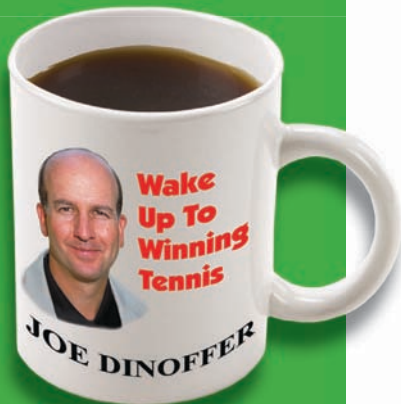


# CUP OF JOE



In “Cup of Joe,” we want to evaluate accepted methods of how tennis should be played and coached in the context of the modern game. Some readers may conclude that many of the accepted ways of thinking are now obsolete; other readers may feel their importance is reinforced. Either way, we want to hear from you—about this current topic and on other topics you’d like us to address. Email me at [joe@oncourtoffcourt.com](mailto:joe@oncourtoffcourt.com) and we will try to publish your comments in future columns.



*Waking up to the facts and myths of winning tennis.*

## Which Shots Are Most Important?

By Joe Dinoffer  
USPTA and PTR Master Professional

**P**icture this situation. You’re getting a driver’s license and you can only get one type. Your options are a truck license, car license, or motorcycle license. You are going to drive a car 99 percent of the time. Which license should you get?

If this seems ridiculous, it is. How does it relate to tennis? Simple. The main shots in tennis are the serve, return of serve, forehand groundstroke, backhand groundstroke, volley, overhead, and then some other lesser used shots like dropshots, topspin lobs and defensive squash shots. But here’s the first question: Shouldn’t players learn and master the skills of the most frequently used shots in tennis, just like practicing to drive a car if that’s the type of vehicle they will be using? If this makes sense, read on.



©FRED MILLANE

**SAMPLE CHART TO IDENTIFY SHOT FREQUENCY**

Specific Shot / Games	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TB	Total Swings per Shot
Serve														
Return of Serve														
Forehand Groundstroke														
Backhand Groundstroke														
Volley														
Overhead														
Lob														
Dropshot														
Other														

**TOTAL NUMBER OF SWINGS IN THIS SET**

NOTES: Count all swings where there is ball contact. TB = tiebreak



©FRED MULLANE

**On average, which shots are most important?**

**Serve = 44%**

**Service Return = 34%**

**Everything else = 22%**

**Q:** So, how do you figure out which tennis shots are the most commonly used?

**A:** It's fairly easy to do. I personally charted matches of different levels, ages and genders, simply counting the total swings at the ball for each player. Then I compared that number for each type of shot to the total number of swings at the ball that each player made in an entire match.

Here's a simple example. Take one match with two steady and young teenage girls. The score was 6-3, 6-3. Each set averaged 60 points in total points played. The number of swings per player per set was 110, or 220 per player over both sets. The player who lost missed about 60 percent of her first serves and double-faulted 10 times. She served nine total games in the match with 99 of her 220 swings at the ball being serves. What percentage of her total swings were serves? A whopping 45 percent.

**Q:** But don't points last much longer than that?

**A:** Not at all. The average tennis point is usually no more than three hits, and only average longer on slower clay courts, where the court offers players more time to get to the ball.

**Q:** That can't be true. I remember seeing much longer points at my club and especially at many pro tournaments.

**A:** That's right. We remember the long points because they are the most exciting, but the average point is actually very short. And, remember, a service ace is just one swing for the server. A double fault would be two. The pros hit more service winners than club players, but this fact is also balanced out by the occasional very long point that we remember as the highlight of a match.

**Q:** Players mainly practice groundstrokes. During most of the drills at my club we just hit forehand and backhand groundstrokes. Are you telling me that my practice priorities have been wrong all these years?

**A:** Judge for yourself. Here are the statistical facts. The most common swing is the serve, topping the list at 44 percent. Returning serve is the second most commonly hit shot and totals 34 percent of all swings on average. That's 78 percent for the serve and service return.

**Q:** You mean that all the regular groundstrokes, volleys, and other shots only total 22 percent of my swings at the ball during a match?

**A:** Yes. Therefore the best coaches encourage players to practice their serves and also to find a partner and share the practice time so while one serves, the other can practice his or her service return.

## SUMMARY

If this article makes you rethink the focus of your practice and drill sessions, then that's a good thing. There are many things we do on a tennis court as well as in life that just doesn't make sense. Setting the right priorities on a tennis court in terms of what shots to practice is just common sense.

Specifically, what should we consider? More serving practice with efficient technique, and practicing service returns as much as or more than regular baseline groundstrokes. 🔄

*Joe Dinoffer is a Master Professional in both the PTR and USPTA, a distinction awarded to only a handful in the tennis industry. He has published numerous books and videotapes, and is a frequent speaker at tennis conferences around the world. For more information, visit [www.uncourtsoffcourt.com](http://www.uncourtsoffcourt.com).*