

SAMPLE



TENNIS

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## About the card sort

- The cards describe competencies, behaviours and qualities in the game of tennis.
- The sort should be completed in a conversation with a coach, parent or mentor.
- The cards should be used to identify competencies to grow into super strengths or areas to work on.
- On the back of the cards are ideas for actions to support development planning.
- Use the cards at the beginning and end of the season, and following key milestones.

Categories of competencies for squash include:

- mental skills
- self
- athlete life
- health
- physical
- technical skills
- tactics

*Turn over to see the full list of competencies.*

Mental Skills	Self	Athlete Life	Health	Physical	Technical Skills	Tactics
Performance Focus	Team Values and Culture	Managing Time and Energy	Mental Health and Wellbeing	Core Strength and Balance	Attacking and Finishing	Game Plan
Resilience	Leadership	Circle of Support	Health	Range of Movement	Rallying and Building	Tactical Awareness
Motivation and Passion	Communication	Financial Skills, Facilities and Equipment	Women's Health	Muscle Endurance	Neutralising	Momentum
Self-Belief and Confidence	Programme Ownership	Future, Change, and Career Planning	Robustness	Aerobic Fitness	Defending and Counter Attacking	Holding Serve
Performance Preparation	Identity, Purpose and Self-Awareness	Sponsorship and Athlete Brand	Injury Recovery	Speed Endurance	Serve	Breaking Serve
Performance Review	Competitiveness	Relationships	Sleep	Speed	Return	
Practicing Pressure	Work Ethic		Nutrition	Agility		
Mastery	Drive and Ambition			Recovery		
Deep Practice	Continuous Growth					
Composure						

2

## How to use the cards

### ATHLETE

1

#### **SORT FOR STRENGTHS**

Sort the cards into roughly three even piles with the following black cards forming the top of each set:

- high/strength
- middle/average
- low/work-on; and
- not applicable.

Sort based on your highest level of competition.

2

#### **EXPLAIN/RECORD**

Explain reasons for placement, focusing on strengths and areas to work on. Take a photo or fill in the worksheets to record placement to refer back to on review.

3

#### **PRIORITISE**

Once completed, pick up the cards sorted as areas to work on. You may also wish to select some strengths to include in your development plan that could become super strengths. Flip over the header cards and sort again for priorities for the next season or training block using the black cards (high, medium, low). Aim to narrow down to not more than two development priorities per category.

*Once you have identified your priorities, turn over the cards.  
The back of the cards have development planning ideas.*

*Please Turn Over*

2

## How to use the cards

### COACH/ MENTOR

1

#### INTRODUCTION

Explain the purpose of the process.

Explain the process (see website for more detail) and discuss confidentiality.

Check for comfort and questions.

2

#### GUIDE

Guide the process.

Question, clarify and summarise to help the athlete identify the critical priorities.

Listen with an open mind, avoid making judgements.

3

#### PLAN

Record placement of cards with notes. Select priorities emerging from the second sort and identify development actions (see ideas on the back of cards) in collaboration with the athlete.

*TIP: You can complete a separate card sort for comparative discussion.*

# STRENGTH



COMPETENCIES ASSESSED AS A STRENGTH AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL  
OF COMPETITION, IN RELATION TO OTHER COMPETENCIES

# HIGH PRIORITY



COMPETENCIES ASSESSED AS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR  
THE NEXT COMPETITION AND TRAINING BLOCK

# MIDDLE/AVERAGE



COMPETENCIES ASSESSED AS MIDDLE AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL  
OF COMPETITION, IN RELATION TO OTHER COMPETENCIES



# MEDIUM PRIORITY



COMPETENCIES ASSESSED AS A MEDIUM PRIORITY FOR  
THE NEXT COMPETITION AND TRAINING BLOCK

# WORK-ON



COMPETENCIES ASSESSED AS AN AREA TO WORK-ON AT THE HIGHEST  
LEVEL OF COMPETITION, IN RELATION TO OTHER COMPETENCIES

# LOW PRIORITY



COMPETENCIES ASSESSED AS A LOW PRIORITY FOR  
THE NEXT COMPETITION AND TRAINING BLOCK

# NOT APPLICABLE



THESE ARE EITHER NOT APPLICABLE OR TO BE SORTED AT A LATER DATE



# MENTAL SKILLS<sup>©</sup>

— SORT CARDS —



## Performance Focus

- I am able to maintain my focus on doing what I need to do, regardless of the level of competition.
- In adversity, under pressure or following unexpected events, I will:
  - Acknowledge my thoughts and feelings in the moment.
  - Use strategies to actively manage my emotions and reactions (e.g., self-talk, imagery, affirmations).
  - Focus on the process, not the outcome.
  - Continue to communicate (through words and actions) positively and effectively.
  - Maintain my confidence.
  - Make rational decisions.

## Developing Performance Focus

### Experiment with ways to stay calm, manage focus and eliminate distractions

Feeling stressed or anxious affects your focus. Set up situations in training where you could get distracted (e.g., under fatigue, situational pressure).

In these situations, practice different strategies to stay present, e.g., breathing control, imagery or visualisation, cue or focus words, and/or thought dumping/stopping.

### Reflect on the consequences

Discuss with someone (a mentor or coach) what the outcomes and impacts of losing your composure are. Discuss high profile examples.

### Identify your triggers

Consider what triggers you away from focusing on the present. Build a plan to manage these, testing out how quickly you can refocus.

### Key moment planning

Focus is having less in your mind. Use a journal to identify and plan your focus for key moments that may arise. Quiz the consistent performers in tennis on their strategies. Evaluate your focus at training as well.

### Focus on what you can control

Draw a circle. Inside the circle write down everything about your performance that is within your control. Next, write down everything that is outside of your control outside of the circle. Observe and review how much time you spend thinking and worrying about things outside of your control.

### Become actively aware

Keep a journal/daily training diary in which you rate yourself every time you train or play. Simple daily evaluations are critical to improving your focus because you are building a habit of being consciously aware.



# Composure

- Cool under pressure.
- Does not become defensive or irritated when times are tough.
- Can be counted on to hold things together during tough times.
- Can handle stress.
- Is not knocked off balance by the unexpected.
- Doesn't show frustration when resisted or blocked.
- Continues to communicate positively and effectively under pressure.
- Maintains confidence.



## Developing Composure

### Reflect on the consequences

Discuss with someone (a mentor or coach) the outcomes and impacts of losing your composure. Discuss high profile examples.

### Experiment with ways to stay calm, manage focus and eliminate distractions

Feeling stressed or anxious affects your focus. Ask other athletes what they do to manage their mood and focus and stay calm in high-pressure situations. Experiment with different strategies, e.g., breathing control, routines, music, mental imagery or visualisation, cue or focus words, perceptual positioning (NLP) and/or thought dumping/thought stopping.

### 'Key moment' planning

Performance preparation is key to maintaining composure (*see performance preparation card*).

Write down key moments that might arise and plan what you need to focus on at this time. Assess key moments where you have been super composed or times you have lacked composure, and reflect on what you were thinking. Discuss these moments and the outcomes with a training partner or coach.

### 'What if' planning

Brainstorm some 'what if' scenarios with a mentor or coach and plan what reaction(s) you will have to each scenario so that you have pre-planned your responses.

### Focus on what you can control

Draw a circle. Inside the circle write down everything about your performance that is within your control/sphere of influence (e.g., your actions and attitudes). Next, write down everything that is outside of your control, outside of the circle. Observe and review how much time you spend thinking about and worrying about things on the outside. Practice focus activities.

*Also, see performance focus card.*



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# Team Values and Culture

- Aware of self and impact on others.
- Is a guardian (has kaitiaki) of team values (during both good times and bad times) and encourages others to do the same.
- Is widely trusted. Contributes to team feedback and is seen as a direct, truthful and humble individual.
- Respects and trusts the coaches/leaders, and shows confidence in others.
- Understands role in the team, is selfless, and willing to support the development of others.
- Doesn't misrepresent him/herself for personal gain.
- Can quickly sense what will help or hinder the team.
- Can see the bigger picture (i.e., not just where I am headed, but also where I come from).
- Has considered the whakapapa of the group (i.e., the story of the group, land, or water that we perform on).

## Developing Team Values and Culture

### Understanding our culture

- Has your team discussed how they are seen from the outside, and how they want to be seen?
- Has your team discussed what moments or events have created those perceptions and how you might go about changing them?
- Is everyone absolutely clear on what behaviours are expected within the 'desired' culture and which are not?
- Have you discussed scenarios and what you would be expected to do?
- Have you discussed consequences of falling short of expectations with the team?

- Does your team integrate team values into review and reflection of team performance? e.g., if courage is a team value, do the team use courage as a way to reflect on performances, or look for moments of courage on the field.

### Supporting the leaders

What feedback loops have been set up? How does the coach best receive your feedback? Discuss your ideas and observations with your coach, and work together to build the culture you desire. If you are a junior member of the group speak to someone you trust, who has the influence to take action.

### Reflecting on the past

Reflect on the times when you have known a behaviour was outside of what is expected. Reflect on what action you took and what your motivations were. Reflect on any barriers to taking action and how you would approach the situation in hindsight.

### Knowing why it's important

Have you drawn a clear line of sight between the impacts/consequences of not respecting team agreements and the success of individuals within the group?

### Using humble enquiry

If you see or hear something that doesn't sit right, try asking a humble question to check others' perceptions.



# Leadership

- A role-model in all things within the team/group, sport and community.
- Supports other individuals, especially young athletes to perform at a higher level.
- Communicates well, inspires through actions and words.
- Supports the coach(es) to build a team/group culture and vision; encouraging commitment to any team goals.
- Is a guardian of team values and contributes to team spirit.
- Is committed to what needs to be done.

## Developing Leadership

### Self-leadership

First and foremost, you are a leader of self. You have a responsibility to lead through your actions. Ask others how they perceive you and reflect on whether you are a role model to others. Are you committed and dedicated? Do you use initiative? Do you consistently demand excellence of yourself and others?

### Is leadership for you?

Do you see yourself as a leader? Just because you are a senior athlete, this doesn't mean that you have to take on a leadership role.

### Be conscious of your influence on others

If you are respected by others, you are a leader whether you are formally called a leader or not. Is your influence on others positive? Do you openly support the other leaders in the group, the coaches and management? Do you hold yourself accountable to the team/group/club's standards?

### Building connections

Build knowledge of others to form a deeper connection to them outside of sport. Seek to understand what they bring into the environment and where they come from. Think about how you are cultivating their sense of belonging and connectedness. Show you care.

### First steps

Talk with your coach about what opportunities there might be for you to take a leadership role. Start with small leadership responsibilities.

### Find role models

Identify some leaders that you know and respect. Research them or ask to meet with them to find out about their experiences as a leader.

### Encourage others to lead

Good leaders delegate and create space for others to show leadership too (sometimes all others need to show leadership is an invitation).



# ATHLETE LIFE<sup>®</sup>

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# Managing Time and Energy

- Concentrates on the most important priorities.
- Has structure within each day.
- Manages device/screen time.
- Uses a diary and/or calendar.
- Uses down time wisely to recharge my energy.
- Knows that priorities change at different times.
- Life is mostly stable and well balanced.
- Has friends and interests outside of sport that allow some variety, challenge and stimulation.
- Is OK with things outside of control.



## Managing my Time and Energy

### Noticing when things are out of balance

When things get out of balance, you may start to feel stressed or anxious. Do you know what behaviours others would see that reflect a healthy or unhealthy balance?

Reflect on your life balance weekly, and if you notice a series of low scores or downward trend over weeks, talk to someone trusted in your inner circle of support about what changes are needed.

### Plan your down time

Look at your schedule, and plan when you have spare time that you could use. Think about how best you can use this time to refresh mentally and physically.

### Set aside time to plan

Set aside time on a Sunday night to plan your week and then take 10 mins each morning to plan your priorities for the day.

### Examine how you spend your time

Is your life one-dimensional? Do you spend all of your time on tennis and only hang out with people related to tennis? Having another way to engage the brain, e.g., study, a job or interest, can help you stay fresh, continue to enjoy tennis, work towards a career after you retire, and provide perspective.

### Device time

Set limits for your device time and avoid screen time in the 30mins before sleep.

### Planning in and using breaks effectively

Look at whether you can plan a complete break in your annual programme. Use this time wisely to refresh; e.g., try something new, do something outside your comfort zone, meet new people. TIP: keep your fitness up during your break through cross training.

### Managing priorities

Write a list of everything you have to do in priority order. Look down your list and draw a line between the things you 'have to do' and the things that you can delete, defer, or delegate. Now set about 'managing' the things below the line to move them off your short term 'to-do' list.



# Future, Change, and Career Planning

- Has a plan for at least the next year (i.e., income source, living arrangements, sporting competition plans, etc.).
- If at school or studying, is actively preparing for the transition into part-time or full-time work.
- Knows what careers are of interest and is developing skills, experience and/or networks in this area.
- Has a transition plan for any upcoming changes.
- Has a strong support network to navigate through changes and support settling into new routines (may take six to 18 months).

## Tips for Future, Change and Career Planning

### Not sure what career you would like to follow?

- Write down your strengths/talents and what you are passionate about.
- Write down the times in your life you have been in flow (when everything has clicked and you've been in your element). Identify industries or the type of work you are interested in.
- List jobs in which your skills, passions and interests were being used.
- Research; have conversations with people you know in careers you are interested in.
- Consider study options to work towards a career pathway.

### Need a job that works in with tennis?

Make a list of the job parameters that would be ideal:

- How many hours per week?
- What days/times you would be available to work?
- How much flexibility you would need to attend competitions?

Identify jobs that may fit this profile. If you have no experience in this area, consider what work experience would support your application. Prepare your curriculum vitae and identify a list of people/businesses to approach. Search job advertisements.

### Building a network of support

- Make a list of the areas of your life you might need some help/support with (e.g. somewhere to live, finding a part-time job).
- Identify people in your current circle of support and ask them to make introductions to people who may be able to help you in these areas.
- Talk to other athletes who have followed a similar path, and ask them for help identifying people who may be useful connections during your change journey.
- Ask your regional or national sporting organisation for any contacts or relationships they have that may help you through your change journey.



# HEALTH

SORT CARDS



# Health

- Is consistently able to turn up to training and competitions healthy and ready to go (no ongoing sickness or health challenges).
- Has self-care routines to maintain health.
- Will proactively see the GP with any health concerns.
- Has a positive body image and healthy eating habits.
- Is able to manage health during travel, including adjusting to time zones and new sleep routines.
- Is able to train and compete at altitude and in heat within normal adaption expectations.
- No addictions (i.e., drugs, alcohol, gambling).

## Tips for Good Health

### General health, body image, addictions or mental health

If you have concerns, talk to someone in your trusted circle to support you to seek help from a GP, counsellor, or clinical psychologist.

### Sleep

If you are struggling with sleep, look at your sleep habits:

- Does your bedroom environment promote consistent, uninterrupted sleep?
- Do you have a stable sleep schedule?
- Is your bedroom comfortable and free of disruptions?
- Do you follow a relaxing pre-bed routine?
- Do you have healthy daily routines and habits that contribute to supporting your sleep?
- Do you know how much sleep you need?

Seek professional help if you are struggling with getting the right amount or quality of sleep.

### Build your knowledge

Identify someone in your circle of support that will have access to research and specialist knowledge on athlete-specific approaches to subjects such as travel, altitude, and heat.

*Also, see women's health, sleep and nutrition cards.*



# Women's Health

- Understands the importance of menstrual cycles and the role hormones play in recovery, bone, and overall health.
- Is knowledgeable about menstruation and what is normal.
- Knows when to ask for help in relation to pain, bleeding, or other menstruation symptoms. Feels confident to be able to manage symptoms well.
- Can identify the key markers for menstrual health and knows who to contact if she notices any problems.
- Understands that contraception is a choice and is well-informed about the full range of choices available. Knows where to seek help, and has the information and support to make contraception decisions.
- Is aware of common female health issues such as premenstrual syndrome, dysmenorrhea (very painful menstruation), menorrhagia (very frequent or heavy menstruation, amenorrhea (not starting periods until after age 16 or missing more than three periods in a row), endometriosis, and polycystic ovarian syndrome.
- Has positive support from coach/sport to talk about and manage women's health issues.

## Tips for Women's Health

### See your GP

Ask your GP or sports doctor for information on women's health issues related to sport. Did you know that endometriosis and polycystic ovarian syndrome affect around 10% of all women? Recent research has highlighted the prevalence of girl's and women's health concerns but also that they are under-recognised and under-reported. This means they are diagnosed late and the side effects and outcomes made worse. Don't put up with any negative symptoms which impact what you choose to do or how well you perform. Ask and seek support and help.

### Support from your coach/sport

If you have concerns about managing women's health issues in relation to performance or training expectations, identify someone within tennis or circle of support that can help you to get understanding and alignment with your health needs.

### Managing your whole health is key to menstrual health

Wellbeing is a balance of social, emotional, physical and mental health and together they are key to your performance as an athlete. Your menstrual cycle is sensitive to imbalances in your health. Keeping a 'balance' is critical to your cycle and hormones.

### Improve your menstrual health knowledge

Did you know that menstrual cycle hormones can affect metabolism, bone density, hydration, immune response, pain tolerance, body temperature, weight, muscle recovery, injury risk, mental health and many other aspects of health and performance? Get informed, and regain choice and power over your body.

Check out:

- HPSNZ website, WHISPA.
- Sport NZ balanced female health handbook and infographic, [sportnz.org.nz/balanced-female-health](https://sportnz.org.nz/balanced-female-health).
- Australian Institute of Sport, female performance initiative.





# PHYSICAL SKILLS<sup>©</sup>

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## Core Strength and Balance

- Maintains balance at the point of ball strike.
- Can keep balance to achieve maximal power output through legs.



## Developing Core Strength and Balance

Core strength and balance has different component parts, including:

- Balance – the ability to maintain equilibrium when stationary or moving (i.e., not to fall over) through the coordinated actions of our sensory functions (eyes, ears and the proprioceptive organs in our joints).
- Static Balance – the ability to retain the centre of mass above the base of support in a stationary position.
- Dynamic Balance – ability to maintain balance with body movement.
- Speed – the ability to move all or part of the body quickly.

- Strength – the ability of a muscle or muscle group to overcome resistance.
- Co-ordination – the ability to control the movement of the body in co-operation with the body's sensory functions e.g., catching a ball (ball, hand and eye co-ordination).

Getting your timing right requires repetitive practice, video analysis and body awareness.

### **Ideas for training, core strength and balance:**

- Aim to improve the component parts of core strength and balance (listed above) individually or in combination.
- Design high agility training exercises that require excellent timing, lunging,

change of direction, balance and co-ordination.

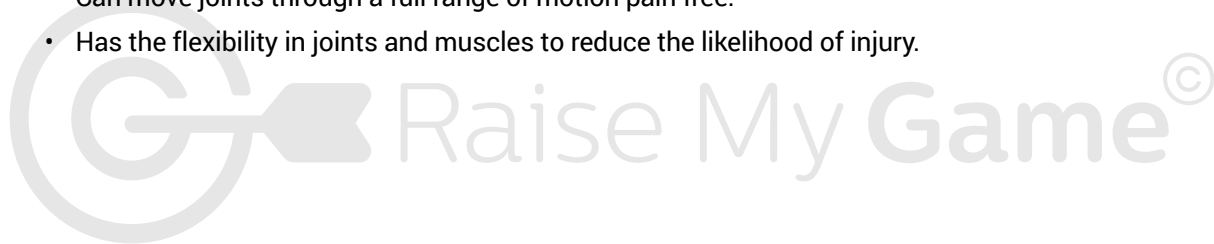
- Add in 10 mins of ladder or cone work before your existing sessions (as a guide, a time of less than 2.8 seconds for males and 3.4 seconds for females for running the length of a 20-rung ladder, one foot in each rung at a time, is considered as excellent for senior athletes).

*Also, see speed development and agility card.*



## Range of Movement

- Can stretch and move to reach the ball in all areas of the court.
- Can move joints through a full range of motion pain free.
- Has the flexibility in joints and muscles to reduce the likelihood of injury.



## Developing Range of Movement

Flexibility is the ability of your muscles and other connective tissues to stretch temporarily.

Mobility is the ability of your joints to move freely through a range of motion in a pain-free way.

### Developing flexibility

Include stretching in your daily routine. Once you are warmed up use dynamic stretching prior to your competition, and static stretching after a competition. Target areas of your body that most need it.

### Progression

Make sure the muscle overload is progressive.

### Warm-up

Develop a short routine of breathwork and dynamic stretching prior to training, strength sessions and games that works for you.

### Warm-down

Develop a routine of static stretching following training, strength sessions and games. Make sure you hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds.

### Breathing

Proper breathing is an important part of all exercise, especially stretching. The foundation of breath work, diaphragmatic breathing, is intended to help you breathe more effectively and with less energy. It also engages and strengthens your diaphragm and core muscles. If your diaphragm and core aren't strong, stretching and strength training will be more difficult.



# TECHNICAL SKILLS<sup>®</sup>

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# Attacking and Finishing

- Recognises attacking opportunities early and uses correct footwork patterns to take the ball early and maximise options.
- Is able to effectively move opponent out of the centre of the court through a broad range of shots: attacking down the line, angles and dropshots.
- Is competent at taking the ball out of the air and finishing points at the net – drive volleys, volleys, smashes.

## Developing Attacking and Finishing

### Mastery

Skill development is about repetitive practice of each different shot (e.g., drive volleys, volleys, smashes, dropshots, etc.), whilst managing your training loads without getting injured.

### Analysing construction of a point

Seek to understand the construction of the point in terms of court positioning, decision-making, timing, balance, and technical skill execution, in order to set up a winner, by:

- Using video analysis.
- Asking specialists to review your technique.
- Watching videos of the best in the world.

### Use targets

In training, set target areas of the court that you are aiming to hit within, set goals and then measure % success rate.

### Confidence in all shots

Identify any shots you have less confidence in and consider how you can add in extra practice of these shots under pressure.

### Choice of training opponent

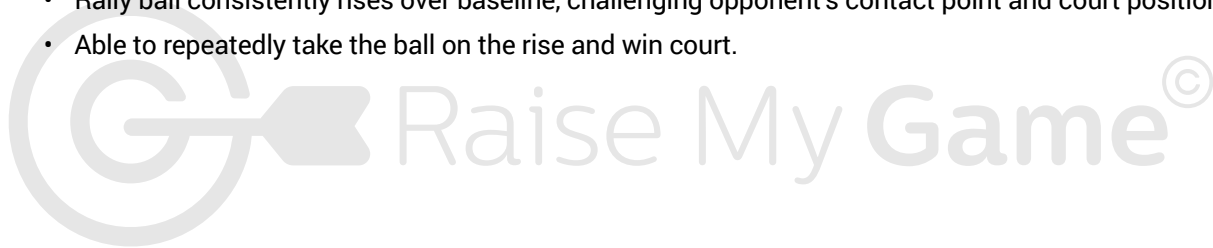
Choose a training opponent that can force you to practice attacking and finishing under pressure.





# Rallying and Building

- Able to rally consistently with speed, depth and spin to all areas of the court.
- Rally ball consistently rises over baseline, challenging opponent's contact point and court position.
- Able to repeatedly take the ball on the rise and win court.



## Developing Rallying and Building

### **Mastery**

Skill development is about repetitive practice of each different shot, whilst managing your training loads without getting injured.

### **Analysing the technical skill**

Analyse your technical execution during rallies (e.g., timing, hitting the ball on the rise, speed, depth and spin), by:

- Using video analysis.
- Asking specialists to review your technique.
- Watching videos of the best in the world.

### **Measuring outcomes**

Use area targets in training, e.g., to measure and track accuracy when aiming to hit deep into the opponent's court.

Use speed radars to measure and track return speeds. Set goals and then measure % success rate.

### **Confidence in all shots**

Identify any shots you have less confidence in, and consider how you can add in extra practice of these shots under pressure.

### **Choice of training opponent**

Choose a training opponent that can force you to practice rallying under pressure.



# TACTICS

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## Game Plan

- Has a clear game plan that reflects their game style and utilises their strengths to expose the opponent's weaknesses. Strengths and weaknesses are not limited to tennis shots and physicality but should also include character traits (e.g., patience, grit etc).
- Is able to play their primary gameplan on all surfaces, in all conditions, with appropriate adjustments where needed.
- Maintains a scouting journal with notes on past matches and potential future opponents to inform future game plans.

## Developing your Game Plan

### Analyse opposition

Watch live matches or videos of games played by your opponents, analyse their strengths, weaknesses, game plan, and decisions. Keep a scouting journal from your analysis and matches played.

### Analyse self

Ensure you understand your own strengths and weaknesses on different surfaces, and in different conditions. Knowledge could be gathered through analysis of both your training and matches.

### Formulating the plan

Discuss the plan with your coach until you have 100% confidence in it. Consider if there are any aspects of your game plan you can prepare for during your training week.

### Game debrief

Review implementation of the game plan with the coach including your decisions to stick with, or change the game plan. Keep notes on what you learnt to refer back to.

### Learn from history

Become a student of the game. Watch videos of games played, analyse the strategy and decisions made. Read books and talk to former players to pick their brains.



# Tactical Awareness

- Understands the highly important difference between shot selection and execution and knows what to change after mistakes.
- Understands the five phases of play (Attacking/Finishing, Building, Rallying, Neutralising/Defending, Counterattacking) and chooses the most appropriate shots and level of risk for each situation.
- Understands patterns of play and knows which areas of the court to play into, to receive a ball to their strength, or to make it difficult for the opponent to play to their weakness.

## Developing Tactical Awareness

### Training scenarios

Practice using game scenarios (e.g., up or down a break) to develop decision-making around shot selection in the five different phases of play.

### Learn from mentors/senior players

Analyse tactical decision-making with a coach, mentor or senior player following your own matches or others' matches. Keep notes on what you learnt, to refer back to.

### Learn from history

Become a student of the game. Watch videos of games played, analyse the tactics, decisions made, and whether you would have made the same decision(s). Read books and talk to former players to pick their brains on game strategies.

