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How To Reduce Your Unforced Errors

By Coach Kyril

Here's a doozy. I could literally give you dozens of reasons why people hit more unforced errors than they should, but that wouldn't do you much good. I will give you the number one reason, however: Poor balance. I've written extensively about this subject in the past, but I would like to 'connect the dots' for you, as it were, and explain how poor balance causes a subtle chain of events to occur that, explained individually, don't add up to much; but when linked together, explains how a tennis player can go from being in perfect position to hitting that unforced error in less than one second.

Look at it like this: If a ship is off course by 1 degree, it's no big deal if the Captain catches it right away; but by the time that ship gets 100 miles out to sea, the ship is way off course. It's the same way with unforced errors in your tennis game. To understand why you hit so many unforced errors in a tennis match, you need to reverse engineer the situation from the ideal, and find out where the weak link is in your 'chain', so to speak.

Ideally, at the moment we hit a 'perfect' tennis shot, several things have happened; the last of which is the stroke. Before we can swing that perfect stroke, however, we must be in the right place at the right time on the tennis court. We must be 'in position'. In order to be in the proper position to hit the tennis ball, you must be balanced. If you are not balanced, your swing will not be efficient. If your swing is not efficient, you lose the two most important aspects of the shot itself: power and accuracy. Since power and accuracy are what we are striving for (to varying degrees) on just about every shot, it would behoove us to face the fact that we need to be balanced every time. It is the ideal. It is what we strive for in order to get our desired result: an accurate, powerful shot.

So now that I've answered the question and shown you the main cause of unforced errors, I will let you in on a little secret: balance is merely the 'tipping point', or 'point of no return' when it comes to the root causes of unforced errors. Looking backwards, if balance is the 'tipping point', then there must be aspects of on-court movement that cause poor balance in the first place. There are several, among them lack of coordination, lack of speed and agility, lack of physical conditioning, impatience, lack of training...the list goes on.

However, there are plenty of ways to quickly improve your balance on the tennis court

without going through hours of repetitious drills. The first way is to recognize where your center of gravity is while 'static', or not moving. Vertically, it's right around your belly button. When you are moving, however, your center of gravity is constantly shifting to different points in your body. Knowing this allows us to make a change in how we move in order to keep our center of gravity as close to our belly button as possible. A good way to do this is to move with your knees in a slightly bent position, which lowers the center of gravity and allows your leg muscles (largest muscles in your body) to do the work they were meant to do, as opposed to your lower back.

A second way to improve your balance on the court is to think of your head, torso, and legs as one unit, and not a bunch of separate body parts that just so happen to be linked together. You can 'feel' this by doing the following the next time you're on the court:

- o As you warm up, try to keep your head above and 'in-line' with your hips, as opposed to leaning your head forward every time you move to the tennis ball.

- o Keep a slight knee bend and stay on the 'balls of your feet' while preparing to move to the ball.

- o If the ball you are about to hit is a low one, bend at the knees and not the waist. This will keep your head more in line with your torso, keeping you more balanced, and as a bonus will not only strengthen your legs, but will also help to prevent the lower back injuries so common in tennis.

In conclusion, remember that while there are a number of causes of unforced errors, balance is a huge key to preventing them. Work on your balance regularly, and you'll see your percentage of unforced errors fall through the floor!