COACHING EDUCATION COURSE MANUAL

TEACHING TENNIS AS AN OPEN SKILL: *SITUATION TRAINING IN A GAME-BASED APPROACH*

COURSE OUTCOMES:
Participants will learn a practical framework and tactical-technical tools for coaching tennis through Situation Training.
Themes include:

- Running game-specific open play scenarios
- Why sessions built on a 'tactics-first' approach are more effective than regular 'drill-based' coaching
- Creating realistic drills that apply to real-world match-play
- Technical coaching that helps player solve problems they encouter on court

FACILITATOR: WAYNE ELDERTON

- 30 years as Head Course Facilitator for Tennis Canada Coaching Certification – British Columbia
- Tennis Director – North Vancouver Tennis Centre

Wayne is one of only 3 coaches in Canada who have both Coach 4 and Club Professional 3 Certification levels . He is also certified by both PTR and USPTA

Wayne is acknowledged as one of Canada's leading development coaches and coaching educators. He has won numerous awards including the Canadian Tennis Professionals Association's 'Course Facilitator of the year' award and 'Club Professional of the year' award.

He is a national expert on the Game-based approach and other modern coaching methodologies. He is a major contributor to the Canadian coaching certification system's educational materials and curriculums.

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INTRODUCTION

Motor learning classifies tennis as an 'open skill' sport. Open skills require a player to adapt technique for the situation they are in. This is in contrast to teaching tennis like a 'closed skill' sport (like one would teach gymnastics, diving, etc.)
(For a short article on open skills for tennis click here)

Situation Training is a way to apply the Game-based Approach (GBA) to learning in order to learn tennis as an Open Skill. GBA simply means, *'Get people to play and help them learn to play better.'* Situation Training is a systematic way to synchronize tactical and technical learning.

SESSION STRUCTURE

To apply a GBA, sessions will follow a Play/Practice/Play format:

- **Situational Point-Play (SSP) (Initial play)**
  After the warm-up, start with playing actual tennis points to start on a high note and prepare a practical learning environment (players will be more open to learn when they start with how they are practically performing during play).
- **Tactical-Technical Learning (TTL)**
  Gain repetition and feedback on how to perform technique in the specific situations the session is about.
- **Situational Point-Play (SSP) (Game Integration)**
  End on a high note by replaying the original play situation to provide opportunity to integrate the skills learned in the TTL section.

DIAGRAM #1: PLAY/PRACTICE/PLAY FORMAT

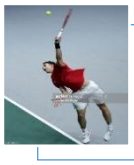
RUNNING SITUATIONAL POINT PLAY (SPP)

In Situational Point-Play, actual tennis points are played. However, some situations may occur infrequently during regular point play. Keep in mind the most important principle when running Situational Point Play:

DIAGRAM #2: SITUATIONAL POINT-PLAY RULE

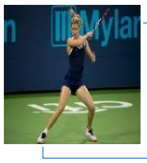
To target specific situations, coaches can start points in any of the following **5 Point Situations**.

DIAGRAM #3: POINT SITUATIONS



Serving

Returning



Both Back

Approaching & at Net

Passing

For Doubles, points can be played with players in the following formations:

- **One-up/One-back**
- **Both-back**
- **Both-up**

COMMON TOPIC EXAMPLES
(Can be applied in both singles and doubles situations)

Both Back:

- Solve the problem of how to receive a ball wide/high in the corner and maintain a neutral rally

Serve:

- Solve the problem of how to send a 2nd serve to the BH to neutralize the opponent.

Return:

- Solve the problem of how to take advantage of a short 2nd serve and send it to the corner to move the opponent.

Approaching & at Net:

- Solve the problem of how to receive a shorter/weaker ball and take advantage with a Down-the-line approach shot to set up a volley.

Passing:

- Solve the problem of how to receive a challenging approach shot and lob it over the opponent's head.

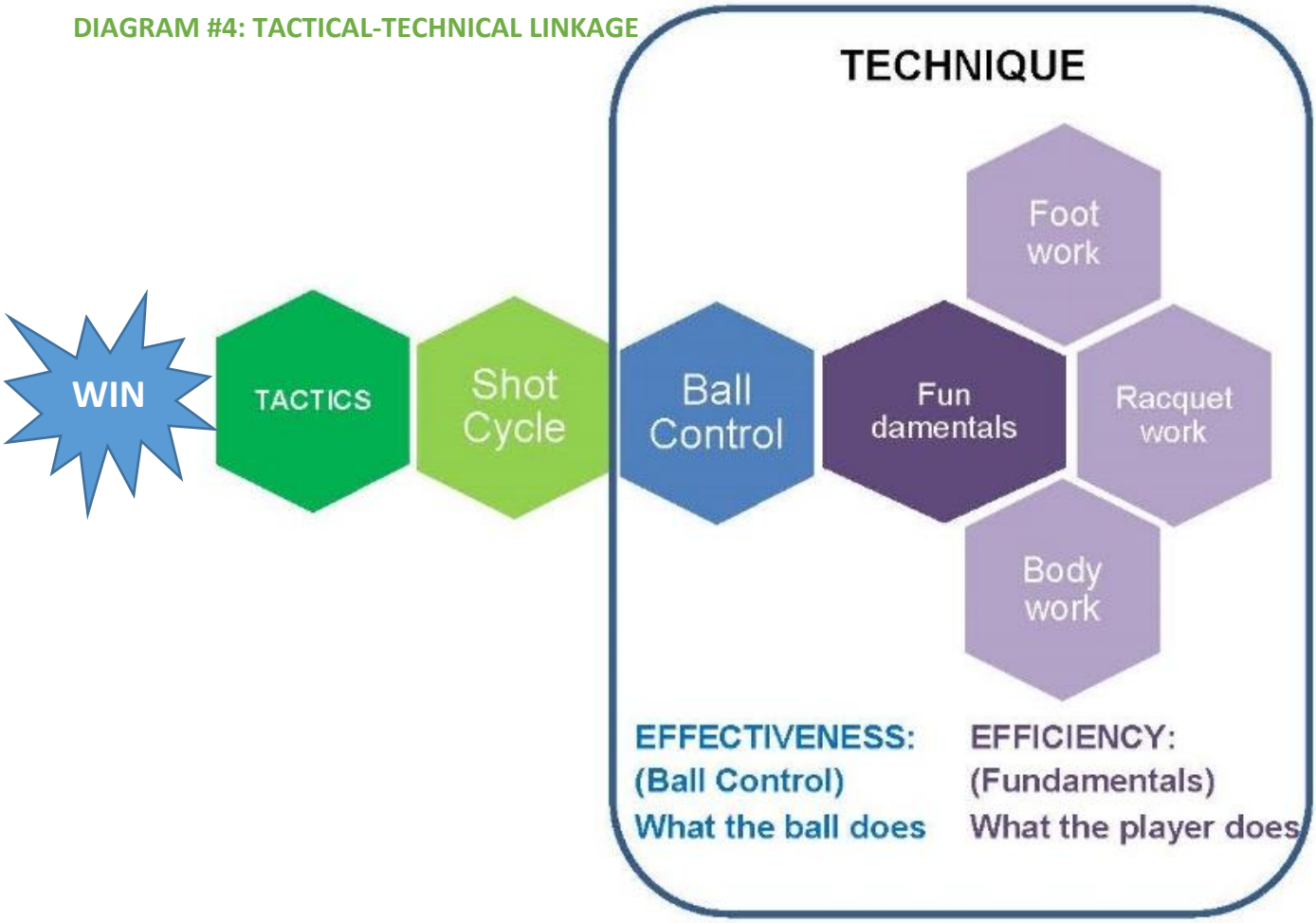
RUNNING TACTICAL-TECHNICAL LEARNING

Diagram #4 is one of the most important diagrams in the Canadian Coaching Education system. It shows the intimate connection between tactics and technique (called 'Tactical-Technical coaching). All technique should be connected to tactics.

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** that are *functional* (can adapt to the situation).

DIAGRAM #4: TACTICAL-TECHNICAL LINKAGE



TACTICS

When it comes to tactics, most coaches don't have a framework to help them systematically deal with tactics however, winning games are all about tactics (whether hockey, chess or tennis).

There are two key concepts to understand to help Situation Training:

1. The first is an overall 'Tactical Mission' that gives the priority for your tactics.
2. The second are the basic core tactics most commonly employed in tennis.

DIAGRAM #5: TACTICAL MISSION

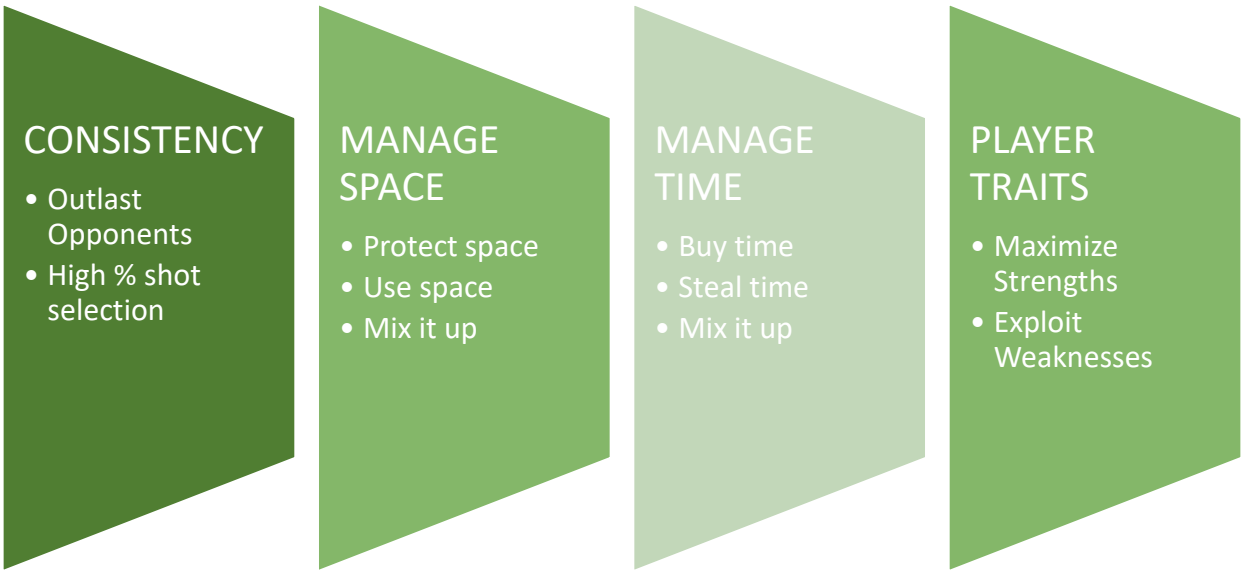


DIAGRAM #6: CORE TACTICS

THE SHOT CYCLE

Strokes (E.g. Forehand, Backhand, Serve, Volley, etc.) are the basic building blocks of coaching. However, when coaching situationally, they are not a helpful tool since technique must vary for the situation. For example, does is a Crosscourt topspin rally 'forehand' use the same technique as a level down the line drive 'forehand'? Or, a defensive loop 'forehand' when backing up? Or, a shoulder height attacking 'forehand' from ¾ court? Or, a 'forehand' when receiving a shot high and wide? If there is so much technical variation required for all these shots, then it is not helpful to talk about 'forehands' as much as specifying which forehand?

A different building block must be used for Situation Training. This is the ***'Shot Cycle'***, which defines the specific situation a player is in during a single shot. **We should talk about tennis in terms of *'shots'* not *'strokes'*.**

The Shot Cycle identifies what situation you are in when receiving the ball (reception) and what you will do as a response (Projection). The Cycle isn't finished until it completes with a recovery for the next shot.

This is how situations need to be defined.

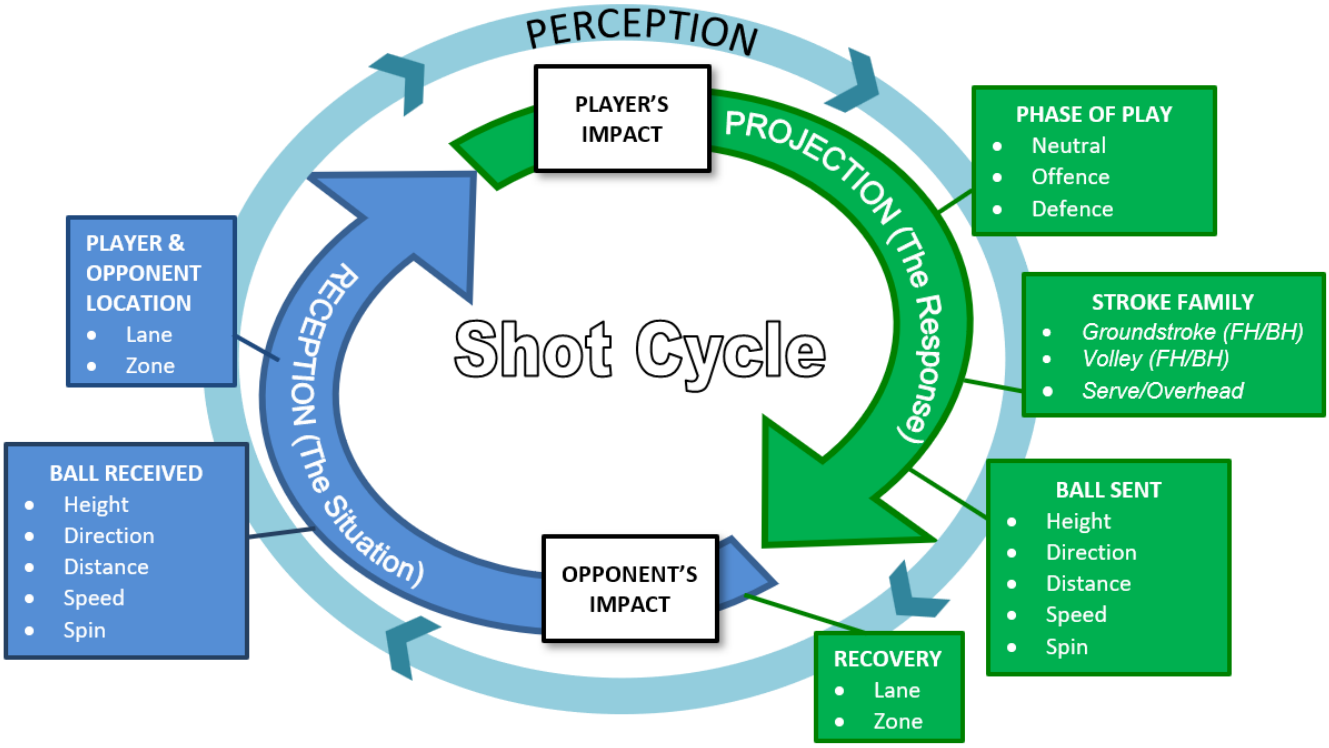


DIAGRAM #7: THE SHOT CYCLE

BALL CONTROL : THE FORGOTTEN TECHNIQUE

To perform any tactic, a player must control the ball appropriately.

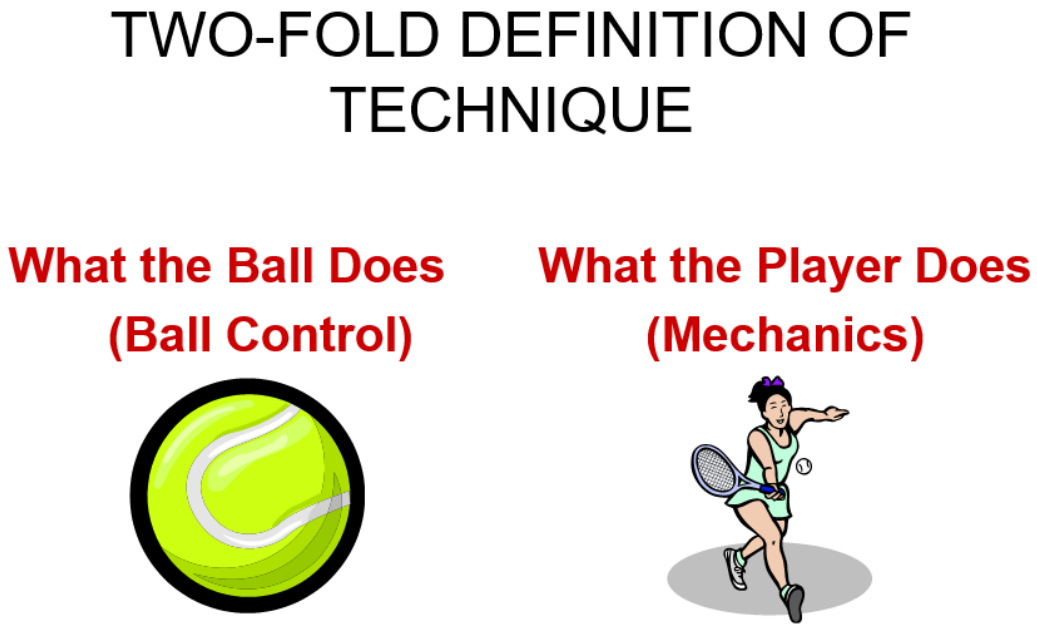


DIAGRAM #8: TWO-FOLD DEFINITION OF TECHNIQUE

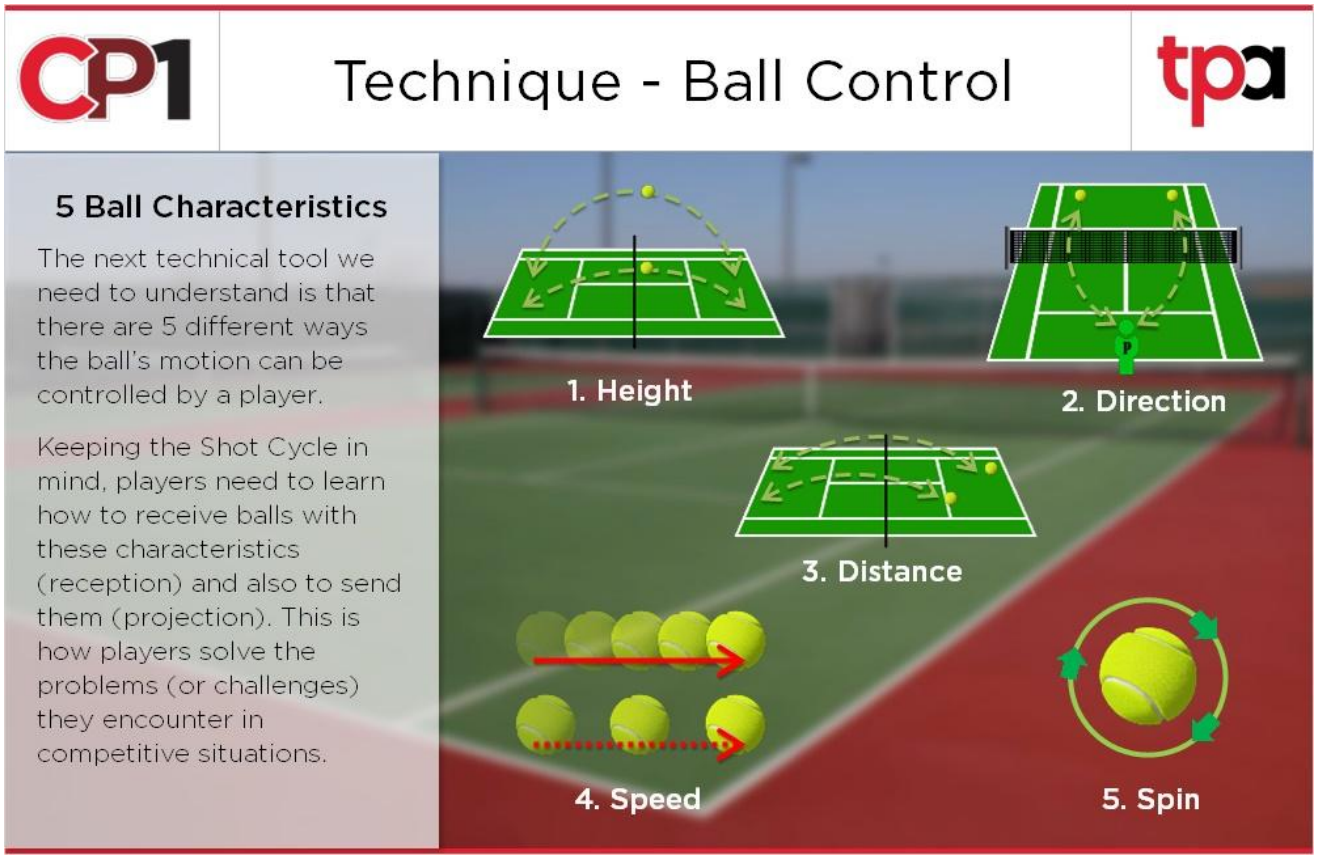


DIAGRAM #9: 5 BALL CONTROL CHARACTERISTICS

P.A.S. PRINCIPLES

Every ball control needed to perform a tactic is created by the correct 'recipe' of the P.A.S. Principles.

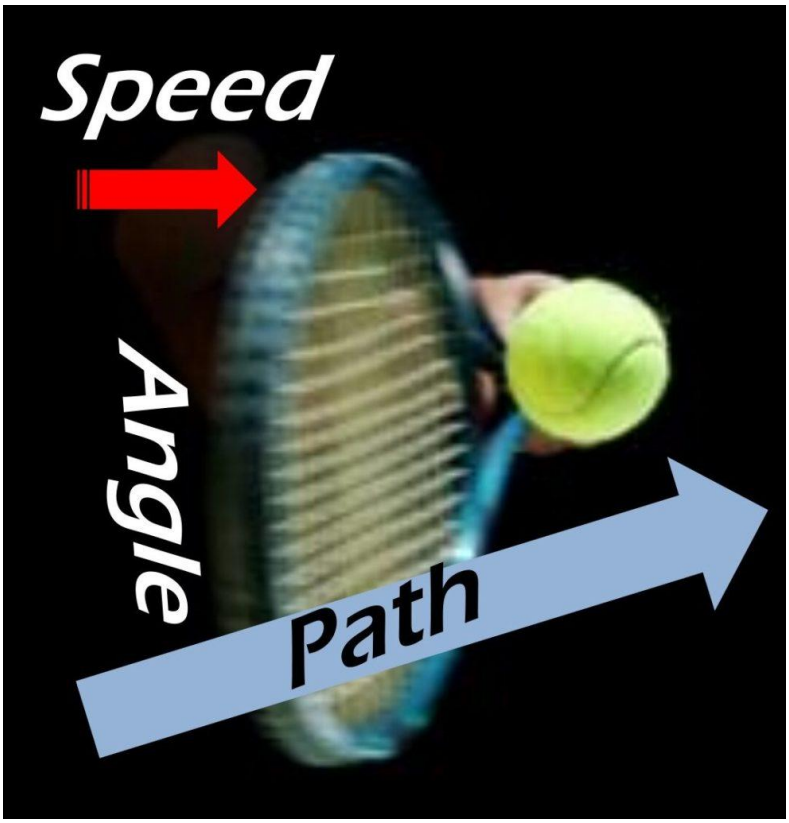


DIAGRAM #10: P.A.S. PRINCIPLES

PAS PRINCIPLES

PATH

- Vertical
  - Level
  - Low to High
  - High to Low
- Horizontal
  - Circular
  - Hitting Zone

ANGLE

- Vertical
  - Open
  - Straight
  - Closed
- Horizontal
  - Back
  - Outside
  - Inside

SPEED

- Velocity
  - Maintain
  - Accelerate
  - Decelerate
- Rhythm
  - Fast-Fast
  - Slow-Slow
  - Fast-Slow
  - Slow-Fast

DIAGRAM #11: P.A.S. ELEMENTS

TIMING: THE CRITICAL TECHNICAL PRINCIPLE

Not only is tennis classified as an 'Open Skill' sport, it is also classified as an 'impact sport'. The 4-5 milliseconds the ball is on the strings is the most critical moment of the entire game.

The technical definition of timing is:

'A centered impact, in an ideal relationship to your body, for the shot you intend you hit.'

The ideal relationship created is defined on 3 axis' (Groundstroke example):

Vertical: How high the ball is contacted in relation to the body (e.g. shoulder height, waist level, knee level, etc.)

Horizontal: Where the ball is impacted back to front in relation to the player's body and the net (e.g. late, early)

Lateral: How far or close to the body the ball is impacted (e.g. 'jammed,' stretched)

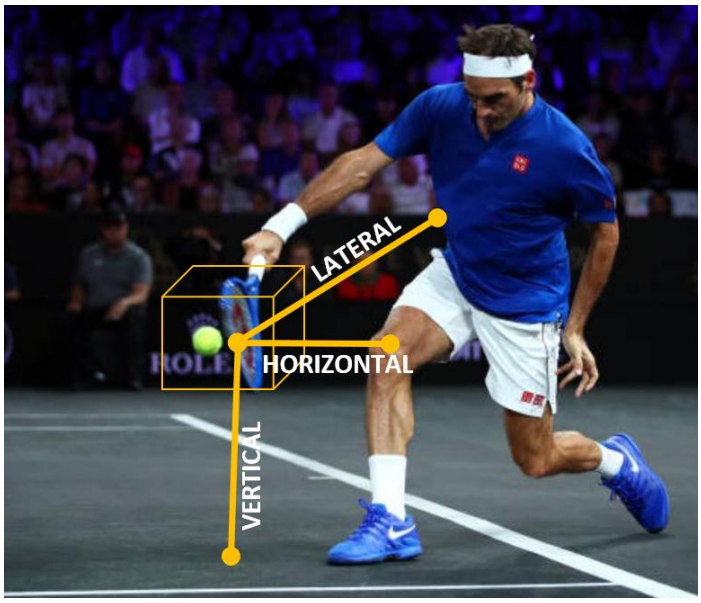


DIAGRAM #12: TIMING OF IMPACT POINT

Understanding this allows coaches to observe, analyze and improve the quality of the Impact point timing.

RESOURCES

All of these concepts are covered in detail on my website **acecoach.com**

Here as a few of the relevant articles that can add to this workshop:

- **Learning Tennis as an Open Skill** https://acecoach.com/learning-tennis-as-an-open-skill/
- **The Tactical-Technical Continuum** https://acecoach.com/tactical-technical-continuum/
- **The Shot Cycle: Foundation of Situation Training** https://acecoach.com/the-shot-cycle/
- **Technique for Situation Training: Ball Control** https://acecoach.com/technique-for-situation-training-ball-control/
- **Technique for Situation Training: P.A.S. Principles** https://acecoach.com/p-a-s-principles/
- **Timing is Everything** https://acecoach.com/timing-is-everything/
  Video: https://youtu.be/wqlqPVyAAMs

I encourage you to explore the site. All the articles are free. Best wishes for your journey to coaching tennis situationally as an open skill.

Wayne Elderton

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