AIMS

- To study *specific* tactics and patterns of today’s top female players
- Compare and contrast with the men’s game – tactically and technically
- How will this influence our coaching next week?
1st Serve Tactics

- 1st serve no longer just a way to start the point
- Opportunity for the first point of attack
- Seen as the first shot in a winning pattern of play

Improvements in 1st Serve

Wimbledon 1992 - 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Wimbledon '92</th>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Wimbledon '06</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De Swardt</td>
<td>108 mph</td>
<td>Mauresmo</td>
<td>120 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capriati</td>
<td>107 mph</td>
<td>Williams (V)</td>
<td>120 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seles</td>
<td>107 mph</td>
<td>Mattek</td>
<td>120 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graf</td>
<td>106 mph</td>
<td>Perry</td>
<td>120 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basuki</td>
<td>106 mph</td>
<td>Sprem</td>
<td>119 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navratilova</td>
<td>104 mph</td>
<td>Savchuk</td>
<td>119 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shriver</td>
<td>101 mph</td>
<td>Bremond</td>
<td>117 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tauziat</td>
<td>99 mph</td>
<td>Clijsters</td>
<td>117 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appelmans</td>
<td>97 mph</td>
<td>Ivanovic</td>
<td>117 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabatini</td>
<td>97 mph</td>
<td>Henin-Hardenne</td>
<td>116 mph</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Serve & Groundstroke Attack

- The most popular 1st serve tactic

- 1st serve and ‘big’ forehand:
  - movement into space: crosscourt/down line
  - movement out of space: inside out / inside in

- 1st serve and early backhand:
  - backhand hit from inside baseline
  - time pressure applied

So what did we see..?

- Lots of effective wide serving from the deuce court (for right-handers)
- Fewer wide serves from the advantage court
- A wide range of second shots
- Players using this tactic at U14 level
- Players using this tactic on a range of surfaces
Serve & Maintain Control

- No pre-planned 2\textsuperscript{nd} shot but a pre-planned \textit{mentality}
- Applies particularly to juniors with less power
- Server simply continues to build pressure through quality hitting
- Eventually an opportunity arises (space, short ball, opponent error, etc.)

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Serve & Maintain Control

So what did we see..?

- Longer rallies but with the \textit{same} tactical intent
- Opponent never allowed to return to a neutral position
- Lots of ‘stingers’ vs. ‘winners’ being hit
- Used against the deeper return
- ‘serve and see what happens’ is not a tactic!
Other 1st Serve Tactics

- Serve and drive volley (same effect as a pressuring groundstroke)

- Serve and ‘sneak’ volley (instinctive decision after hitting 1st serve)

- Serve and volley (Mauresmo winning Wimbledon – exception or trend?)

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Other 1st Serve Tactics

“I felt tactically I played very well today, and also throughout the tournament, because my game is different from what the other girls are playing on grass.”

- Amelie Mauresmo, 2006 Wimbledon Champion
2nd Serve Tactics

“It's gonna be a kind of drop shot for her.”
Elena Dementieva vs. Serena Williams, Miami 2004.
(19 out of 20 second serve points lost!)

- Still a potential area of weakness
- 2006: women won 41% second serve points
  men won 47% second serve points
- Returner favourite to win point
- ‘Contain the Enemy’ is the first priority

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2nd Serve Tactics

- Use accuracy as a weapon
- Use variety of direction as a weapon
- Aim to move ball out of returner’s hitting zone
- Encourage courage when serving

Drill: 2 points for return winner vs. 1 point double fault
Returning Tactics

- Crucial to return well in women’s game
- Perhaps the most neglected shot?
- Average shots per rally (Maes, 2005):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French Open</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Serve & Return = 45% of women’s tennis!
Do we spend 45% of our time on serve and return?

1st Return

- Priority to neutralise the threat of the 1st serve!

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1st Return

So what did we see...

- Lots of deep middle returns:
  - high % target and reduces angles available
- Forehand and backhand inside-out returns:
  - no change of ball direction and high % target
- Defence turning into attack very quickly (x2 ball combinations)
- Also, blocked return:
  - as a tactical choice or played under extreme pressure

2nd Return

- Excellent opportunity to dominate an opponent!

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So what did we see..?

- A variety of aggressive shots played from inside the baseline
- Strong physical and psychological messages sent
- Players assuming 1st serve mentality and tactics
- Often hit to server’s forehand side – bigger grip change needed

So what?

- Female players becoming faster, stronger, and playing at a higher ‘tempo’ than ever before
- Women learning to dictate point at earliest opportunity
- 1st strike mentality: ‘Actor’ vs. ‘Reactor’
Tactical Trends

- 3 traditional game styles moving closer together: Baseline Player – All Court Player – Serve & Volley Player
- Extreme ends almost extinct?
- Fewer specialists today
- Less variety of tactics
- This is a key difference between women’s game and men’s game

Physical Differences: Women vs. Men

- Height: women 10-12cm shorter
- Weight: women 10kg lighter
- Body Fat %: women 20-25% vs. men 10-15%
- VO2 max: women 10-25% lower
- Muscle Mass: women 23kg vs. men 35kg
- Upper Body: women = 54% of male strength
- Lower Body: women = 68% of male strength
**Tac/Tec Differences: Women vs. Men**

- Men play with stronger reliance on the serve (higher % of 1st and 2nd serve points are won)
- More serving power, more *variety* of spin (esp. topspin)
- More approaches to the net

- Women play with stronger reliance on the return (more breaks of serve in women’s matches)
- Less variety of spin (more slice than topspin)
- Less approaches to the net – lob used more as weapon

**Development Differences: Women vs. Men**

- Women mature earlier than men
- 14 year old junior vs. senior player = a threat!
- ‘Development window’ closes earlier
- Less time to develop variety within game style?
- Higher expectation to compete at earlier age
Some serve & return ideas

On court…

Tactical Conclusions

- Make the serve and return more fun!
- Use tactical serving targets to teach technique – remember Frank!
- Think of the serve and return as the *start* of a pattern of play vs. start of a rally
- Use patterns that include her best 2nd shot
- Encourage baseline control whenever possible
Tac/Tec Differences: Women vs. Men

- Women hitting the ball flatter and earlier
- Using pace of oncoming ball from up the court
- Using shorter, simpler swings to coordinate
- Prefer backhand to forehand?
- Men playing from further behind baseline
- Using heavier spin and using more of the court
- Often prefer forehand to backhand
- Use more tactical variety as a result

Tac/Tec Differences: Women vs. Men

Average length of rally:
French Open 2005 (Carl Maes)
- MEN: 5.3
- WOMEN: 4.4

Slovenia ETA (2) U16 2006 (Iain Bates)
- BOYS: 5.8
- GIRLS: 4.2
Influence of Court Surface: Women vs. Men

- Men tend to show stronger preferences for certain court surfaces
- More diverse range of shots = tactical variety
- Different game styles suited to different surfaces
- Between 1995 – 2006: Only two French Open champions won a Grand Slam on another surface
  (Agassi and Kafelnikov)

Influence of Court Surface: Women vs. Men

- Fewer ‘specialists’ in women’s game who excel only on one surface
- Top players dictate the opponent and the court!
- Game style and tactics remain basically the same
  Between 1995 – 2006: Six French open champions won a Grand Slam on another surface
  (Graf, Sanchez-Vicario, Pierce, Capriati, S.Williams, Henin-Hardenne)
Court Surface: Women past & present

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian</td>
<td>Hingis</td>
<td>S. Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Sanchez-Vicario</td>
<td>Henin-Hardenne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wimbledon</td>
<td>Novotna</td>
<td>V. Williams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>Davenport</td>
<td>Clijsters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Influence of Court Surface: Women vs. Men

“Clay isn’t necessarily my strongest surface, but I just continue to play my game, and I think it holds up well whether I’m playing on hard courts, grass or clay.”

- Alicia Molik
## WTA Top 10 Players

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1991</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>+/-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Age</td>
<td>22 yrs</td>
<td>20 yrs 9 mths</td>
<td>- 1 yr 3 mths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Height</td>
<td>173.8 cm</td>
<td>177.2 cm</td>
<td>+ 3.4 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving Speed</td>
<td>103.2 mph</td>
<td>118.5 mph</td>
<td>+ 15.3 mph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prize Money</td>
<td>$841,197</td>
<td>$1,622,403</td>
<td>+ $781,206</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Playing from the Baseline

- At any given moment what do we see?
  - Build / Attack / Defence
- Fewer ‘neutral’ moments today
- Game being played at a higher ‘tempo’ from the baseline
- Women hitting harder and earlier vs. men hitting more spin from deeper positions
- ‘Building shots’ create opportunities to attack…
Building from the Baseline

Consistency/Accuracy/Variety:

- 10-25% points won as winners, 75% + errors
- ‘Stinger’ vs. ‘Winner’ mentality: 60:40, 70:30, 80:20……
- Less qualities (pace, spin, variety), more accuracy needed
- Backhand cross-court = most common rally pattern?
- Ability to change direction is vital
- Big targets on switch since directional pressure applied
- How much variety is used?...

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Building from the Baseline

“I don’t like big slicers. Like Conchita Martínez. I don’t really like playing against her. She has a tricky game: lobs, slices, drop shots. Sometimes it’s really difficult”

- Anastasia Myskina

- Is variety the past or the future?
- Less variety today
- Henin-Hardenne backhand: defensive slice, approach slice, drop shot, short angle slice & topspin, passing shot, lob, aggressive drive, etc.
- ‘Art of Coaching’ is to decide how much variety is required…how long are you willing to spend on it? (Bayli)
**Attacking from the Baseline**

- Players hitting hard, flat, and early
- Using shoulder high attack & drive volley
- Applying time pressure
- Using pace of oncoming ball
- Allows for accuracy and easier access to net
- Sending messages of aggressive intent

**Defending from the Baseline**

- Defence must neutralise *immediately*
- x2 defensive shots in a row usually loses point
- Players must *accept* the need to defend:
  - (‘dull defence vs. mighty miss’) 
- Women using high and *low* recovery shots
- Counter-puncher becoming more common in response to the power player? *(Hingis, Myskina?)*
- Receiving skills often overlooked in favour of sending?
When Playing at the Net

“Women are more effective at the net than men”

- O’Donoghue and Ingram, 2001

When Playing at the Net

- Women choose net play much more carefully!
- Traditional approaches have changed:
  - serve/volley, chip/charge, approach shot harder due to strength of return and pass
  - Drive volley – link between baseline and net
  - Groundstroke technique with big targets
  - Sneak volley: short angle vs. deep angle
  - Smash: big targets and more practice!

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When Opponent is at the Net

- Use the ‘two ball pass’
- Pass down the middle (especially early on)
- Lob (especially over forehand side)
- Movement up the court to short angle
- Use the ‘double bluff’

Tactical Development:

Key Stages of Tactical Development

- Technical, physical, and mental skills all develop at varying rates and at different times
- Tactical development planned for the long term
- Do you have a ‘vision’ of player in 5/10years?
- Girls mature quicker than boys: early specialisation vs. medium/late specialisation?
- 4 Key stages as follows:
Stage One (Fundamentals)

- 5 – 9 years old
- Coordination, movement, and reception skills
- Vital to let her play the game (mini tennis)
- Play mostly in first 3 game situations
- Tactical emphasis: ball over and in, move opponent around, recover to good positions
- Some net play situations towards end of stage
- Understanding game, rules, competition also

Stage Two

- 9 – 12 years old
- Begin to build points with sequence of shots
- Recognise strengths and build stroke technique
- Tactical emphasis: Variety of serves (placement & pace), recognise 1st serve as chance to attack, neutralise with 1st return (high & deep), attack a weak serve, use variety from baseline, defend with height, win with consistency, use drive volley, finish some points at net, use lob as main weapon, play as a doubles team
Stage Three

- 13 – 16 years old
- Start competing with senior players
- Expected to play in all 5 game situations
- Tactical emphasis: Variety of serves (direction, pace, spin), attacking patterns with 1st serve, change flight path and direction on return, attacking patterns with 2nd return, build/attack/defend from baseline, different tactics for different opponents, approach net with sneak, use intercept volley in doubles, use two-ball pass, play with strength on the run

Stage Four

- 16 years +
- Well-defined game style
- Comfortable playing on different court surfaces
- Taking responsibility and problem-solving
- Using patterns that maximise strengths and minimise weaknesses
- Players ranked between 100-75 WTA are ranked 500 at 16yrs old

“I like to win by myself and if I lose I like to take responsibility that I’m the one that lost”
- Tatiana Golovin
Tactical Conclusions

- Keep tactics simple
- Do one or two things *really* well
- Ability to execute game style against anyone, anywhere, and on any surface
- Game style = Technique + Physical + *Psychological*