



Gym VS

These tennis-specific training tips can help make you a stronger player.

BY HOWARD WALDSTREICHER

DO YOU PLAY TENNIS sitting down? Or lying on a workout bench? Or while on an elliptical trainer? Of course not. You play tennis on your feet, moving with explosive speed across the court, stopping and starting, crouching and jumping, twisting your trunk to reach shot after shot.

To master your movement through three dimensions you need to train in three dimensions, using resistance and movement that strengthens your core and develops your ability to start and stop at any moment, to get to the ball, and to last through a vigorous match.

In short, you can be *gym fit*—like many tennis players. Or you can be *tennis fit*—like the *best* tennis players.

When you train using common gym routines and machines, you're likely to get all the side effects that come with that kind of training—soreness, joint aches, and stiffness. You want functional strength, balance, coordination, speed, power, and the ability to move in any direction. That is what makes you a “tennis athlete.” And if that's your goal, I recommend you put down the weights and pick up some elasticized bands. Within weeks, I think you'll find more speed, more quickness and more explosive power—without the back, shoulder, or hip pain. That's right, no pain—plenty of gain.

BEING TENNIS FIT

There are four aspects to tennis fitness—abdominal strength (your core), running, rotation, and momentum. Let's take a look at all four and examine how they come into play when you play.

Ab strength>>

The role of the abs as part of the kinetic chain is to protect the lower back from moving too far when arms and legs start flying. Powerful abs—your core—can keep your center of gravity (belly button) directly over your base of support (feet). On the court I often see players who cannot control their center of gravity. When they have to make a quick change of direction, their upper body momentum goes too far. The result is inconsistent tennis, and, soon, lower-back problems.

The abs are stabilizers, not movers, and you must train your core from a standing position to keep you stable during quick, unpredictable movement.

Tennis Fit

Running>>

Tennis is a three-step game with a quick change of direction—and winning play is all about that first step. In truth, it's chaotic movement, not just running. You never know in which direction you'll be required to move. You don't move on the court like your fitness jog, standing tall and moving in a straight line. On the court you are always in an athletic stance and ready to move in any direction. Tennis is explosive movement, entirely different from your five-mile run.

Rotation>>

Tennis is all about rotation, yet few players train for it. There's a difference between rotation and twisting: twisting is rotation without using your whole body, especially your hips. Twisting can crush your lower back and knees, but true rotation will not.

Explosive power comes from our ability to rotate. Exercise that effectively develops our rotational ability is always from a standing or running position, never lying or sitting.

Working with bands is ideal for developing rotational strength—when you rotate your trunk using band resistance you work not just your abs but also the many stabilizing muscles throughout your core. Those are the muscles that help you control your fast, chaotic motion on the court and the controlled, explosive rotation of your powerful serve. Without rotational strength throughout your core you cannot control your shot, and you are setting yourself up for injury.

Momentum>>

Big biceps and six-pack abs look great, but they don't guarantee great tennis. Here's the reason bench presses and crunches don't do much for your game: great tennis isn't just about an explosive start to your run—it's about a quick, controlled stop or turn on the court as well. Your neuromuscular system must react to the momentum generated by your explosive three-step run across the court, for a stop or turn that sets you up for the next shot.

Bands are ideal for momentum training. Running forward against the band's resistance, you learn the explosive first step. Running backward or sideways under resistance you learn controlled slowing and stopping. And remember that controlling your momentum isn't just a matter of strong quads and hamstrings—a controlled turn or stop at speed requires the stabilizing muscles of the core as well.



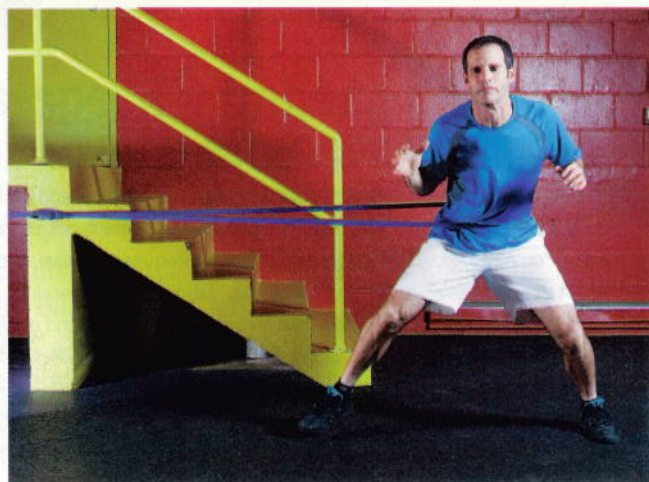
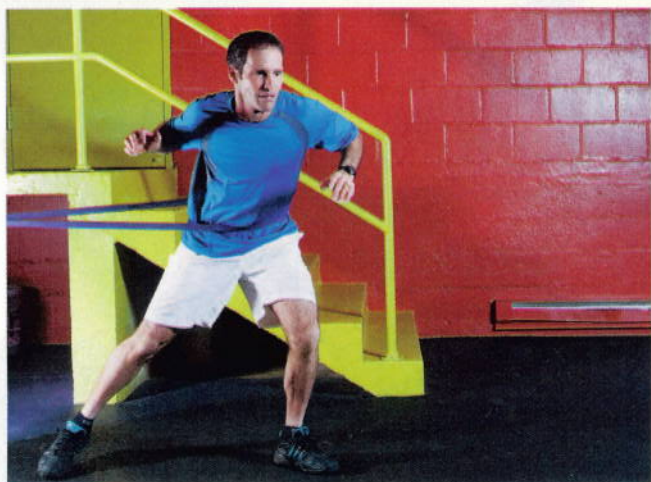
Strike up the Band >>

Ever wonder what it would be like to train like a pro? Here is a sample workout used by Bob and Mike Bryan and Melanie Oudin that covers the four principles of tennis fitness we've discussed.

The routine is performed with two resistance bands looped together to make one long band. One end of the long band should be anchored to a fixture such as a closed door, and the other placed around your waist or held in your hands. You can do these in your home, in any space big enough to accommodate a two or three step run and a few feet to extend the band.

All exercises are performed for 30 seconds on and 10 seconds off. Perform all exercises in the circuit, rest for one minute, and repeat:

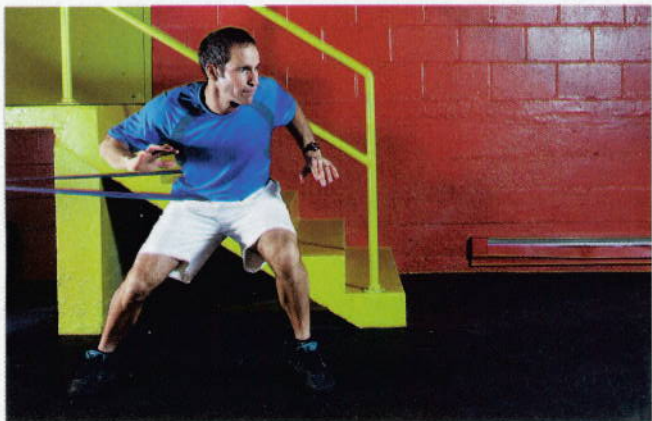
That's half of one circuit. Complete the circuit by doing all five exercises again, with the band extending left instead of right for the lateral stance routines. Once 30 seconds becomes easy, increase your time to 45 seconds for each exercise.



SIDE SHUFFLE — Place the band around your waist and stand laterally so that the band extends to your right. The band should have slight tension, but not be pulled tight when you start. Begin in an athletic stance with your knees slightly bent and your feet shoulder width apart. Push off your right leg and shuffle left three quick steps. Then shuffle right to return to the starting position. Do these as fast as possible. At the farthest point right the band should be pulled tight but should not be uncomfortable.



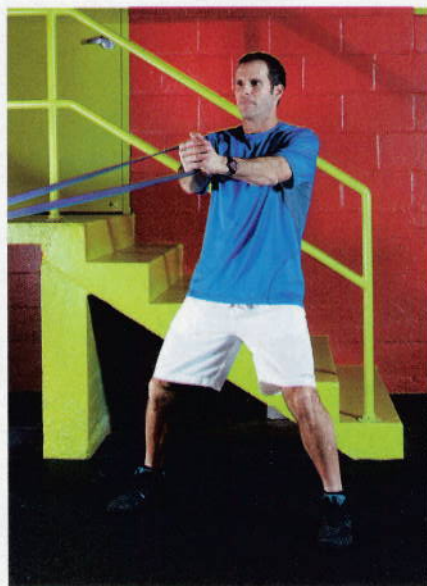
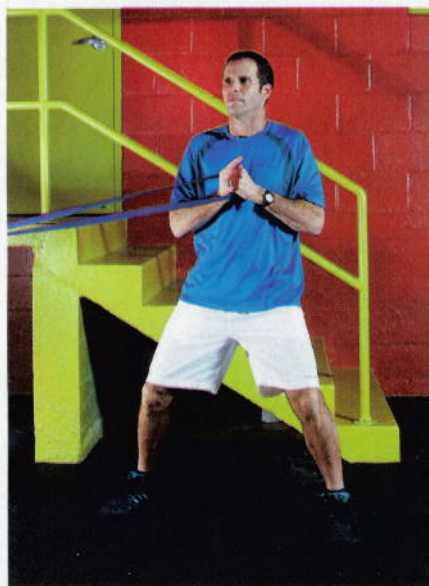
ONE-ARM PUSH — Start in the same lateral stance as the side shuffle, with the band extending to your right. Grab the band with your right hand, leaving your left arm at your side. The band should be somewhat taut, so that it's an effort to hold the band at chest level. Make an explosive punch directly outward, keeping your fist in line with your navel. The band will be pulling your fist hard to the right. Hold your fist steady, and pull it back to your chest. Repeat. This is great for core strength—your abs are working hard against the band to keep your body straight and stable.



TURN AND GO – Start in the same lateral, athletic stance as the side shuffle, with the band around your waist. Push off your right leg and turn into a forward run. Run hard against the band for 2 or 3 steps. Then turn sideways and do a quick side shuffle back to the starting point. Remember, it's not how far you can run in the band—it's how you can control your momentum and change direction under band tension. Concentrate on that first step explosion to get to the ball.



ONE-ARM PULL – Grab the band in your left hand and directly face the point of attachment—the band is extended straight out in front of you, with some tension. Start in a staggered stance with your right leg in front and left leg behind. With your left hand extended outward, explosively pull your arm back against the band to your chest, and stand straight up at the same time. You want to load first and then explode up on the pull transferring your weight. When you pull, make sure you drive with your hips.



STANDING AB PUSH – Start in the same lateral stance as the one-arm push, band extending to the right. Grab the band with your left hand (your outside shoulder), and put your other hand on top for a comfortable hold. Bring your hands to your chest in alignment with your belly button (your center of gravity)—there should be some tension on the band. Push your hands out as far as you can, keeping them aligned with your belly button, and hold for two seconds, then bring your hands back to your chest and repeat. Focus on pushing with your abs. The band will want to pull you towards it, but your butt must work with the opposite side trunk to prevent this.

Howard Waldstreicher is the founder and creator of HalfHourPower. He helps train the Bryan Brothers and Melanie Oudin on their explosive power. For more great workouts visit www.halfhourpower.com