



**ANALYSIS OF TACTICAL INDICATORS IN PROFESSIONAL PADEL: A
NARRATIVE REVIEW OF THE SERVE, RETURN, AND POINT FINISHING**

**ANÁLISIS DE LOS INDICADORES TÁCTICOS EN PÁDEL PROFESIONAL: UNA
REVISIÓN NARRATIVA SOBRE EL SAQUE, EL RESTO Y LA FINALIZACIÓN**

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ABSTRACT

Professional padel has undergone a considerable technical and tactical evolution over the last decade, which requires continuous updating of scientific knowledge. The aim of this narrative review was to provide an integrated analysis of the current scientific evidence on three critical phases of play: the serve, the return, and point finishing. A bibliographic search was conducted in the Web of Science, Scopus, and PubMed databases, and 21 original articles published between 2020 and 2025 that focused on elite performance were selected. The findings show that the serve acts as the main catalyst for positional advantage, although its effectiveness erodes more rapidly in women's padel than in men's padel. The return emerges as the key neutralization tool, showing a marked sex-based dimorphism in the use of the lob and the direct return. Finally, point finishing is defined as a sequential process in which the net is the critical space and the smash stands out not only as a winning shot but also as a generator of forced errors. It is concluded that contemporary padel is moving towards greater tactical stability, in which the reduction of unforced errors and functional specialization according to playing side are decisive. This review provides an updated interpretive framework for optimizing training processes in high-performance contexts.

Keywords: performance analysis; success indicators; tactics; racket sport; elite.

RESUMEN

El pádel profesional ha experimentado una notable evolución técnica y táctica a lo largo de la última década, lo que exige una actualización continua del conocimiento científico. El objetivo de esta revisión narrativa fue proporcionar un análisis integrado de la evidencia científica actual sobre tres fases críticas del juego: el saque, el resto y la finalización del punto. Se realizó una búsqueda bibliográfica en las bases de datos Web of Science, Scopus y PubMed, seleccionando 21 artículos originales publicados entre 2020 y 2025 que se centraran en el rendimiento de élite. Los hallazgos muestran que el saque actúa como el principal catalizador de la ventaja posicional, aunque su eficacia se desgasta más rápidamente en el pádel femenino que en el masculino. El resto emerge como la herramienta clave de neutralización, mostrando un marcado dimorfismo según el sexo en el uso del globo y del resto directo. Finalmente, la finalización del punto se define como un proceso secuencial en el que la red es el espacio crítico y el remate (*smash*) destaca no solo como un golpe ganador, sino también como un generador de errores forzados. Se concluye que el pádel contemporáneo avanza hacia una mayor estabilidad táctica, en la que la reducción de errores no forzados y la especialización funcional según el lado de juego son decisivas. Esta revisión proporciona un marco interpretativo actualizado para optimizar los procesos de entrenamiento en contextos de alto rendimiento.

Palabras clave: análisis del rendimiento, indicadores de éxito, táctica, deportes de raqueta, élite.

Introduction

During recent years, professional padel has undergone a notable evolution in its technical-tactical patterns, which has stimulated growing scientific interest in understanding the factors that condition competitive performance. Although game analysis has traditionally focused on global indicators of effectiveness, recent literature has shown the need to decompose the point into specific functional units that allow more precise interpretation of how advantage is built, neutralized, and resolved during the rally. In this context, the study of the serve, the return, and point finishing has become an especially useful framework for examining the internal logic of the game.

With regard to this initial phase, the serve is no longer understood as a mere action that starts play but rather as a tactical unit that conditions spatial occupation, net acquisition, and the probability of success in the first shots of the exchange. Several studies have shown that the advantage associated with serving is not uniform, but depends on sex, rally duration, and contextual variables such as serve direction, side of execution, and the tactical formation employed (Sánchez-Alcaraz et al., 2020a; Ramón-Llin et al., 2021a; Martín-Miguel et al., 2024a; Conde-Ripoll et al., 2024a; Conde-Ripoll et al., 2025; Mauro et al., 2025). This evidence suggests that the serve should be analyzed not only according to its immediate outcome, but also according to its capacity to generate favorable offensive contexts.

In relation to the response to the serve, the return appears as a less studied action, although it is decisive for neutralizing the initial advantage of the serving pair and reorganizing the tactical structure of the point. The studies by Escudero-Tena et al. (2023) and Sánchez-Alcaraz et al. (2020a) show that the return in elite padel is characterized by high continuity, but also by considerable variability according to sex, side of the court, serve direction, and competitive context. Likewise, more recent research has highlighted that the return should not be interpreted as an isolated response, but as a key link within the serve-return-third-shot sequence, in which the tactical formation of the serving pair conditions the continuity of the exchange (Martín-Miguel et al., 2024a).

Within this framework, point finishing represents the most extensively developed block in the current literature, particularly in relation to the effectiveness of the last shot, the type of terminal action, the execution zone, and the sequences preceding the outcome. Studies agree that competitive performance is associated with a higher production of winners and a lower

frequency of errors, particularly unforced errors (Escudero-Tena et al., 2022a, 2022b; Conde-Ripoll et al., 2024b, 2025b; López-Sierra et al., 2025). Differential patterns have also been identified according to sex, playing side, handedness, and spatial location, highlighting the offensive role of overhead actions and the relevance of the net as the preferred space for resolving the point (Ampuero et al., 2023, 2025; Fernández de Ossó et al., 2025; Martín-Miguel et al., 2025).

Despite advances in research, the available evidence remains dispersed across studies focused on specific phases of play or isolated performance variables. It is therefore appropriate to develop an integrated and updated perspective on the main findings regarding the serve, return, and point finishing. This need is further justified by the dynamic nature of padel, whose tactical demands and playing patterns have shown progressive modifications in recent seasons, both because of the evolution of competitive level and because of the functional specialization of players (Conde-Ripoll et al., 2024b; Ampuero et al., 2023; Fernández de Ossó et al., 2025). Consequently, a theoretical review of these three blocks makes it possible not only to synthesize accumulated knowledge, but also to provide an updated interpretive framework for understanding how performance is structured in contemporary padel.

Unlike previous literature, which often analyzes game actions in isolation, the originality of this review lies in offering a sequential and integrative approach. This perspective makes it possible to understand not only performance in each phase (serve, return, and finishing), but also the tactical interdependence among them in contemporary padel.

Methods

For the preparation of this narrative review, a structured search strategy was followed, aimed at ensuring transparency and comprehensiveness in the selection of scientific evidence.

Search Strategy and Databases

A comprehensive bibliographic search was conducted in the international databases Web of Science (WOS), Scopus, and PubMed. The search period was limited to studies published between 2020 and 2025. English and Spanish descriptors were used and combined with Boolean operators: ("padel" OR

"paddle tennis") AND ("match analysis" OR "performance analysis" OR "tactical analysis" OR "performance indicators").

Selection Criteria

The inclusion criteria were: (a) original peer-reviewed articles; (b) studies focused on the technical-tactical performance of elite male and female players (World Padel Tour or Premier Padel circuits); and (c) investigations that analyzed serve, return, or finishing variables. Conference communications, books, and studies whose samples were exclusively amateur or from developmental categories were excluded, as were purely physical or physiological studies.

Screening and Data Extraction Procedure

The literature selection process was structured into three sequential phases: identification, screening, and inclusion. After the initial database search, duplicate records were removed. Titles and abstracts were then assessed, excluding studies that did not fit the topic or that addressed non-professional samples. Full texts were subsequently evaluated by strictly applying the eligibility criteria, resulting in a final sample of 21 original articles. Data extraction was carried out by systematizing the findings into three major tactical blocks: serve, return, and finishing. For each block, the design, sample, main variables, and magnitudes of effectiveness described in the literature were identified. The coverage analysis showed that 100% (n = 21) of the studies were indexed in WOS, 81% (n = 17) in Scopus, and 57% (n = 12) in PubMed.

Table 1.

Summary of the articles included in the narrative review

Author(s) and Year	Sample (n)	Variables Analyzed	Main Findings
Ampuero et al. (2025)	10,321 shots	Court zones, shot type, effectiveness	The net is the zone with the highest terminal effectiveness; the baseline concentrates unforced errors.
Bueno et al. (2024)	8 matches	Serve direction, return height and	In men, the serve to the side glass exceeds 78%, and the serving pair tends to win more

Author(s) and Year	Sample (n)	Variables Analyzed	Main Findings
	(422 points)	direction, player hitting after the return, point outcome, number of shots	often. In women, the side glass is also the main direction; the serve advantage is smaller. Longer points reduce the advantage of the serving pair.
Cáceres et al. (2024)	40 matches	Winning/losing pairs, errors, winners	Winners commit significantly fewer unforced errors in critical moments.
Cerrillo et al. (2025)	915 points	Return effectiveness, return type, direction, height, player hitting after the return, and point outcome	The return was predominantly a continuity action: 90.2%. Return errors appeared in 9.1%, and winning returns accounted for only 0.8%. Sex differences were observed in direction and height: boys used more down-the-line and low returns; girls used more cross-court returns and lobs.
Conde-Ripoll et al. (2024a)	46 matches	Unforced errors, gender, outcome	The frequency of unforced errors has decreased, indicating greater tactical stability.
Conde-Ripoll et al. (2025)	3,520 shots	Forced-error generators, serve/return	The serve acts as a generator of forced errors, facilitating indirect finishing.
Courel-Ibáñez et al. (2021)	120 matches	Return trajectory, gender	Predominance of the direct return in men and the lob in women to recover the net.
Courel-Ibáñez et al. (2024)	32 matches	Handedness, playing side, tactics	The presence of a left-handed player on the right side balances winner production within the pair.
Escudero-Tena et al. (2021)	120 matches	Performance indicators 2015-2019	Net effectiveness and winner volume are the best predictors of victory.
Escudero-Tena et al. (2022)	14 matches	Finishing actions, gender	The smash and the volley are the shots with the highest success rate for closing the point.
Escudero-Tena et al. (2023)	20 matches (880 smashes)	Point-finishing smash, smash effectiveness, hitting zone, type of smash,	Point-finishing smashes were predominantly winners. The most effective were flat, down the line, and executed close to the net, especially when the ball went out by x3 or x4.

Author(s) and Year	Sample (n)	Variables Analyzed	Main Findings
Escudero-Tena et al. (2024a)	64 matches	direction, and mode of finishing Gender disparities, finishing actions	Women show greater tactical variability under pressure than men.
Escudero-Tena et al. (2024b)	28 matches	Altitude, performance, gender	Altitude increases game speed and modifies smash effectiveness.
Fernández de Ossó et al. (2025)	80 players	Level (Amateur/Pro), errors, shot	Professional players commit fewer backhand errors and manage double-wall situations more effectively.
García-Benítez et al. (2021)	40 matches	Errors and winners by playing side	The backhand-side player assumes greater finishing responsibility in the men's circuit.
García-Benítez et al. (2024)	82 matches	Shot effectiveness, winning teams	Winning teams are more efficient in the defense-to-attack transition (lob-net).
López-Sierra et al. (2025)	120 matches	Tactical indicators, terminal effectiveness	The flat smash and forehand volley are the most determinant shots in 2024-2025.
Martín-Miguel et al. (2024a)	24 matches	Serve-return-third-shot sequence	The Australian formation conditions serve direction and the intervention of the server.
Martín-Miguel et al. (2024b)	24 matches	Off-the-wall smash, effectiveness	The off-the-wall smash is mainly a shot for continuity and advantage construction.
Martín-Miguel et al. (2025)	4,962 shots	Two-shot sequences, effectiveness	Sequences such as volley-smash are critical predictors of point success.
Mauro et al. (2025)	80 matches	Serve tactics, direction, effectiveness	The serve to the T from the right side with Australian formation is highly effective.
Muñoz et al. (2021)	80 matches	Serve and return strategies, gender	The flat serve increases the probability of winning the point directly in men.
Muñoz et al. (2023)	160 matches	Rally length, performance	Short exchanges favor the serving pair; long exchanges favor the returning pair.

Author(s) and Year	Sample (n)	Variables Analyzed	Main Findings
Ramírez-Ortega et al. (2025)	8 matches (1,068 shots)	Last shot of the point, winning shot, error, court zone, type of finishing	No significant sex differences were found in the zone of the last shot; men and women finished approximately 40% of points from the middle zone. Men produced more winners by bringing the ball back to their own court, whereas women finished more often through a double bounce. Approximately half of the errors ended in the net.
Sánchez-Pay et al. (2023)	1,080 serves	Serve direction and speed-accuracy parameters	Speed and accuracy increase with category, weekly training hours, and experience. Serve side and direction did not have a relevant influence on speed/accuracy.
Sánchez-Alcaraz et al. (2024)	80 matches	Serve tactics, game dynamics	The sidespin serve facilitates net acquisition and third-shot control.

Results

Serve

In general, the superiority of the serving pair has been observed to a greater extent in men than in women and decreases as the length of the exchange increases. In men, this superiority is maintained until approximately the 12th shot, whereas in women it is lost after the 7th shot. In addition, the second serve increases the likelihood of losing the point.

Consistent with this trend, Bueno-García et al. (2024) observed in professional padel that, in the men's category, the serving pair tends to win the point regardless of the tactic employed, whereas in the women's category the difference between winning and losing the point on serve is smaller, especially when a traditional strategy is used. In addition, men recorded an average of 9.64 shots per point, winning service points with shorter exchanges and losing them when the exchanges extended to an average of 11.56 shots; in women, the average was 11.09 shots, with a similar trend between points won and lost on serve.

Mauro et al. (2025) indicate that decisive combinations exist among serve direction, side of execution, and tactical formation. Serving to the middle and center of the court from the left side with a conventional formation increased

the probability of winning, whereas doing so from the right side reduced it. Regarding court side, the serve toward the side wall predominates on the left side, while the frequency of serves to the center of the court increases on the right side, especially in the Australian formation. Ramón-Llin et al. (2021a) observed that the serving pair won a higher percentage of points when using the traditional tactic than when using the Australian tactic, with this effect becoming even more pronounced when the point was extended. With regard to depth, most serves did not reach the back wall and did not show an isolated significant effect, although they did show an effect in interaction with direction.

Complementarily, Bueno-García et al. (2024) confirmed that the serve toward the side glass is the predominant direction in both professional men and women. In men, this direction exceeded 78% of serves and was especially frequent in key points, whereas in women it ranged approximately between 71% and 89% depending on the type of point.

From a more technical-conditional perspective, Sánchez-Pay et al. (2023) analyzed 1,080 serves by 45 male amateur players and showed that serve speed increases progressively with category, from under-14 to senior level. In addition, weekly training hours had a positive influence on speed and accuracy, and greater experience was associated with greater serve accuracy. However, serve side and direction—glass or “T”—did not significantly influence speed or accuracy in amateur serves.

At the level of point performance, the service situation is associated with greater production of winners and shots that generate forced errors. The serving pair obtains better results in short exchanges, producing more winners and fewer errors, especially when it belongs to the set-winning pair. Finally, two out of every three off-the-wall smashes were executed by the serving pair.

Return

Practically all serves are returned in professional padel (with effectiveness above 90%), confirming the limited presence of aces. Escudero-Tena et al. (2023) observed that the direct return predominates in men, whereas the lob is more frequent in women. Serves directed at the server are mostly returned directly, whereas those directed at the partner are more frequently returned with a lob. In golden points, lob use increases significantly. Women use the backhand and cross-court trajectories more frequently. Likewise, from the left side, more down-the-line returns and more backhands are observed, whereas on the right side there is a more balanced distribution.

Bueno-García et al. (2024) provide convergent findings in professional padel, indicating that in men the return is distributed in a balanced manner between lob and flat return, whereas in women the lob is the predominant height, appearing in approximately six out of every ten returns. Regarding direction, in men the down-the-line return was more frequent in non-key points and the cross-court return in key points, whereas in women a slight tendency toward the cross-court return was observed.

In the high-level U-18 context, Cerrillo-Lafuente et al. (2025) observed that the return behaves fundamentally as a continuity action: the point continued after the return on around 90% of occasions, return error occurred in approximately 9%, and the winning return barely reached 1%. In addition, most returns were executed with the backhand, with a frequency close to 60%.

The formation of the serving pair affects the third shot: in the Australian formation, if the serve goes to the side wall, the server is more likely to intervene; if it goes to the T, the intervention of the partner increases. With a conventional formation, serving to the side wall clearly increases the probability that the server's partner will intervene. After the return, the backhand volley predominates in serves to the side wall and the bandeja in those directed to the T.

Cerrillo-Lafuente et al. (2025) also showed that the serve strategy conditions return direction in U-18 padel: with the traditional formation, the cross-court return predominated, whereas with the Australian strategy the use of the down-the-line return increased. In addition, U-18 female players used the lob approximately 12% more than male players and used the cross-court return around 15% more than their male counterparts.

With respect to effectiveness, pairs that lost the set showed a higher frequency of unforced errors on the return. Although forced errors generally increase in return situations, winning pairs in long exchanges achieved more winners and fewer forced errors than losing pairs. Along the same lines, Bueno-García et al. (2024) indicated that, in men, the serving pair tends to win the point regardless of return height, return direction, or the player hitting after the return, although the use of the lob reduces the percentage of points won on serve. In women, flat and cross-court returns, as well as the intervention of the server's partner after the return, were associated with more balanced situations and even with a higher probability of success for the returning pair.

Point Finishing

Points frequently end through a winner or an unforced error. In general, men's padel shows a higher proportion of winners and a lower presence of errors than women's padel, and set-winning pairs record more winning actions and fewer errors than losing pairs. The frequency of unforced errors has decreased progressively in recent seasons. In the comparison by sex, men committed more unforced errors and women more forced errors. Specifically, women committed more forced errors with the backhand and the double wall, whereas men did so with the counter-wall shot and the drop shot.

Ramírez-Ortega et al. (2025) specifically examined the distribution of winners and errors in professional padel, showing that both men and women performed approximately 40% of finishing shots from the middle or transition zone, with no significant sex differences in the execution zone of the last shot. This result reinforces the growing role of the middle zone as a relevant space not only for construction, but also for resolving the point.

Overhead actions are the most effective for producing winners. In men, smash variants predominate, whereas in women the *bandeja* and the forehand volley stand out. The flat and topspin smashes show winner percentages close to 60%, whereas the off-the-wall smash, which mainly generates continuity, presents the highest proportion of errors. The *bandeja* includes both offensive construction actions and a relevant proportion of unforced errors, whereas the backhand volley accounts for more forced errors.

Escudero-Tena et al. (2024), in their analysis of point-ending smashes at the Qatar Major Premier Padel 2023, observed that flat and topspin smashes, executed down the line and from areas close to the net, were the most effective for finishing the point, especially when the ball left the court by three or four meters. By contrast, sliced and cross-court smashes were associated with a higher probability of error, particularly when the ball remained in the player's own court or hit the fence or glass of the opponent's court directly.

Among winning shots, Ramírez-Ortega et al. (2025) further reported that men finished more often by bringing the ball back into their own court, whereas women did so mainly through a double bounce in the opponent's court. Regarding errors, the net was the most frequent destination in both men and women, followed by the back wall.

From a sequential perspective, sequences such as volley-smash, volley-volley, or lob-recovery smash are especially effective. Men showed greater effectiveness in patterns culminating in a smash, whereas women stood out

in sequences involving lobs, shots after the bounce, and transition actions. With regard to match moments, in men's padel the difference between errors and winners increases in critical moments, whereas women reduce this difference under maximum pressure.

With regard to space, volleys and smashes proliferate at the net and show high probabilities of producing a winner; the transition zone is relevant for the bandeja and the smash, which are associated with continuity, winners, and unforced errors; and the baseline concentrates continuity actions and unforced errors. With regard to handedness, right-handed players recorded a higher proportion of winning shots and cross-court trajectories, whereas left-handed players used more down-the-line shots. Finally, left-side players performed a higher proportion of winners and switching displacements, whereas right-side players performed a higher percentage of continuity shots.

Discussion

The reviewed evidence supports the view that the serve in padel should not be interpreted merely as an action that puts the ball into play, but rather as an initial tactical unit that conditions spatial occupation, positional advantage, and the probability of success in the early phases of the rally. The findings show that the service patterns most frequently used by professionals do not always coincide with the most effective ones, revealing a margin for tactical optimization. Likewise, the association of the serve with a greater production of shots that generate forced errors suggests that the serve favors the construction of offensive scenarios and the capacity to impose the initial rhythm of play, rather than the immediate achievement of the point. The subsequent dynamic, such as the frequency of off-the-wall smashes by the serving pair, confirms that the serve initiates a sequence in which the pair takes the net, forces the opponent's lob, and has opportunities to finish.

The findings of Bueno-García et al. (2024) reinforce this interpretation, as they show that serve advantage depends on sex, point type, and rally duration. The tendency of servers to win shorter points and to lose advantage when the exchange is prolonged confirms that the serve generates an initial advantage, but does not guarantee success if the returning pair manages to stabilize the rally.

Likewise, the data reported by Sánchez-Pay et al. (2023) broaden the understanding of the serve beyond the professional context by indicating that service quality in amateur players is more strongly conditioned by

developmental factors—category, experience, and training hours—than by serve side or direction. This suggests that, in non-professional stages, improvement in the serve may depend primarily on technical-conditional consolidation rather than tactical sophistication.

For its part, the return constitutes a decisive action for neutralizing the initial advantage of the serve and reorganizing the tactical structure of the rally. Since direct service points are almost absent at the elite level, the return emerges as a highly stable and low-terminality response that seeks tactical continuity. The variations observed according to sex, direction, and the opponents' formation suggest that the return is not a homogeneous response, but rather an action highly modulated by the spatial context and the player's tactical profile.

Consistent with this interpretation, Cerrillo-Lafuente et al. (2025) confirm in high-level U-18 padel that the return is an action with high stability and low terminality, since it allows point continuity on the vast majority of occasions and rarely produces a direct winner. In addition, the differences observed according to sex and serve strategy indicate that the return should be trained according to the tactical context, especially in traditional or Australian formations.

Regarding point finishing, the general evidence indicates that competitive performance depends on maximizing winners and minimizing errors, which aligns with the progressive decrease in unforced errors in the professional circuit and points to a clear evolution towards greater tactical and technical stability. The data confirm the existence of sex-specific technical-tactical patterns, involving a more decisive men's style based on powerful offensive actions (smash variants) and a women's style with greater relative effectiveness in construction shots.

The contributions of Ramírez-Ortega et al. (2025) allow this interpretation to be refined by showing that finishing does not depend exclusively on the net or the baseline, but that the middle zone assumes a leading role in resolving the point. In addition, the differences between men and women in how winning shots are achieved—bringing the ball back to their own court in men and through a double bounce in women—reveal differentiated finishing profiles.

It is essential to emphasize the spatial and sequential dimension of finishing. Proximity to the net is confirmed as the decisive factor in terminal effectiveness, which indicates that point finishing cannot be explained solely by the type of shot, but also by the location from which it is executed. Likewise,

terminal success depends on immediately preceding construction patterns, such as the volley-smash sequence. This perspective broadens the traditional view centered on the isolated last shot, demonstrating that finishing should be understood in interdependence with the serve and the return.

In the specific case of the smash, Escudero-Tena et al. (2024) reinforce the importance of location and shot type by showing that point-ending smashes are more effective when executed close to the net, with a down-the-line trajectory and through flat or topspin smashes. These findings support the idea that effective finishing does not depend solely on shot power, but on the combination of smash type, direction, execution zone, and the way in which the ball concludes the point.

Finally, the differences observed according to court side reinforce the existence of highly specialized functional roles within the pair: a backhand-side player with a markedly offensive and finishing profile, and a forehand-side player oriented toward construction, balance, and maintenance of the exchange. The integration of these findings makes it possible to distinguish between the shot that directly wins the point and the shot that resolves it indirectly, offering a deeper understanding of how elite players build and materialize competitive advantage.

Conclusions

This review proposes an integrated interpretation of the internal logic of professional padel, concluding that performance does not depend on isolated actions, but on the tactical interdependence among the three phases of the point.

First, the serve is established as the main generator of positional advantage. Its effectiveness does not lie in power, but in the interaction between direction and control of the third shot, especially through the use of the Australian formation. This superiority is concluded to be an ephemeral advantage that disappears significantly faster in women's padel than in men's padel, establishing a critical threshold of rally duration according to sex.

Second, the return is confirmed as the essential neutralization tool. There is a marked dimorphism in this phase: men prioritize the direct return to accelerate the transition and force the error at the net, whereas women use the lob as a strategic resource to reverse the initiative. Technical stability in this phase, by minimizing unforced error, is a distinctive feature of elite pairs.

Third, finishing has evolved towards a sequential model in which the net is the critical space for resolution. Success in closing the point depends not only on the winning shot (winner), but also on the capacity to execute previous actions that act as generators of forced errors in the opponent, thereby redefining the concept of terminal effectiveness.

Finally, it is concluded that padel is moving towards greater technical stability and functional specialization of players according to their playing side. Future research should integrate new metrics of sequential analysis to continue deepening the understanding of this constantly evolving sport.

The main contribution of this work is to overcome the fragmented view of game analysis by demonstrating that effectiveness in contemporary elite padel is based on an interdependent tactical sequence.

Practical applications

With regard to intervention guidelines for the serve-return sequence, this review suggests that training should be approached as an integrated technical-tactical sequence rather than as isolated actions, since both phases decisively condition the initial organization of the point. In this sense, on-court work should be oriented toward training directions, intentions, and responses following the serve and the return, enabling the player to learn to use the serve to generate spatial or temporal advantage and the return to neutralize the opponent's initiative or assume control of the exchange. These tasks should also be developed in representative contexts, with real opposition and temporal structures close to competition, adjusting their complexity to the player's category. In this way, serve-return training ceases to focus exclusively on the mechanical effectiveness of the gesture and becomes oriented toward the player's capacity to make functional decisions from the beginning of the point.

With regard to finishing, intervention should be aimed at training situations in which the player recognizes a real opportunity to close the point and executes a technical response consistent with the advantage previously constructed. Based on the evidence presented in this review, finishing should not be understood as an isolated terminal shot, but as the result of a tactical construction sequence that generates imbalance in the opponent and creates the appropriate context for defining the point. Therefore, on-court work should include tasks that promote the identification of attackable balls, the selection of the appropriate moment to accelerate or change direction, and

effective spatial occupation after the finishing shot. All of this should be adapted to competitive category and maintained within representative game situations, so that improvement in finishing responds not only to criteria of technical precision, but also to the tactical understanding of when and how to close the point effectively.

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