

Analysis of Serving Strategies Based on the French Open

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Background



Figure: grass surface, hard surface, clay surface

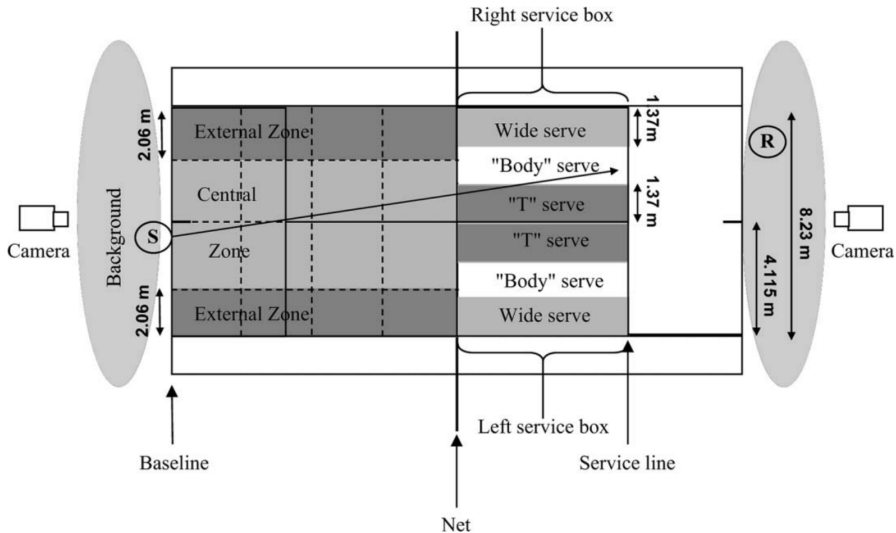
Serving is considered less important on clay court surfaces because following reasons

- Slower Surface
- Higher bounce
- Reduced Aces

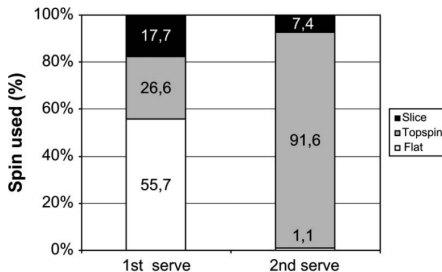
Therefore, some people may think that serving is not a crucial aspect on the red clay courts of the French Open, and players should not rely on serving to score points directly or indirectly. Is this indeed the case?

This study was a quantitative analysis of tennis based on positional play, shot details, stroke selection and execution, winners, and errors. 126 singles matches from terrestrial television tournament coverage were recorded and analyzed . The matches included in the current research were from the second round to the final. All matches in which fewer than 100 points were played were excluded from the study to ensure that each match selected was representative of Grand Slam tennis. This reduced the number of singles matches analyzed from 126 to 116.

Background



spin strategy



The players hit significantly more flat first serves and executed more topspin second serves

There was a significant association between winning a point and the type of spin used when playing a first serve.

$$(\chi^2_2 = 46.8, p < 0.001)$$

Servers won more direct points from a flat first serve (57.6%) than a topspin (24.1%) or slice first serve (18.3%)

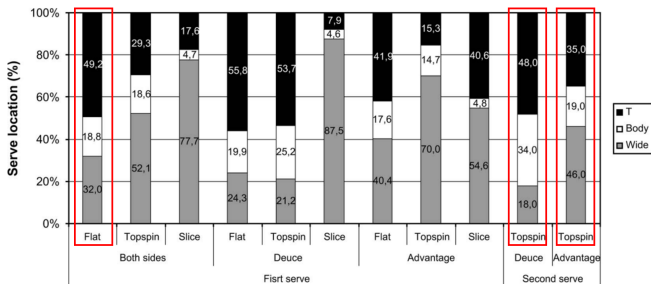
The receiving players executed 15,565 strokes. More than 80.0% of the serve-returns were in, with 75.5% played in the central zone and 24.5% down the line and cross court into the external zone.

Generally, the players won more points when serving (62.1%) than when returning (37.9%). Winning a point was significantly influenced by the type of serve. Players won significantly more points when serving first serves (67.3%) than second serves(53.8%). Receivers won significantly more points after second serves (46.2%) than first serves (32.7%).

The results show that a high proportion of serve-returns were in (80%). This percentage reflects the specificities of the clay game in relation to the characteristics of the surface. The height and relative slowness of the bounce, associated with the receivers ready position on the court far from the baseline, increases the available time budget for hitting the ball. However, even so, servers (62.1%) always dominate over receivers (37.9%). Therefore, There is no doubt that the notion that serving is not important in the French Open is entirely incorrect.

If we are receivers, what kind of positioning strategy should we adopt to maximize our chances of successful returns?

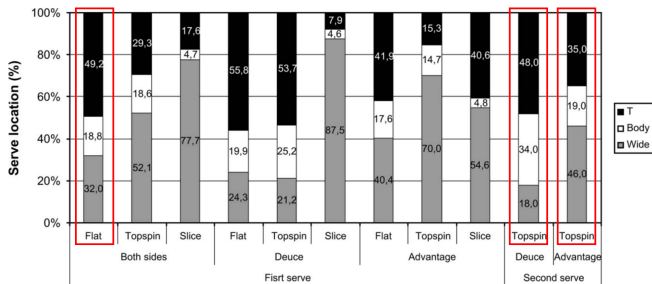
serve-return strategy



For the first serve, we know that the serving side is most likely to opt for a flat serve, and the most probable landing spot for this serve is the T zone. So, should we indeed be prepared for receiving at the T zone?

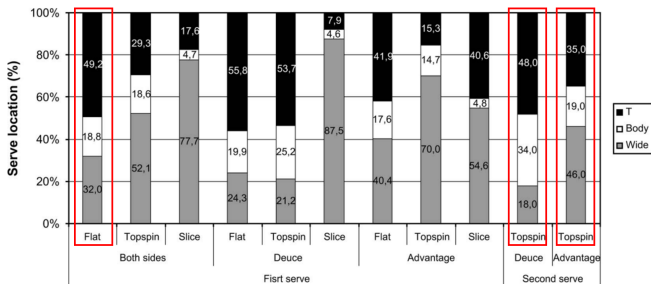
This may not be the definitive answer. While the first serve is primarily a flat serve, topspin and slice also play a significant role. Additionally, the choice of the first serve is highly individualized, as players often prefer to unleash their best and fastest serve without any reservations. Therefore, devising a receiving strategy based on the specific serving habits of individual players is much more reliable than trying to come up with a one-size-fits-all approach by summarizing the habits of several dozen players.

serve-return strategy



For the second serve, more than 90% of the second serves were performed with topspins toward 2 main locations: down the T zone in the deuce court (48.0%) and to the wide zone in the advantage court (46.0%)

serve-return strategy



Receivers can thus anticipate the serving location in advance based on the situation, perform an offensive serve-return by running around their backhand and hitting an forehand to the weakest side of the server.

- Even on the clay courts of the French Open, serving can provide a significant advantage for the serving side.
- A successful flat serve is the most effective way to score points directly.
- Receivers should position themselves strategically when facing a second serve.

Gillet, Eric^{1,2}; Leroy, David^{1,2}; Thouvarecq, Régis¹; Stein, Jean-François³. A Notational Analysis of Elite Tennis Serve and Serve-Return Strategies on Slow Surface. *Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research* 23(2):p 532-539, March 2009. | DOI: 10.1519/JSC.0b013e31818efe29