

WIN IN THE WIND

7 tips on playing better tennis in the wind

By Allistair McCaw (Performance tennis trainer)

It's a fact, you can't control the weather, but you certainly can control how you are going to prepare and have a game plan for it!

Playing in the wind can be one of the most frustrating things for a player. The first and most important element in playing well in the wind is not to get frustrated. It's about dealing with the conditions better than your opponent. In other words how you approach it mentally and being better prepared can be the difference between winning and losing.

Here are my 7 key steps to playing better in the wind:

1. STAY CALM

Let me start with this: If you don't make friends with the wind, the wind will always beat you - period. By staying calm you will be able to make clearer choices and decisions on court.

Also when you can show that you are dealing with the conditions better, you won't be giving anything away to your opponent.

2. READ THE DIRECTION OF THE WIND

Just like a pilot is always checking for weather changes and wind patterns whilst flying, so to should a player whilst playing. On court you need to analyze the direction and changes of the wind and be able to adjust your game plan and tactics accordingly.

3. PLAY SMARTER & TAKE LESS RISKS

Stay a little more conservative to the placement of your shots and don't take unnecessary risks like aiming for the lines. Bring your targets more inside the court. Playing smarter in the wind is going to give you a bigger chance of winning matches. I have characterized 4 different types of wind conditions and the approach you should take to playing in the wind:

1. Playing against the wind:

You need to obviously hit harder to play deeper with the wind against you, but stay smart by mixing it up a bit by playing a slice backhand for example.

2. Playing with the wind:

Here the common problem amongst players is 'overhitting' their shots. To avoid this 'stay in the legs' (get lower) and get under your ball. Playing with topspin allows your ball to lift and dip instead of a flatter ball flying further. Also the slice can be very effective with a backwind.

3. Playing with a side wind:

This is where good footwork comes in as the ball will either be moving away from you or towards you, so small adjustments steps are necessary to get into a good position. Secondly keeping the ball in the court by bringing your hitting targets inside more will eliminate you taking risks and making unnecessary unforced errors.

4. Playing in a swirling wind:

Probably the most difficult of the four wind types as the wind can move the ball all over the place, so good footwork and positioning are key, but by playing your balls down the middle of the court takes away the risk element and makes your opponent play another ball.

4. BECOME MORE PHYSICALLY STRONGER

I'm sure you have cycled head on into a gusting wind and felt how much energy you use up, right? Well the same counts for playing tennis in the wind, especially against it. By playing in windy conditions, you spend and exert more energy by having to serve harder and play deeper balls.

You can have great technique and skills but if your tank is empty after a set then winning matches in the wind is going to be a tough call.

One very important extra here, stay well hydrated and eat on court. Just like a car use more gas driving into a headwind, so to does the body burn up more energy, so keep yourself well fueled!

5. IMPROVE YOUR FOOTWORK

One of the areas that I have focused on with Michaella Krajicek (*see photo*) is improving her footwork. With playing in the wind you need to quickly react with smaller steps to constantly make adjustments. The reason why you may 'mishit' a shot in the wind comes down to poor positioning and timing. Hitting the ball perfectly is about having your body in the right position. Good footwork enables you to be in the best position, so work on it.

6. PRACTISE MORE IN THE WIND

Simply put, to become a better player in the heat you have to play in hotter weather, so to, it is the same with being a better player in the wind – you need to practice more the wind!

I have seen it first hand working with players who actually prefer to plan their training when conditions are best (cooler and no wind) – BIG MISTAKE!

Those of you who play competition, unfortunately can't always choose when to play your matches, so get used to all conditions.

Dinara Safina (*photo*) was one such player I have worked with in the past who strongly disliked playing in the wind, but after becoming more physically stronger and learning to use the conditions to her favor, she is now a top 5 player in the world.

7. ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

Just like everything else in life, having a positive attitude towards playing in the wind can certainly improve your chances of performing better in it.

Together with a good attitude, being physically stronger and having a game plan gives you the confidence that you can handle anything the wind or your opponent throws at you.

Remember: stay calm, remain positive, have a plan and make the wind your friend!