

How to Develop True Confidence In Your Tennis Game



The Formula For a Lifetime of "Getting Better" at Tennis...



By Brent Abel

Please feel free to pass along a copy of this eBook to any of your tennis friends, doubles partners, teammates, tennis professionals, students, or anyone else who you feel would benefit from this information...

Any questions, please contact Brent Abel at brent@webtennis.net or 925-376-4575.

Thanks... *Brent*



Hi and many thanks for taking your time to find out how to develop a true foundation for a lifetime of improving your tennis game.

Getting *c o n f i d e n t*...

Developing lasting confidence in your tennis skills and match play is a process, not a quick fix overnight sensation...

As they say, this is a journey, and yes, you will from time to time get there.

The **process** of “getting there” is what we focus on for our improvement.



Along your path of continuous improvement you'll be able to enjoy the fruits of your efforts within this process, but one of the keys to maintaining improvement and adding to your confidence will be your understanding and belief of **how we learn**...

So, let's get into this stuff ...!

OK, here's the formula for a lifetime of how to get better with your tennis, you know, how to develop a strong sense of confidence when you practice and compete...

The Reality of the Learning Curve...

How we learn, how we improve is too often rushed.

Learning can be done quickly, but your mindset, your attitude has to be such that you don't force improvement.

If you "get" this concept, then you'll be fine. If you don't, then you'll drive yourself nuts and true long lasting improvement and eventual confidence just won't happen...

So, this is important, don't fight this concept, go with it, embrace it, practice it constantly, write it down and put it on the bathroom mirror, I don't know, put it somewhere, but keep this in front of you all of the time so that you actually "get it"...

The learning curve is not a gradual straight line up.

Nope, you don't start a plan for improvement and can then measure it on a chart where the line starts at 0 and slowly works its way up.

The line is a series of ups, downs, and plateaus.



The line above shows how we should measure our improvement progress. Ups, downs, and eventual new levels or plateaus.

Players who don't understand this concept are thrilled during the "ups", freaked out during the "downs", and bored during the "plateaus".

Guess what, the plateaus are where it's at, it's what you want to hope for and look forward to achieving.

It's not the ups, because the ups are not your new true skill level yet. The ups are normally associated with an eventual "down" and then followed by a new plateau.

Players mistakenly get to the peak of an "up" and think that's their new skill level. Wrong. Just because you go out one day and take a set off or even beat a player who is better than you doesn't necessarily mean that you've now found a new skill level.

The reality is that you're about to experience a slight "down" the next few times out on the court that will soon level off to a new plateau. That new plateau will be slightly higher than your prior plateau. Don't fight this...

And it's the "downs" of the learning curve that can make life misery for anyone working hard at improving their tennis. The new high peak feels so good, seems so real, and yet, reproducing that new high peak tomorrow probably is not going to happen.



Embrace your plateaus. Plain and simple....

And if you're on the same plateau for awhile, no worries, because a series of ups, downs, and then a new higher plateau is just out there on the horizon...

"Getting" this concept takes *practice*...

And if you're anything close to the normal side of humanity, you'll get fooled somewhere along the path of trying to improve and think a new high peak is your new skill level.

Here's what I want you do...

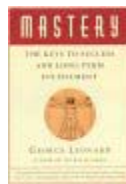
George Leonard has written a GREAT short book on this concept titled "Mastery" and I'm telling you right here right now, do yourself a favor and pick up a copy.

I'm serious, the book is short, to the point, in fact, brutally so, and will be the most important first step you can take to being able to develop true confidence in your tennis game...



Either pick up your copy now through Amazon or I've also got another link to Amazon at the end of this eBook. In either case, spend a couple of bucks to insure that you've "got" this concept...

Click the photo to pick up your copy from Amazon now....



OK, let's move on...

Now that you've got the learning curve reality, let's figure out the specific formula for developing your tennis confidence.

The Elements of Building Confidence in Your Tennis Game

- **Practicing the Stroke Mechanics of Your Strokes**
- **Practicing on Improving Your Visual Contact with the Ball**
- **Practicing Good Mental Habits: Managing Your Emotional Stability During Practice and Matches**
- **Practicing How to Allow “Muscle Memory” to Happen on Its Own**
- **Practicing Accepting the Reality of the Learning Curve**
- **Understanding What Makes a Consistent Player**



So, this IS a process, no quick fixes, no instant gratification...

You'll be able to tinker, have fun, and improve your tennis for all of your days on this planet.

You're going to make mistakes as you learn, as you improve.

The mistakes you make as you learn are NOT failures. Hello..? Repeat that one...

The mistakes you make as you learn are NOT failures...

Mistakes are simply bits of information that help you understand what it is you're trying to figure out. Nothing more... Being critical is a killer. Not only will you not learn, but even worse, you'll start trying other knee jerk reaction methods in hopes of that new way being right.

"Embrace the plateaus..."

Figure this one out.

Work it.

Don't fight this one...



The Elements of Building Confidence in Your Tennis Game

OK, let's get into each one of the elements that we looked at above...

- **Practicing the Stroke Mechanics of Your Strokes**

- **Practice with your professional or get the right information**

Any idea of who you are on the court or who you want to be...? Are you a baseliner, a serve & volleyer, or an 'all-court' player?

Many players don't know. No big deal.

Whoever you are or want to be, get the right information from a teaching professional who understands all styles of play, or from books, DVDs, CDs, whatever, or a combination of the above.

Whoever you are or eventually become as a tennis player, be realistic when deciding what style of play will serve you for your lifetime. You know me, pure baseline play with extreme grips are huge risks for injury and I think that eventually you'll get bored stiff.

I love watching Roddick and many of the professional pure baseline players play, but come on, full western forehand grips and trying to challenge your opponent from 5 feet behind the baseline is a ridiculous model for the rest of us to try to copy...

Start thinking about what your strengths and weaknesses are, and what you can do to improve your strokes that need help. Once you've figured out "who you are" on the court, then you'll know what stroke mechanics to practice. Grips, swing shapes, contact points, and finish positions...

- **Practice on your own - on the court and off**

Practicing with a professional or a practice partner are two arenas for a good improvement plan, but spending time alone on the court and off the court are vital...

Spend some time on a backboard, practice wall, ball machine, and in front of a mirror at home. The at home practice time can be as little as 2-4 minutes at a time, and hopefully daily.

- **Practice drills with another player**

When you spend time on the practice court with another player, be brutally specific with what you want to work on for that day. Going out and "just hitting" is fine for a certain purpose, but going out and thinking that hitting a ton of balls without a focus will build confidence is wrong...



If my practice partner doesn't care what we do on that day, then I feel free to totally dictate what I'm going to work on, how I want the drills set up, and so on...

Most of the time, your practice partner will want to work on something different than you do, which is fine. Before you start, decide how the two of you (or more players) will divide up the time.



Whoever's turn it is for their time gets to outline what the drill is and how it'll be set up. Be specific...

- **Playing practice points, sets, matches**

Practicing how you play a match is a big part of building confidence for the real thing, competitive match situations...

First of all, realize that this is practice and that the results do NOT count. If your practice opponent needs to have bragging rights for the outcome of practice matches, then big whup, no big deal.

Bragging rights for practice matches are meaningless and kind of pathetic.

*During the points, **practice 'letting go'**, you know, trying not to manufacture the stroke mechanics you've been working on. That's a tough one, to not be conscious of the mechanics you've been practicing, but when you play a competitive match, the "how" of the strokes has got to happen naturally, on its own.*

See how much 'muscle memory' has set in from all of your practice by allowing your stroke mechanics to simply come out on their own. It may be and most likely will be that old habits still come through from time to time. Very normal...

- **Practice on Improving Your Visual Contact with the Ball**

Hey, it's a no-brainer, the better you see the incoming ball, whether you're on the move or stationary, your ability to visually track the moving ball will allow SO many positive things to happen with your game.

Talk about confidence...

Forget the old cliché "watch the ball" and let's get into a high tech version to improve your ball tracking skills...



The better you can actually see the ball equates to more consistently arriving on balance to the proper hitting position, the better timing you'll have when you deliver your racket out through the ball at contact, and the more confidence you'll have that you won't have to "peek" prematurely at your shot...

Do two types of exercises to improve this vital confidence building part of your tennis game...

- Stationary Drills
 - Whenever you do any kind of exercise where you're not moving, find a stationary object or spot out in the landscape and lock on it visually.

Practice relaxing your facial muscles as you maintain a visual lock.

- On the Move
 - You're trying to develop leg muscles that enhance your ability to move on the tennis court where your head and eyes don't get jarred around as you start, stop, and change directions.

Some exercises don't promote those types of muscles. For example, long distance aerobic running breaks down those shock absorbing muscles that are crucial for ***your ability to keep your head quiet as you move***. Long distance aerobic running certainly helps you get strong, but your ability to track a moving object while you're also moving is diminished when you do a lot of long distance running...

I prefer short sprint distances where you visually lock on a stationary spot out in the landscape and then try to keep that spot from moving up and down when you sprint. Hard to do, but incredibly good for improving your ability 'to watch the ball'...

There are a kazillion drills and exercises that will promote this skill. Figure out what ballroom dancers do. That's they're entire deal, effortlessly moving with an absolutely still head...

Make sure when you do these drills that your hands are limp, loose, without tension, all of that, because your ability to visually track the ball better on the court is dependent on "soft" hands on the racket...

- **Here's the cycle of watching a tennis ball...**

For discussion purposes, the cycle starts at the precise moment the ball contacts your racket, then travels to your opponent, and then back to the contact once again with your racket. That's one complete cycle.

You can start the cycle any place along that path...

- At the point of contact, as Mr. Federer is about to demonstrate, your eyes have tracked the incoming ball and your head and eyes are pointed directly at your point of contact.



In fact, *your eyes stay there after the ball has been hit.* That's right, you don't see the first part of your shot go back over the net...

Did you get that...?

You don't see the first part of your shot go back over the net...

You keep that nice quiet head still through contact all the way to the completion of your stroke which will probably be just about the moment your shot crosses the net back to your opponent's side of the net and NOT before...



- As you feel the finish of your shot, you come out of that finish with your legs moving back towards the middle of the court carrying your quiet head on balance...

When you look up, you visually go straight to the ball, not to your opponent. This is crucial...

- Just prior to your opponent making contact with your shot, go into a 'split step' with soft hands and a quiet head, and get a good visual lock on the ball prior to their contact.

Discipline yourself to NOT see directly into or at your opponent, your peripheral vision will do all of that for you and you'll get plenty of information from your peripheral that will help you anticipate anything that you might want to know...

Ok, you're 50% through the cycle of 'watching the ball'...

- Find the ball coming off of your opponent's racket and decisively move with a quiet head to wherever your next hitting position is going to be... Track the ball ALL the way in, do not be distracted by anything out in the landscape...

Soft hands and quiet eyes will help you. And here's what separates the good players from the average players, their ability to consistently track the ball from their opponent to them...

And there is a reality when you're on the move to your next hitting position, and it's this, if you get off balance at all, your body needs your eyes to find a stationary object out in your horizon, something with a definite vertical and horizontal axis, meaning...



If you get off balance when you're moving, guess what, you have to stop watching a moving object (right, the ball) for a moment as you regain your balance, and unfortunately, that may be enough to where you don't ever really 'find' the incoming ball again.

Bad deal, right...? Yep. How you move is critical. On balance with a quiet head and soft hands are a must.

- And finally, the ball arrives back to your racket and the cycle starts all over again...

Keeping your eyes down through contact develops an ENORMOUS amount of confidence....

- **Practicing Mental Toughness: Managing Your Emotional Stability During Practice and Matches**

Players rarely, if ever, actually *practice* 'mental toughness'...

It's a vital skill to learning, improving, and eventually playing well.

There are two areas where we need to have consistently good emotional stability if the learning process is going to take place and when we compete.

Your attitude will determine how well and quickly you learn. Understanding the learning curve as we've discussed before is a 'must'. Without it, you're fighting yourself the whole way.



Lots of players think they solve their frustration by thinking that whatever they're working on is not getting results fast enough and then they go and try something else. It's a cycle of failure that can be hard to break...

Making mistakes when you practice is important in understanding how things work. Getting upset when you make mistakes stops the learning process and has zero positive effects...

You must practice mental toughness before it will feel natural in a competitive situation. It's not a light switch that you can just turn on and off whenever you feel like it...

Practice mental toughness on and off the court. Again, visualize exactly how you'd like to react to specific match situations where things are going well or things are not going well...

This element of developing confidence is a personal, almost intangible skill that requires your full attention. No excuses here, none...

Here's what to practice....

*In practice matches, work on this four part **between-points** system, a specific four part routine that takes place after every point...*

1. *No emotional response to the point you just finished. You don't want to be all over the emotional chart of ups & downs depending on whether you've just hit the greatest shot ever or just blew the easiest sitter ever. Maintain as even a keel as possible.*

None... This is total acceptance of the reality of the learning curve.

2. *3-4 deep controlled breaths*
3. *Decide on any specific simple strategy that might be appropriate for the upcoming point. Nothing fancy, if at all...*
4. *Lastly, a little self-pump, "come on, here we go..."*

Work this routine after EVERY point.

Get comfortable with it. Practice it off the court also.

Visualize a point where you blow the easiest put-away in the world, then go through the four part routine feeling yourself maintaining a nice emotional stability. Visualize and feel it...

Then visualize a point where you hit the greatest shot ever hit and immediately start the four part routine. Visualize and feel it...

Get comfortable with the plateaus....



- **Practicing How to Allow “Muscle Memory” to Happen on Its Own During Competitive Matches**

- *When you play a competitive match, there are basically two things you focus on during any given point... Seeing the ball and deciding where you want to hit it.*

It's that simple. And the more you don't try to manufacture the strokes, the more you play instinctively, the better you'll play, and the faster you'll improve. Confidence...

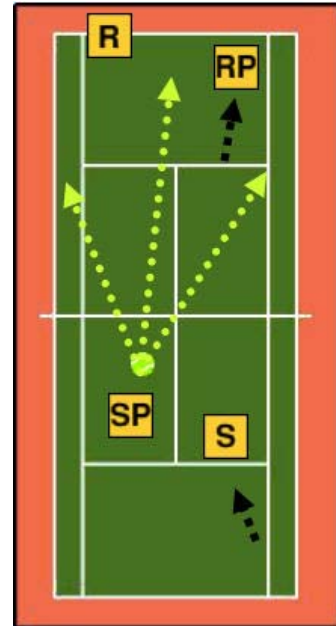
Your practice arenas are designed more for consciously working on and trying to manufacture stroke mechanics and even specific strategies.

But when you play, those conscious 'how to' thoughts have to be turned off. You have to practice turning those swing thoughts off and allowing your muscle memory to kick in...

It's not easy and it can be tough because it feels like such an intangible. This is an incredibly important skill to practice, to relax and let go of needing to control your stroke mechanics.

Again, as I said earlier, if your new practiced mechanics don't come out on their own or just some of the time, you know, if old habits keep showing up, hey, that's very positive feedback that you still need more practice time for those changes to start coming out naturally, instinctively...

This skill is a tough one, and it can cause frustration, but hang in there, the payoff will be huge...



- **Practicing Accepting the Reality of the Learning Curve**

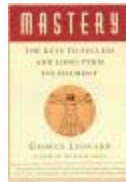
And here we are again... Can you "get" up to speed with this concept? I know you can.

You're going to have frustration, doubt, and at times probably want to ring my neck for me insisting that you hang in there one more day.

During those times, and believe me, there will be those times, forget about forcing improvement on that day and look at that day's practice as a good fitness opportunity.

Hey, I'm not going to tell you that every day that you go out to practice or play a match that it's going to be perfect or even fun. Tough...

Tell yourself to simply "get through" today without going crazy and worst of all taking some steps backward. Just letting it be a good old fitness day of playing hard is good enough...



- **Understanding What Makes a Consistent Player**

And finally, recognize those times in practice when you feel rushed with your shots, when you feel anxious to end the point, when you feel as if all you want is for the point to be over...

What makes a player consistent, meaning, an ability not to commit unforced errors, is really about the skill of recognizing whether or not you've been able to arrive to the proper hitting setup on balance and where your 'muscle memory' can perform...

It's an absolute impossibility for any of us to **always** arrive on time and on balance to our next shot... We can do it some of the time and that's the best we can hope for...

What makes some players better than others is their ability to recognize if they're not setup correctly that at those times to not force a stroke that was never designed for that situation...

When I got better as a player was when I could finally not panic and rush through shots if I wasn't in a good hitting position. Realizing that it was OK at times to simply keep the ball in play without completely giving your opponent an advantage made a huge difference in my overall play...

I gained the **confidence** that it was OK to stay in the point... Work on this one. Be aware in practice of this situation and work through it... Your ability to not panic or rush will make you a much more consistent tennis player....

Wrapping Up...

Well, so there you have it...!

You have some work to do, but this isn't brain surgery we're doing here, no, so print this out, and start your program for getting organized with your practice for developing more confidence in your tennis game...

I haven't spent any time here teaching you how to hit the ball, but we've focused on the necessary elements of understanding the learning curve, how to handle it, and the specific skills to practice that will help build a solid foundation for a confident tennis game...

You've now got the information, take care of business, and just get the process started...

I am available if you need some help. Feel free to drop me an email to brent@webtennis.net. I'll do my best to get back to you within 24 hours...

And speaking of strokes and strategies, go to the next page to get access to my line of instructional lesson packages. The list of lessons is an evolving work in progress, so if you don't see a product that is listed that interests you, email me and I'll develop it...

Embrace the plateaus...

Thanks for your time and keep moving forward out there...!



Access to Brent's instructional lesson packages is on the next page

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