



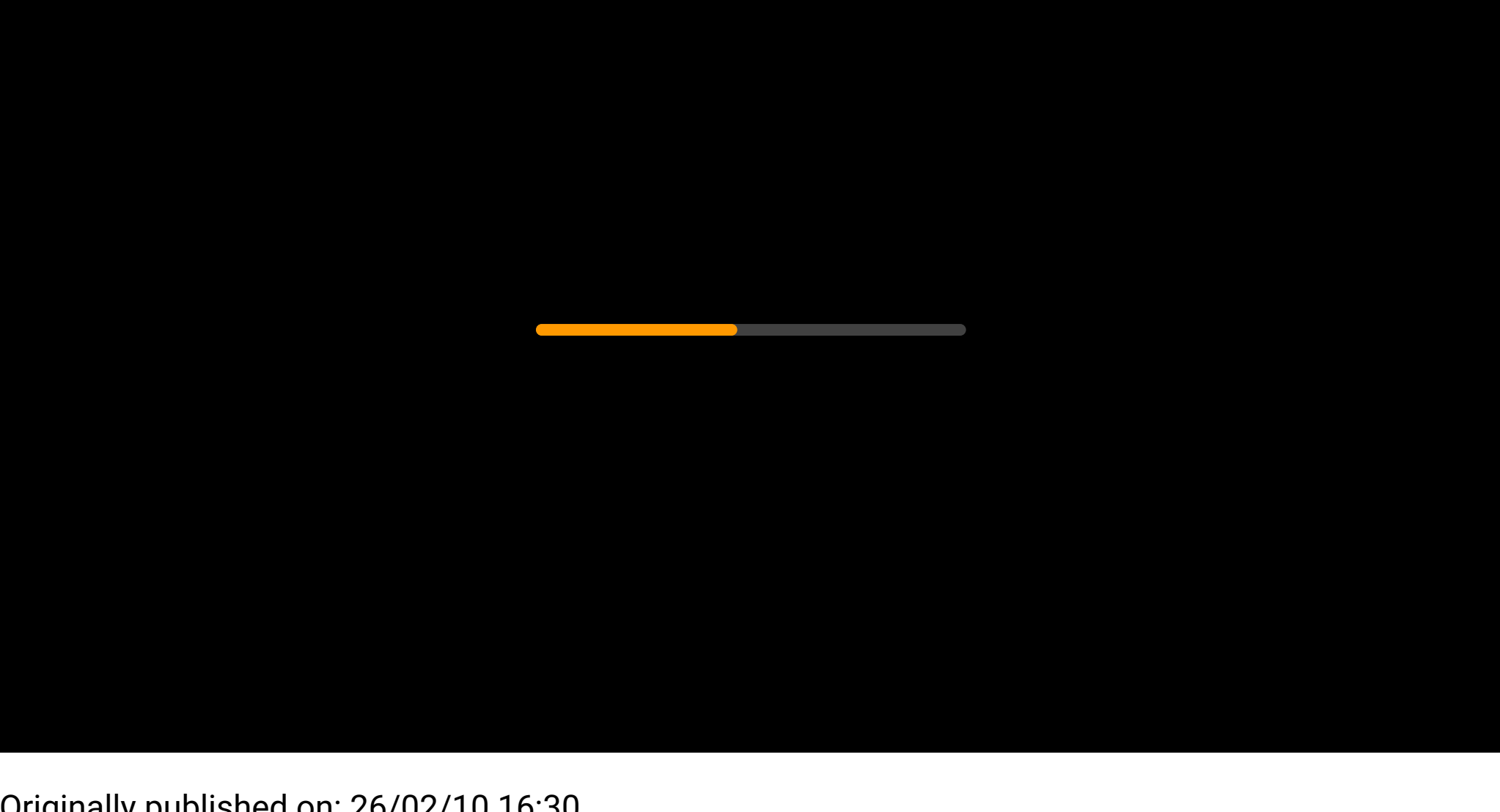
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Back to basics: Return of serve

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Like the serve, this is a shot that doesn't get practised very much by a lot of players, but like the serve it's a hugely important shot in any player's repertoire.

The technique

1. Get into the habit of waiting with a forehand grip. Because you can use the non-playing hand to help, it's easier to change from forehand to backhand rather than the other way round.
2. Use a small split step as your opponent is about to strike the serve to burst in the direction of the ball.
3. On first serves you have less time to react so shorten your backswing and use the pace of the serve just block it back if necessary. The take-back is no more than a turn of the hips.
4. Move forward to cut down the angles, meet the ball out in front of your body and get your bodyweight behind the ball.

Tactics

As a general approach, just aim to neutralise first serves to stay in the rally. Try to attack second serves so you can dominate the point. Your returns could be improved by trying one or more of the following simple tips...

- Watch your opponent's ball toss closely and you will start to pick up earlier which way the ball is going. This will allow you to prepare earlier and be able to make more returns.
- Watch the ball for longer and try to see it hit the strings of your racket.
- Try to avoid starting your recovery too early or you'll pull away from the ball.

Sammel says...

If you're taken out wide by the serve, aim for the middle of the court or cross court so if you catch it late you'll still get it in. If you have time, use your stronger side – probably your forehand – especially to attack second serves.

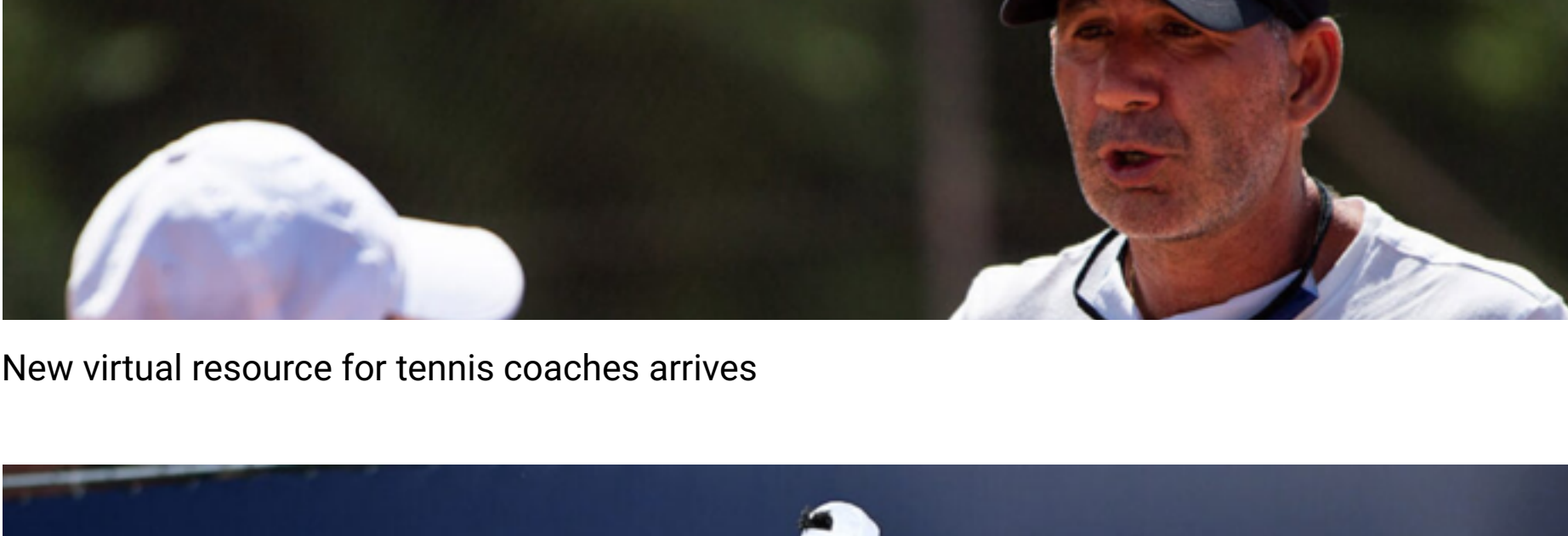
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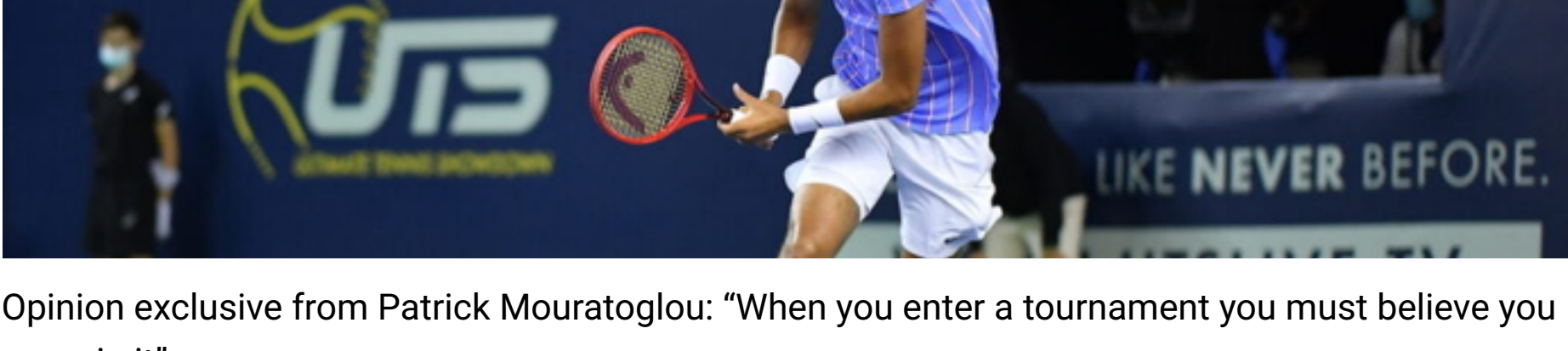
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