

LINKING TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL SKILLS THROUGH THE GAME-BASED APPROACH (GBA)

Maria Bolster

The thinking behind the GBA is simple - *tennis is a game*. Every game needs to be played, and playing is a tactical endeavour. Success in any game requires clear intentions, decision making and problem solving. In regard to technique, tennis is not figure skating. No judges are at the side saying “your follow through was much better than your opponents”, 15-0 for you!

Technique is second (behind tactics), but not secondary. Yes, technique is critical for tennis success. However, if you really want to set the stage for meaningful stroke development, the key is tactics. If applied correctly, the GBA is the most effective way to learn technique. GBA is effective through using “Situation Training”. The goal of ST is to identify the situations players encounter in match play and improve their performance in those situations.

THE TWO BECOME ONE

If a coach grasps the critical point that - there is a smooth connection between tactics and technique - their coaching upgrades dramatically. Technique is only a means to perform a tactic. Technical skill by itself is useless in a game if it is not used in the right way, at the right time and in the right location. The fact is that without tactics, good technical strokes are simply an exercise in looking stylish. Tennis players execute really bad ideas with nice strokes all the time. Learning a stroke without a tactical intention is deficient. How many players have had a coach feed them baskets of balls to “groove” a stroke that they were unable to use in a match? If the coach doesn’t spend a lot of time integrating the skill into tactical play, the likelihood of the player using it in real match play is little to none.

THE TACTIC DETERMINES WHAT TECHNIQUE IS PROPER

The connection moves from tactical to technical or visa versa through 3 steps.

TACTICS: First define the tactic the player needs to perform eg. crosscourt forehand.

BALL CONTROL: Ball control is a critical bridge between tactics and technique. Determine the key ball control characteristics needed for the tactic to be effective (5 Ball Controls: Height, Direction, Distance, Speed, Spin).

In a CC forehand the ball would need good height with arc and topspin in a CC direction, which will be controlled by the position of the racquet at impact.

TECHNIQUE: The mechanics needed to perform the shot consistently at higher speeds in an economical way without wasting energy and minimizing injury.

The key point is that technique is only “proper” if it accomplishes the task for which it was meant.

CONCLUSION

You see your opponent wide on his forehand side and he sends a mediocre ball CC to your forehand. Which forehand technique do you apply? The sharp angled CC topspin? The looping arc deep topspin to the center? Or do you hit a line drive? Each shot in tennis presents choices and each one requires very different technique. Your selection is every bit as important as your form.

Tennis was not created so players can follow through. Technique is only a means to play, not an end in itself. To really learn technique that is relevant, practical and useful, remember the key is TACTICS.