

Ready, Set, Tennis! On Point Tips For Your Game

By Samantha Durbin

Tennis, a classic. In a time when hybrid workouts are boundless, sometimes it's nice to circle back to a classic sport. And that's what Lucy has done with a fresh collection that beats typical tennis whites. Spring is around the corner, and if you want a new outdoor workout that gets both your body and mind in shape, tennis could be for you. Senior instructor at the Santa Monica Tennis Center, Mike Scovotti, shares some pro tips, from gear to visualization to another excuse to watch Roger Federer in action. And Mike's most important piece of advice? Have fun!

How is tennis a physical workout? What body parts does it target?

I've had marathon runners stop a lesson after five minutes embarrassed because they feel out of shape. Obviously they're not if they're running marathons, but tennis works a different bunch of muscles. Tennis may not send your Fitbit into overdrive with steps, but with the short bursts, quick cuts, and intricate footwork, you'll get as good a workout as any other sport, especially in the legs and core. Your cardio will improve after just a few times playing for at least an hour.

The more I play and teach tennis the more I realize how it's so much more mental than physical. I recently read an article about the mental side of tennis, and a lot of pros are quoted saying the mental part is their favorite part because it's always such a challenge, even at their level. It's a different game of chess every single match.

How is tennis a good mental workout? How can the mental health of tennis improve someone's lifestyle off the court?

In many other sports, you pass the ball when it's time for the last shot. If someone has a better shot, or if you get nervous, you can pass it off. Not in tennis. It's all you. You don't have anyone to talk to in the middle of a match except yourself. The momentum swings can wreak havoc on your mental state, and in tennis there are continuous momentum swings. If you've found something that works, it's a matter of time before your opponent counters that, then you have to come up with a new plan to counter his counter. And so it goes.

It can be really fun if you're in control and it can be an absolute grind if you're not. The fun part is the "game within the game" that is the mental fight. Sometimes you're going against your opponent, but a lot of the time you're playing against yourself and your mind. It's easy to get frustrated and let your head beat you—it happens all the time.

It's great training for everyday life. Whether it's work or your kids, or anything else that requires problem-solving, that mental exercise will help with nearly every decision. There's not much time to think when you're in the middle of a point, and that carries over to quicker decision making and more mental sharpness when dealing with everyday life.

Tennis is one sport I've heard lessons can be beneficial, how so?

A good foundation should be set in place before you play on your own. Anyone can hit on a ball machine, but if you don't have the proper technique in place, then you're creating muscle memory for all the wrong strokes. My foundation was set when I was a kid, and I still refer to it today. So do the pros.

Take lessons from a few different instructors. It's all about you getting better. Different instructors will see various aspects of your game/swing/footwork that I may not see. The way they say something might trigger you to get your racket back quicker—whatever works.

I also encourage clients to watch as much of the pros on television as possible. You'll store certain moves in your subconscious and try to do what they're doing next time you're on the court. It can't be a bad thing if you're trying to emulate Roger Federer's style, right? That's how I supplemented my lessons as a kid; I would watch Andre Agassi and try to do what he did on the court. It gave me a visual image of him hitting a forehand that I could always refer to. Visualization in tennis is essential. I try to take videos of clients when they're doing something right so they can see what it looks like to hit a great forehand.

What do you recommend for beginning tennis gear?

What is the best racquet for you? The racket that feels the best. You might want to play with Federer's racket because you love him, but that's tough for a beginner—his racket is heavy with a smaller area to hit the ball. Demo as many as possible and then make your choice after some time and trial. This is easy. Most pro shops have a demo program, and websites like [Tennis Warehouse](#) will send you a few to try. There's also the grip size, grip, and strings. It can be overwhelming, but as long as you stick with what's comfortable for you, you can't go wrong.

I'm a huge fan of tennis shoes. Many beginners start with running shoes, which can lead to trouble on a court. Running shoes are designed to run in a straight line. Tennis is the opposite of that—it's side-to-side movement and cutting at different angles. It's easy to roll

an ankle in running shoes on a tennis court. Find a good pair of tennis sneakers, and you'll wear them more than you think.

As for clothes, pockets are a must! You need two balls to serve in case you miss your first one.

What are good before and after tennis snacks?

Depending on the time of day, I'll eat a little something before that gives me energy but doesn't fill me up. I always keep something in my bag to take a bite of during changeovers. Mostly protein bars, sometimes candy for the sugar rush, bananas. You're going to burn a lot of energy during a match, and you need to put it back somehow. After a match, protein repairs tired muscles, carbs are great for energy. A mix of both is best. Stretching after is helpful for repairing muscles, too.

Liquids are super important. You sweat a lot during matches, and there's nothing worse than cramping up during a long, hard match. Agassi said his trainer used to make him drink some concoction before matches that tasted like super salty electrolyte water. That's exactly what it was. Salt will help you retain water during a match.

What are some training secrets from the pros?

Visualization. With how important muscle memory and the subconscious is in tennis, nearly everything you see gets stored somewhere. And I mentioned this before, but it's so helpful: watch the pros. Study them, watch how early they take the racket back, how precise their footwork is. It will be stored in your brain, and you'll start to see a difference once you get comfortable with your foundation. Then go and try to do what they do. It's sort of like a method acting exercise.

Lastly, push yourself. You're out there solo, with nobody to pass to. You'll be impressed by what you're capable of physically and mentally.