How to Play a Tennis Tiebreaker

Three Parts: Serving in a Tiebreaker, Switching Sides in a Tiebreaker, Winning the Tiebreaker

In tennis, there are games, sets and matches. To win a game, you must score four points and have a two point lead. To win a set, you must win seven games and have a two game lead. To win the match, you must win the best of three sets or the best of five sets depending on where you’re playing. In tennis, there are no ties. When both sides are tied at six games apiece, a tiebreaker game will take place to decide the winner of a set. Tiebreakers have their own unique rules that are different from those of normal games in tennis. If you want to compete in tennis, you should know what to expect when you have to play a tiebreaker.

Part 1

Serving in a Tiebreaker

Decide who goes first. The person who was set to serve at the end of the last game will serve first in the tiebreaker. In tennis, the server switches at the end of every game. If you were the receiver in the game before the tiebreaker, then you will serve first. Just like in a normal tennis game, the first service will be from the deuce (right) side of the hash.

Unlike a regular tennis game, the first server in a tiebreaker will only serve one point. In normal tennis games, only one person serves throughout the game.
Alternate servers. After the first player serves one point, the second server will serve two points. For the rest of the tiebreaker, each server will serve two points at a time. Remember that you will change servers after every serve where the total score is odd.$^{[3]}$

If the score is four to three, then you would change servers because the total number of points is seven, an odd number.

If the score is four to two, then the server would have one more serve because the total number of points is six, an even number.

Serve from the advantage (left) side of the hash first. After the first serve in the tiebreaker, each player will perform the first of their two serves from the left side of the hash. In normal tennis games, you always serve first from the right side of the hash so it may feel a bit awkward to switch it up in the tiebreaker.
An easy way to remember this is that every even point will be served from the advantage side of the court. For example, if the score is four to three and you are serving the eighth point in the game, then you will serve it from the left side of the court.[3]

Hit your second serve from the **deuce side of the court**. After you serve from the left side of the hash, you will move to the right side of the hash to perform your second serve. The exception to this rule is of course that the very first point in the tiebreaker is also served from the deuce side of the court.

Every time you serve an odd point, you will serve it from the right side of the court. For example, if the score is three to three and you are serving the seventh point in the game, then you will serve it from the right side of the court.

**Part 2**

**Switching Sides in a Tiebreaker**
Keep your side at the beginning of the tiebreaker. In tennis, players only switch sides at the end of odd numbered games in a set. The tiebreaker is technically the thirteenth game in a set so both players will remain on the same side of the court they were on for the twelfth game.

In normal tennis games you would switch sides after the first game, the third game, the fifth game and after any other odd numbered games.

![Diagram of tennis court with text: EVERY 6 POINTS](image)

Change sides after every six points. In normal tennis games, players keep their side for the entirety of the game. In tiebreakers however, players will alternate sides after every point where the total score is a multiple of six. Switching sides during the tiebreaker keeps everything fair. One side of the court may be at a disadvantage, especially if you’re playing outside.\[4\]

If the score is five to one, then the total score of the game is six and the players would have to alternate sides.

Some examples of disadvantage you may have on a particular side of a court include: the glare from the sun, the wind blowing in your face and the blinding lights at the venue.

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Switch sides in the middle of your service set. Because players change sides of the court at the end of an even number of points (six) and servers alternate after odd numbered points, whoever was serving before the side switch will serve their second serve after the side switch.[5]

In normal tennis games, the side switch occurs at the beginning of a new game so there is always a new server.

Trade sides after the tiebreaker. If there is another set after the tiebreaker, the players will start the first game of the new set on the opposite ends of the court from where they ended up in the tiebreaker. If the score of the tiebreaker is seven to two, the players will switch sides for the next game even though there has only been three serves since the last side change.

Most professional organizations worldwide don’t allow tiebreakers to be played in the final set of a match so there will always be a new set after a tiebreaker.

The U.S. Tennis Association is one of the only worldwide tennis organizations that does allow tiebreakers to be played in the final set of a match.
Part 3

Winning the Tiebreaker

Be the first to score seven points. You only have to score four points in order to win a normal tennis game. In a tiebreaker however, you have to score seven points to achieve victory. The way points are counted in a tiebreaker is also different from the way they are counted in a normal tennis game.\[^{6}\]

In a normal tennis game points are counted as: love (zero), 15 (one), 30 (two) and 40 (three).

In a tiebreaker points are simply counted as: one, two, three, four and so on.

Win by two. Just like a normal game of tennis, you must attain a two point advantage over your opponent to win the tiebreaker. The game will continue as long as it takes for one player gain a two point lead over the other.\[^{7}\]

If the score is seven to six, the player with six points has one more chance to even the score up.
Be aggressive. Tiebreakers are mental and can be high-stress situations. You may be tempted to play it safe, but you’ll likely be more successful going into attack mode. Keep the intensity of your serves and be unpredictable. Try to get off to an early lead by getting in your opponent’s head.

For example: If both you and your opponent are right handed, then it would be safer to serve the ball down the middle of the court so they’d have to return it using their backhand. However, they might be caught off guard if you serve towards their stronger forehand.\[8\]

Tiebreakers are often decided by mental errors. Force your opponent to make mistakes by making it impossible for them to know where you’ll hit the ball next.
Second article

Tie-Breaker Scoring
'The Tennis Score Solution - Break The Tie - Finish The Set'

Picture this. The tennis score in the second set is 6-6 in the finals at the French Open. Your eyes have been glued to the television as you watch two of the world’s best tennis player’s battle competitively for each and every single point.

Just when you think one of these top-notch tennis athletes is going to take over the set and dominate, the other tennis player reverses course evening the tennis score. The phone rings, you answer the call and tend to an urgent matter taking you away from this intense match.

Upon your return the tennis score resulted in 7-6 for the second set and the finalists have just started playing the first game in the third set. If you are new to the sport of tennis or just a casual spectator, you might be confused because it was your understanding that a tennis competitor must win by two or more games to win and close out a set.

So how and why is the outcome of the tennis score 7-6 in the second set?

Well your thinking is on track to a point. The standard rule in tennis is to win by two or more games to close out a set. The confusion is that many spectators not familiar with all the rules of the game probably think that this rule is etched in stone.

This is true, but what if both of the tennis competitors fail to take over, dominate, and control the outcome of the tennis score within the set? The length of the set and possibly the match would drag out as it continuously rotates back and forth for countless games until one of these athletes outwits, outplays, and outlasts the other.

That slogan probably sounds familiar to reality television fans of the show Survivor, but a similar slogan would have to apply in tennis where surviving the longevity of such a match can be brutal. That is the way tennis was played prior to the evolution of television advertisements.

Thank goodness for tie-breaker scoring.

Spectators appreciate it and for the most part tennis athletes prefer it. The results of the tennis score for such a close set is no longer dragged out for countless games to finish a set and ultimately a match.

Think about this for a second.

Grand Slam Tennis Tournaments have been known to last over four hours, sometimes over five hours at times and that is with tie-breaker scoring integrated into the rules of the match.

What would happen in many of these matches if tie-breaker scoring was not a factor in finalizing the tennis score in a set?
Chances are an hour or two, possibly even three hours could be added to the duration of such a competitive match. Consequently, this would trigger the complexity of marketing television advertisements as well as locking down television programming schedules.

Tiebreaker scoring, commonly termed the '7 Point Tiebreak' is the time management answer to accelerating the tennis score and finalizing a set when the tennis game score is tied at 6-6. At this point a final game is played utilizing an alternative point scoring method ... the '1', '2', '3', '4' point scoring system.

A '7 Point Tiebreak' simply means the first competitor to earn seven points with a two point advantage wins the game and more importantly the set.

For instance, the final game score could be 7-0, 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, 7-4, or 7-5. Notice 7-6 was not mentioned. Keep in mind that in order to win a game, a competitor must have a two point advantage - therefore, 7-6 will not win a '7 Point Tiebreak' game.

The game must continue until one of the tennis competitors closes out the set with a final tennis score of 8-6, 9-7, 10-8, 11-9, 12-10, etc. for the '7 Point Tiebreak' game.

The '7 Point Tiebreak' game is the final game after twelve games have been played and the game score is tied (6-6) for the set. In tennis, this is the only time a tennis competitor closes out a set by winning with a one game advantage resulting in tennis game score of 7-6 or 6-7.

That covers scoring a '7 Point Tiebreak' game. To initiate game play in a '7 Point Tiebreak', how do you determine who serves first?

Simply continue the rotation of serves.

In other words, the tennis competitor next in line to serve initiates game play by serving the 1st point from the right service court (deuce court).
The rotation of serves rotates after the 1st point is played out.

The 2nd and 3rd points are served by the opponent of the competitor who served the 1st point.

This competitor serves the 2nd point from the left service court (advantage court or 'ad' court) and then serves the 3rd point from the right service court.

With the exception of the 1st point played, each competitor throughout the entire '7 Point Tiebreak' game serves two consecutive points always serving the first point from the left service court then serving the second point from the right service court.

After every six points played, the tennis competitors switch ends on the court and game play continues until a winner of the '7 Point Tiebreak' game is determined.

When the '7 Point Tiebreak' game is finalized and the match is not over the tennis competitors switch ends on the court again since the outcome of the match is 7-6. 7 + 6 = 13 and the traditional tennis scoring rules state that tennis competitors always switch ends on the courts when the sum of the games adds up to an odd number.

On another note, the traditional tennis scoring rules specifically states that the tennis competitor who served the 1st point in the '7 Point Tiebreak' game now receives serves at the beginning of game play in the next set.

**Tie-Breaker Scoring Tips**

- 6-6 in a set results in a '7 Point Tiebreak' game played
- 7 points earned combined with a 2 point advantage wins the game
- the 1st point is served from the right service court (deuce court)
- rotate serves after the 1st point is played
- with the exception of the 1st point served, each competitor serves two consecutive points always serving the first point from the left service court (advantage court or 'ad' court) then serving the second point from the right service court (deuce court)
- every 6 points, the tennis competitors switch ends on the court

Tie-Breaker scoring compliments the sport of tennis and is widely embraced by tennis athletes, spectators and network television management.

The next time you are watching a Grand Slam Tennis Tournament and the game score is tied at 6-6, stay tuned in for an electrifying battle for points in a '7 Point Tiebreak' game to determine the outcome of the final tennis score for that set and possibly the match.