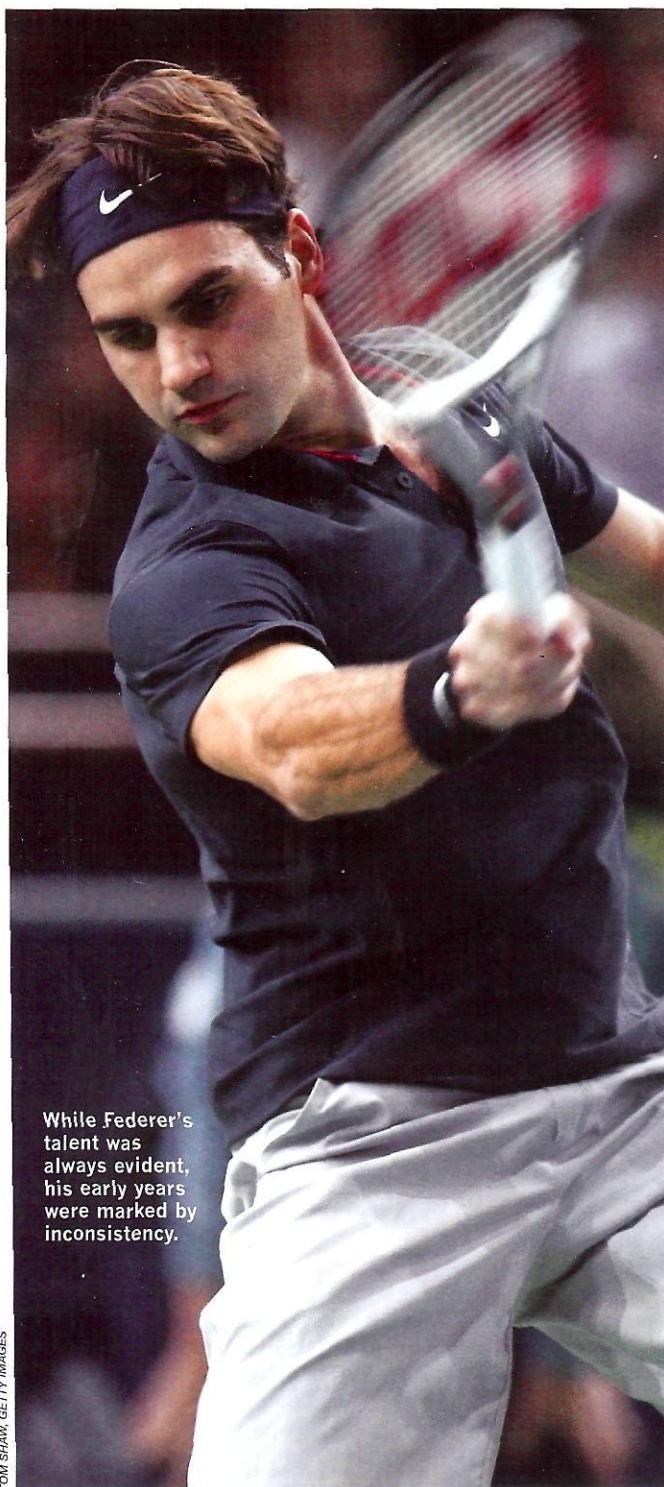


# Frame Their Game

In order to develop naturally talented players into elite ones, coaches must firstly establish their students' strengths and weaknesses, which will help establish their game plan. **By Dieter Wilhelmi**



While Federer's talent was always evident, his early years were marked by inconsistency.

TOM SHAW, GETTY IMAGES

**A**s coaches we understand there are different playing styles and techniques that can be used successfully and that we must develop a coaching methodology that will ultimately bring about competition success.

One of our primary roles is to concentrate on the athlete's progress in terms of technique, style and performance. We should maximise all of these factors so that players can reach their performance potential.

We often ask ourselves: what makes an elite tennis player? We know it's not just a matter of physical attributes and that talent alone may also not bring about competition success. Success is usually the end result of a range of factors that impact on a player's game. These may range from inherent skill level to co-ordination, speed and agility and the ability of a player to convert thought into action. They must also exhibit motivation, fighting spirit, and willingness to take risk. As coaches we cannot expect to change an aggressive player who loves to take risks into someone who feels most comfortable at the baseline. So our role is to tailor these attributes to the individual's requirements, ensuring that the training undertaken and the techniques developed are placed into a game plan that the individual can successfully handle.

Game management is the methodology by which coaches structure their coaching so that the individual develops a winning game plan that he or she can successfully follow in competition. Game management could therefore be defined as: The ability of an athlete to manage what they already have, regardless of standard, into a winning game strategy.

## Technical Considerations

Selecting the correct playing style is not easily achieved and requires considerable experience. For proper game management to occur, the techniques selected must fit the player both physically and psychologically.

This means we need to spend time learning to understand our players. This can be achieved through good communication and utilising our observation skills. We must study the athlete's techniques and movements carefully in order to determine personal style that is most effective for any given player.

When Pete Sampras was 14-years-old, for example, he was ordered by his former coach Pete Fischer to switch his "trusty two-handed backhand for a single-handed shot". Sampras grudgingly made the change and suffered as his junior ranking plummeted, but slowly rebuilt his game around the stroke Fischer insisted he needed in order to prevail at Wimbledon.

As we know, Sampras is not the only top professional player to make changes on the grounds that he had to develop techniques that would fit his overall game plan. Stefan Edberg's coach

