



## **The Art of Adaptation: Tactics and Drills to Counter All Styles of Play**

Developing a game plan against different tennis playing styles involves a blend of strategic preparation, a positive mindset, and in-match adaptation. Below are the styles you will most likely face on your competitive road.

### **Primary Play Styles:**

- Steady Baseline – Relies on you making the mistake
- Aggressive Baseline – Relies on their power to force errors
- All Court Player – Relies on their strengths in all areas of the court
- Serve & Volley Player – Relies on their serve and quick approach to the net
- Counter Puncher- Relies on their strengths to use your power against you

### **Sub-Play Styles**

- Runner/Pusher
- Drop shot/Lobber
- Slicer/Hacker
- Moon Baller

Understanding the diverse styles of competitive tennis players is crucial for developing effective strategies and tactics to face any opponent across the net.

Each style presents unique challenges; a steady baseliner will test your patience and consistency, while an aggressive baseliner will pressure your defensive skills. An all-court player's versatility demands adaptability, and a serve-and-volleyer challenges your passing shots and lobs under time pressure. Facing a counterpuncher requires you to be deliberate and thoughtful with shot selection to avoid playing into their hands.

Recognizing these styles and having a game plan (strategy and tactics) for each is crucial, and the real differentiator is mindset and mental toughness. It enables you to stay focused, manage mistakes and frustration, adapt under pressure, and maintain the strategic discipline needed to counteract your opponent's strengths while exploiting their weaknesses.

The following pages describe the various play styles and potential tactics and drills to practice to help you counter the style of players you will face. Remember that the following tactics are to get you thinking about playing proactively and are by no means the only tactics that can be implemented.

## Steady Baseliner

A steady baseliner in tennis is a player who excels at rallying from the back of the court, often near the baseline. This player typically demonstrates consistent groundstrokes with minimal unforced errors, relying on patience and endurance to outlast opponents in long points. They prefer to engage in exchanges from the baseline, using depth and precision to keep opponents at bay. Steady baseliners often have a strong defensive game. They can hit with topspin to control the ball's trajectory and wait for the right opportunity to construct points and force errors from their opponents. Rather than overpowering with sheer force, they wear down their adversaries with tenacity, patience, and strategic placement.

### Tactics to Use Against a Steady Baseliner:

1. **Change of Pace and Spin:** Break the baseliner's rhythm by mixing heavy topspin with slice and flat shots.
2. **Depth and Angles:** Keep the baseliner moving by hitting deep shots to push them back and angled shots (short and deep) to move them side to side.
3. **Attack the Net:** Approach the net to finish points quickly before the baseliner settles into a groove, forcing them to hit passing shots.
4. **Use the Drop Shot:** Introduce drop shots to bring the baseliner forward, disrupting their comfort zone at the back of the court.
5. **Increase Your Shot Tolerance:** Neutralize their baseline game by enhancing baseline consistency integrated with depth and the ability to move the ball from side to side.

### Drills to Practice These Tactics:

1. **Pace and Spin Drill:**
  - **Objective:** Practice changing the pace and spin of your shots.
  - **Drill:** Have a partner or coach feed balls to you at the baseline. Alternate between hitting topspin, flat, and slice shots to various target areas. Aim to maintain consistency while changing the spin on every shot.
2. **Deep Shot and Angle Drill:**
  - **Objective:** Improve your ability to hit deep shots and create angles.
  - **Drill:** Mark out target areas in the back corners and angles of the court. Rally with a partner or coach, focusing on hitting five deep balls followed by an angled shot to various targets.
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### 3. Approach and Volley Drill:

- **Objective:** Develop confidence in approaching the net and volleying.
- **Drill:** Begin with a baseline rally, then approach the net on a short ball to execute a volley. Repeat this sequence, focusing on split-step timing and placing your volleys to target areas as you approach. Include practice moving through the first volley as well as drop volleys.

### 4. Drop Shot Drill:

- **Objective:** Master the touch and timing for effective drop shots.
- **Drill:** From the baseline, engage in a rally, and on a signal from your coach or partner, execute a drop shot. Work on disguising the drop shot until the last moment. Practice using both forehand and backhand drop shots

### 5. Return of Serve Drill:

- **Objective:** Enhance the depth and precision of your return of serves.
- **Drill:** Have a coach or partner hit serves to you while you focus on returning the ball deep down the middle or to marked target areas. Practice on both first and second serves to simulate match conditions.

### 6. Increase Your Shot Tolerance Drill:

- **Objective:** Enhance your groundstrokes' consistency, depth, and precision to implement a play pattern and create an opportunity shot.
- **Drill:** With coach or partner, strive for five groundstrokes past the service line with a pattern of play (e.g., 3 to the backhand side, 1 to forehand to pull wide, 1 to the open backhand side).

## Aggressive Baseline Tennis Player:

An aggressive baseliner is a type of tennis player who thrives on power and depth, dominating play from the back of the court. They excel in generating forceful groundstrokes, often aiming for the lines to push their opponents back and control the point. This player is typically confident in their forehand and backhand drives, using these shots as weapons to dictate rallies. They prefer to take the ball early on the rise, reducing their opponent's reaction time. While they can deliver impressive winners, their style can sometimes lead to higher unforced errors, especially when pressured or when their rhythm is disrupted.

## Tactics Against an Aggressive Baseline Player:

1. **High and Deep Balls:** Counter their power by sending high, deep balls to push them beyond their comfort zone at the baseline.
2. **Slice and Variety:** Use slice shots and varied spins to disrupt their timing and force them to adjust their aggressive swings.
3. **Target the Weakness:** Identify and exploit weaker strokes, often the backhand, to create opportunities and reduce their attacking options.

4. **Absorb and Redirect Pace:** Utilize their pace against them by blocking or redirecting the ball to different parts of the court, especially if they have less mobility. Learning to hit on the rise will aid significantly in this tactic.
5. **Bring Them to the Net:** Aggressive baseliners prefer the back of the court, so use short slices or drop shots to bring them forward and force them to play a volley, which may be outside their comfort zone.

## Drills to Practice These Tactics:

### 1. High and Deep Ball Drill:

- **Objective:** Enhance your ability to hit high, deep balls consistently.
- **Drill:** Rally with a partner or coach, focusing on hitting every shot with a high trajectory, aiming for the area between the service and baseline. Use topspin to control the depth and keep the ball in play.

### 2. Slice and Spin Control Drill:

- **Objective:** Improve your slice shots and introduce spin variations.
- **Drill:** Alternate hitting topspin and slice shots from the baseline. Aim for consistency and depth, and practice disguising your slice until the last moment. Work on heavy topspin short angles near the service box corner.

### 3. Backhand Target Practice Drill:

- **Objective:** Practice targeting your opponent's weaker side.
- **Drill:** Engage in crosscourt rallies, aiming for your partner's backhand (or forehand, if that's their weaker shot). The partner or coach should try to maintain a consistent rally, providing you with realistic practice.

### 4. Pace Absorption Drill:

- **Objective:** Get comfortable with absorbing and redirecting fast-paced shots and become proficient in taking balls on the rise.
- **Drill:** Have a coach or hitting partner deliver fast-paced shots to you. Practice blocking the ball back deep or redirecting it crosscourt with minimal backswing. Practice standing inside the baseline to hit more balls on the rise.

### 5. Bring Them to The Net Drill:

- **Objective:** Develop your touch with drop shots and follow up with lobs to practice bringing the aggressive baseliner to the net and then pushing them back.
- **Drill:** Start a baseline rally and intermittently introduce a drop shot to bring your partner or coach to the net. Once they reach the net and return the ball, use a lob to send them back. This helps you practice the transition from a finesse shot to a defensive lob. You should also practice a topspin (offensive) lob.