

ONE MORE TIME

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The Holy Grail for 99% of tennis players is “how can I win more matches?” And the most effective way to win more matches is....**be more consistent**. Whether you are playing Roger Federer, Venus Williams, or your nemesis at the club, you cannot be beaten if you hit the ball back into play!

Heres what **Bjorn Borg** had to say on the subject:

“I believe successful tennis is a game of consistency and taking advantage of the proper percentages”.

Do you want to argue with a man who won 5 Wimbledon and 6 French Opens? I thought not..

The challenge of playing consistent tennis tests all four aspects of your game:

- **Technically** do you have all the shots to stay in a long rally?
- **Tactically** can you select the correct `percentage shots` as the rally develops?
- **Physically** do you have the speed and endurance to get to every ball?
- **Mentally** do you have the concentration and mental toughness to triumph in long rallies?

Now that I have convinced you that consistency is the key, what are the keys to consistency?

1. Give yourself a margin for error. In baseline rallies aim 1 metre inside the side lines and 3 metres inside the baseline. If you are a little off target, the shot will still be in. Aim 1 to 2 metres over the net in baseline rallies for the same reason – only hit low if your opponent is moving to or is at the net.

2. Hit the ball only as hard as you can control it. Rafael Nadals average groundstroke speed is 70 mph. But you are not Rafael Nadal..

3. Use spin. Topspin makes the ball dip and come into court. Slice allows you to control and return balls when you are under pressure, especially on the backhand side.

4. Hit crosscourt more often than down the line. You will be hitting over the lower part of the net, into a `longer` court (come back Pythagoras, all is forgiven - and bring your hypotenuse).

Lets take the theory to the court. Here are my top three exercises to help you become a more consistent player:

EXERCISE ONE.

Rally from the baseline. Neither player is allowed to hit a winner or come to net. Win the point by outlasting and out maneuvering your partner.

EXERCISE TWO.

Rally from the baseline, starting with an underarm serve. There must be a rally of 10 shots before either player can score a point. If the rally breaks down before it reaches 10, neither player scores.

EXERCISE THREE.

Rallying from the baseline, one partner is designated the attacker, the other is the defender. To win the point the defender need only hit 6 balls in a row back into play. The attacker is forced to "go for it", providing the defender with lots of practice in being consistent when under pressure.

Let me leave you with a couple of thoughts. If you hit the ball back twice, your opponent has two chances to miss. But if you hit it back 20 times, she has 20 chances to miss. And finally, although winning isn't everything, I have always felt that winning slowly is a lot more fun than losing quickly...

To improve your consistency in baseline rallies, visualise `a court within the court` and `a net above the net`.

