



Chapter One

Introducing Momentum

‘WHAT IS GOING ON?’ shrieked Julia and smashed her racket down. Nothing was working now, and didn’t look likely to work. Things had swung against her.

Until 6–1 4–2, it had been plain sailing. Winners came with ease, she was calm and in control while her opponent looked to be giving up. She was coasting home. She couldn’t do anything wrong and her opponent couldn’t seem to do anything right.

But that was 25 minutes earlier and now it was 6–1 4–6 1–5. All hope of winning had almost gone. Her mind was in turmoil, frustration was building – this match should have been hers.

Then, with a last dying kick, she got angry, hit out and saved three match points at 1–5, another one at 2–5 and suddenly things turned again. Five minutes later, at 5–5 there was only one winner. She won 7–5 in the final set.

This was an international match against Russia in the European Team Championships but it could equally have been a club match, or a friendly match in a park somewhere.

Why do matches twist and turn like this? Why are they so unpredictable?

The answer lies in momentum and its flow. At the end of the match, the result is not always a reflection of the physical skill of the players. It is often a reflection of how the players dealt mentally with momentum being with them or against them – and how they reacted to the situations that can cause a swing in momentum.

This book is about the flow of momentum in tennis. It explains why momentum fluctuates, how you can control it and how to make it work in your favour. The book is not about technique; instead it covers the real problems that tennis players face:

- *How to hold on to a lead.*
- *How to fight back from hopeless positions.*
- *How to grasp opportunities that come your way.*

Before these problems can be solved, we need to know more about momentum itself and how to control it.

Some Key Questions

What is momentum?

Momentum is the force that controls the flow of the match. It is a hidden force. It is invisible because it comes from the flow of energy between competitors. You can sense it when competing or spectating. It dictates the *run of play* – you can *feel* things going for or against you or the players you are watching.

Many words and phrases used in sport are linked to the *flow of momentum*. For example:

- *things are going your way*
- *stepping up a gear*
- *things turning against you*
- *lulled into a sense of false security*
- *holding it together*
- *can't do anything wrong at the moment*
- *things going from bad to worse*
- *took the wind out of your sails*
- *being up against it*
- *plain sailing*
- *having your back to the wall*
- *ebb and flow*
- *turned the tables.*

Momentum exists in all sports and is what makes them so exciting to play and watch. It is why the score does not always reflect the state of play and why the better/stronger player does not always win. Momentum gives sport unpredictability, which is why spectators stay interested.

How does it work?

Momentum acts like water – flowing backwards and forwards, sometimes faster or slower, or at times not moving at all.

The flow of momentum is more than just a sporting phenomenon, it is a fact of life and exists in everything we do. For example, you can look back and see how things went during the course of a meeting, a day at home, a week, a

relationship or a career. Once you start thinking in terms of momentum, you can identify where, when and often why things went for or against you. You can spot turning points in your career, your relationship or your game. Of course, like most things, momentum is easier to see in retrospect.

Is momentum controllable?

You'll often hear people say it isn't. In a recent television programme a darts commentator spoke of 'momentum creeping in and creeping out of the match' – as if it had a mind of its own and was not something that might be controlled.

If this is the case, how is it that some players always seem to manage to get momentum on their side when it matters most? It is not random. It is not simply a case of certain players continuing to get lucky, like gamblers on a winning streak. If it were random then the law of averages suggests that simply being strong enough, fast enough or agile enough would ensure sporting success. We know this is not true.

There are certain players who keep winning key points, who know when it matters to win a point or string a series of points together, and who can tell how and when to take action. They seem to possess an ability to perceive such things and to time their moves so that the momentum flows with them.

The flow of momentum can be controlled, just as rivers can be controlled. Momentum can be harnessed and turned to your advantage providing you can identify and use the flow of momentum in the present.

How can you learn to use it?

Through experiencing or reading about practical examples of tennis match play (as given in this book), you can begin to discover what it feels like when the momentum is for you, against you and neutral; how and why momentum switches; how to respond to turning points; and how to establish it, keep it with you or regain it. You will understand why fighting spirit is the key and more importantly, the most effective times to use it.

This book does not just cover raising your general standard of tennis; it focuses on raising your overall standard of competing. Controlling momentum flow is a vital skill for players at any level.



Why is managing momentum important?

There are many factors involved in tennis matches so no two matches appear to be the same. This is because there are so many variables, for example:

- *surfaces*
- *weather conditions*
- *locations*
- *equipment*
- *styles of opponent*
- *mental approaches*
- *form at different times.*

However, if you are a player you will have had the feeling of history repeating itself in seemingly very different situations. This is because momentum is the *secret* link between matches.

Managing momentum will help you bring together and control many of the variable factors that affect you during matches. This book explains why different match situations can produce the same feelings in a player. It helps you to make the most of whatever situations you find yourself in, whether you have just lost four games in a row or need to hold serve in order to win a match.

Greg Rusedski's serve – a bigger weapon on a grass court