

**MY**

**ADAPTABLE PLAYER METHOD**

**BY STEVE WHELAN | MY TENNIS COACHING**



## PLAYING WITH PURPOSE

# A Practical Coaching Framework for Tennis

### Why this resource?

Because tennis isn't about perfect strokes.

It's about reading the game, responding to pressure, and playing with purpose.

### What you'll get inside:

- 5 Principles of Play that guide player behaviour
- Core tactical intentions: Jam, Stretch, Survive
- A model for understanding momentum shifts
- Practice design tools for match-ready sessions
- Coaching prompts to guide attention and reflection

### How to use it:

Don't just read, use each section to shape your training.

Adapt the examples. Challenge your players.

Build sessions around real decisions, not textbook technique.

UNBALANCED



UNCOMFORTABLE



# MY PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

**FORGET PERFECT. PLAY WITH PURPOSE, FEEL, AND FREEDOM.**

# 1. Play With Intention

## Make Your Opponent Uncomfortable

EVERY SHOT SHOULD MEAN SOMETHING.

Ask: What do I want to do to my  
opponent right now?  
Move them? Rush them?  
Survive? Let that goal guide  
your next action.



## 2. See the Court Like a Problem-Solver

LOOK FOR SPACE, TIME, AND PRESSURE, THEN USE IT.

Is there an opening to attack? A  
moment to reset?  
Every point gives you chances.  
The more you see, the more you  
can do.



### 3. Change the Rhythm, Change the Game

THE GAME IS ALWAYS CHANGING. SO SHOULD YOU.

Points don't follow a script. One moment you're attacking, the next you're scrambling.

Learn to switch gears, stay balanced, and respond in the moment.



## 4. Stay in the Fight: Turn Defence into Attack

NOT EVERY SHOT WINS THE RALLY—SOME JUST KEEP YOU IN IT.

When under pressure, find ways  
to survive or turn defence into  
attack.

Resilience is a weapon.  
Use it.



## 5. Trust What You See. Trust How You Move.

LET YOUR EYES GUIDE YOUR ACTIONS. LET YOUR BODY FIND SOLUTIONS.

You don't need perfect  
technique, you need real  
responses.

Play what you see. Move how  
you feel. Find your own way.





# MY PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

HOW TO WIN IN TENNIS

## MY PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

# HOW TO WIN IN TENNIS

HIT THE BALL INTO A POSITION WHERE YOUR OPPONENT CANT GET IT BACK

THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED IN OFFENSE OR DEFENCE BY

### JAMMING



YOUR OPPONENT

### STRETCHING



YOUR OPPONENT

### SURVIVING



YOUR OPPONENT

## PLAYING WITH PURPOSE

# YOUR INTENTIONS SHAPE YOUR ACTIONS

Each shot is a decision.

Each decision reveals your intention.

Design practices that guide these intentions:

- Jam your opponent
- Stretch your opponent
- Survive your opponent

What does your player intend before they hit?

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# MY PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

COMPETITIVE BALANCE

# TENNIS IS A GAME OF **COMPETITIVE BALANCE**

YOU CAN EITHER BE **BALANCED** OR **UNBALANCED**

**BALANCED**



**COMFORTABLE**

**UNBALANCED**



**UNCOMFORTABLE**

# TENNIS IS A GAME OF **COMPETITIVE BALANCE**

YOU CAN EITHER BE **BALANCED** OR **UNBALANCED**

Performance in tennis is constantly shifting between states of **balance**, physically, emotionally, and tactically.

These shifts create opportunities (affordances) or threats, depending on who holds **balance** in that moment.

Recognising and adapting to these states is critical for decision-making and skill execution.

# TENNIS IS A GAME OF **COMPETITIVE BALANCE**

## BALANCE DIMENSIONS

### BALANCED



### COMFORTABLE

- **Physical Balance:** Stable base, control of center of mass, readiness to act.
- **Emotional Balance:** Confidence, calm under pressure, clarity in intention.
- **Tactical Balance:** Recognizing affordances and having time/space to act on them.

**“Balance is not a posture, it’s a perception of possibility.”**

# THREE PHASES OF COMPETITIVE BALANCE

## Player      Opponent

**BALANCED**



**COMFORTABLE**

**UNBALANCED**



**UNCOMFORTABLE**

**BALANCED**



**COMFORTABLE**

**BALANCED**



**COMFORTABLE**

**UNBALANCED**



**UNCOMFORTABLE**

**BALANCED**



**COMFORTABLE**

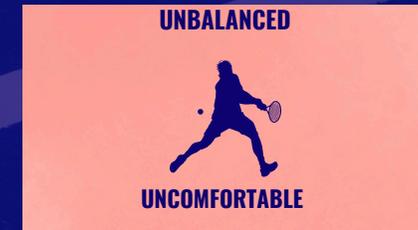


## THREE PHASES OF COMPETITIVE BALANCE

**Player**



**Opponent**



PHASE	WHAT IS HAPPENING	PLAYER STATE	BEHAVIOURS	KEY COACHING FOCUS
You Balanced / Opponent Unbalanced	You're in control, your able to dictate play.	You're in control, your able to dictate play.	Strike with intent, step into court, take time away.	Encourage attacking intentions. Guide attention to affordances for stretching/jamming.

# PLAYING WITH PURPOSE

## YOU'RE IN CONTROL

You're balanced. They're not.  
It's time to stretch or jam.

Train attacking behaviours:

- Step in
- Take time away
- Change direction or pace

Practice Design Ideas:

- Serve + 1 inside baseline
- Bonus points for winners or forced errors
- Start point with a strong feed to player strength

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## THREE PHASES OF COMPETITIVE BALANCE

**Player**



**Opponent**



PHASE	WHAT IS HAPPENING	PLAYER STATE	BEHAVIOURS	KEY COACHING FOCUS
Both Balanced (Mutual Chaos)	High-level rally where both players are locked in.	Physically stable, emotionally aroused but composed.	Fast pace, sharp decisions, dynamic footwork.	Train adaptability under pressure. Emphasize perception of small shifts in control.

# PLAYING WITH PURPOSE

## MUTUAL CHAOS

Both players are balanced. Pressure builds.

Train adaptability:

- Fast exchanges
- Tempo changes
- Recognise small shifts in momentum

Practice Design Ideas:

- Start with deep neutral crosscourt
- Bonus point for using slice/drop/high ball
- Reward tactical variation, not just speed

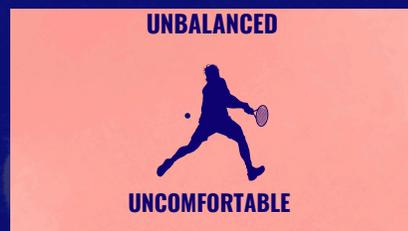
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## THREE PHASES OF COMPETITIVE BALANCE

**Player**



**Opponent**



PHASE	WHAT IS HAPPENING	PLAYER STATE	BEHAVIOURS	KEY COACHING FOCUS
You Unbalanced / Opponent Balanced	You're reacting and surviving. Opponent is applying pressure.	Hesitant, backing off, low confidence.	Defensive shots, hesitation, reactive play.	Train defensive affordances: surviving, resetting, countering. Build emotional regulation tools.

# PLAYING WITH PURPOSE

## YOU'RE UNDER PRESSURE

You're unbalanced. They're in control.

This is where players must survive.

Train recovery:

- Reset the point
- Defend with height or depth
- Wait for the chance to flip it

Practice Design Ideas:

- First Ball wide or deep to start
- No attacking until they reset
- Bonus point for turning defence into neutral

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