask, "What can you do about it now that the match is over?"

I am hoping that you can see what I am doing with my questions. I am helping to isolate the problem so that you can do something about it the next time you are playing as well as go out and practice the shot or shots that were weak or not working very well. But, to just say that "I played terrible" is not helpful.

Sometimes my students will say, "I should have won," I ask them why. They may say that, "I was ahead and lost." In other words they choked," or they say"I am a better player" or "they got lucky", or "they were just a dinker," or "I just didn't play well" or any number of things about the match. I tell them, "No, you should not have won because, for whatever reason, your opponent played better than you did and you need to figure out how you lost the points."

If you have ever said these things, once you figure out how you were losing the points, you can then go and practice these shots. Also, once you understand that your opponent was actually better than you were, I tell them, "If you don't like the fact that your opponent was better than you, then you need to hit 50 million more balls so that you improve." Of course, I believe that while you are hitting these 50 million balls, you will improve that much faster if you focus on the "Core Principles" of the mental game.

The whole point of losing is that you get to find out where your weaknesses are. If you played a two year old, you could just about do anything and you would win. When you lose, it should be an incentive for you to go out and hit those 50 million more balls so that the next time you will play better.

Most of the time, I put myself into a situation where I will lose. For example, I don't play in my age division (except when I play in National tournaments) because I
need to be pushed and I need to find out where my weakness are so that I can improve and fix them. And, just for the record, as soon as you think that you have fixed your weakness, another one is presented to you the next time you lose.

So really take the time to find out why you lost and then go and practice using the metal game principles. You will find that your game will continue to improve and maybe you won't have to actually hit 50 million more balls.

We all think that easy balls are really easy, don’t we? Then why do we miss so many of them? In the next lesson, I will tell you why slow and easy balls are not really that easy and how to make them easy.

**Lesson # 35: Why “Slow” Or “Easy” Balls Are Not Easy**

Here is Lesson #35 where I will discuss why slow or easy balls are not easy and, of course, how to make them easy.

I will bet you never miss easy balls, do you? Oh, you do? Why is that? If they are so easy, then how can you possibly miss them?

People always think that a ball that is coming slow and is a “set up” is easy to hit and when they miss this “set up” they get mad. Let’s take a look at these easy balls and see why they really are not that easy and how to make them easy once you understand “the animal.”

Let me put my physics professor hat on for a minute. What do you know about an easy ball? Well, first of all, it is traveling slowly. Duh! Ok, but what is really different about them? If you see the trajectory of a slow ball, you will notice that it is more up and down. On a fast ball, this trajectory is pretty much parallel to the ground when you are hitting it. The analogy I like to use is two cars at an intersection. If the two cars are coming from a right angle, the speed of the two cars and the timing has to be perfect for them to have a crash. But, if they are coming from opposite directions, the speed can be anything and you will hit the other car. You can even close your eyes.
When you are going to hit a slow easy ball, the ball is traveling more up and down and you are going to swing at it more parallel to the ground. You will also want to swing with more speed because you have to generate your own power since you won’t be getting much power off speed of the ball. These factors make the timing of hitting an “easy” ball more difficult.

So, what do you need to do on these slow balls in order to get the “right timing?” Do you know yet what I am going to say? So, in order to get the timing perfect, you really need to see the ball to the blur of the racket so that your body can learn to time it correctly.

Hitting these kinds of balls should be easier to do since the ball is coming slowly, but let’s look at what the mind is saying. It is saying,”Ok, this is a really easy ball and I am going to hit it hard for a winner and win the point.” When you think this, your focus is no longer on the ball, you probably tense up, and therefore you have a good chance of missing. Then you get mad, and on the next one you try harder and the pattern continues or gets worse. Or, maybe, you hit the last easy ball really well so you try to do it again which may lead to tension which in turn causes you to miss the next time you get an easy ball.

The next time you play and you get these easy balls and you start missing, really really see the ball to the blur of the racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, don’t try hard to hit a winner and see what happens. Don’t forget that your breathing needs to also be relaxed and you should be exhaling as you hit the ball. As you know, this breathing helps keep your upper body relaxed.

Now you know the secret to making a “slow” and “easy” ball truly easy. Pretty easy, eh?

Do you know how to get answers to questions when you don’t know where to go to get them? Even when going to Google.com won’t work? When you listen to the next lesson, I will give you a technique that will give you answers.
Lesson # 36: What To Do When You Have A Question And Don’t Know The Answer

In Lesson #36, you will learn what to do when you have a question and you don’t know the answer.

Have you ever lost something and then after you gave up looking for it, the answer just came to you as to where it was. What about when you forgot someone’s name and later in the day when you were doing something else, the name came into your mind? This same power of the mind is what we tap into when we use the “Wondering Technique.”

This is one of the terrific concepts I learned from Dave Dobson who was an absolute master of Neural Linguistic Programming commonly known as NLP. Here is one of many many ways you can use this technique. If you are behind in the score and you can’t figure out what strategy change you need, you would say to your “other than conscious mind”, “I wonder how I can change my strategy so that I will be more effective.” Or you could say, “I wonder what I could do to play better.” Then you just relax and let the answer come to you.

Here is the reasoning behind this technique. Back in the old days when we were on the phone and someone tried to call us, they got a busy signal because we didn’t have “call waiting” then. There was no way that the person calling you could get through, and you didn’t even know that someone was trying to call you.

Trying hard to think about what different strategy to use is like being on the phone, and when the answer does come, your answer will get a busy signal and not get through because your mind is too active. So just relax your conscious mind and let the answer come to you. With practice, this can be a very powerful tool. And you don’t have to limit it to tennis. You can use this technique for any issue in your life that you need answers for.

Learning to play the mental game can be a little complicated. In this next lesson, I give you a summary of what to do when you play matches.
Lesson # 37: A Summary of What to Do When You Play Points, Games, or a Match

Here is Lesson #37 where I give you a summary of what to do when you play points, games, or matches.

After Listening to these CDs, are you really clear about how you play the mental game in a match? Or is it just too much for you to remember?

When I was in Mexico City working with six of the top juniors, I wasn’t always sure the concepts I was teaching them were being understood because I didn’t speak Spanish. They were getting it, but I just didn’t know for sure. After working with them during the week, they played in tournaments on the weekend, so I wrote the information presented below for them so that it was easy for them to remember what to do and to make it simple for them.

Here is what I wrote for them and it will help you also.

- Make the “Core Principles” the most important thing that you do.

- Keep away from thinking about your strokes. If you feel you need some help with a particular stroke, visualize and re-program it mentally, maybe even take a practice swing, and then forget about it and go back to doing the “Core Principles”.

- Every time you miss the ball, visualize and re-program seeing the ball going into the court the way you would have liked it to, and then forget about it and go back to doing the “Core Principles”.

- Remove all judgments or at least keep them to a minimum. When you judge, it leads to trying which leads to tension, which leads to missing shots. If you miss a ball, let it go and encourage your body to learn to hit it in the court through visualizing and re-programming. If you hit a good shot, give your body credit. Guard against trying to do it again, but tell your body to keep those good shots coming.
• If you think about winning at any time, but especially at the end of a game, set
or match, take a deep breath, sigh and say “cancel, cancel”, letting those
thoughts go. Go back to doing the “Core Principles”.

• Print out and read before every match the Core Principles.

• Listen again to Lesson #7, Lesson #9, Lesson #12, Lesson #13, Lesson #14,
and Lesson #24

Some Final Thoughts

This is the end of the series on the mental game lessons. Thanks so much for
listening. Please listen to these CD’s often as you will pick up new “stuff” every time
you listen. There is just too much content to learn it on only one time through.

These concepts really need to be experienced in order for you to be able to get the
improvement you would like. If you would like some help in actually experiencing
these concepts, I can help you cut down on the time it takes for you to learn how to
do these things and I can make sure you are really doing them the way they need to be
done. So, if you, or any of your friends would like some personal help, please contact
me at david@maxtennis.com and let’s figure how to get together in person.

Please be sure to listen to the other CD’s. Even though the mental part is the most
important part of playing, there are tons of other things on the other CD’s that will
really help you to play your best.

On the strategy CD, you will find some strategies that you won’t find anywhere
else. These strategies will help you with the winning part of the game. On the stroke
CD, you will learn how to work on your strokes so that they will become absolutely
consistent and how you can give yourself a lesson every time you play. On the Drills
CD, I have put all the drills on one CD so that you won’t have to search all the other
CD’s to find them. There are also drills that are only on that CD. These drills are
critical for you to do if you want to learn these principles quickly.
On all of the other CD series, I always talk about the concepts of seeing the ball, breathing, and relaxing as I discuss these other parts of the game. If I don’t specifically talk about these concepts, just know in the back of your mind, that you will want to do them in conjunction with the issues at hand.

No go play the mental game.
Working on Your Strokes and Other Aspects of Tennis

Lesson # 38: The Mother of All Tips

Have you ever wanted a technique that pretty much did it all when it comes to practicing your strokes, consistency, focus, and your relaxation? The mother of all tips comes pretty close to doing it all. Wow! How good is that?

I do believe that this is one of the “miracle” tips, but it will take some focus and concentration so you can do it correctly.

Here is what you are to do: Start by holding your follow-through until you see your ball bounce on the other side of the net. This means that your arm and racket will come to an absolute stop. You must do this even if you miss the ball. In fact, it is even more valuable to hold it longer when you miss.

When you are holding, pay attention to the location of your follow-through and how relaxed you are. This is the time you will relax your grip and arm, maybe to the extreme. Ask yourself if someone was standing next to you, could they take the racket out of your hand without much effort? That is how relaxed you must work toward. Also, I did not say to try to follow through correctly or to make anything happen. You are just letting your arm and racket go wherever it wants to end up naturally. You will also hold and relax your footwork.

Here are some things to watch out for when doing this exercise. You will have a tendency to not hold the stroke when you miss and not even know it, so you must be very aware and allow yourself to hold even longer at these times. In addition, you will have a tendency to not allow the stroke to come to an absolute stop every time, even on a regular stroke, so you need to be especially aware of this.
Remember that this is not the time to worry about hitting the ball into the court. It is much more important to hold your follow-through, even if it means that you miss the next ball because you are not ready for it.

You will also need to be aware of whether you fall off balance when you are holding your footwork. If you find that you are off balance, it means that your legs are too tense, so you will have to relax them until your body can figure out how to keep your balance.

After you get comfortable with the holding and relaxing, work on seeing the ball to your racket some of the time, and some of the time work on your breathing. If you can do all three in the same period of time, that would be ideal.

This exercise has a lot of benefits, some of which you may not even know about. The foremost is that it will absolutely groove your strokes. It will make you more consistent in hitting the balls in the court. It will force you to learn how to be balanced with your footwork. And best of all, it will help you break the pattern of reacting physically and judging your shot.

Speaking of reacting physically to your shots, do you know when you do react and/or judge your shots and what it looks like? Here are some questions to ask yourself to see if you ever react to or judge a shot.

- Do you ever make a verbal sound when you miss? Some of my student make a sound but are not even aware of it until I point it out to them.
- Do you look away immediately when you miss or even if you hit a great shot?
- Do you look down at the ground or hang your head after a shot is missed?
- Do you pump your arm when you hit a winner?
- Are you aware of any other physical patterns that you do when you either miss a shot or hit a winner?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, use it as a wakeup call to remind yourself that you need to let go more and let go of any judgments.
The short version of this Mother of All Tips exercise is to just allow your arm and your footwork to come to a complete stop before you recover to the ready position. However, if you have difficulty with this, then you will need to go back to holding your follow through until your ball bounces on the other side.

When you use the Mother of all Tips, it will help you, big time, on the problem of letting go of your physical reactions. Please spend some quality time with it.

Let me tell you a story about how well this tip can work.

When I was at a tournament where my book was being sold, one of the players who bought my book asked me if I would give him “the test” in person. Since I love giving the test, I said sure. Well, he was one of the 2% who got the test correct, but his strokes were not very grooved. I told him that I wanted to show him the Mother of all Tips which I did. It took me about 10 minutes to get him to do this technique to my satisfaction.

He was still in the consolation mixed doubles with a partner who he had not met previously as the tournament had fixed him up with this partner. After his match, his partner said to him, “What happened to your game? You improved 1000%!” Now, I think she must have exaggerated a little, but it gives you an idea as to how powerful this technique can be. And in only 10 minutes.

This technique is not to be used in match play. It is to be used when you warm up and practice. However, if you want to use it in a game situation, then you can do it but only if you truly make it Ok to miss more balls and you make it OK to sometimes not be ready for the return ball. Remember, this is to help you groove your strokes and not to maximize your play. However, you just might find yourself playing hugely better.

Do you remember how to maximize your play? If your said, see the ball, keep your focus on the contact point for a short time, breathe and relax properly, you would get a gold star.
Lesson # 39: How to Give Yourself a Lesson Every Time You Play

Do you ever wish that you didn’t have to pay for a million lessons every time you want to improve or learn a new stroke?

Once you really learn this technique, you can give yourself a lesson on any stroke or any part of tennis that you may ever want to learn. If you remember, I gave you a summary of “The Process” in Lesson #33. Of course, here I will address using it to learn tennis strokes.

1. You first must know exactly how to hit the stroke you want to practice. This is your goal or ideal stroke. You must know it so well that you can teach it to a beginner. If you don’t know exactly how you want to hit your stroke, you can still use this technique, but you will bypass step 2 and start with step 3. Or you will need to actually take a lesson from a teaching pro or watch a video of a pro hitting the stroke so that you are clear on how to hit it.

2. Take some practice swings without the ball, starting from the ready position and making certain you are able to do these practice swings absolutely perfectly every time. Take as many of these swings as needed until you can stroke it relaxed and without thinking too hard about how to do it. In order to make sure that you are taking the practice stroke correctly, you may need to follow your stroke with your eyes as the racket goes through your entire swing and especially into the backswing. Remember, the follow through is the most important part of the stroke so make sure that you pay extra attention to it.

3. Before you start hitting the ball, decide what part of the stroke you want to work on. Choose only one part at a time, and plan on spending a few minutes on each part. I would start with the follow-through because, as I said earlier, I believe this is the most important part of the stroke. Then I would spend a few minutes on the grip and the wrist to make sure that they are relaxed. Next I would go to the backswing, followed by the path of the racket as it goes forward to the contact with the ball, and then the footwork.
4. So, starting with the follow-through, you will just be relaxed, feel and be aware of the arm and the racket moving to wherever they both finish up. This needs to be done with as little effort as possible. When you make your stroke as relaxed as you can, your body will learn very quickly how to follow through correctly, and later on when you are not thinking about the stroke, your body will still stroke it the way you were practicing it. This is what you are aiming for.

5. As you compare your stroke when you are hitting with “the ideal stroke” and you are aware that your stroke is not doing what you want it to, then stop hitting the ball and take a number of practice swings again without the ball using an absolutely perfect swing. It would also be helpful to visualize this perfect swing and/or talk to yourself about the swing. Then go back to step 4 and just be relaxed and feel your stroke again.

6. If your stroke is not getting close to your practice swing or is not improving, it means you are trying too hard to control your stroke, and you will need to relax some part of your body more. Another issue you may have is that you may be trying so hard to just hit the ball that you didn’t do a very good job of feeling the stroke.

7. While you are following the instructions listed above, do not be concerned about where your ball is going or try to hit the ball into the court. You are playing a different game. Your awareness is to be on your stroke or what I call body awareness and not on the ball. As you get better at feeling your stroke, it would be helpful to add seeing the ball or being aware of your breathing. Do not try to do both at the same time. If you find yourself missing too many shots, you could fix this by visualizing your ball going into the court and then letting go of any thoughts about this and just getting back to being relaxed and feeling your stroke again. Remember, you are working on your stroke and not working on hitting the ball into the court.

Lastly, you are not to use this technique in a match. This is only for practice and/or warm-up.
Lesson # 40: Ground Stokes: A check List of Things to Practice

You have most likely taken some lessons. Some of you have taken lots of lessons, but, do you know what to practice? You now know how to practice but have you ever kept a check list of things to practice? I will bet that you haven’t and here is your chance to be awesome.

This checklist is just a guideline for you. It includes some issues that I feel are important to take a look at from time to time. As you practice, you should be adding some of your own personal stroke issues to this list and it is important that you keep a personal check list on your computer so that you can easily add to it and print it out so you can take it to the court with you.

When you practice, you should use the process that I discussed in the previous lesson to work on any of these issues.

Here is the checklist.

- Hit all balls harder that are above the net and not too deep.
- Hit more top spin on low balls and down-the-line balls.
- Make sure to do a complete follow-through no matter what, especially on reaching balls, return of serves and when your opponent is at net.
- Exhale through the mouth in a relaxed way, with a sigh just before and through hitting the ball.
- When returning serve, gently exhale with a sigh just as your opponent hits the ball and continue exhaling through your hit.
- Take a split step just as your opponent hits the ball.
- If you are missing the return of serve, hit the ball a little easier, using a more relaxed stroke.
• If you are having trouble returning serve, hold your follow-through until it comes to a complete stop.

• If the stroke is not feeling proper and if you feel the need, take a practice swing without the ball.

• Allow the racket to rotate over the ball gently as contact with the ball is made.

Lesson # 41: Serves: A check List

As with the check list for the ground strokes here is a check list for your serve. This will include a check list of things if you miss your first serve. If you have been known to miss a first serve, then this check list is very important.

As I have said before, you should use the process in Lesson #39 that I discussed earlier to work on any of these issues.

• See the ball spinning as it is tossed into the air, and see the blur of the racket as it hits the ball.

• Focus on the contact point for a short time.

• See the ball as it goes to the opponent's racket.

• Bend your knees a little when serving.

• Rotate shoulders on the serve.

• Always hit a slight amount of side spin on the first serve. This helps keep the ball in.

• Exhale through the mouth in a relaxed way, using a sigh, just before hitting the ball.

• If you miss a serve, take time to visualize the ball going into the court before your next serve.
Below are some questions you may want to ask yourself if you are missing your first serve a lot. I believe that you should be hitting 75 to 80 percent or higher of your first serves in. If you are not, then by asking yourself these questions and actively adjusting what you are doing, you will see your first-serve consistency improve.

The same applies for your second serve. If you serve more than one double fault a set, then you need to take a look at what is going on and make some adjustments.

As you will notice, many of these questions are the same as the check list that I gave you earlier. The difference, of course, is that the questions you need to ask yourself here, you will be asking them during a match if you find yourself missing more than normally. The other check list contains things you are to do when you are practicing your serve. I am hoping that you are taking some time to actually hit a bucket of balls from time to time and not just using the matches you play for practice.

Here are the questions.

- Am I seeing the ball to the blur of the racket?
- Am I focusing on the contact point for a short time?
- Am I seeing the ball to the opponent's racket?
- Have I visualized the serve, including seeing the ball, the speed, the stroke, and the exact path of the ball going two to six inches over the net immediately before I serve?
- Am I taking enough time before I serve to truly do a complete and thorough visualization?
- Am I gently exhaling just before I hit the ball and keeping the exhale long through the hit?
- Am I relaxing my grip and/or my wrist enough as I make contact with the ball?
- Am I relaxing my arm enough as it goes through the swing? Remember it should be like a wet noodle.

Let’s move on to the Volley checklist.
Lesson # 42: Volleys: A Checklist of Things to Practice

This checklist is for when you practice your volley. Hopefully, you are adding some of your own personal stroke issues to these lists.

Here is the check list for the volley.

- See the trajectory as the ball comes to your racket.
- Hit any volley that is above the net hard.
- Take a split step at the moment your opponent hits the ball.
- When hitting volleys, be sure to always keep the handle lower than the head of your racket.
- Show the emblem on the backswing.
- Exhale through the mouth in a relaxed way, using a sigh just before and long after hitting the ball.
- Have your racket continue 12 to 18 inches after hitting the ball. This means that you want to hit through the ball as if it isn’t there.
- Keep the face of your racket facing in the direction of where you want the ball to go.

Lesson # 43: Books and Articles to Read

Do you ever read other articles or books on tennis? In my opinion, you will learn an unbelievable amount about all aspects of the game if you read Ron Waite’s articles and David Smith’s Books. While Ron has written so many terrific articles and an e-book, David has written two terrific books. If you read just these two peoples
books and articles, you won’t have to read any others. They are always so right on the money.

Ron Waite is a certified USPTA tennis instructor who took up the game of tennis at the age of 39. Frustrated with conventional tennis methods of instruction and the confusing data available on how to learn the game, Ron has sought to sift fact from fiction.

In his over seven years of tennis, Ron has received USTA sectional ranking for four years, has successfully coached several NCAA Division III men's and women's tennis teams to post season competition, and has competed in USTA National singles tournaments. Ron has trained at a number of tennis academies and with many of the game's leading instructors.

In addition to his full-time work as a professor at Albertus Magnus College, Ron photographs ATP tour events for a variety of organizations and publications. The name of his column, TurboTennis, stems from his methods to decrease the amount of time it takes to learn and master the game of tennis.

Ron has written some terrific articles on just about all aspects of tennis. If you are really serious about your mental game, as well as learning about a wide variety of subjects, go to the Articles page on my web site, www.maxtennis.com, and you can find the links to all his articles. I have not read any articles by anyone that are better.

David Smith has written two very impressive books. His first book is called Tennis Mastery, Advance Beyond the 3.5 Level. It is probably the most complete guide to learning, developing and mastering the sport of tennis out there.

His second book is called Coaching Mastery, The Ultimate Blueprint for Tennis Coaches, Tennis Parents, and Tennis Teaching professionals. If you are a coach, you will learn how to attract players to your programs, develop sustainable programs, and build championship teams. If you are a parent, you also will find this book indispensable.

Even if you are not a coach, this book will give you a great deal of terrific info on the game and how to play it. Who is David Smith? Go to his web sites www.coaching-mastery.com and www.tnt-tennis.com to find out or order his books.
To make it easy for you, I have both links to Ron and David’s web site if you go to the links page on my web site. www.maxtennis.com.
Strategy You Won’t Find Anywhere Else

General Strategy Ideas

Lesson # 44: Consistency: The first and Last Resort

If your life depended on you hitting the ball in the court, would you know a way to do it so that you would survive? It is surprising how many players don’t have a good idea how to hit the ball consistently.

The whole idea of playing the game of tennis is to hit the ball into the court more times than your opponent. Depending on your level of play, using just the strategy of consistency may be what gives you the win.

Here I am going to tell you how you want the ball to travel in the air so that you can hit every ball in the court. We have already talked about how to make it happen. Do you remember? I hope so. If you answered, see the ball, keep your focus on the contact point for a short time, breathe and relax, then you get another gold star.

There are three obstacles to hitting the ball into the court. The first is that you must hit the ball over the net. OK, so how high do you think you should hit it? How about three to six feet over the net. Maybe you would want to aim your ball closer to the six feet distance so that you will have a pretty good margin of error.

The next obstacle is the baseline. When you hit the ball six feet over the net, you cannot hit the ball too hard; otherwise it will go long. So you must hit the ball fairly easy.

The third obstacle is the sidelines. The obvious way to overcome this is to hit the ball right down the middle.

So, by hitting the ball high over the net, fairly easy, and right down the middle, you will cut down drastically on missing the ball. Use this strategy if and when you
start missing your regular shots. Then, when you get your groove back and regain your focus, you can start to hit the ball harder and with more placements closer to the lines and lower over the net.

**Drill # 5: A Consistency Drill**

After you are comfortable focusing on the ball and feeling your breathing, you are ready to work on maximizing the number of balls going into the court. So, how do you make the ball go into the court over and over again? You should know the answer to this by now. Did you say just focus on the ball, focus on your breathing, and keeping your body relaxed? Very good. You get an A.

Using the drills explained above and spending as much time as needed on each drill, do the following:

Every time you miss the ball, take the time to visualize or talk to yourself about exactly where you wanted the ball to go. If your stroke doesn't feel right, relax it more the next time. If after re-visualizing and/or talking to yourself your balls don’t get more consistent, then you are too tight somewhere in your body and you must relax more. Start with relaxing your grip and/or your wrist.

See if you can hit 10 balls in a row. Then see if you can hit 15, then 20 in a row. Doing this will help you discover what state of mind you need to be in to hit consistently. It will also help you learn to stay focused for longer and longer periods of time.

After working on hitting 10 or more in a row, play a game of up to seven points as I explained in Lesson #54. Look to see how, if at all, your focus and concentration are affected.

If your shots change once you start the game of seven, then you know that you have some more letting go to do. Also pay attention to the way you hit the ball. Did it change? Do you all of a sudden hit the ball easier so that you don’t miss it? Ideally, you should be hitting the ball the same as you did before the game of seven starts. So, if you aren’t hitting the same, you need to “just do it” to use a popular saying.
This game of seven that you do when hitting forehands cross court, backhands cross court and down the line shots are really consistency drills. When you hit to only one place, you will not be able to really hurt your drill partner as you can’t make them run and likewise, they can’t make you run, so it is the person who can hit the most number of balls in the court that is going to win.

If you have trouble focusing or you find that you are missing shots you were making before playing the points, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I trying to win? If yes, you must know by now that trying doesn't work. Only seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, breathing, and relaxing properly does. Remember: if you play better than your opponent, winning will take care of itself. Your job is to find what state of mind you need to be in to maximize the consistency of your play.
- Am I trying to stroke the ball correctly? Am I thinking about my stroke? If you answer yes, you will need to let go and trust that your body will do this for you.
- Am I making consciously seeing the ball spinning, keeping my focus on the contact point for a short time, and consciously feeling my breathing the most important thing in my life when I am playing? Here is one of the little tricks that might help you stay focused. If I told you that every time you see the ball correctly and breathe correctly when you hit the ball I would pay you $1,000,000, do you think you would make doing these things more important? Most people would say yes. I think the only person who would maybe say no would be Bill Gates. Even if you make it important, you don’t need to try hard to do it. You just need to do it.

Lesson # 45: The Three Major Weaknesses and How You Can Exploit Them

If you were coaching any sport that had an opposing player or players, do you know what the general strategy would be? Without knowing the answer to this question, you can forget about your strategy being all that effective.
I guess I will give you the answer unless you told yourself that you would find and play the weaknesses of your opponent. Do you know what weaknesses most players have in tennis?

Most players have three major weaknesses. However, these weaknesses tend to disappear as the player advances in skill. Here they are:

1. **Backhands** – What about your backhand? Do you think it is weaker than your forehand? The exception may be if the player hits a two-handed backhand. Then you need to pay closer attention to see if this is indeed weaker. And if the player's forehand and backhands are both good, you can make your determination on which side he or she hits harder and/or more accurately, thereby forcing you into errors more often.

2. **Running and hitting** is also a weakness. Don’t you think it is easier for you to hit the ball when it comes to you than when you have to run for it? The same is true for your opponent.

3. **Hitting the ball deep** is also harder for your opponent to hit back. Many times a deep ball will come back short or the player will miss it. Is this one of your weaknesses also?

Of these three weaknesses, which one do you think is the easiest to exploit? If you said, “Hit to the backhand,” you would be correct. It is easier to hit to one side of the court than it is to make someone run or hit deep. So, hit every ball to the backhand side and wait for a relatively easy ball that you can hit to the forehand and make them run. And, of course, unless you are going for a sharp angle or drop shot, work on hitting all of your balls deep.

After you have hit to the forehand side to make your opponent run, hit the next ball to the backhand side again to make your opponent hit a running backhand. This way you can exploit two weaknesses within a single point.

You should be hitting anywhere from 2 to 10 balls in a row to the backhand before you make your opponent run especially if your opponent has a really good forehand. This way, when you do give your opponent a forehand, not only will you be making your opponent run, but they may just miss it because they have lost their groove and/or rhythm.
You may find other weaknesses in your opponent that you can use so it is helpful to observe your opponent play so that you can then develop the strategy to exploit it.

Here is a story about how powerful it can be to just hit to the backhand. I was coaching a young whipper snapper a while back. He was a really good player as he was ranked 45 nationally in the 14 and under. He was playing in a 16 and under tournament and I was there to coach him.

I had told him to hit to the backhand to set up the running shot to the forehand, but for some reason, he would hit ball after ball to the forehand. In his next match, I told him I wanted him to hit the first 3 balls in a row to the backhand even if it was the wrong strategy. He was to do this after hitting the serve and return of serve anywhere he wanted to.

Anyway, in his next match, he did what I had asked him to do and I was blown away with what I saw. This match was the semi finals of the tournament, so we are not talking about beginners or average players. All the players had good ground strokes etc. What really surprised me was that time after time, my student won the point on the first three hits. He didn’t even have to hit to the forehand to make his opponent run. So, please do this when you play. It works big time when you do it properly.

Here is another example. Where do you see Roger Federer hit most of his backhands? Hopefully you are going to say crosscourt to the backhand. You will see more variation if he is playing a left hander or if he determines that his opponent’s backhand is stronger, but if hitting to the back hand most of the time is good enough for Roger, let’s play like he does and do the same.

Lesson # 46: How To Determine If Your Opponent’s Forehand Or Backhand Is Weaker

What if you start warming up and you can’t tell if your opponent’s forehand or backhand is weaker? What about once you have started playing, can you tell then? Here is how you can decide.
When you are warming up, you should be able to get a pretty good picture of which stroke is stronger or weaker. Be sure to hit enough balls to each side so that you have enough information to make a determination. If your opponent's forehand and backhand look the same, you will need to do some more investigating. When the game starts, assume that the backhand is weaker. If you find you are getting hurt by the backhand, change and begin hitting most of your balls to the forehand and see what happens. Use the same plan for determining weaknesses when your opponent is warming up volleys and overheads.

In the following lessons, I will be talking about some very specific strategies that you most likely will not have heard anywhere else. Even if you have, are you using them? If not, you will need to begin to implement them as they really work.

**Specific Strategies that really work**

**Lesson # 47: Why You Should Hit All Serve Returns Crosscourt**

The return of serve is one of the most important shots in tennis, yet I don’t see much said about it nor do I see it being practiced very much. Are you aware of how important it is? If you are aware how important it is, then why don’t you practice it more? If you do practice it, how often? Do you know how the return is different from other shots?

I admit that I have not done any actual studies of the return in doubles, but it is my contention that the team that gets the most return of serves back in doubles is the team that wins. Notice I said that just getting the returns back. I didn’t say anything about hitting great returns. I will talk more about doubles a little later, but first I want to address the return of serve for singles.
When playing singles, I believe that you should hit all returns crosscourt. That means that all forehands are to be hit to the left side and all backhands should be hit to the right side, regardless of which side you are returning on.

So, whenever I am talking about the return of serve and about hitting cross-court, I mean hitting all forehands (assuming you are right handed) to the left corner and all backhands to the right corner, no matter which side you are receiving on. Just saying hit cross court may be confused with hitting an inside out forehand from the ad court. Technically, that would be crosscourt, but that is not the crosscourt I am referring to here in the singles part.

Here is my reasoning.

It is an easier and more natural stroke to hit the ball cross-court and a key element of breaking your opponent’s serve is just to get the return back in play, hopefully well enough that you don’t give him or her a setup. By hitting the easiest and most natural shot, you will hit that many more returns back. In addition, it is harder to hit a return down the line because when the ball is coming fast, you have less time to turn your body enough to make it an easy shot. The only exception may be if the return is very wide and your body is already turned sideways.

If you are returning from the deuce court and hitting a cross-court forehand, not only is the distance to the baseline longer, but you will also be hitting the ball over the low part of the net. The only disadvantage is that you are returning to your opponent’s forehand. In the ad court and if you are hitting a backhand return, you also will be hitting over the low part of the net and you will have a longer distance but the good news is that your ball will be going to your opponents backhand.

Here is another reason for hitting the return cross-court: If you think about it, breaking serve is rare. So by hitting the ball cross-court, you want to accomplish three things other than just getting it back. First, you want to make your opponent hit a running ball which if you remember is a weakness for most players or at least more difficult. Second, you are pulling your opponent wide and off the court. And third, you want to get control of the point on the first hit.

The nature of the serve gives the server an advantage because, assuming your opponent has a good serve, most of the time the server is in control of the point from
the beginning. So, all you need to do is to string together a couple of good returns so you can take control and win the point. This will put that much more pressure on your opponent, and with some of his or her errors, you will have broken the serve.

Also, you won’t have to think about where you are going to hit your return, as you have already planned it. This in itself is important because it will allow you stay that much more relaxed, and you will be able to concentrate on seeing the ball and on your breathing.

Do you think your opponent will know in advance where you are going to hit your return if you have this pattern of hitting crosscourt? Don’t worry. Believe me when I tell you most players will not have a clue. I have played many good players and asked them afterward if they saw a pattern on my serve return, and about 95 percent of them said no, they didn’t know where I was hitting it.

However, here may be a concern. If your opponent knows that you have listened to this CD, they just might know where you hit your returns. And, if you ever play against me, you will absolutely know where I hit it, but I don’t care if you do know.

If I hit a good return, I will be making you run wide and I will be taking control of the point. The issue here is that you are to play your game and that game is that you want to hit as many returns back as you can and you will do this by preprogramming where you are going to hit it and that place is going to be the easiest and most natural place so that you can, in fact, hit more returns back. Wow! How is that for a mouthful?

Of course, there are always exceptions to every rule. When I play against my doubles partner and he hits his serve to my forehand when I am in the deuce court, I do not hit my return to his forehand. That is because he can hit his forehand so well down the line that I can’t get to it. Against another player I used to play, I would not hit any of my returns, if I could help it, to his forehand because his forehand was such a weapon that he would hurt me big time with it.

My final point is that if hitting cross-court is good enough for the best players in the world, it should be good enough for us. In the 2005 U.S. Open Finals, I
observed both Agassi and Federer hitting their return of serves cross-court more than 95 percent of the time. They must have learned it from me (ha ha).

In doubles, obviously you will want to hit your return of serves cross court most of the time. The thing to remember here is that if your opponents are poaching a lot, it becomes a cat and mouse game as to where you hit your return. Remember, however, what I said earlier. It is the team that hits the most returns that wins, so just because your opponent is moving a lot at net, keep your focus and make sure you don’t let him or her take your focus away from seeing the ball so that you miss. I know, this is easier said than done, but you can begin to guard against this situation if you are aware of it.

If you decide to hit the ball down the line in doubles, and this applies to singles also, program where you are going to hit it before the ball is served and then let your body hit it. One of the big things to remember, your opponent still has to hit the winner. How many times have you hit a ball right to the net person and he or she has missed the volley. Please don’t let the net person screw up your focus so that you miss the ball.

One last thought about your doubles return of serve. If you are having difficulty getting the return back or if your opponent is moving a lot and hitting a lot of winners, have your partner stand back on the base line. This will take the pressure off of you because now the net person cannot hit winners so easily with both of you in the back court.

Here is one more last thought. I see so many players stand inside the base line to return the serve in doubles so that they can hit the return and get to the net. I also see these same players missing return after return. My question is, “what good is it to get to the net quickly if you don’t get the return back in the first place?” And, on the serves you do return, you don’t win that many points anyway. That brings up another last point when you are playing doubles. I sure have a lot of last points here, don’t I?

All of these points I am making up to now relate to making sure that you get the return back. This final last point not only addresses that but also addresses what happens after you get the return back. First of all, if you will stand further back than normal which means standing back behind the baseline to return serve, it helps in a number of ways.
First of all, it not only gives you more time to hit the ball, but it gives you more distance to the back line so your ball won’t have the tendency to go long. But, you say, “The server is going to get to the net before I do. I say, So what? Think about what happens. You hit a good return and then begin to move into the net. At best you can only get to the service line before the ball comes back to you. Where is the ball when you go to hit it? The ball is just above the net or it is lower than the net. Sometimes it is even at your feet. Given that the distance to the back line is much shorter and given that the ball is not higher than the net when you hit it, you cannot hit the ball very hard so that you can force an error etc.

Here is what I do when I play doubles. I stand back behind the base line so that on a first serve I have more time to react and on a second serve I can return much more aggressively. I still stay back and wait for the server to return the ball to my side. I don’t have to worry about him hitting it out of my reach because I only have my side to cover. If the ball comes back anywhere short, I can now hit my second ball with power and placement which is usually down the middle. Ever heard that the best shot in doubles is down the middle? It is amazing how many points I get doing this even against much better players than I am.

Another plus for our side is this. When I can power the return of serve, it gives my partner a better chance to move and cut off the return of my return and therefore win the point.

Sorry to get into so much doubles strategy, but so much of doubles is the return of serve. Obviously, there is so much more to doubles and I won’t be getting into it in this CD series.

Lesson # 48: Where To Hit Your Lob

Do you ever think about hitting your lob cross court? When I ask this question or I ask where do you want to hit your lob, I get the answer that the lob should go more down the line because it is the shortest distance which makes it harder for your opponent to get to. This has not been my experience. Listen to where I believe the
lob should go and see if you can find any faults in my logic. Then see if it works. That is the final argument. Is it going to work?

Try hitting your lob cross-court. This will give you the longest distance to hit, thereby giving you a greater margin of error. If you think back to when you have had to hit an overhead that has been hit cross-court, you will know how much harder it is. Yes, your opponent has more time to get to your lob because your lob has longer to travel, but he or she will have to run farther and will be further out of court. Obviously, this idea applies to singles only. In doubles, lobbing over the net player is the place to lob most of the time.

Do you ever practice your lob? When you do, how do you do it?

I will be willing to bet that you don’t spend much time, if any, practicing your lobs and overheads. Most of the time when you are warming up your opponent’s overheads, you just try to feed the lob to them so they can hit an easy overhead. This is not the way you want to hit your lob during the match. Here is an easy way to practice both the lob and overhead if you have a willing partner who will do this drill with you. Obviously, you won’t be able to do it when you are warming up for a tournament match.

Hit the first ball to make your practice partner hit a volley, then hit a lob on the return of that shot. When you hit your lob, do not try to just feed it to him or her. Go for the perfect lob cross-court.

If your practice partner hits an overhead back to you, hit your practice partner another volley and not a lob. Then hit another lob if he or she returns your shot. Your practice partner should be hitting overheads for winners. This way you both can warm up practicing what you would do in an actual match.

Here is my reasoning using this drill. You can practice your lob every time you warm up, assuming you are playing with someone you know who wants to warm up this way. By only hitting a lob from a volley, you will be practicing hitting a lob like you would in a match.

When you hit your lob, make sure your breathing is relaxed, and you see the ball spinning all the way to the blur of your racket keeping your focus on the contact
point for a short time. Since I consider the lob to be a “touch shot,” relaxing more as you hit the ball is a must.

If you are hitting your lobs long, then you will need to relax your grip and your wrist just a little as you make contact with the ball. Pretty soon your body will learn the exact tension it needs to hit a good lob. Don’t forget about visualizing. It will work on your lob also.

In the next lesson, you will learn my thoughts on why you want to hit your overhead as hard as you can.

Lesson # 49: Why You Should Hit Your Overheads As Hard As You Can

Do you want to win the point every time you hit an overhead? Well, maybe not every time but 95% of the time? If your answer is yes, then you must do what I am going to tell you now about how to hit your overhead.

Let me tell you a story. Quite a few years ago, I was playing in a tournament on a slow court against a steady player who was fast on his feet. I felt I needed to go to the net because I couldn’t win the points from the baseline, and he was tiring me out. But when I went to the net, he lobbed a lot, and I just tried to angle my overhead off. I quickly found out that didn’t work. He just ran it down and hit an even better lob or hit a passing shot. Not only did I get very tired, I lost the match.

After the match, I got to thinking that if I hit my overhead as hard as I could, I could end the point then and there, and I wouldn’t get so tired. I also thought that all I had to do was to hit my overhead five or six feet away from him and because my ball was going so fast he, most likely, would not have time to get to it, and if he was able to get his racket on it, his shot would be weaker, and I would be able to really put the ball away on the next shot.

So, here is what happened. I started hitting my overheads as hard as I could, and I found from then on that I almost never missed my overhead and I almost
always won the point on the first hit. Because I was ending the point sooner I was less
tired.

Obviously, you must use some common sense when hitting your overhead as
hard as you can. That means that if you can just barely reach the ball, you cannot and
should not try to hit it hard. To do so may hurt your arm or shoulder because of the
awkward way you must hit the ball. But if you are in position, you must hit it very
hard. I can’t tell you how many times I have seen players who just hit the overhead
easy just to get it back and end up losing the point. Why not hit the ball hard so that
the point is over right then. I do believe you will find yourself winning that many
more points. And besides, have you ever seen the pros hit easy overheads?

Please don’t forget that you still must see the ball spinning to the blur of your
 racket keeping your focus on the contact point and allow yourself to exhale before
making contact with the ball.

Lesson # 50: If You Get A Short Ball

There are some inherent problems with short balls. Do you know what they
are? Are you aware of what you do when you get a short ball? Do you ever hit a drop
shot or do you only go for the approach shot?

Here is one of the problems with short balls. I am not talking about short high
balls. I am talking about short low balls. Because the ball is low and because the ball is
short, the distance to the back line is shorter, therefore you must hit the ball easier
than normal. Otherwise the ball will go out. Because you are hitting the ball easier,
your opponent will have more time to get to the ball thereby making a passing shot
more likely.

When you do get a short ball, I recommend that you hit a drop shot and then
close to the net to cut off any angle. Even if your drop shot is not really good, there
are still a lot of advantages. In order for your opponent to hit his or her ball into the
court, he or she must hit the ball easier because again, the distance to the baseline is
shorter, and he or she must hit up on the ball in order to get it over the net. This will
give you more time to react and hit a winner, but many times your opponent will just
miss the ball or not even get to it.

If your opponent tries to lob, the same principle applies. Because the distance
is shorter, your opponent must hit the lob more up and down and with a good touch.
If he or she doesn’t miss the ball long, you will have more time to run it down
because the ball has to go at a much more vertical angle while you are running straight
back.

After your opponent has figured out that you will drop shot on a short ball, he
or she will start moving in toward the net. This is the time to hit your normal
approach shot. Because your opponent is moving toward the net to get your drop
shot, your normal approach shot will be that much more effective. Then keep mixing
them up, and your opponent will never know what you are going to do.

One point on your focus. If you are like me when I hit a drop shot, I have a
tendency to not stay focused on the ball after I hit it. My focus gets sidetracked by my
thinking if he or she will get to the ball in time or I will be thinking about where the
ball will be hit. As a result, so many times I don’t move well for the ball. It just seems
like when I really just watch the ball and not my opponent running for the ball, that I
win that many more points unless, of course, my opponent hits a really great shot.

Lesson # 51: When You Serve A Let Ball On Your First
Serve

One day when I was playing and I served a let on my first serve, I got to
thinking about where I would hit my next serve. I asked myself, “what would my
opponent be thinking about on where I might hit the next serve.” Not being psychic,
I got to thinking about where I should hit the next serve. My conversation with
myself came to the conclusion that I would most often be thinking about the serve
coming to the same side so I made a rule that I would serve to the other side if I
served a let on my first serve. When I do this, I discovered that many times my
opponent would miss the return. This doesn’t work every time, but it has worked
enough for me to use it.
When I am watching Roger Federer play, I always look to see what he does and although I have not charted it, it is my belief that he does this more times than not. Anyway, try it out for yourself and see if it works. It is as good a strategy as any.

Lesson # 52: A Basic Singles Strategy

Are you clear with yourself on what your strategy will be when you are playing singles? When I am working with first time students and I ask this question, I rarely get a clear answer. Let me help you with some clear ideas that are pretty easy to think about as well as execute.

I have talked about consistency being the first and last resort for strategy. This is still the number one basic strategy.

I have also talked about hitting to the back hand. Many times I have my students only hit to the back hand. Doing this most of the time is absolutely the next best strategy.

Using this strategy of hitting to the backhand with some variations would be the third basic strategy and it is what I will talk about now in more detail. Even though I call this a basic strategy, it is very powerful and I use it big time myself. Maybe I should not call it basic.

For the explanation of this strategy, I am going to assume that the backhand is the weaker side and that the player is right-handed. There are many variations to this that you can use depending on the patterns of how your opponent returns the ball and how he or she moves, but this is meant to be just the beginning step in the area of singles strategy. I will use the term “appropriate ball” throughout this lesson. Here is what I mean by this:

When you have hit a ball so well that you have forced your opponent wide to the backhand and you get an easy ball, I would say that this is an appropriate ball. It is appropriate because you can now hit this ball to the forehand side to make your opponent run for a forehand and if you hit it good enough, it just may be a winner.
Another appropriate ball would be any easy ball that your opponent hits to your forehand, allowing you to then hit the ball to their forehand side, generating a good angle cross-court. This will work especially well if you have hit four or five balls to the backhand side because your opponent will still be thinking the ball will be coming to his or her backhand and/or will be standing over on the backhand side because that is where you have hit the previous balls.

Let’s get back to the strategy.

**Here is what you do when serving in the deuce court**

1. Serve to the backhand side 85 percent of the time. Serve to the forehand side 15 percent of the time keeping them mixed up.
2. Hit the next ball and keep hitting the balls to the backhand side until you get the appropriate ball which I defined earlier. Hit this appropriate ball to the forehand side.
3. Then go back to the step 2 which is to hit the next ball and keep hitting the balls to the backhand side again until you get another appropriate ball. Hit this appropriate ball to the forehand side again. As a variation, hit two in a row to the forehand side.

**Here is what you will do when serving in the ad court**

1. Again serve to the backhand side 85 percent of the time. Serve to the forehand side 15 percent of the time still mixing them up.
2. Hit the next ball to your opponent’s forehand side.
3. Hit the next ball and keep hitting the balls thereafter to the backhand side until you get the appropriate ball, then hit the ball to the forehand side.
4. Then repeat hitting to the backhand side until you get another appropriate ball, then hit the ball to the forehand side again. As a variation, hit two balls in a row to the forehand side.

As you may have gathered, the idea of this strategy is to maximize hitting to your opponent’s weaknesses. You have hit the ball to your opponent’s weaker side and made your opponent hit running forehands and running backhands. And if you hit any of your balls deep, you have made your opponent hit balls that are that much
more difficult for them. By hitting two balls in a row to your opponent’s forehand as a variation, you may be able to “wrong foot” them, therefore keeping them off balance.

Here is what you do when returning serve and the ball is served to your forehand

1. Hit all forehand return of serves to the forehand or left side as I talked about in Lesson #47.
2. Hit the next ball and keep hitting the balls to the backhand side until you get the appropriate ball, then hit the ball to the forehand side.
3. Then go back to the previous step which is to hit the next ball and keep hitting the balls to the backhand side until you get another appropriate ball. Hit this ball to the forehand side again. As a variation, hit two balls in a row to the forehand side.

Here is what you do when returning serve and the ball is served to your backhand

1. Hit all backhand return of serves to the backhand or right side as I talked about in Lesson #47 on return of serve.
2. Hit the next ball to the forehand side. As a variation, hit two balls in a row to the forehand side.
3. Hit the next ball and keep hitting the balls to the backhand side until you get the appropriate ball, then hit the ball to the forehand side again.
4. Then repeat hitting to the backhand side until you get another appropriate ball, then hit the ball to the forehand side again. As a variation, hit two balls in a row to the forehand side.

Notice that when a ball is served to your forehand, the strategies are the same in both the deuce and ad court.

Notice that when a ball is served to your backhand, the strategies are also the same in both the deuce and ad court.

One last thought about this strategy. You still must be able to execute it. If you are having difficulty, start with just hitting all of your balls to your opponent’s weak side.
and work on being consistent. Remember, consistency is the first and last strategy to use against your opponent.

**Lesson # 53: A Basic Doubles Strategy**

I have talked about some doubles strategy in Lesson #47 on the return of serve. If you haven’t listened to that yet, you really need to.

I find doubles to be a really fun game to play. I play a lot more singles which is why most of these lessons apply to singles. However, here I will tell you about some basic things to do that will improve your doubles immediately.

Here is a good example of how powerful these concepts are. When I was living in Victoria, B.C., one year I coached a local high school team. There were no boys teams or girls teams as they combined both girls and boys together.

I had these two girls on the team who were literally beginners. They were, however, terrific athletes and they learned very fast how to hit the ball into the court. Because they didn’t know any other way, they were able to execute the basic doubles strategy that I am going to present to you here.

It was amazing to watch because they beat some teams that were better players and came within a point of beating a team that was much much better. The only reason they didn’t win was because the other team had enough experience to change their play to neutralize my girl’s strategy and my girls didn’t know how to change what they were doing.

Just listening to me tell you about this doubles strategy can be a little hard to follow, so you may want to listen to it all the way through and then go back and listen to one part at a time while you implement it the next time you play. Then go on to the next part. You can also print out this lesson if you want. In fact, there are many of these lessons that you may want to see in print.

Most, if not all, of the following doubles strategy I learned from Dick Leach, who was one of the most successful coaches at the University of Southern California
(USC) for a number of years. When I was in college, doubles was my best game and my partner Horst Ritter and I were undefeated. I thought I was this big mucky muck doubles player and that I knew a lot about how to play it.

After I started teaching, Dick invited me up to his tennis camp in Big Bear, California, to play and enjoy some time off. It was here that I observed what Dick was teaching about doubles strategy in a clinic. I was shocked and amazed at how little I really knew. I didn’t know any of the things he was teaching. What he taught made so much sense, and I, of course, stole his ideas and began to teach my students the same strategy.

Years ago Dick put together a more complete booklet of his doubles strategy and he has made it available to me. If you purchased a book from my web site you received this doubles booklet as a bonus. If you didn’t and you want it, please e-mail me and I will send you the link so you can download it. Here is what Dick taught.

When you are at the net, always hit your volley at the opposite net person. This includes the overhead. This shot is most effective when aimed at knee level of your opponent. If you, by chance, actually hit your opponent, just say you are sorry, but do not change your strategy.

Here is when and how to change this strategy. If your opponent has great reactions and is returning most of your shots, you will then want to hit your volley three feet to the outside part or towards the doubles line of that person.

When you are at net and your partner is serving, you will want to stand in the exact center of the service box. As soon as your partner’s serve bounces in the service court, move in at a straight line directly toward the center strap, stopping when you get three feet from the net. The purpose is to get close to the net where your volley is so much more effective and you cut off the angle of the return.

If you are able to hit the ball, remember to hit the ball at the opposite net person. If you do hit the ball, you will stay in your position in case the ball is returned to you. Hopefully, you have hit a winner.

If you cannot or do not hit the ball, you must back up, all the way to the “T” if possible. Sometimes the ball is going back and forth so quickly that you won’t have time to get all the way to the “T”, but you need to move in that direction.
You will need to change this strategy, when you have lost two points on the deuce side from having your opponent hit a return of serve down the line. Likewise, when you have lost two points in the ad court, you must also change your strategy. Notice that these changes in strategy are independent of each other.

When you do need to make a change, instead of moving toward the center strap, you will move straight in, or if the serve is hit wide, you will move in at an angle parallel to it. You will still always move in close to the net no matter whether you are moving toward the center strap, moving straight in or at an angle if the ball is served wide.

If your opponent returns most balls high over the net or hits a lot of lobs, then you must adjust and maybe not move forward at all. After you determine that your opponent can hit down the line, you will then play a cat and mouse game. You will still want to move in towards the center strap, but from now on you will see if you can out guess your opponent as to where he will hit the ball and move accordingly. You will still want to move to the center strap from time to time just to keep your opponents guessing.

When you are at net and your partner is receiving, you will want to stand on the service line in the middle. Please don’t stand off center towards the alley. If you want to stand off center, stand closer to the center service line.

When your partner returns the ball and **IT GOES PAST THE NET PERSON**, then you will move in toward the center strap. Again, remember to hit your volley at the net person. If your partner is hitting great returns and your opponent who is at net never hits the ball, you can then begin to move in a little sooner. The purpose is to get close to the net where your volley is so much more effective and you cut off the angle of the return.

If you cannot or do not hit the next ball, you must back up to the T, if possible. If you are playing at a high level, then these movements are shortened because the speed of the ball going back and forth will not give you much time to move very far. This does not mean that you don’t make an effort to move some.

You will need to change this strategy when you have lost two points on the deuce side from having your opponent hit a ball down the line. You must also change
your strategy when you have lost two points in the ad court. Now you will move in toward the net, following a path parallel to the ball. If your opponent lobs this ball a lot, then you cannot move in toward the net and you must be ready to move back so you can hit the ball using an overhead.

Again, and after you determine that your opponent can hit down the line, you will then play a cat and mouse game again. You will still want to move in towards the center strap, but from now on you will see if you can out guess your opponent as to where he will hit the ball.

What is important here is that you are moving around. This will keep your opponents guessing and many times it will throw them off so that they will miss balls they would normally be able to hit.

To help you understand a little easier the concepts of where you need to be when you are playing at net, here are the general rules.

When your partner is hitting the ball and he or she is at the baseline, then you should be back on the service line so you can play defensive should the ball be hit to you.

If your opponent is at the baseline and he or she is hitting the ball, then you should be moving in toward the net so you can play offensive should the ball be hit to you. However, you should not be moving in until the ball has passed the net person. And if you do hit the ball, you will want to stay close to the net in the event the ball comes back to you.

This next part deals with when you are serving or when your partner is serving. If you are playing with someone who does not know this strategy, it will be up to you to tell them about what to do. This is, of course, if you think they would be open to improving their doubles. Please don’t be telling your spouse these things. I don’t want to be responsible for any divorces.

When you are serving in the deuce court, and assuming that your opponent is right-handed, it is absolutely critical that you serve the ball most of the time to your opponent’s backhand. Most of the time means 98 percent of first serves and 100 percent of second serves.
How far away you stand from the center to serve depends on how well you are able to serve to the backhand. If you are having trouble serving to the backhand when standing over from the middle and close to the doubles alley, you must move closer to the center to assure that your serve goes down the middle to the backhand. If by chance you are standing in the middle and you serve wide to the forehand, you must be ready to move to the right to protect an angled return of serve wide to your forehand.

Again, this serving to the backhand when serving in the deuce court is extremely important and if you are not able to serve to the backhand, you may want to listen to Lesson #20 on aiming the serve, get out with a bucket of balls, and practice doing so. I can’t tell you how many points you will win doing this.

When you are serving in the ad court, you must also serve the ball to the backhand side most of the time. Although it is not as critical as in the deuce court, the percentages stay the same. You should stand over about eight to 10 feet from the center line so that it is easier to serve to the backhand. Here it is OK to stand closer to the doubles alley if you want.

When you are receiving in the deuce court, and assuming that your forehand is your best shot, you want to stand far enough to the left so that you can hit as many forehands as possible, but not so far over that the server can hurt you with a wide serve. Most of the time you will want to return the serve cross-court which means hitting the ball back to the server.

One of the dirty little secrets of doubles is that with few exceptions, the team that returns the most balls wins the match. In order to do this you must figure out a way to return the serve into the court no matter what. And no matter what means even if you hit your return to the net person. If you haven’t listened to Lesson #47 on the return of serve yet, you may want to do that as I talk more about doubles and the return of serve.

If you are receiving in the ad court, assuming that it is your best shot, again, stand far enough to the left so that you can use your forehand but not so far that you get into trouble if the ball is hit down the middle.
As the title says, these are just basic strategy rules. Doubles is a very complex game, and there are many variations to the above strategy such as poaching, signaling, playing Australian doubles, serving and going to the net, returning serve and going to the net, hitting your return down the line, playing the angles, how to defend against poachers, and when to lob, to name more than a few. However, when you master this basic strategy, your value as a doubles partner will be measurably enhanced. Then you can begin to play around with the other variations and strategies.
Terrific Drills To Improve Both Your Tennis Game And Your Mental Game

Introduction to Drilling

Lesson # 54: You Need to Drill and How I Do It

You do really want to improve your game, don’t you? Do you want to know the fastest and proven way? In case you haven’t guessed by now, here is the answer. You absolutely need to drill.

How often should you drill? At least twice a week. If you normally play for 1.5 hrs, it is best if you drill for 45 minutes and then play sets for 45 min using the things you worked on in your drills. If you spend some serious time drilling, you will see a huge improvement in just 6 months to a year. I know you are saying that is a long time, but it really is a short time in tennis years. It just takes a long time to get really good at this game.

In this Drill CD series, I am going to give you drills that will improve just about every aspect of your game. There are lots of other drills out there and everyone says their drills are the best and there may be some drills out there as good or better than mine. The difference is that mine are designed around using the mental game to speed up learning. Of course, once you get good at playing the mental game you can use those principles with any drill.

If you remember Ron Waite and his e-book and articles I wanted you to read, he liked my drills so much that he had his college team use them. From my way of thinking, that says a lot about these drills I am going to give to you in this series.
Doing drills is the only way to really hone your accuracy, consistency, and strategy. Please take drilling to heart and spend at least half of your time on the tennis court doing them.

I am going to use as my example the basic forehand cross court drill. It doesn’t really matter which drill you are doing, but this is the general process to use as you do any drill.

Always start out with the basic concepts which, as you know, is seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and allowing your breathing to be exhaling properly. Then, as you are hitting fore hand cross courts, begin to notice what is going on with your ball. For example, if you see that your ball is going long, start paying attention to your grip and wrist so that you can relax it a little. You can do this while you are still seeing the ball and/or breathing. For a reminder on how to deal with missed balls, please listen again to Lesson #12.

How long you will pay attention to your grip and wrist will depend on how soon you are able to stop hitting your balls long. As you continue hitting crosscourt, maybe you see that the pattern of your balls are going too much down the middle. You will stop for a few seconds and re-visualize the path of the ball, then begin to work on letting your body hit the ball to your target. If you see a pattern of your balls going into the net, then you will spend some time working with relaxing your backswing. If your whole stroke feels out of sorts, you will want to do the Mother of all Tips I talked about in Lesson #38 for a few minutes.

So, you will change what you practice on depending on what is happening. Each day you practice, there will be something different. It always won’t be that you are hitting your balls into the net so you will have to change what you work on as it may be different from your last practice session. All the while you still work on seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, and breathing.

Then there are the times when you will work on the things on your checklist. If you see that you are missing a lot of balls, you may want to re-program the ball going into the court, but because you are practicing some other physical issue that is on your check list this is the time where you don’t really want to care where the ball is going.
For example, if you are working on your split step, it doesn’t matter where your ball goes. You are playing a different game. You will still work on your seeing the ball and breathing but even this doesn’t matter. What you are doing is making the item on your check list the important thing.

You will do this process I discussed a few minutes ago while doing all the drills I will give you in a few minutes. All these drills will help you develop your physical game, but more importantly they will help you discover what state of focus and relaxation your body needs to be in for you to play at the top of your game. Another important part of each drill is what I call "mind awareness." When you continuously ask yourself questions it will be the key to improving this mind awareness.

If you find that you are not getting better as you drill, then you are not doing the mental game correctly. Most likely, you are trying too hard and therefore are too tight in some part of your body. So, just do the opposite of what you have been taught in the past: Try less, relax some part of your body more, let go of judging your shots, and stop thinking about the drill. Really work on getting your conscious mind out of the way and letting your “other than conscious mind” direct your body. In other words, revisit the Core Principles.

Here are some other ideas for you as you drill. I find that if you place a small orange road cone on the court as a target, this will help you be aware of where your ball is actually landing in relation to your ideal.

Any time you practice and do the drills I am going to tell you about, please don't just hit down the middle. I see so many people hitting for an hour and just hitting balls over and over again right down the middle. You don't want to hit down the middle in a match so why would you do it so long in practice. When I drill, I just spend very minimal time hitting down the middle when I am warming up. I go into the drills as soon as possible.

Instead of hitting down the middle you will want to hit forehands crosscourt, backhands cross court, forehands down the line, and backhands down the line. You can do the same when working with your volley. Always have a specific place that you are aiming for when you drill, no matter what you are working on.
After working on any drill for a while, play a game up to seven points. This will simulate playing points in a match. I see a lot of players playing a game up to 21. The reason I don’t like this is that it doesn’t simulate a match. The games in tennis are short so even playing up to seven is on the long side.

When I was in college, my roommate and I played a lot of ping pong. As you know in the game of ping pong you play up to 21. My roommate would sometimes have a “hot streak” and I would not be able to catch up so one day I said, “Let’s play to 51.” When we played to 51, I never lost to him because I was more consistent. The problem was that this is not how ping pong is played. So, play the shorter game of seven because that is closer to the way the games in tennis are.

Another concept to keep in mind while drilling is to always try to simulate a game. That means you don’t hit the ball in the air if you are behind the base line and you get all balls on the first bounce. If you get a short ball that normally you would hit and go to the net, you do that in the drill. If you are doing volley drills, you let out balls go out. If you are hitting backhands cross court and your opponent hits it late and the ball goes down the line, you still play it as if you were playing a match. The point here is to play as you would in a match.

In this drill CD series, I have included all the drills and ways to practice that I told you about in some of your other lessons. I repeat them here so that you can not only find them more easily and listen to them, but also so you will be reminded again to do them. All of these drills are very important to the development of both your physical and mental game.

After working on a drill and the next time you play a practice match, work on utilizing the same things you worked on in the drill. If you were working on forehand cross court, hit more forehands cross court when you play. If you were working on serving and volleying, then serve and volley every time when you start playing games. Even if you lose! Remember, you are working on improving, not working on winning. Winning will come automatically. The final thought on all the drills is, “can you still do what you worked on in the drill as well as when you start playing the game? If you can, you have arrived.
The way I see someone getting the most out of these drills is to print out these drills and take them with you when practicing so that you can refer to the drills and do them correctly.

Lesson # 55: How to Drill When No One Will Drill With You

Ok, you really want to drill, but no one wants to drill with you. Is this true and you can’t find anyone who wants to drill? I hope this is not the case.

It is too bad that more people don’t want to do drills. As I said earlier, doing drills is absolutely critical if you are really wanting to take your tennis game to the highest possible level. The good news is that you can “fake” doing them when you play. It can be more difficult but doable.

Here is what you need to do. When you play games, decide that you are going to play a different game. Choose what you want to work on and just focus on it.

For example, you could decide that you will hit all of your balls to the backhand side no matter what. Even if you know that it is the wrong strategy. And while you are doing this, make sure that you do this while working on seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, breathing properly, or working on relaxing your grip and wrist. After doing this for a while, hit all balls to the forehand side.

Here are some other variations. Hit side to side. Again, no matter if it is the wrong strategy. Hit two balls in a row to the forehand then two balls in a row to the backhand. Hit two to one side then one to the other. Hit a drop shot then lob when he/she comes in. On all second serves after the return of serve go to the net. Serve and volley on every serve and hit your volley to one side only on every volley. When you are serving, wait for the return of serve and hit an approach shot and go to net. Again, all of these “drills” you will do even if you miss every ball and lose 6-0, 6-0. You get the idea?
**Mental Game Core Principles Drills**

The next 4 drills are the absolutely critical drills to help you play the mental game the way it needs to be played. These 4 drills will help you learn what it really means to see the ball, breathe, and relax. These drills are where you can begin to be aware of what kind of balls you are having difficulty with staying focused on.

You may want to print out these drills. Remember, I gave you the PDF file on the first CD.

Until you can really do these drills really well, you need to spend some serious time with them.

**Drill # 1: Seeing the ball**

Spend five minutes or any period of time you want just seeing the ball. Seeing the ball means focusing on the ball and being able to tell yourself at all times what direction the ball is spinning. Seeing the ball means consciously seeing what direction the ball is spinning as the ball comes over the net, after the ball bounces, all the way to the blur of your racket, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time and as your ball bounces to your opponent's racket. It also means consciously seeing the ball spinning when you miss the shot long, wide, or into the net. You may want to listen again to Lesson #1 on seeing the ball.

In order to see the ball completely, keep thoughts about your stroke or hitting the ball into the court out of your head. Just focus on seeing the ball spinning. In addition, make seeing the ball easy. Relax your eyes. Just think about when you read. You don’t try hard to see the words, you just do.

As you do this drill, pay attention to the different balls that you are hitting. Are there any balls that “make” you lose your focus? These will be the balls you really need to work on as you get beyond seeing a normal ball. For example, you might have
difficulty seeing a really deep ball to the blur of your racket, or maybe you have
trouble seeing the ball when you hit the ball out.

Anyway, once you get good at seeing the ball, you will constantly need to refine
it. If you are anything like me, there will be times when you think you are seeing the
ball, but you just really aren’t.

Here are some more questions to ask yourself after a point or rally is over so that
you can make sure you are seeing the ball correctly:

- Am I seeing the ball spinning all the way to my racket?
- Am I seeing the blur of the racket as the ball hits the strings, in other words,
am I seeing the ball to the presence of the racket?
- Am I seeing the ball spinning after the bounce?
- Am I keeping my eyes on the contact point after I see the ball to the blur?
- Am I seeing the ball spinning after it crosses the net and to the other side of
  the court?
- Am I seeing the ball spinning, even when I hit the ball long, wide, or into the
  net?

Any "no" answer means that you have some more practicing and letting go to do.

Here are a few more questions.

- Am I worrying about hitting the ball into the court?
- Am I trying to hit the ball into the court?
- Am I worrying about stroking the ball correctly?
- Am I trying to stroke the ball correctly?
- Am I trying to direct the ball to a certain spot on the court?

Any "yes" answer means that you have some more practicing and letting go to do.

Let’s move on to a drill to practice your breathing.
Drill # 2: Paying attention to your breathing

In this drill, you will be working primarily on your breathing. Many of my students tell me that the breathing part is the hardest. Please don’t let this keep you from working on it. Even if you are not able to do it very well, it will still have huge benefits and will lead you to the next level. You may want to listen again to Lesson #2 on the breathing. Here is how you can practice it.

Spend five minutes or any period of time you want paying attention to your breathing.

The ideal breathing pattern is to allow your breathing to be very relaxed, to use a long exhale with a sigh before you make contact with the ball and to continue exhaling through the hit. Paying attention to your breathing means consciously feeling your breathing, even after the point or rally is over. The idea is to be able to do this over an extended period of time.

To do this exercise properly, you will have to keep thoughts about your stroke or about hitting the ball into the court out of your head. Focus only on your breathing.

You also need to know that you may or may not hit the ball very well, and you need to let go of this. This exercise is not designed to maximize hitting the ball into the court. It is an exercise of relaxing and letting go. However, you may just find yourself hitting better. My point is that you are not to worry or even pay attention to this aspect.

Here are some questions to ask yourself after a point or rally is over:

- Am I consciously feeling myself exhaling?
- Is my breathing very relaxed?
- Am I sighing before the hit and continuing it after?
- Am I consciously and continuously aware of my breathing even in between points and into the next point or rally?
- Am I able to stay focused on my breathing, even when I hit the ball long, wide, or into the net?
Any "no" answer means that you have some more practicing and letting go to do.

Here are some more questions for you to ask yourself.

- Am I worrying about hitting the ball into the court?
- Am I worrying about stroking the ball correctly?
- Am I trying to direct the ball to a certain spot on the court?

A "yes" answer means that you have some more practicing and letting go to do.

Drill # 3: Combining Seeing the ball and Breathing

After spending some time just watching the ball and then working on just your breathing, now you need to do the ultimate. Here is what you want to do.

Spend five minutes or any period of time you want working on consciously seeing the ball and consciously feeling your breathing at the same time. Again, you must keep your mind free of thoughts about hitting the ball into the court or about your stroke or you won’t be able to do this. Focus only on the ball spinning and your breathing. Refer to the questions to ask yourself in Drills #1 and #2.

Drill # 4: Feeling and relaxing your strokes

This next drill helps you develop the proper amount of relaxation when you hit the ball and works on really grooving your strokes. Actually, this is a bunch of small drills because you will be doing this drill with every stroke and paying attention to different parts of your stroke.

If you feel like your strokes are not consistent, then you will want to spend more time with this drill.
Have you heard me say that the follow through is the most important part of the stroke? When you work on the follow through, many things happen and some of them you won’t even know about. The main component of this drill is doing the Mother of all Tips that I talked about in Lesson #3. Hopefully, you have already spent some time doing it and here I give you some additional ideas to work on while you do this Mother of all Tips.

You will want to spend five minutes holding the follow-through until it comes to a complete stop. This means stopping and holding the footwork also. Spend some time combining holding the follow-through with consciously seeing the ball spinning or consciously feeling your breathing. When you do this, it becomes an extremely powerful exercise.

Spend five minutes on each stroke doing the following: without controlling or judging, consciously feel your complete forehand stroke from the time you are in the ready position to the time you recover back to the ready position. Then spend five minutes with the backhand, five minutes with the forehand volley, and five minutes with the backhand volley or any other stroke you want.

While you are consciously feeling the stroke, keep thoughts about hitting the ball in the court out of your head. In case you were wondering, feeling the stroke means that you are able to absolutely describe the exact movement of your arm, wrist and the racket as you are moving it through the stroke.

For example, do you know if your racket is going up, down, or straight back when you are taking the racket back on your forehand? Since so many of my students have difficulty with being accurately aware of their swings, you may want to take some videos of your swing so that you can be really sure you are swinging the way you think you are. When you get comfortable with feeling your stroke, add either seeing the ball spinning or your breathing, but not both.

Here are some specific mini drills that you may want to work on. If you know that you are having difficulty with a stroke, by paying attention to and feeling the different parts of the stroke it will help a lot. If you have not done these awareness exercises, then it will be very helpful in improving your strokes. Even if you don’t know how to fix a particular stroke, it won’t matter. By paying attention and feeling your strokes, changes happen for the better even if you are not aware of any changes.
Mini Drill #1: Spend some time consciously feeling the direction the arm and racket travels on the backswing from the ready position?

Mini Drill #2: Spend some time consciously feeling the direction the arm and racket travels as the racket starts forward?

Mini Drill #3: Spend some time consciously feeling the direction the arm and racket travels as the racket goes forward and makes contact with the ball?

Mini Drill #4: Spend some time consciously feeling the path of the arm and racket after the racket makes contact with the ball?

Mini Drill #5: Spend some time consciously feeling and knowing exactly where your follow-through ends? Remember that the follow-through is the most important part of the swing.

The key to doing these drills is to absolutely know what is going on with your stroke during these specific parts of the stroke. In order to do this, you must be letting go of where your ball goes and even trying to make your stroke “right.” Your only job is to just feel what the arm and racket are doing.

When you get really good at this drill, you can begin to feel the entire stroke all at once.

Drill # 5: A Consistency Drill

After you are comfortable focusing on the ball and feeling your breathing, you are ready to work on maximizing the number of balls going into the court. So, how do you make the ball go into the court over and over again? You should know the answer to this by now. Did you say just focus on the ball, focus on your breathing, and keeping your body relaxed? Very good. You get an A.

Using the drills explained previously and spending as much time as needed on each drill, do the following:
Every time you miss the ball, take the time to visualize or talk to yourself about exactly where you wanted the ball to go. If your stroke doesn't feel right, relax it more the next time. If after re-visualizing and/or talking to yourself your balls don’t get more consistent, then you are too tight somewhere in your body and you must relax more. Start with relaxing your grip and/or your wrist.

See if you can hit 10 balls in a row. Then see if you can hit 15, then 20 in a row. Doing this will help you discover what state of mind you need to be in to hit consistently. It will also help you learn to stay focused for longer and longer periods of time.

After working on hitting 10 or more in a row, play a game of up to seven points as I explained in Lesson #54. Look to see how, if at all, your focus and concentration are affected.

If your shots change once you start the game of seven, then you know that you have some more letting go to do. Also pay attention to the way you hit the ball. Did it change? Do you all of a sudden hit the ball easier so that you don’t miss it? Ideally, you should be hitting the ball the same as you did before the game of seven starts. So, if you aren’t hitting the same, you need to “just do it” to use a popular saying.

This game of seven that you do when hitting forehands cross court, backhands cross court and down the line shots are really consistency drills. When you hit to only one place, you will not be able to really hurt your drill partner as you can’t make them run and likewise, they can’t make you run, so it is the person who can hit the most number of balls in the court that is going to win.

If you have trouble focusing or you find that you are missing shots you were making before playing the points, ask yourself these questions:

- Am I trying to win? If yes, you must know by now that trying doesn't work. Only seeing the ball, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time, breathing, and relaxing properly does. Remember: if you play better than your opponent, winning will take care of itself. Your job is to find what state of mind you need to be in to maximize the consistency of your play.
- Am I trying to stroke the ball correctly? Am I thinking about my stroke? If you answer yes, you will need to let go and trust that your body will do this for you.
• Am I making consciously seeing the ball spinning, keeping my focus on the contact point for a short time, and consciously feeling my breathing the most important thing in my life when I am playing? Here is one of the little tricks that might help you stay focused. If I told you that every time you see the ball correctly and breathe correctly when you hit the ball that I would pay you $1,000,000, do you think you would make doing these things more important? Most people would say yes. I think the only person who would maybe say no would be Bill Gates. Even if you do make it important, you don’t need to try hard to do it. You just need to do it.

**Drill # 6: A Running Drill**

Now do drills #1 through 4 again, but this time you will hit your balls to alternate sides while your practice partner will hit to one side only. When the person running gets tired, switch.

The purpose of this drill is twofold. The one hitting from side to side gets to practice seeing the ball and breathing while hitting a change-of-direction ball. The runner gets to practice seeing the ball and feeling his or her breathing while running and hitting. You may find that your focus will not be as good as when you were just standing and hitting so here are some variations if you are having problems with your focus:

• Spend some time just consciously watching the ball spinning, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time and forget about your breathing.
• Spend some time just consciously feeling your breathing and forget about focusing on the ball.
• Combine seeing the ball and breathing.
• Pretend that someone will pay you $1 million for every time you can see the ball and breathe properly. That is just about how important you must make your focus.
When you are doing this running drill, again awareness is very important and again you will need to have these following questions handy so that you can ask yourself these awareness questions:

- On the balls that I have to run hard for, am I still able to see the ball spinning to the blur of my racket and keep my focus on the contact point for a short period of time. If your answer is no, you need to let go more and to make this more important.
- Am I still able to feel my breathing and do a long exhale just before and through hitting the ball? If your answer is no, you need to let go more and again make this more important.
- When I am aiming my ball, am I trying so hard to aim that I have not watched the ball and kept my focus on the contact point for a short period of time. If your answer is no, you need to learn to let go more and let your body do the aiming while you are busy seeing the ball.
- Was I able to keep my awareness on my breathing while I was thinking about aiming? If your answer is no, you need to learn to let go more and let your body do the aiming while you are busy breathing.

**Drill # 7: Another Running Drill**

Do Drill #6 again, but this time one of you will hit your balls anywhere while the other will hit to one side only. When the person running gets tired, switch.

The purpose of this drill is again twofold. The one hitting anywhere gets to practice seeing the ball spinning, keeping their focus on the contact point for a short time, and breathing while deciding where to hit the ball for maximum effect. The runner gets to practice seeing the ball spinning, keeping their focus on the contact point for a short time, and feeling his or her breathing while running.

The real value of this drill is to find out what state of mind you must be in to choose where you want the ball to go. You do it by making sure that the thought of where you want the ball to go is just a knowing, and it must follow in fourth place...
behind seeing the ball spinning, keeping your focus on the contact point for a short
time, and being aware of your exhaling. And when you know where you want the ball
to go, let your “other than conscious mind” direct your body.

Here are the awareness questions to ask yourself to make sure you are getting the
most from this drill:

- When I miss the ball, am I really seeing the ball properly or am I putting
aiming the ball first?
- When I miss the ball, am I feeling my breathing first, or am I putting aiming
the ball first?
- When I miss the ball, am I keeping my focus on the contact point for a short
time, or am I putting aiming the ball first?
- Am I trying too hard to hit the ball to where I want it to go? If your answer is
yes, you need to relax more, starting with your grip, wrist, and arm at the
shoulder when you make contact with the ball.
- On the balls that I have to run hard for, am I still seeing the ball spinning to my
racket keeping my focus on the contact point for a short period of time?
- Am I still feeling my breathing and exhaling just before hitting the ball on the
hard running balls?

Drill # 8: Volley Drills

You can use all of the above drills to practice volleys as well, while keeping the
following ideas in mind.

In my opinion, breathing properly is the most important thing to do while
volleying. If you are serving and volleying, see if you can feel your breathing as you are
moving to the net. If you are just standing at the net, practice feeling your breathing
first using a relaxed exhale before and continuing after you hit the ball and at the same
time, but secondarily, work on seeing the ball.
Also, work on keeping your focus on the contact point for a short period of time. When you volley, you will have to make this focus on the contact point a lot shorter than when you are hitting a ground stroke.

Obviously, if the other player is at net and you are hitting ground strokes, again you will have to keep your focus on the contact point just as short. But, you can do it and it works big time.

In the next set of drills, I will give you some terrific drills for the return of serve, the lob and overhead. Also, I will give you one drill that you absolutely will want to do as it not only is a good drill to do, but you may want to use it in a match. In case you are wondering which drill that is, it is what I call the Second Generation Bounce Hit drill.

**Drills for Specific Shots and Other Little Games**

**Drill # 9: The Return of Serve Drill**

I am willing to bet that you don’t spend much time practicing your return of serve. Am I right? I also wonder, why not? The return of serve is so important because breaking serve is very hard and is impossible if you don’t get the serve back. And, just getting it back is not always enough. You need to get it back so that you have a chance to win the point.

So, when you are playing a willing opponent who is a friend, here are two ways to practice your return of serve. You can only do this in practice matches and not in tournaments. You can even do it in doubles if all four of you agree to practice it.

Here is the first way.

The main idea is that the point cannot start until the return of serve has been hit into the court.
If you missed the return on your backhand side, your practice partner must then serve all serves to your backhand until you get it back into the court. If you missed the return on the first serve, then your practice partner will serve another first serve. If that first serve is missed, then your practice partner will serve a second serve, but it still must be to the backhand side until you get it back.

If your practice partner misses the second serve, he or she will keep serving second serves until the ball is in play. This means that he or she cannot double fault. This way you get to practice your backhand return until you get it right.

If your practice partner serves an ace, then the challenge for him or her is to hit another ace. If you miss the return on the first serve, then the challenge for the server is to hit two first serves in a row. If the server double faults, he or she will have a chance to practice a second serve. That way the server gets to practice also.

This drill will allow you to do the return of serve over and over without worrying about losing the point. It also takes the advantage away from the server, as the server doesn’t get a free point just because he or she hit a good serve. It is a terrific way to work on one of the most important shots in tennis.

Here is another way but this time it is a way to practice the return of serve every time you are warming up in a non tournament match. In case it sounds familiar, it is the same way that I have already explained in Lesson #18.

If you warm up your serve the way most players do when you are playing a practice match, you most likely will serve three balls, which your practice partner catches and then he or she will serve them back to you which you then catch. You do this back and forth until you feel that you have had enough serves.

If you are playing with a friend and it is not a tournament match, here is what you can do instead.

One of you will choose to warm up the serve. The other player will practice their return of serve. You will do this until the person serving has had enough serves. Then you change and the other person serves while you practice returning.

When you are practicing returning, you are to practice hitting your return as if you were actually playing. You are not to hit the ball just back to the server.
When I started to do this, I noticed that I would serve more balls than when I warmed up the other way. I could really work on my focus so much better. It was like I was out hitting a mini bucket of balls. It also really helped my return of serve from the moment the game started.

This way you will be able to practice your return even if it is only for a short period of time. After warming up your serve and return of serve this way, you will be surprised how much better your serve and returns will be in a very short time.

You will also have a benchmark when you begin to play the points. You can ask yourself, “Am I returning serve as well, now that we are keeping score or am I tensing up and trying too hard to hit the serve back?”

Drill # 10: The Lob and Overhead Drill

Here is a terrific way to practice both the lob and overhead. You can also do this one every time you warm up in a practice match if you want to take just a little more time warming up and if you have a willing partner who will do this drill with you.

Here is what you do.

Hit the first ball to make your hitting partner hit a volley, then hit a lob on the return of that shot. When you hit your lob, do not try to just feed it to him or her. Go for the perfect lob cross-court. If your hitting partner hits an overhead back to you, hit your hitting partner another volley and not a lob. Then hit another lob if he or she returns your shot.

Your hitting partner should be hitting overheads for winners. This way you both can warm up practicing what you would do in an actual match. Make sure you are hitting your overheads like you would in a match. See lesson, #49 in the Strategy series about why you want to hit your overhead as hard as you can.

Here is my reasoning. Using this drill, you can practice your lob every time you warm up, assuming you are playing with someone who wants to warm up this way. By
only hitting a lob from a volley, you will be practicing hitting a lob like you would in a match. When you hit your lob, make sure your breathing is relaxed, and you see the ball spinning all the way to the blur of your racket still keeping your focus on the contact point. Since I consider the lob to be a “touch shot,” relaxing more as you hit the ball is a must.

If you are doing this drill to just practice your lob and overheads, try playing a game of up to seven to add a little pressure like you would have in a match. Check to see if you still hit your lobs and overheads the same as you were before you kept score.

**Drill # 11: The Second Generation Bounce Hit Game**

Caution: This Exercise may be hazardous to your Conscious Mind.

This is the most advance of the “letting go” exercises. Use at your own risk. When you do this exercise, your conscious mind will not be able to try, think, judge, or do. At least, not very much.

You should be familiar with the normal Bounce-Hit Exercise, as I talked about it Lesson #1 on the Seeing the Ball.

If you are not already familiar with this Bounce Hit drill, this 2nd Generation Bounce Hit drill may not make complete sense to you. If you haven’t worked with the bounce-hit exercise yet you may just want to do the original one first in practice until it is familiar before trying to do this advanced one.

Many years ago, when I learned from Tim Gallwey about the Bounce-Hit exercise for seeing the ball, I used it when I was rallying or practicing. However, when I used it during a game, I found I couldn’t do it. I then proceeded to give it up and forgot about doing it in a match for all these years.

I had been struggling with my conscious mind for a while because it kept interfering with my game. It wanted to get involved with hitting the ball in the court. I had visualized letting go many times. I had reprogrammed letting go over and over
again and still my conscious mind just kept interfering. When I say interfering, it means that I was choking.

So, over the few months that I was finding myself choking, I was searching for ways to keep my focus on the ball and my breathing for the entire point, especially when the point and the match got tight. I was really good at seeing the ball and breathing during a match, except when it came to the “crunch” time when all I had to do was hit the ball in to win the point. I would then try to hit the ball how and where I wanted to and ended up missing the ball.

As it happens, when I work on a problem, the answer comes. This time it took months. For some reason, I thought about and started to do the bounce-hit during my practice. The thought came to me that I should try it when I played a match, as I had not done it for years and years. I wanted to see if I could do it now that I was so good at seeing the ball and breathing. I felt that I was now sufficiently “mentally developed,” that I would be able to actually do it right.

It was amazing. Not only was I able to do it even though it was not perfect at first but I found I did not miss the balls I was missing before. When I played 3 days later, I did the bounce-hit method when I served and volleyed. I found that for the first time in my tennis life, I did not panic on a hard half volley and my other volleys were so much more relaxed. I still missed some balls, but they were ones that I was still too tight on.

But, here are the “kickers” I discovered while practicing this exercise and why I call it the “second generation.”

When you say the word “hit” it is a hard sound. I noticed that when I was saying it, my voice was at a higher octave than normal and it was a tense sound. I began to soften the saying of “hit” and it made a lot of difference. I also noticed that I was doing the same thing when my opponent was hitting the ball, especially when he was serving and when I was serving. I began to soften the word “hit” again when my opponent was hitting the ball as well as on my serve. I saw a big difference in the way I felt and how well I hit. Lo and behold, my conscious mind could not get control of my body. At least not very easily.
By the way, I would say the bounce-hit out loud, but very softly so only I could hear myself saying it. You would not be able to hear me say it from the other side but you could hear me say it if you were standing close to me. I suggest doing this as it helps you be aware of how you are saying the bounce-hit and whether or not you are relaxed when you say it.

Here is the other “kicker.” At the same time as I was saying “bounce-hit,” I started to really see the ball to my racket like I normally would do when not doing the bounce-hit and that added the icing on the cake.

To sum up, make sure that you say the word “hit” softly with a very relaxed voice as the ball travels to both sides. This, of course, includes when you serve and when your opponent serves. At the same time you are doing this “bounce-hit” exercise, see the ball all the way until you say “hit.” Make sure you are still keeping your focus on the contact point for a short time. And, again, see the ball and say “bounce-hit” as the ball is going to the other side of the net.

If you can’t do this very well at first, all it means is that you have some more “letting go” to do. You may need to work on what I call the “foundational place” of the mental game, which is truly letting go of everything. I talked about this in Lesson #31. This means letting go of hitting the ball into the court, letting go of any strategy, letting go of aiming, and letting go of trying to do anything else that you may be thinking of when you are playing. Thinking about these things is your conscious mind getting involved. Once you get to this place, you will find doing the bound-hit exercise, seeing the ball and breathing much easier.

And, the dirty little secret is that this is the place you are searching for. This is where you need to be when you play. It is the ultimate place to be so that you play your very best every time you play.

Don’t believe me on how amazing this Second Generation Bounce-Hit is. See and do it for yourself.
Drill # 12: The Spinning Game

Another game to play is to say out loud or to yourself what direction the ball is spinning. When you hit the ball, say what direction it is spinning as it is going over the net and again when the ball is coming back toward you. Don’t forget to consciously see the spin after the bounce. And you know what direction that is, right? If you don’t then you have not done your homework in Lesson #1.

Drill # 13: The Trajectory Drill

Here is another game to play. Watch the trajectory of the ball as it comes to you and as it goes back to the other side. Ask yourself whether the ball is still rising, has reached its peak, or is dropping when you hit it. Do the same when your opponent is hitting the ball.

This drill can be an eye opener when you do this when you are volleying. Did you know that probably 99% of balls you hit when you volley are dropping before you hit it. The other 1% is at the peak. If you hit a ball that is rising, then you need to know that the ball would be going long if you didn’t hit it. So, let all rising balls go so you will win the point.

Drill # 14: The Listening Game

If you have done the bounce-hit game that I explained in Drill #11, then this concept of listening is very similar except that you are hearing the ball instead of saying “bounce” or “hit”. Of course, you will want to see the ball at the same time.
Just hear the ball bounce on the ground and hear the sound that the ball makes when it makes contact with the racket. Hear these sounds on both sides of the court. Try this in a practice game situation and see what happens.