

Make the Wind Your Friend on Court

By Curly Davis



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In many areas of the country, this is the time of year players are moving from indoor tennis to outdoor tennis; from playing in conditions where the weather isn't a factor, to playing where the weather—specifically, windy conditions—can wreak havoc with the flight of the ball.

We all dislike playing in windy conditions, but when we play outside, we have no control over the weather. The wind takes the ball in a direction we had no intention for it to go. But

there are some things you can do to counteract the influence of the wind on your shots, and make your time playing in windy conditions a bit more enjoyable.

And remember, the wind is a great neutralizer; it doesn't care if you're the No. 1 seed or not. If you have a windy day and you're playing against a stronger opponent, the wind may play mayhem with the stronger player, neutralizing their strengths and giving you a better chance for the upset.

Spins

With the wind, hit topspin.

When the wind is at your back, gusting from behind you, the ball will carry farther than you intend. To counter this and keep your shots from landing long on your opponent's side, you need to put more topspin on the ball. Topspin will work against the effect the wind has on the ball, by pulling it down into the court.

Position

Wind in your face, give plenty of space.

Wind at your back, depth the opponent's shot will lack.

When the wind is in your face, your opponent's shot will be coming at you deeper and quicker. By positioning yourself farther back, it will give you more time to "read" where his or her shot will land.

Conversely, when the wind is at your back, you will need to position yourself closer to the baseline. Your opponent's shots will be "butting" up against the oncoming wind, resulting in a shorter landing ball on your side. By positioning yourself closer to the baseline you will not find yourself charging at the ball at the last instant.

Cross-Court Winds

Down the middle solves the riddle.

When you are playing in a cross-court wind, it's difficult to calculate the effect the wind will have on the ball flight, particularly when hitting down the line. So as to not worry about the wind's effect on the ball, aim for the middle of the court. You'll increase your margin of error and give the ball more room to land in your opponent's court, rather than risk it going wide.

Serve

Power vs. spin when playing in the wind.

Here are a few tips when serving on windy days:

- Lower your ball toss. The wind plays havoc with ball tosses. To give the wind less opportunity to move your service toss around, don't toss the ball as high as you normally would.
- When serving into the wind, don't waste your energy attempting to deliver power on the serve. The wind in your face will "kill" the power.
- When serving in a cross-court wind, go with the wind. If the wind is blowing from right to left, then spin the ball to where the wind will help assist the movement of the ball.

Shot Selections

Touch shots are tough shots.

When attempting "touch" shots, lobs or drop shots on windy days, you must know the direction the wind is gusting. A touch shot doesn't have power, thus the ball won't cut-through the wind, allowing the wind to have more influence on the flight. A few coaching tips:

- Drop Shots: A good drop shot will be a bad drop shot when the wind is at your back. With the wind gusting from behind you, the ball will be carried deeper in the opponent's court than you planned, making it easier for your opponent to react and get to your shot. But, when the wind is gusting into your face, a bad drop shot will be a good drop shot because the wind will stop the ball quicker and drop it into the court, making it land shorter, closer to the net. For this same reason, if the wind is cross-court, then drop-shot into the wind.

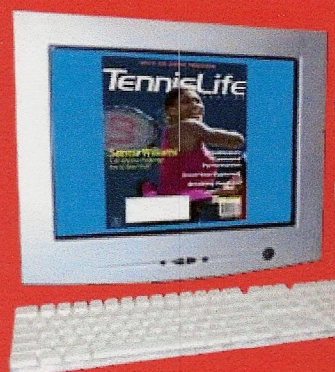
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● Lobbing into the wind: It's important to feel the strength of the wind in your face to know how hard to hit your lob. My advice is to not be afraid to hit the lob out—give the shot enough power, and know that the wind will help keep the ball in the court.

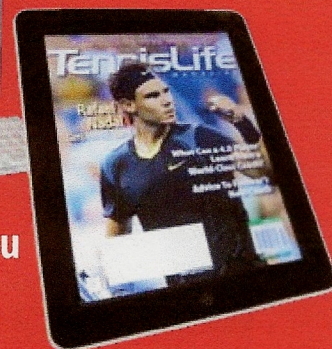
● Lobbing with the wind: Again, the strength of the wind behind you is important to know. A strong wind will require you to only pick the ball straight up and let the wind carry it to the opponent's court. In short, you don't send it forward; you let the wind do that. ☺

Longtime tennis teaching pro and academy director **Curly Davis** is the owner and director of the **Curly Davis International Tennis Camp** in Naples, Fla. For more information, visit www.curlydavistennis.com.

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