

June Issue, 2000

NORTH CAROLINA Tennis Today

9, NO. 5

North Carolina's Tennis Magazine

PRICE: \$2.00

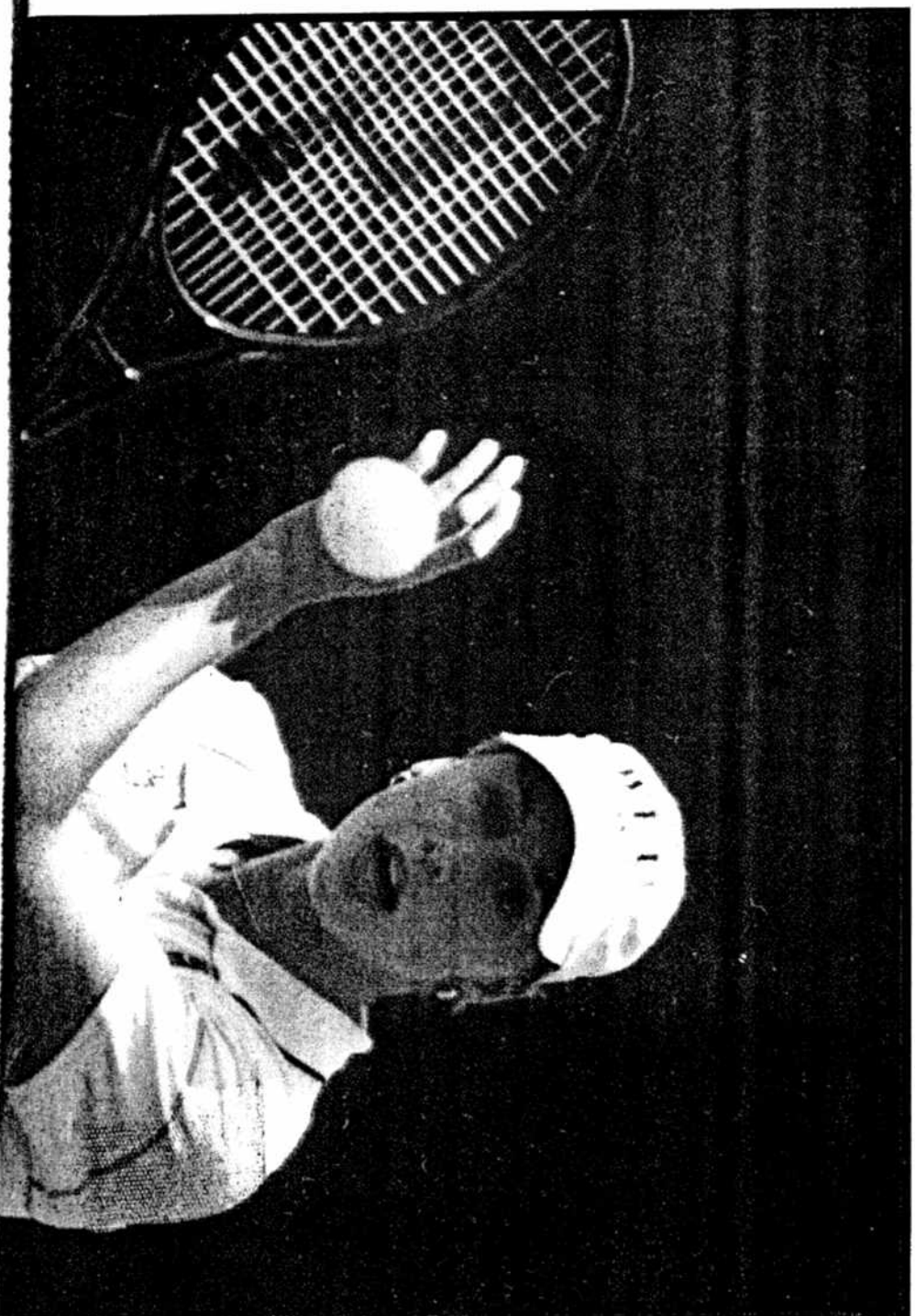
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Reaction Time & Anticipation Timing Important For All Players

By Mike Kernodle

What are anticipation timing and reaction time and how are they related to the sport of tennis? Anticipation is a situation that requires a player to coordinate a movement in response to a stimulus. In the sport of tennis it is the ability of a player to react to what is occurring on the other side of the net and react rapidly and accurately. Reaction time is the interval of time between the presentation of a stimulus and the beginning of a movement.



Mike Kernodle

In other words, how long does it take to figure out what the opponent has done and be- to move to get into position to hit incoming ball. Andre Agassi and Jimmy Connors arguably have two of the best returns in the history of tennis. Much of their success may be due to their ability to read the opponent's toss or movement of the ball by picking out subtle cues that allow them to anticipate what is going to happen and react more rapidly.

Pete Sampras and Goran Ivanisevic surely have two of the most difficult serves to return in the business. Pete was taught from an early age to use the same toss for all of his serves which effectively eliminates any potential cues making it very difficult for an opponent to anticipate the serve.

tennis ball).

However, these are all elite athletes. Can anticipation and reaction time be applied to other skill levels? Absolutely!! With a basic understanding of these two principles you can make very positive strides towards becoming a better tennis player and/or coach. The following information contains suggestions as to how one might utilize this knowledge to anticipate, react and win and some questions to ask when searching for a teaching professional.

"Martina Hingis is a master at disguising the direction of her ground strokes and establishing patterns of play to lull the opponent into complacency....."

Recognize that the more predictable the opponent is in their tendencies and patterns, the easier it will be to anticipate what they are going to do and react more rapidly and accurately. Also, keep in mind that if your tendencies and patterns are predictable the opponent will anticipate and react more rapidly and accurately.

environmental conditions (different court surfaces, wind, sun, style of play, etc.) (C) Will the pro take the time to sit with you while watching other people play and teach you to recognize relevant tendencies and patterns? (D) Will the pro demonstrate and explain the benefits of establishing a specific pattern of play on purpose and then faking out the opponent by suddenly switching to a different pattern?

For example, you might begin a point with a cross court down the line pattern and then suddenly hit down the line twice in a row; or hit a number of inside out forehands followed suddenly by a down the line forehand.

As the number of stimulus/response choices increases reaction time becomes slower. If a player can hit a wide variety of serves (slice, flat, kick) using a wide variety of speeds with the ability to place the ball anywhere in the service box, the opponent will be much slower to react than if only one speed and spin with limited placement is available. This is why the skill of picking out relevant cues and/or hiding your own cues is extremely important to success in tennis.

If you can watch your opponents service motion and toss and pick up cues that will inform you of spin and placement it will reduce the number of choices you have to make allowing you to react more rapidly and accurately. Conversely, if you can eliminate cues from your game your opponent will have to react to more stimuli and this will result in a slower reac-

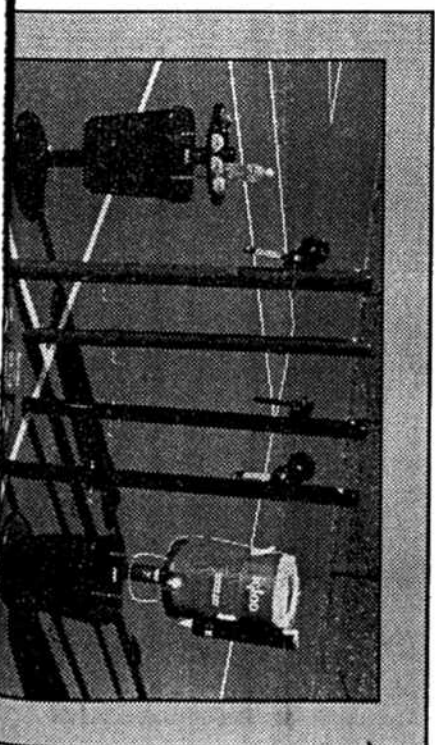
player becomes overly aroused, the visual field will narrow which can greatly reduce the ability to pick out relevant cues. In other words, if you become too excited you will get tunnel vision and have a reduced visual field.

Keep in mind there is an optimal arousal level and attaining that level is individual specific. This means that some people are naturally at the appropriate arousal level and will be fine in competition, some are naturally at a relatively high level of arousal and need to be calmed, while some are at a very low level of arousal and need to be stimulated. Much of this information is covered in several of the books by the well-known sports psychologist, Dr. Jim Loehr, but tennis professionals should be well-versed in the concept as it is an integral part of on-court performance.

In summary, if you can learn to pick up cues from your opponent, eliminate

or hide cues in your game, recognize predictable patterns of play in your opponent while refraining from being predictable yourself, establish predictable patterns on purpose with the idea of suddenly deviating from the pattern, and maintain a manageable level of arousal; you will become adept at anticipating, and reacting. This should result in winning more points and matches. Good Luck!

Michael Kernodle is an USPTA Master Professional and an Assistant Professor in Motor Learning and Motor Development at Appalachian State University. During his seven-year tenure as Appalachian State's men's tennis coach he guided the team to a Southern Conference Championship in 1996 and was named the USPTA Southern Division College Coach of the Year in 1994. Dr. Kernodle is also a member of both the USTA and the ITA (Intercollegiate Tennis Association) sports science committees.



Pete Sampras and **Goran Ivanisevic** have two of the most difficult serves to return in the business. Pete was taught from an early age to use the same toss for all of his serves which effectively eliminates many potential cues making it very difficult for an opponent to anticipate the flight path and/or spin of the ball. Ivanisevic has a somewhat unorthodox service motion, not unlike **Roscoe Tanner** or **Kevin Curren**, which also makes his serve very difficult to read. **Martina Hingis** is a master at disguising the direction of her ground strokes and establishing patterns of play to lull the opponent into complacency until she suddenly deviates from that pattern to win the point. These are all examples of how the ability or inability to anticipate can affect the speed and accuracy of one's reaction to a stimulus (for our purposes, beginning a movement to intercept an incoming

Recognize that the more predictable the opponent is in their tendencies and patterns, the easier it will be to anticipate what they are going to do and react more rapidly and accurately. Also, keep in mind that if your tendencies and patterns are predictable the opponent will anticipate and react more rapidly and accurately.

If you are in the market to take lessons to work on your game do some research and ask some questions. (A) Does the teaching professional have a reputation for using teaching progressions oriented towards reducing the predictability of their students strokes? (B) Will the pro use appropriate drills, videotape replay, and competitive game-play situations to help you reduce the likelihood of using the same ball placement pattern all of the time? This might also include designing practice sessions during which you should be forced to deal with variable

service motion. The toss and pick up cues that will help you in you of spin and placement it will reduce the number of choices you have to make allowing you to react more rapidly and accurately. Conversely, if you can eliminate cues from your game your opponent will have to react to more stimuli and this will result in a slower reaction time.

Once again, your teaching professional can have a positive impact. (A) Ask them to help train you to pick out cues by spending time with you watching film of other players, and provide feedback on the court while you play practice sets or during competitive drills. (B) Watch films of yourself to find cues that your opponent could use to react more effectively and try to eliminate those cues. (C) Ask the pro to discuss and explain the negative effects of becoming overly aroused (wired, psyched up, pumped). If a

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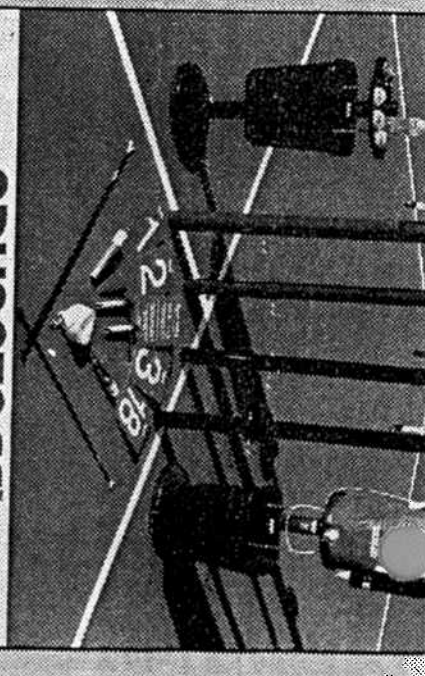
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