

BY BENJAMIN SNYDER

# GAME PLAN!



**SOME LEADING COACHES SHARE TIPS ON EVERYTHING FROM TECHNIQUE TO PERSPECTIVE TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR GAME.**

**1**

**“YOU HAVE TWO SETS OF EYES.**

The eyes *and* brain.” The significance of

this? “When you see the ball coming, your eyes see the ball and then your brain thinks if you can get there before you react. If you train your brain to think as you see, you can move without hesitation.”

Bollettieri says to “play every ball as if it is in.” This trains the player to “go after” every ball and to be an aggressive shot maker.

**2**

**BOLLETTIERI ON TECHNIQUE:**

“It makes no difference what grips you use.

The earlier you start your backswing, the chances of early contact increase.”

**3**

**A WEAK MENTAL GAME**

can sometimes paralyze a player, especially in such

an individual arena. “When you are nervous, move your feet and exaggerate your follow through. Most people will stop mid-swing.”

**4**

**STICK TO YOUR STRENGTHS.**

“Try to get to your strokes that you feel most

comfortable with. If your forehand is your weapon, make sure you slide over to hit another forehand for your next shot.”

**5**

**BOLLETTIERI URGES PLAYERS**

to play with perspective. “Everyone is nervous. It’s

who can get over it the fastest.”

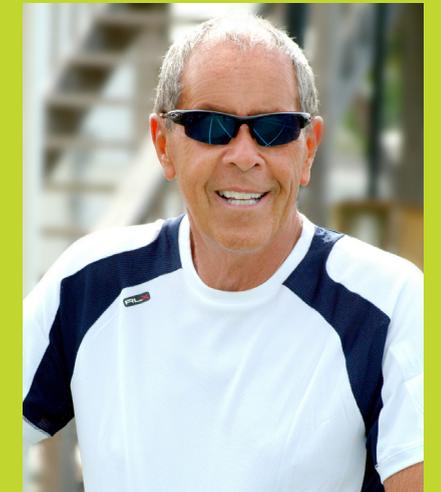
**6**

**ONE THING IS ALWAYS THE**

same during a tennis match of any level. “No matter

what your style of play might be, there is one factor that will never change. The player that hits the last ball over the net will win the trophy.”

» **NICK BOLLETTIERI**



**NICK BOLLETTIERI CHANGED** the sport drastically back in the late 1970s after opening the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy near Bradenton, Florida. Through his influence, junior tennis players could be trained in a boarding school-style setting for the first time in tennis history.

According to his website, his academy was the first in the world to “combine intense training on the court with a custom-designed academic curriculum.” Today, the program teaches “the technical and strategic on-court training with specialized performance physical training and mental conditioning” needed to become champions.

Through those techniques and more, the man, 81, helped his players earn results.

Among his star pupils are Andre Agassi, Jim Courier, Monica Seles, Jelena Jankovic, the Williams sisters, and Maria Sharapova. Through his teaching methods, the New York native helped develop these athletes— and others—to become some of the best in the world.

The man behind the success of so many stars shared some of the tips that have proven effective with some of the sport’s greatest. He focused on technical and mental aspects of the game he has dominated as a coach.

» MAUREEN DIAZ



**RANKED AS HIGH** as No. 592 on the WTA Tour and a four-year athlete at the University of Southern California, Maureen Diaz now trains talented juniors who are on track to become top American players for the United States Tennis Association. Since February, Diaz has worked in the new USTA Player Development Feeder Program, with National Coach Erik Kortland, to train 9 and 13 year olds.

“It’s nice to work with someone who’s kind of new to the sport because they can absorb a lot of it faster,” Diaz says. “They’re just so much more engaged and they’re just loving to learn the sport right away.”

Her passion for coaching began as a competitor on Tour. The Californian recalls traveling to tournaments, but also taking the time to teach the children of the families she’d live with away from home.

With her strength being the double-handed backhand, Diaz focuses her tips on the stroke.



**1 ON THE IMPORTANCE** of court positioning: “For the backhand, you always have to

get behind the ball with the outside leg. This gives you the option to hit the open stance, if you’re stretched out, or [to] step into the ball instead of stepping across and blocking your weight.”

**2 MOVEMENT, TOO, IS KEY** when hitting an effective backhand. “I always like the

step out motion as your first move. If you’re right-handed, you always step-out with your left foot first. Then, you can kind of spin with your right foot or hit with an open stance. It can go both ways.”

**3 “IF YOU’RE RIGHT-HANDED,** use your left hand like you’re hitting a left-handed

forehand. Let go of the right hand and let the left hand control it.”

**4 “I THINK A LOT OF THE** problem I see is the left hand is way too underneath; you

see a lot of kids use the baseball swing. You need to make sure the left hand is [placed at a] more eastern [grip on the handle] so you can have more acceleration for the backhand.” Instead, players tend to strike a tennis ball on the backhand side “too high, almost like thinking of it as a baseball.”

**5 PEOPLE “MAKE [THE SHOT] TOO** big of a stroke. I just say turn with your shoulders and

not with your wrist and just make it one smooth motion, as opposed to hitting it too choppy. I keep it very simple.”

**1 THE FOREHAND MUST BE** mastered for success in tennis today, Dektas says. “Being able to hit the

forehand from all positions is what the best players in the world do. Don’t accept the backhand if you prefer the forehand. Get to your forehand.”

**2 BE ABLE TO MIX UP THE SHOT** and hit with variety. “Be able to hit it with a different amount of

power and spin.” This can be accomplished with the use of the semi-western grip. This “will give you the opportunity to have versatility and [to hit all] types of shots” with the forehand.

**3 IT’S IMPORTANT TO NOT ONLY** strike the ball with aggression, “but also with spin over the net,

with clearance. A heavy forehand has power, spin, depth, and height.”

**4 TO HELP GAIN PENETRATION** on the forehand side, Dektas says it’s important to

have the mentality to “be okay with missing deep.” Not only that, but it helps to “make the deep part of court actually a goal” when playing.

**5 WHICH PLAYERS HAVE FOREHANDS** to watch and learn from at the Western & Southern Open?

Dektas suggests fans check out Roger Federer and Victoria Azarenka.



» MATT DEKTAS



**MATT DEKTAS HAS BEEN COMING** to the Western & Southern Open for as long as he can remember. He first attended as a fan with his family. Now Dektas is there as a celebrated teacher of tennis, a chaperone for the budding talent he trains as a high school coach at Cincinnati Country Day School and in his position as the Director of Tennis at the Five Seasons Sports Club.

Dektas has been named the Greater Cincinnati Pro of the Year, Ohio Pro of the Year, and Midwest Junior Coach of the Year. He has trained 14 players who achieved Top 25 USTA national rankings.

One of his players, Komal Safdar, now a professional and member of Syracuse

University’s team, even played last year in the Western & Southern Open qualifying tournament. “That was a great experience,” Dektas says. “It was great for [Komal] to gauge where she was, and I think for the young players to go and watch and to see that the level is not that far off is kind of exciting and motivating for them.”

The close proximity of the event serves as a motivating factor for players hoping to enter the professional ranks. “You need to be able to dream about that kind of stuff before you can go that far, and I think having an event here keeps the kids thinking and dreaming bigger,” says Dektas, author of *The Perfect Tennis Parent - A Guide for Parents of Competitive Junior Players*.