

6 Things Totally in Your Control You Can Do Right Now to Gain 6 Points Per Match

by Brian Rusche

Background:

Tennis employs a winner-take-all scoring system that gives a game-loser no credit for points won, nor any credit for battling through a multiple-deuce game. In a match with lots of deuce games it is possible to win over 40% of all points and still lose a match 0-6, 0-6. It is also possible to win more than half of the total points in a match and still lose a match 4-6, 4-6 (this assumes that each set has 4 games won at love and 6 games lost after reaching deuce).

I've lost too many close matches where 6 points could have made a HUGE difference. Remember, the tennis scoring system exaggerates the smallest of point differentials.

Next Time You Play:

1. Improve Your Ready Position. Unless you are serving, **start each point** with your mind, body, and racquet prepared for a hard shot coming your way. Make it easy for your reflexes. Every micro-second matters.
2. Catch Bad Tosses. **Don't help your opponent** by trying to serve a bad toss. Take as many attempts as you need. Even top-10 pros often catch tosses, especially on windy days.
3. Stay Out of No-Man's Land. If you've gained the net with a forcing shot, claim it and get ready for a drive or a lob. Don't retreat -- you've earned an offensive position. If you find yourself hitting a ball mid-court and your shot is lame, recover quickly to the baseline – you haven't earned the net and **you don't want to stay in no-man's land** where incoming balls will most likely bounce near your feet.
4. Stop Hitting Rally Balls Right Back to Opponent (especially an opponent at net). This is a **cardinal sin in doubles** and really dumb in singles too. There is a proper time to go at an opponent, but it's not with a normal return of serve, nor a rally ball.
5. Hit and Recover Court Position. Hit, follow-through, and **immediately recover** to the center of your opponent's possible replies, usually the center of the court. As awesome as they sometimes are, don't stand still and watch your shots.
6. Assume your serve is good unless your opponent clearly calls it "out." **Never hesitate or stop playing** because you think it might be out. Where your serve lands is your opponent's call, not yours. And, if you hit an ace close to the line and your opponent is uncertain of his call, "sell" your serve by immediately and confidently walking into position for the next point.