

What is Sport-Specific Training?

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Training for Performance Series

“Why are there no bicep curls?” This is a question I often hear from my clients. I tell them that they are training for function and performance, and for most people, bicep curls do not fit the bill. If you are a Bavarian waitress, then yes, you should do bicep curls. For almost everyone else, I do not recommend them. Strong arms are important, but equally important is having strong legs, a strong core, and the ability to transfer force from the legs, through the core, to the arms.

Understanding this is the key to understanding sport-specific training, which is a subset of functional training. We train movements instead of muscles; and we build a foundation of mobility, stability, strength, power, speed and endurance that supports your movements. We also train movements similar to those in your activity; and some that are the opposite of those in your activity to prevent overuse injuries.

Let's look at tennis for specifics. The obvious movement in tennis is the swing, which is usually performed with one arm (forehand and serve at

least). But the power in a tennis swing comes from the legs and core, not just the arm. A great stroke requires the athlete to 'stiffen' the core so that power can be transferred and amplified from the legs, through the core, through the arm, and to the racket.



If the core is not strong, then the energy from the legs will not reach the racket, and the resultant stroke will be weak. How do we strengthen the core and upper body to improve this energy transfer? Cable chops and lifts, side planks, one arm cable pushes and pulls, inverted rows, pullups, and pushups are all great options.

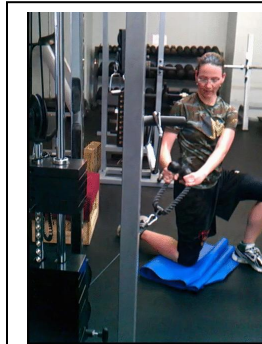
What about the other arm? A right-handed tennis player does not use the left arm very much, so would sport-specific training mean we disregard it? Definitely not! We may focus even more on the left arm to avoid muscular imbalances. Allowing the left side to remain untrained while the right side gets strong will almost certainly lead to back and neck problems for a tennis player.

The second thing we notice with tennis players is that they have quick and explosive steps on the court. I would tend to argue that leg strength is more important than arm strength in tennis. The swing is irrelevant if you cannot get to the ball. Tennis players need to have strong legs so that they can move quickly in any direction and then stop and change directions quickly. Leg strength for tennis players should involve some form of squat, which is really the basic stance in tennis, and some form of deadlift to ensure that the glutes, hamstrings and back are strong. A focus on single leg strength is also important to avoid the muscle imbalance that comes with primarily lunging one way.

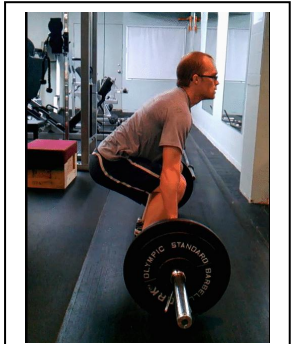


Power training for tennis players will start with a focus on landing. Tennis involves explosive movement, but our ability to decelerate has a bigger impact on performance than our acceleration. In addition to improved performance, it has a significant impact on reducing injury risk: An athlete who can control their power is less likely to sustain ankle, knee and groin strains and sprains. Power exercises can include lateral hops, squat jumps, ladder shuffle and power cleans.

Some Great Exercises for Tennis



Cable Lift



Deadlift



Rear foot elevated split squat



Agility ladder Shuffle

