

## Move up a level 2.5 – 3.0

### Get your first serve in

Match statistics at every level show that you have a much greater likelihood of winning the point when you get your first serve in play. Opponents at every skill level can more easily put you on the defensive when they can play a second serve. Stay away from trying to win points with a big serve, especially if you just get your second serve in the court. Remember, you are only as good as your second serve.

If you can hit a high percentage of first serves to your opponents weakest side, you should win a high percentage of points

### Find your strike zone

You are still working on developing consistent and solid forehand and backhand ground strokes and volleys. If your contact point is different every time you hit the ball, chances are your strokes will be also. Try to position yourself on the court so that you are hitting the ball in your strike zone. When the ball is in that strike zone, you will have your best chance of doing exactly what you want to do. You can hit your shots confidently with more power, spin and with better direction.

### Learn to direct your shots

The singles court is 27 feet wide. If you divide the court into thirds, or nine foot sections, you can use those sections to direct your shots away from your opponent and still have a large margin of safety. When moving your opponent or opening up the court, there is no need to hit for the lines. You can play offensively by hitting the outside thirds of the court and move your opponent from side to side, or simply hit to their weakest side. If you are in trouble, play the smart and safe shot by hitting into the middle third of the court.

### Work on grips and preparation

The best strokes in the world are of little value if they are hurried or rushed. React to the ball the instant it leaves your opponent's racquet. Learn to change to the correct grip as soon as you turn to the forehand or backhand side and make it your goal to be completely prepared for your stroke by the time the ball lands on your side of the court. Give

yourself the best chance of playing your very best shot by preparing your grip as you move to the ball, be set for your forward swing by the time the ball lands on the court and hit the ball in that comfortable strike zone every time.

## Join a team so you can grow and practice together

You will improve much faster if you have a group of people you can play and practice. If you join a team, you automatically have a group with a similar ability level to practice and play. It is not only more fun to play on a team, the group will most likely have people with different styles, strengths and weaknesses. The more of these styles you see and are comfortable with, the more success you will have in match play.

## Play at least once a week

It is difficult to improve if you play infrequently. You have a better chance of improving if you play at least once a week. Playing on a team or in a league will provide you with a set time each week to play a competitive match. If you want to improve at a faster rate, play two or more times a week

## Play in a tournament

Nothing beats the experience of playing in a tournament. When you enter a tournament you practice with more intensity and play with a better focus. Seek out tournaments that are flighted to your ability level. Playing tournaments gives you an opportunity to play people with different styles. Figuring out how to adjust and adapt is a fun part of the game.

Signing up for a tournament gives you an event and date to prepare for. Your preparation before the experience of playing competitive matches will raise the level of your game at a rapid rate. The experience you gain by playing tournaments will increase your confidence and make you “match tough.”

## Simple drills to move you from a 2.5 to a 3.0 player

The easiest drill is to go to the court and serve a basket of balls to different targets on the court. Serving to both ad and deuce courts, see if you can hit targets that would take your opponent out wide - close to the sideline, or down the center.

Develop consistency, timing and control by using a backboard or wall. In a position not too far away from the wall, hit ten forehands in a row with moderate speed and ample height. Do the same on the backhand side. Then do ten in a row alternating forehands and backhands. After you are successful, you can increase the difficulty by moving back a few steps and repeating this sequence.

With a partner, try to rally over the net aiming all shots in the doubles alley. This is difficult, so make this drill easier by starting at the service line and gradually moving back once you can comfortably sustain a rally. Try this by using all forehands then all backhands.

If you don't like to practice, but love to play, than play more. Don't beat yourself up about not practicing. At your level, the more you play, the faster you will improve, especially if you play a variety of people. Compete against players at a higher level who will challenge you, and people at a lower level so you learn how to win.

## Equipment tips

Finding the right racquet will help your game in the long run. I would suggest that you start with an oversized racquet because it will allow you to get more balls back in the court. The longer strings are also more forgiving on your arm.

A good reference point is to string your racquet near the middle of the manufacturers recommended range. If you have compact strokes and let your racquet supply the power, drop the string tension for more power. If you take a full or loopy swing, increase the tension for greater control.

Change grips or overgrips frequently to give you the best feel. Experiment to discover which you prefer - a tacky grip or the dry, absorbent type.

A higher gauge (thinner) string is lighter and gives you more “bite” on the ball, which is especially beneficial when adding spin to your shots. As you might expect, thinner strings will wear faster and break sooner than a thicker and heavier string. I would recommend the thinnest string available for greatest playability if you are not prone to breaking strings.