

MORE THAN JUST THE DRILLS: THINK BEFORE YOU FEED THE BALL!

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1. INTRODUCTION

- Tennis is a game of emergencies.
- Tennis is dynamic, complex, interacting, chaotic...system.
- Learning the game / skill acquisition in tennis (Davids et al., 2008):
 - o Search for a stable and functional state of co-ordination during an activity (i.e. shot, movement, decision) that has a goal (i.e. win the point).
 - o Each activity is defined by several variables or **constraints**.
 - o Constraints can be:
 - **Individual**: Characteristics of the player (i.e. height, weight, motivation, level of play, etc.).
 - **Environmental**: Physical (i.e. altitude, temperature, etc.) or social (i.e. family, coach, values, peers, etc.).
 - **Task**: Rules, type of court, balls, racquet, time, etc.
 - o **Improvement** → Overcome the constraints of the task.
 - o Adapt to changing constraints → problem → self-organisation
 - o Each player produces a unique solution to the problem → **variability**.
 - o Variability allows for a flexible adaptation to the constraints of a dynamic environment such as tennis play.
 - o **Practice** → selection of the adequate behaviours / solutions to the task constraints.
 - o **Retention** → more likely to happen if skills have been acquired across a range of different constraints.

2. LESSONS LEARNED FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

- **France:**
 - o The strength of a Grand Slam nation
 - o Importance of coach education
- **Russia:**
 - o Learning the basic fundamentals
 - o Importance of technique
- **Argentina:**
 - o The drive of the individual
 - o Facing adversity efficiently
- **Spain:**
 - o Joint effort Federation / Academies / Clubs
 - o Importance of mentality
- **Technique:**
 - o Common optimal co-ordination patterns do not exist
 - o Each time a skill is performed it should adapt to subtle differences
- **Learning:**
 - o Encourage change and adaptation
 - o Develop optimal individual technique...not idealised technique
 - o Goal → discover a relevant movement solution
- **Teaching:**
 - o Facilitating independent learning

- Search, discovery and use of constraints in game play
- Emphasise implicit vs explicit instruction
- **Feedback focus:**
 - External (i.e. ball) better than internal (i.e. body parts)
 - Effects of actions better than antecedents of actions
- **Drills:**
 - They are not special
 - Top coaches have favourite drills and repeat / vary them
 - Manipulate game conditions to facilitate the process for the player to achieve the goal
- WHAT YOU DO VS. HOW YOU DO IT

3. KEY COMPONENTS AND CONTENTS OF QUALITY DRILLS

- Key components:
 - Quality
 - Commitment player / coach
- Contents:
 - Intensity: In and out drill (Alvarez / Sánchez)
 - Acceleration: Hand feed drill (Porta)
 - Movement: Inside out FH drill (Alvariño)
 - Footwork: Groundstrokes reaction drill (Bruguera)
 - 100% effort: 2 vs 1 killer drill (Ferrero)
 - Angles: FH & BH baseline angle drill (Alvariño)
 - Confidence: 2nd serve drill (Piza)
 - Good habits: Serve with basket in front drill (Ferrero)
 - Anticipation: Service line return drill (Giffenig)
 - Weakness: High BH return progression drill (López)
 - Agility: Mid court 2 v 1 half volley drill (Margets)
 - Reaction: Surprise volley drill (Andrade)
 - Motivation: Drive volley drill (Roig)

4. CONCLUSION

- Adapt practice / drills to players intrinsic dynamics by changing:
 - Rules
 - Space / zones
 - Equipment
- Help players explore key areas of task dynamics
- The more experienced the player, the more the coach should minimise prescriptive, verbal communication / feedback during drills