

Doubles

Most adults play doubles in preference to singles. After all, there are only three types of matches that you can play in tennis and two of these are doubles (mixed and gender specific doubles). When I watch doubles, mixed included, I often wonder what is the goal or objective of the net player.

1. Are they hoping to make things happen?
2. Are they going to make things happen?
3. Or are they waiting to make things happen?

When speaking to players, both young and old about how their match went, one gets lots of replies but generally they fall into maybe three categories.

1. The game passed them by,
2. They couldn't influence the game,
3. Things work for me at the net.

Doubles is primarily a game of anticipation, where singles is a game of action and reaction. So if you play doubles like you play singles, more than likely you are going to end up losing. I try to play at the net with the word FAST in my mind.

F could stand for frustration because it is very frustrating to know that you could have reached that last ball but you didn't react or that you didn't anticipate it. Or it could be that you felt it off your chest as your partners last shot was so short that it was easy for the opponent to target you. Or F could be get those feet moving, Fast Feet as this will help you cover the net area like a blanket. Or F could be to get a feel for what your opponent can do and can't do.

A stands for anticipation. Don't react but anticipate where the next shot might go. If your opponents are behind the baseline, well then, they will want to play the highest percentage shot and that shot is cross court so you become a poacher. Whereas if you see them stepping forward to attack their short ball then protect yourself by becoming a gamekeeper.

S could stand for the score. Winning teams tend to be more aggressive, losing teams tend to be defensive and play the high percentage ball i.e. lobs and cross court shots. Look at their stance, semi open stances tend to allow their hitters to go cross court. If they are off balance they too will try to play the high percentage shots. Do they tend to have big swings or short blocking actions? Learn from the first few and anticipate from there on in.

T could stand for target. If you are trying to influence the game by poaching then you need to know where your best target area is. Sometimes it is at the opposing net player. Sometimes it's towards the side-lines.

As mentioned earlier doubles is about anticipation and what is that? By taking a chance! If you don't take that chance or risking it then you are not going to influence that point, that game or that match.

Hopefully you can try to introduce some of the above in your next match and maybe even F could stand for First heading towards the First Division, your first win again that pair that always seem to be your bogies!

When you gain confidence with your ability to poach then the next article will be above faking. When you can influence your opponents shot making. Making doubles and mixed even more enjoyable.

Keep practicing and here's to a new First in 2018

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