

# Tactical Intentions for Singles Players

A guide outlining key tactical intentions that can elevate your singles game.

Success in singles tennis requires not only physical skill but also a solid strategy. Each section focuses on a different tactical approach that can be applied during a match.

## 1. Consistency

**Objective:** Keep the ball in play as much as possible.

- **Focus on Accuracy Over Power:** Rather than going for risky shots, aim to place the ball consistently within the court, avoiding unforced errors.
- **Rally Patience:** Be prepared to engage in long rallies, waiting for the right opportunity to attack rather than trying to force a winner too early.
- **Minimize Unforced Errors:** Cut down on mistakes by playing within your limits, ensuring you maintain large safe target zones throughout the match.
- **Build Pressure:** By being consistent, you can frustrate your opponent and force them into making errors, giving you an advantage.

## 2. Move the Opponent

**Objective:** Disrupt your opponent's rhythm and positioning.

- **Utilize Angles:** Hit the ball cross-court and down the line to force your opponent to cover more ground.
- **Vary Shot Placement:** Mix up deep shots with drop shots or lobs to move your opponent forward and backward as well as side to side.
- **Exploit Open Space:** Look to hit the ball into open areas of the court, making it difficult for your opponent to establish a comfortable position.
- **Tire Them Out:** By constantly moving your opponent, you can wear them down physically and mentally over the course of the match.

### 3. Maintain Good Court Position

**Objective:** Stay in a strong position on the court to react to your opponent's shots effectively.

- **Recover Quickly:** After each shot, return to a neutral or advantageous position in the court, typically near the baseline or slightly inside it.
- **Anticipate Opponent's Shots:** Position yourself in a way that covers the most likely return shots from your opponent, allowing you to respond more quickly.
- **Control the Centre:** Dominating the middle of the court gives you better access to both sides, making it easier to cover wide shots.
- **Balance Offense and Defence:** Understand when to neutralise, when to step in to attack and when to stay back to defend, maintaining a balance that keeps you in control.

### 4. Use Your Strength

**Objective:** Leverage your strongest shots or skills to gain an advantage.

- **Identify Your Best Shot:** Whether it's a powerful forehand, a reliable backhand, or a solid serve, use your strongest shot frequently to dictate play.
- **Construct Points Around Your Strength:** Build your strategy around setting up situations where you can use your best shot, forcing your opponent to play to your strengths.
- **Play to Your Style:** Whether you're an aggressive baseline player or a skilled net rusher, stick to the style that works best for you and forces your opponent to adapt.
- **Capitalise on Confidence:** When you use your strength effectively, your confidence will grow, allowing you to play even more assertively.

### 5. Exploit Your Opponent's Weakness

**Objective:** Identify and target your opponent's vulnerabilities.

- **Observe During early parts of the Match:** Pay attention to your opponent's strokes during early in the match to identify any technical weaknesses.
- **Target Weak Shots:** If your opponent has a weaker backhand or struggles with high balls, direct more of your shots to those areas.
- **Vary Your Tactics:** If your opponent is uncomfortable with a certain style of play (e.g., they dislike slice shots or struggle with pace), incorporate those elements into your game plan.
- **Adjust Throughout the Match:** Be flexible and continue assessing your opponent's game as the match progresses, exploiting any emerging weaknesses.

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By understanding and implementing these tactical intentions, singles players can develop a more strategic approach to matches. This not only improves overall performance but also increases the chances of consistently winning against a variety of opponents.

# Example drills to develop the above Tactical Intentions

## 1. Consistency

### Drill: Consistency Challenge

**Objective:** Enhance consistency by emphasizing the importance of reducing unforced errors and rewarding solid, strategic play.

#### Setup:

- **Participants:** Two players.
- **Court:** Full singles court.
- **Equipment:** Tennis balls and racquets.

#### Instructions:

1. Players engage in a point-based competition within a singles court. The points can be played as rallies or in a tiebreak format with serves.
2. Scoring is as follows:
  - **+1 Point:** Earned by hitting a winner.
  - **+1 Point:** Earned if the opponent makes a forced error.
  - **-2 Points:** Deducted if a player makes an unforced error.
3. The goal is to reach 10 points first to win the game, or for the opponent to reach -10 points, resulting in a loss for them.
4. Play continues until one player meets the winning condition.

**Coaching Tip:** Emphasize the importance of consistent, controlled play. Encourage players to focus on constructing points patiently and minimizing risky, high-error shots. The scoring system is designed to reinforce the value of consistency over flashy but low-percentage plays.

## 2. Move the Opponent

### Drill: Cross-Court to Down the Line Competition

**Objective:** Practice moving the opponent by hitting deep, controlled shots cross court until a time where you get the opportunity to change up your direction and attack the ball down the line

### Setup:

- **Court:** Cross-court setup: use only half the court diagonally, until the attacker hits a ball down the line.
- **Equipment:** Tennis balls, racquets, (cones to mark the deep/wide target areas - optional).

### Instructions:

1. Player A starts the ball with a cross court feed.
2. Player B plays back cross court, until a shot they determine is easy enough to change up the direction and attack down the line.
3. The goal is for Player B to consistently hit deep crosscourt shots until they draw a shorter / weaker ball from Player A.
4. If Player A hits the ball short, Player B is allowed to attempt a winner down the line to 'Move the Opponent'.
5. Once Player B attacks down the line, the full singles court becomes open, and the players play out the point.
6. Players switch roles after a designated number of points or time

**Coaching Tip:** The 'Attacker' should look to push their opponent back from the baseline and / or wide of the tram lines, to create space and time to set up the attack down the line.

### 3. Maintain Good Court Position

#### Drill: Positioning Awareness

**Objective:** Improve court positioning by practicing quick recovery and effective movement to maintain control over the court.

#### Setup:

- **Participants:** Two players.
- **Court:** Full singles court.
- **Equipment:** Tennis balls and racquets.

#### Instructions:

1. Players rally with each other, focusing on maintaining optimal court position after each shot.
2. After hitting a shot, each player must quickly recover to a neutral or advantageous position near the centre of the baseline (or just inside it), preparing for the next shot.
3. If a player receives a short ball where their feet or momentum takes them further than 2 meters (for example) inside the baseline, they should advance to the net position rather than returning to the baseline.
4. Players should pay attention to their opponent's position and shot direction, adjusting their own court position accordingly to cover potential returns / passing shots.
5. The focus should be on smooth, efficient movement, avoiding getting caught out of position.

**Coaching Tip:** Encourage players to be proactive in their movements. Emphasise the importance of recovering after each shot and anticipating where the opponent might hit next. For short balls that bring the player inside the baseline, progressing to the net can be a powerful offensive move, so practice this transition smoothly. Consistent, disciplined positioning is key to controlling the court and dictating play.

## 4. Use Your Strength

### Drill: Run Around to Attack

**Objective:** Practice using your strongest shot to take control of the rally and dictate play.

### Setup:

- **Participants:** Two players.
- **Court:** Full singles court.
- **Equipment:** Tennis balls and racquets.

### Instructions:

1. Player A feeds a slower, easy ball to Player B's backhand side, intentionally targeting their weaker side.
2. Instead of hitting a backhand, Player B runs around their backhand to hit an aggressive forehand, using their strength to attack.
3. After hitting the forehand, Player B should focus on staying in control of the rally, using their forehand to dictate the point and keep their opponent on the defensive.
4. Player B should aim to maintain pressure with their forehand, looking for opportunities to continue hitting with their strength and forcing errors from Player A.
5. The drill continues with Player A feeding balls to different areas, but the focus remains on Player B consistently using their forehand to control the rally.
6. Players switch roles after a designated number of points or time

**Coaching Tip:** Emphasize the importance of positioning and footwork when running around the backhand. Encourage Player B to be aggressive with their forehand while also maintaining balance and control to avoid overhitting. This drill is designed to help players recognize and capitalize on opportunities to use their strongest shot during a match.

## 5. Exploit Your Opponent's Weakness

### Drill: Target the Backhand

**Objective:** Practice identifying and exploiting the opponent's weaker backhand side to gain a strategic advantage in the rally.

### Setup:

- **Participants:** Two players.
- **Court:** Full singles court.
- **Equipment:** Tennis balls and racquets.

### Instructions:

1. Player A starts by rallying with Player B, with the specific aim of directing most of their shots to Player B's backhand side, which is identified as the weaker side.
2. Player A should vary their shot placement to the backhand, using a combination of deep cross-court shots, or even angled shots to force Player B to use their backhand repeatedly.
3. If Player B attempts to run around their backhand, Player A should be prepared to redirect the to the open space or continue targeting the backhand side.
4. The focus for Player A is to maintain consistency while keeping the pressure on Player B's backhand, forcing errors or weak returns that can be easily attacked.
5. The drill continues with Player A maintaining control of the rally by exploiting the backhand, while Player B tries to counteract by improving their backhand or using footwork to hit forehands.
6. Player A could also pull Player B out wide or deep on their forehand side, to open up the space to their weaker side (backhand)

**Coaching Tip:** Encourage Player A to be patient and disciplined in targeting the backhand, waiting for the right opportunity to either finish the point or continue applying pressure. This drill helps players develop a tactical mindset, where they learn to exploit specific weaknesses in their opponents while maintaining control of the match.