

## **SERVICE BORG**

Paris, nineteen seventy four. At only eighteen years old, Bjorn BORG wins the French open for the first time.

The crowd discovers a player, who, in the following years, will win 6 times this authentic world clay championship.

## **COUP DROIT BORG**

While putting a strong topspin to his background strokes, BORG creates in this period a new way of playing tennis on clay.

Very shortly, other topspin players will imitate him, and will appear at the top level. Guillermo VILAS, at first, challenging BORG, but not beating him.

## **WILANDER**

Mats WILANDER, a few years later, follows the Master's way to become world N° 1 tennis player.

These different players are at the origin of a new era for clay tennis. From now on, efficiency is much more emphasized than beauty of style. Players use that clay, which slows the ball and makes it bounce higher, just to take the greatest advantage of topspin.

## **RALENTI REVERS BORG**

By spinning the ball from the bottom to the top and by making round trajectories, players avoid hitting the net, make less depth mistakes and produce high bouncing balls protecting them from attacking shots.

## **GERULAITIS**

Attacking players, in trouble with these high balls which are difficult to control, cannot make it easily to the net. And when they can, it is a challenge to anticipate those new trajectories and they find themselves in a tricky situation.

## **SAMPRAS (après le passing-shot)**

Along the next decades, the attacking tempered players will keep on trying to set offensive strategies. Pete SAMPRAS, Marat SAFIN, John Mc ENROE, Henri LECONTE, Stefan EDBERG, Tim HENMAN will all fight to dictate their style, but will always be beaten on the post.

## **NOAH-WILANDER**

Only exceptions, Adriano PANATTA in nineteen seventy six and Yannick NOAH in nineteen eighty three will achieve to win the French open. But to beat Mats WILANDER in the final, Yannick NOAH will show more patience than usually in building his attacks, and above all realize real feats at the net.

### **LENDL (coup droit)**

Ivan LENDL was the first to combine baseline game and ball speed to overcome topspin players. But we shall have to wait until the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century to see a new generation of players appear, the generation of baseline strong-hitters: COURIER first, and then AGASSI, MUSTER and KUERTEN.

All these players can combine power and consistency. Like BORG, they use a strong topspin, but they add power in the strokes, which makes them real baseline attackers, able to dominate the game and to hit winners.

### **FERRERO**

With the new century, this domination of "topspin hitters" seems to grow. Between 2001 and 2005, real clay courters have been 14 out of 20 semi finalists.

### **EVERT-NAVRATILOVA**

During the last 30 years, women's tennis did not follow the same evolution. With Chris EVERT, Martina NAVRATILOVA or Steffi GRAF, classical game mostly overcomes, and shy topspin incursions are scarcely successful.

### **Pied de SERENA**

In return, as for men, power recently entered female tennis. 3 players, Mary PIERCE, Monica SELES and Serena WILLIAMS have especially shown that violence of the strokes could make the difference in women's game.

### **HENIN (entrée sur le court)**

More recently, Justine HENIN-HARDENNE has proved twice that it was possible to win the French Open by adopting a strategy very close to men's, a strategy in which power and topspin are key words.

### **PIERCE**

Then, in women's as in men's tennis, search for power in strokes has become something one can't get away from. In order to take advantage of biomechanics resources, men and women have developed a new technique.

### **CLEMENT**

Even though **service** does not have the same importance that it has on faster surfaces, it remains the shot which influences the result of the point.

### **DAVYDENKO**

In men's tennis, first serve gives the opportunity to score directly, without having to really play the point. Although, if the clay player sometimes reaches for an ace, his goal is also to raise his percentage by serving powerful, topspin and varied serves to confuse the returner and force him to make mistakes.

## **ROBREDO**

While doing this, he can directly store points upon return errors, or at least get in a strong position in proportion to his opponent. And by dominating the game from the beginning of the rally, he gives himself more chances to win the point.

## **GROSJEAN (APRES COSTA)**

In this aim, on 1<sup>st</sup> or on 2<sup>nd</sup> serve, inside-out topspin serves are often used to place the returner off the court beyond the alley, and therefore open court for a winner.

## **FEDERER**

When **returning**, the first goal is to avoid unforced errors and to start a rally trying not to find oneself in a weakness position towards the server.

## **FLECHES VERTES**

By having a position which is more backwards than on other surfaces, returner often aims his return toward a central zone of the court to reduce risks of lateral mistakes.

## **DECALAGE MUSTER**

He also tries to have a high and deep trajectory so that he can neutralize the server by limiting his opportunities of hitting angle shots.

## **DAVYDENKO**

Facing a second serve, the returner can sometimes show a more offensive attitude by hitting the ball earlier. Though, because of the quality of second serves on this surface among the present players, this option is not so frequent.

## **APRES RETOUR DE FERRERO**

Once players have set a rally, clay courters apply a principle of patience, which consists of keeping the ball in play, neutralizing the opponent, and taking initiative only as the situation is really favourable.

## **GONZALES**

And whenever they can win the point by destroying their opponent and pushing him to make a mistake, it is even better because each time a little bit of his confidence flies away.

## **APRES RETOUR DE NADAL**

On clay, it is necessary to count on the opponent's mistakes. So you have to push him to errors as finally you know that this strategy brings in more points than winners do.

### **APRES RETOUR DE GAUDIO**

On this demanding surface, the notion of physical strength takes its real sense. The one who is not able, at any moment and during hours, to hold a 10 to 15 strokes rally running from one end of the court to the other, to control starts, sliding, split-steps, has only few chances to get big victories on clay.

### **APRES AMORTIE DE GAUDIO**

In that way, clay is the best school to learn self-discipline and courage, a school in which you have to find it fun to fight on every point. But one doesn't have to only struggle by defending. Nowadays, exclusive defenders cannot play a big role in top tennis.

### **COUP DROIT NADAL**

Present players have developed a specific game, made of power and topspin, so that their baseline shots can be at the same time curved, fast and high bouncing.

### **FIN RALENTI ROBREDO**

When score is tight and points become more and more critical, they do not hesitate to take an option of safety by playing in a smaller court.

### **APRES FAUTE VERKERK**

And when they want to open game, they mostly direct their strokes towards security zones, not too close to the lines.

### **APRES SERVICE NADAL**

No matter the ball does not bounce near the baseline, as height of bounce and spin given to the ball are so tough to control that the opponent is pushed backwards, unable to attack.

### **APRES RETOUR FERRERO**

If clay courters mainly lean on their strokes' power, they also are real tennis geometers, able to find surprising angles, to vary deepness and ball spins so that they can make the most of the whole opponent's court.

### **RALENTI COSTA**

Using this type of game based on such solidity requires an exemplary physical endurance and a perfect footwork, particularly since every player tries hard to mainly play with his best shot towards the weakest opponent's shot.

### **COUP DROIT GASQUET**

Fortunately, clay tennis is a game where attacking is efficient. And as soon as they get the chance, players are able to go on the offensive to overtake their opponents.

## **RETOUR FERRERO**

They are continuously on the watch for a favourable situation, reaching for a recovering position within the lines. Because actually, it is from this forward position that they can become master of the game, and hit winners.

## **ROBREDO (FIN DU POINT)**

Once they reach this strength position, they can equally make good use of their forehand or their backhand to hit decisive shots.

## **COUP DROIT FEDERER**

Whether it is played down the line or crosscourt, forehand is still the big shot to put the opponent out of reach.

## **GONZALES**

Clay courters also like to move around their backhand to use one of the main weapons on clay: inside out forehand.

## **APRES COUP DROIT GROSJEAN DE DOS**

When played inside out, or straight down the line, it often leads to win the point. And when it does not, it strongly unsettles the opponent, forcing him to long runs.

## **GASQUET APRES REVERS**

Backhand has also become a dreadful weapon, especially when oriented down the line, because it surprises players who take a risk to recover on the backhand side, opening the forehand part of court.

## **FEDERER**

If power is the rule, a good and soft hand, which was formerly the trademark of clay court players, is still very useful.

Once the opponent is pulled back in the strings by strong baseline shots, the front of his court is open, and it is possible to take him by surprise with drop shots. In the last few years, for the subtle tennis amateurs, this shot has found its dignity again.

## **APRES RETOUR KUERTEN**

Volley and net game is certainly not the area of predilection of clay court players, although they sometimes risk themselves to conclude there the destruction work they have begun from baseline.

## **GAUDIO**

Whenever they decide to go to the net, they constantly lean on a strong attacking shot, and next volley is frequently a very simple one.

## **NADAL**

When the ball comes in between hips and shoulders, players often choose to hit a drive volley, giving thus more speed to the ball.

## **DAVYDENKO**

However, as they give more power, they lose a little bit of control and can commit big mistakes.

## **NALBANDIAN**

Go to the net against clay court players can be dangerous because they are very good at passing-shots. Also they are able to alternate these low shots with topspin lobs, forcing the opponents either to rush forward for low volleys or backwards on topspin lobs.

## **GAUDIO**

This strategy, mainly based on a powerful topspin background game, is good enough for clay court experts to remain the best on this surface.

## **DAVENPORT DE DOS**

The specialization related to court surfaces is less detected among women who, for most of them, seem to be able to play equally on all surfaces.

## **HENIN APRES SON SERVICE**

Yet, one of them, Justine HENIN-HARDENNE, has developed a specific strategy, perfectly adapted to clay. The Belgian young woman lays a path which is very close to men's tennis, a path that could be taken by other female players in the future, provided they acquire speed and strength qualities which are necessary to play this type of game.

## **HENIN PROFIL COUP DROIT**

Lying on a perfect footwork and on an efficient attack/ counter-attack game where sliced low shots alternate with height trajectories, Justine HENIN-HARDENNE also applies the principle of patience.

## **RETOUR KUZNETSOVA**

Just like the best male clay players, she does not rush and try to hit winners as she can take benefit from opponent's mistakes.

The young Belgian woman follows that logic when, on big points, she hits returns of serve towards the central zone of the court, betting on the opponent's mistake.

## **SHARAPOVA SERVICE**

In the same way, she does not hesitate to play curved trajectories towards the center of the court, or in safety zones, whenever she is not in a position to be attacking. In that way, her game's conception is very close to men's.

## **IVANOVIC**

Other female players seem to imitate her, but, apart from Amélie MAURESMO whose topspin is strong enough to neutralize attackers, most of the others do not possess technical weapons to make it a permanent strategy.

## **PIERCE**

Though, this security game is not enough, and offensive patterns remain valid on female clay tennis.

## **APRES ACE SERENA**

To dominate their opponents, the best women players have different weapons.

## **SERVICE HENIN APRES ACE**

Service, first of all. Even if aces are less numerous than in men's tennis, 1<sup>st</sup> serve is getting more and more speed and has become a real offensive shot, causing many mistakes on the returns of serve.

## **PETROVA**

First serve also gives the opportunity to take position inside the court, starting point for many attacking and winning shots.

## **SERENA**

Return of serve is an essential shot, as it is at the origin of the many breaks which can be observed in women's tennis. Even if sometimes, this second shot of a point is only played to keep the ball in play, it often becomes an offensive shot, as soon as the second serve is not deep or powerful enough.

## **PIERCE**

By playing a two-hand return, players get through their left arm additional strength which helps them to counter serves.

## **SERENA**

They then can keep a forward position that allows them to take advantage from the beginning of the point.

## **SHARAPOVA**

By hitting forehands with closed grips, they fully capitalize the action of the wrist, first relaxing and then slap the ball.

## **SHARAPOVA POING SERRE**

Thus, taking advantage of the relative weakness of serves, women have made of the offensive return a key to top female tennis. And today, the efficiency of this shot is comparable with the efficiency of service.

### **MYSKINA POING SERRE**

Once rally has begun, each player tries hard to control the game so that she can create attack opportunities.

Then she uses forehand as well as backhand to dominate the opponent.

### **SERENA REVERS**

Backhand, which is mostly played with 2 hands, is at the same time safe and precise, employed for moving the opponent and prepare points. It is also a powerful weapon when the aim is to finish points.

### **ARRET IMAGE PIERCE**

The strong action of the wrists when hitting the ball allows the player to transmit more energy to the ball, also hiding the direction of the shot until last moment.

### **REVERS HENIN**

Whenever they play their backhand with one or 2 hands, players can reach all parts of the court with their backhand. But it is mainly on down the line shots that they surprise their opponent and that this shot gets its best efficiency.

### **SERVICE HENIN**

Backhand has so become a true attacking shot, authorizing to hit the ball on the rise and not to lose an offensive position in recovering.

### **SERENA**

And yet, forehand remains for many the basic shot to take the lead during the rally and conclude points. As soon as occasion occurs, women do not hesitate to move forward and jump into their stroke to use their power.

### **GRAF**

To take best benefit of this weapon, they must show a flying and quick footwork a little like Steffi GRAF, who often looked like she could play all balls with her forehand.

### **SHARAPOVA COUP DROIT**

Even though they do not use as often as men their forehand moving around their backhand, this one nevertheless provides spectacular points, especially when played inside out.

### **GOLOVIN SERVICE**

Being alternate with powerful shots forcing the opponent to move backwards, drop-shots naturally find their place in modern clay game.



## **PIERCE**

But these drop-shots, breaking the rally rhythm and surprise players are not yet very frequent.

## **PIERCE JAMBES**

When they want to become more offensive, first rule is to gain one or two meters forward and take position just before the baseline. It is the condition to really dominate the rally.

## **AMELIE COUP DROIT**

Together with the development of their athletic qualities, and in relation with the strength of their approach shots, some of them come to the net to finish points. But because they do not always possess the right muscular qualities to catch accurate passing-shots, they search for a quick conclusion. Then they frequently use drive volleys, either on their forehand or on their backhand.

## **SHARAPOVA COUP DROIT**

Women have therefore put more and more power in their tennis, and developed a amazing game, for the crowd's greatest pleasure, now very numerous to appreciate women's game.

## **HENIN BRAS LEVES**

Who will win tomorrow on clay?

## **SERENA**

One point seems to be sure: physical intensity will not decline, and women and men in the future will have to be very strong on the physical level.

## **GASQUET**

And, on this demanding surface where battling is the rule, one will always have to know how to struggle, be extremely brave and shed sweat.

## **BALLE / PIED**

About the future, questions are still to get answers:

- Will women's game grow toward strategies using more topspin?
- Hard topspin male hitters will they still dominate?
- Or, will new talented attackers be successful through real offensive strategies?
- Unless newcomers can combine ground strokes power and net game?
- Clay will give us the answer...