

THE IMPORTANCE OF COACHING & PRACTISING 'SERVE PLUS ONE' IN TODAY'S GAME

This paper gathers research, analysis and commentary from academics, tennis coaches and other sports professionals looking into the importance of short points in tennis today.

SUMMARY

Research and analysis from tennis tournaments around the world, including the Australian Open and Wimbledon, show that the first four shots of a rally are increasingly important in today's game. Players that win more points in their first two shots, known as *serve plus one*, are far more likely to win matches than players that dominate longer rallies.

RESEARCH

Investigating the most important aspect of elite grass-court tennis: short points

In their 2021 research paper, facilitated by the LTA, Anna Fitzpatrick et al. found players that won more short points (0-4 shots) than their opponent won the match in over 90% of cases. The short point is the dominating factor in success. These results support findings by other researchers and tennis practitioners who suggest that short points are crucial in tennis success and should be a key interest for coaches.

ANNA FITZPATRICK ET AL., 2021

Coaching analysis from the experts: first four shots are the key

The new analytics coming into our sport shatter a lot of old myths and help define a new way of understanding the game.

Less than 30 per cent of rallies go to five or more shots, yet players spend most of their practice sessions grinding out forehands and backhands. Players all over the world typically spend around 90 per cent of their time on the practice court grinding forehands and backhands into oblivion, thinking this style of practice is tailor-made to win matches.

The match court looks nothing like this. It is filled with short rallies dominated by serves and returns — two specific elements that get very little love on a practice court.

CRAIG O'SHANNESY · STRATEGY ANALYST FOR WIMBLEDON, AUSTRALIAN OPEN, ATP WORLD TOUR

Serve plus one, and return of serve plus one

“Today’s best players focus on and try to execute a good serve and a good first shot following the serve. Most of the points are won with one of these shots, and the player who successfully hits the first two balls well more often is almost always the winner of the match. This idea seems extremely simple. However, pay attention next time you play a match and keep track of the number of points that you are able to execute the serve plus one, or return of serve plus one, as you had planned.”

STEVE ANNACONE · USPTA ELITE PRO, DIRECTOR OF ANNACONE TENNIS

The advantages of serve plus one

The serve is the first shot that opens the game, but most of the time we work it with serving buckets at the end of training. We usually do a lot of tactical work on the baseline, but rarely link it to the serve. Thinking of game patterns as serve plus one opens up the possibility of seeing certain important details to take into account.

- We pay attention to the footwork and the recovery from the serve, optimising the preparation for the next shot — very different from recovery between groundstrokes.
- We visualise patterns of two shots before starting the point, so we start the points having a higher order.

Creating simple sequences of plays and having them very clear increases your effectiveness on the court. Working them in practice, you will start the points with a plan and a scheme, and train in a smarter way.

GEORGE MARGI · FOUNDER & CEO, GLOBAL AGENT ACADEMY

Tennis tips from a high-performance workshop

Most everyone has a lot of practice with baseline rallies, but good game play works on serve +1. This type of practice prepares you for match play, not just aimless rallying, and because so much of tennis is about the serve and return of serve, it gives you reps on these vital strokes that rallying or even regular match play cannot duplicate.

GENE DESROCHERS' TENNIS COACHING

Tennishead insight: the simple but incredible tactic that makes Roger Federer so great

“Serve +1 is a specific serve tactic that combines the serve and the first groundstroke after the serve into... one devastating unit. Hit a serve. Immediately follow it up with a forehand. Win the point. That’s how it typically goes for the Swiss legend Roger Federer. Analysis of Federer’s serve +1 strategy across 28 matches at the Australian Open, including winning the title in 2017, shows just how dominant this lethal one-two combination really is.

In short, the earlier in the point the better, before opponents can extend it to a neutral battleground. As you can clearly see, the serve +1 forehand strategy is a supercharged tactic that can be used by players at all levels of our sport — even you!”

CRAIG O’SHANNESSY · TENNISHEAD

Combine the serve and the first shot into one unit

Don’t think of the serve as just a one-way weapon. Too often we think the primary role of the serve is to crush aces. Well, when you look at the top 14 ace totals on the ATP Tour, 8 of those players lost the match. Hitting aces is not all it’s cracked up to be, because you still need a plan for the majority of points that have to be played.

BRAINGAME TENNIS

How to use serve plus one as a weapon

Most points end within four shots. People practise their serves, but they just practise the serve and then stand there. Work on practising your serve and the recovery — the one-two punch.

TOM AVERY · TENNIS COACH FOR OVER 40 YEARS