

TACTICAL-TECHNICAL CONTINUUM

In any open skill sport ([click here for a video on tennis as an open skill](#)), playing is an exercise in problem-solving. To win, players must identify the problem and apply solutions. In tennis, we can define these problems to solve as tactics. Therefore, in tennis, tactics come before technique. Form follows function. A player needs to know **‘what’** they need to do (tactics) before deciding **‘how’** they should send the ball (technique). Technique is only a means to achieve the tactic of winning more points (or losing less).

Since Louis Cayer first systemized our Canadian coaching methodology in 1988, technique has never been an end in itself but, the technical solution to tactical problems.

Also, technique in tennis requires **adaptation**. It is not like gymnastics, where points are gained by making the proper moves. In a match, the umpire is not at the side rating your ‘form’ and awarding points (*‘Great follow-through, 15-0 for you!’*).

Because of all this, coaches must be mindful of the direct connection between tactical problems and their technical solutions. Any technical instruction is more effective if directly connected to accomplishing a tactical intention rather than achieving a particular ‘look.’

I have labelled this connection between tactics and techniques the ‘Tactical-Technical Continuum.’ And, it is one of the most critical concepts in our methodology, with the diagram below being one of the most essential.

“Coaches need to be mindful that there is a direct connection between tactical problems and their technical solutions.”

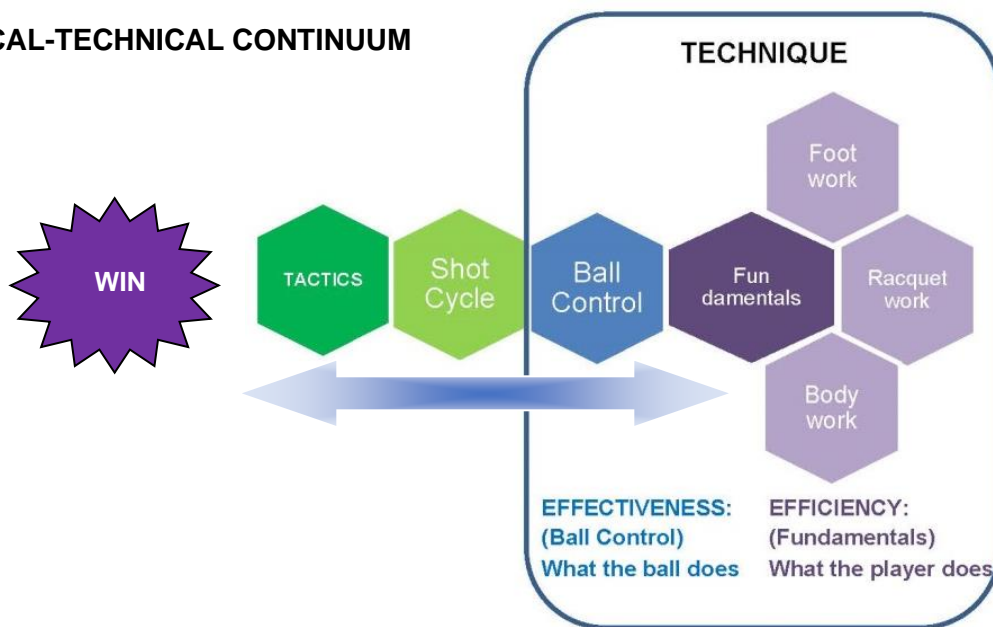
THE TACTICAL-TECHNICAL CONTINUUM

The continuum is a *story* that flows from *tactics to technique* and back again. Therefore, technical coaching must have a connection to tactics. The story from the tactical end of the continuum flows like this (see diagram below):

- The goal of playing any game (including tennis) is to **win**
- To win, effective **tactics** are required
- Tactics and technique occur in various situations (**Shot Cycle**)
- To perform tactics in these situations, the ball must be controlled *effectively* (**Ball Control**)
- Finally, controlling the ball requires the execution of *efficient* **Technical Fundamentals**

For example, to **win**, the tactical intention (**Tactics**) could be to hit away from the opponent to the open court. In a baseline rally situation (**Shot Cycle**), the balls' **direction** must be controlled for an inside-out FH (**Ball Control**). To control the direction, the players must angle their racquet at impact appropriately. To make it easier to hit the ball with the appropriate angle, they must turn their shoulders a little more than sideways on the preparation to time the impact to be slightly later (**Fundamentals**).

TACTICAL-TECHNICAL CONTINUUM



When *techniques flow to tactics* working from the other end of the continuum, the story then unfolds like this:

- When coaching technique, the **Fundamentals** are used to maximize control of the ball.
- What the ball does (**Ball Control**) then makes the tactic
- The tactic is performed in a specific situation (**Shot Cycle**)
- The tactic then wins the point (**Tactics**).

The example would play out like this:

The coach tells the players to turn their shoulders a little more than sideways on their FH preparation (**Technical Fundamentals**) to make it easier to time the ball slightly 'later' to angle their racquet appropriately to control the ball's direction (**Ball Control**). Since the situation is a baseline rally, they will be using their FH for an inside-out (**Shot Cycle**). The ball is hit away from the opponent to the open court to win the point (**Tactics**).

THE COACHING FUNNEL

To practically apply this concept, we can illustrate it in a form I call 'The Coaching Funnel.' It is how a coach decides what intervention or feedback will help the player be more effective & efficient.

The process starts with the coach simply asking the question of **'What?'** In other words, the coach identifies the *outcome* to be achieved. Using the example above, the **'What?'** outcome is the tactic of hitting to the open court. The coach then asks, **'How?'** to ascertain the first step to achieve the outcome (which here would be to send the ball in an inside-out direction).

At this point, the **'How?'** (direct the ball inside-out) then becomes the **'What?'** outcome. Then, a new **'How?'** is asked (*How can the player direct the ball inside-out?*). In our example, that would be the process solution of angling the racquet appropriately at impact to send it inside-out and away from the opponent.

Creating this racquet angle then becomes the new **'What?'** outcome, and a new **'How?'** is asked (*How can they get their racquet in position to make that angle?*). The solution would be to time the ball slightly 'later' by angling the shoulders on the preparation a little more than sideways to make it easier to achieve the angle.

So, all the elements have been filtered down the funnel until it boils down to the one connected, relevant coaching intervention of, ***'Turn your shoulders a little more than sideways and time the ball a little 'later' to get the racquet angle looking at your target.'***

Here is the funnel in visual form:

What: Send ball to open court

How: Place ball with an inside-out FH



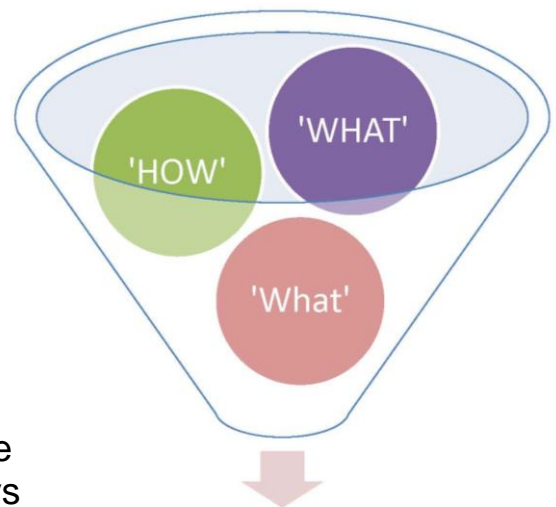
New What: Place Ball with an inside-out FH

How: Impact 'later' to control racquet angle



New What: Impact Later to control racquet angle

How: Turn shoulders slightly more than sideways



Specific Coaching Intervention

This is a vastly different process than a coach who does not like the 'look' of a player's 'form' and tells them to 'Follow-through.'

CONCLUSION

Understanding the Tactical-Technical Continuum helps coaches connect their technical instruction to tactical intentions making them more relevant. The 'Coaching Funnel' process is a practical method to provide useful feedback that helps players solve tactical problems by applying effective and efficient technique.