

Dear Glen,

What is the appropriate amount of backswing on my groundstrokes? I have noticed that many players on the tour have fairly long swings.

Dear Player,

Most of the players on the tour use loop swings and depending on the speed of the court, the loop can get fairly large. The large swing uses gravity to produce power source. The swing is also used as a timing mechanism. Power can be produce through three sources; racquet speed, ball speed, and body speed. A combination of these power sources can create an incredible force.

The length of the swing is based on the amount of reaction time that one has to hit the ball. The determining factors in this equation are the speed of ball and the speed of surface. The lesser the time, the shorter the backswing and with more time comes the ability for a bigger backswing.

Dear Glen,

I'd like to make a donation to a local charity that helps youth tennis. Do you have any recommendations?

Mary

Dear Mary,

A donation can be made to Friends of our Parks (FOOP). The funds would be used at one of our community centers for racquets and tennis balls. I appreciate the ongoing support of local individual to provide to the entire community. Within a couple of years, it is our intent to have Junior Team Tennis at many of these centers.

Dear Glen,

My partner and I have been practicing our doubles to be a better team. It was suggested by our pro to hit on the ball machine. Is this something my partner and I should do together or rent on our own. I am also interested in any drills that you may have that would help on the machine.

Dear Playing Partners,

The ball machine is perfect for practicing your doubles strokes. I find it good to bring your partner to alternate picking up the balls and to make observations how you are hitting the ball. My favorite drill to improve your doubles game is to practice diagonal hitting using the doubles alley. This simulates doubles play. The aspect I like best about the ball machine is that it has no ego. It replicates the last programmed ball no matter what you do with your last hit.

To improve your volley, hit from numerous places on the court. Practicing the low volley is of great importance to a doubles player. The ball machine is also good when learning how to put the ball away.

Dear Glen,

Being a confirmed hardcourt player, I seem to be reaching for the ball constantly. The claycourt bounces are always inconsistent and cause bad hits on my part. Beyond practicing more on the clay, how can I improve my strike zone?

Dear Player,

If you have ever looked at great players, they tend to hit the ball at the same height in relation to their body every shot. Many players struggle with the footing and bounce of the ball on clay. Most confirmed claycourt specialists tend to contact the ball at chest level. This tends to enhance topspin because of having a longer distance to hit low to high. Learning to move on the clay as well as distancing yourself from the ball is a premium.

Dear Glen,

I have played tennis on the west coast for twenty years and enjoy hard court tennis. My issue is how to adjust to clay court tennis. I seem to make a lot of errors and become very impatient with hitting the long rallies and the bad bounces. Should I stick to hard court and forget the clay?

Dear Player,

Clay is the way to go. Having spent some time in California, the concrete courts put a beating on your knees. You should be able to extend your tennis-playing career on the "dirt".

Playing on clay is an art form of sorts and will take many hours of hitting to truly find your balance. Maintaining consistency is a premium and hitting the ball higher over the net with spin is one of the common denominators of success. Change your mind set and you will truly love the surface in your near future.

Dear Glen,

What is the best way to block a return in singles play? I have a good return of serve, but sometimes get in trouble with well-placed and hard-hit serves. Any ideas?

Sherry

Dear Sherry,

What a great idea to develop additional weapons for competition. A simple way to gain success with this shot is to keep the racquet head above the wrist and the eyes on the same level of the racquet. Forward movement of the body should take place to dissect the angle and assist in creating forward energy into the contact point. If done properly, the force of the ball will contribute to a rebounding equal force.

Dear Glen,

What are the best ways to tactically win volley points? My doubles partner is willing to drill and improve this shot, but we need some direction on how to make this a reality.

Dear Doubles Player,

Directional intent is the singles most important key to winning volley points. The volley hit cuts reaction time dramatically and if placed properly, the ball will not be touched. Hitting with depth in the court will cause it's own problems for your opponents. Depth of hit will cut reaction time and force opponents to move backwards to hit. If you combine depth with hitting to the weaker side of an opponent, the outcome will be very favorable.

Dear Glen,

I have noticed that many tour players switch to new racquets at the ball change in match play. Is there any advantage to this by a good club player?

Dear Player,

Rituals are very important to any player. The serve is such a big advantage to these players that a freshly strung racquet can potentially be the difference between winning and losing a point at a critical time. Having a newly strung racquet, as a returner, can help get a very tough serve back in the court. With most players, it's about "feel" and if they have the confidence to hit the shot, there is a better chance of winning the point. This may be something that you may want to try.

Dear Glen,

Is there any strategy used when returning serve in a singles match? I have a good return but struggle when trying to put the point together. I am an aggressive player, but tend to make a lot of mistakes. Any suggestions?

Dear Player,

Depending on the serving weapon and strategy of your opponent, trying to neutralize the serve is the key. First, the ball must be returned consistently. The next step is to keep the ball deep to the baseline to push your opponent back behind the baseline. One other part of this return strategy is to buy additional time to get ready for the first strike. This can be achieved by either hitting the ball higher over the net or by hitting the ball slower.

An offensive return can be hit by taking the ball on the rise and hitting the ball harder and lower over the net. This is a bit riskier but the upside is winning points quicker with less effort expended.

Dear Glen,

I really enjoyed your mixed doubles round robin during the Memorial Day weekend. My question is to know how to motivate my female partner to play better. My level of play is around 4.0 and we never really played good as a team? Is there something that I could have said to help my partner play better?

Mike

Dear Mike,

The round robin was a fun time for all. I have to believe it had less to do with motivation and more to do with personal expectations. The tennis was set to be a social activity with less emphasis on winning. The only suggestion that I might have is to be very positive

with your comments to your partner and encourage good play. It can be very intimidating to play with a good player.

Dear Glen,

As my opponents hit the ball harder and harder, the ball seems to fly long of the baseline beyond my control. How is it that World-Class players can keep the forehand in play?

Mary

Dear Mary,

It all comes down to racquet speed and what are called spin rates. Rafael Nadal hits this shot with an average spin rate of 3,200 rpm. Even Pete Sampras had an average of 1,800 rpm for someone that hit relatively flat. To create this shot, the racquet strikes the ball in a violent windshield wiper act. The racquet tends to wrap around the body. Watching this stroke at the French Open is the perfect forum to gain an understanding of the stroke.

Dear Glen,

How do you serve when the sun is in your eyes? When I toss the ball up, all I see is stars. How do I overcome this obstacle?

Kim

Dear Kim,

There are a couple of suggestions that I can make. One consideration is to wear sunglasses when playing. Many don't like this alternative, but it beats getting stars in the eyes from the sun. Altering your toss and your court position on the court may also help the situation.

I tend to practice during the worst serving times to find ways to adapt to the poor serving conditions. One last idea is to spin the serve in to not only get more first serves in but to buy time for the first strike.

Dear Glen,

Looking at the better players that play singles, they build the points to produce results. I am a singles player and looking for some advice on building service points to hold serve. Any ideas?

Dear Player,

This is one of my favorite areas of tennis to coach. Many players only think in terms of attacking the net or playing from the baseline. Since the two constants in the game are the serve and the return, this is the first step in building a point. For instance, if a serve is hit out wide on the deuce court, the next shot should be hit to the other corner. Next, if the serve is hit effectively down the center, the next shot may be hit behind the player.

Building points is very much like a chess game where there is emphasis on knowing your next move. If this is not done, reactive tennis is played and you become a human yo-yo. One last building point would be to serve into the body of the returner. This will tend to

create a short return in which an aggressive shot can be hit away for a winner. Whatever the strategy, plan your next shot in advance for the best result.

Dear Glen,

What is the best way to return a hard flat serve? Having tried a shorter backswing, this only produces a short return. The funny thing is that there is no problem return hard doubles serves. What gives?

Tom

Dear Tom,

The easiest strategy I know for this shot is to back up. This will do three things for your return;

Extend the length of the court

Reaction time will increase

Ball speed will slow as it travels a further distance

Dear Glen,

I have had an injury to my knee that inhibits my movement to the ball. My doctor would prefer that I don't play tennis till my knee is rehabilitated. Should I get a second opinion? I really want to play tennis.

Addicted to the game

Dear Addicted,

I would listen to your doctor. I know my own tendency when hitting with players. Even when injured, my competitive nature will get me chasing the ball. This will only extend my rehabilitation. If you must hit, set up the ball machine so that you can hit from a stationary position. This will give you your tennis "fix" and it might even improve your stroke.

Dear Glen,

During a doubles match, a ball fell out of my pocket in the middle of a point. I immediately called a let and our opponents said that it wasn't my call. Is this correct? Should we replay the point?

Ahmed

Dear Ahmed,

According to USTA rule 26.2, nothing a player does entitles that player to call a let. The point would be lost. The opponent may call a let if it is a distraction and recognized it to be an unsafe situation.