

Playing good doubles

Playing Good Doubles

Doubles tends to be more fun and social than singles as there is a team as opposed to individual element involved. From a scoring perspective it is played under the same rules as singles. There are however two players on each side on a wider court (i.e. tram lines are included) and there is a different order of serving and returning. Partners take turns serving (once every four games) and can change their order only at the start of a new set. Similarly, partners decide whether to receive serve from the left or right-hand service court for the duration of a set.

Doubles had the following benefits:

- Emphasises the general development of an all-round game. Players have more of an opportunity to hit volleys, lobs and overheads.
- Gives players confidence to play at the net as they have to cover one half of the court. There is somebody behind them should the ball go over their head or past them to the back of the court.
- Encourages them to play a more aggressive game, especially at the net. There is an opportunity to poach should their opponents hit a weak return. The players at the back of the court tend to hit the ball harder, hit into open spaces or use the lob in order to force an error out of their opponents.
- Provides the players with the opportunity to use greater angles than they might use when playing singles. If players can accurately hit the ball

into the tram lines they can prevent their opponents from poaching. Also short angled balls are very difficult to deal with as players have to run fast to the ball and find it difficult to control shot when they get there.

- Develops a strong and accurate return of serve. A poor return of serve will generally be punished by the net player. It also teaches the players how to lob the ball when under pressure on service returns.
- Develops quick reactions and improves reflexes as volleying at net speeds up the game.
- Encourages teamwork and communication. It forces the players to co-operate. Poor communication results in under performance.
- Players feel less anxiety, because they share the pressure with their partner, and hence they often experience more fun and enjoyment.

Setting up a doubles team:

Choosing a doubles partner is an important decision. It requires more than technique and tactics to build an effective team as the psychological demands are different to singles. There needs to be emotional harmony as this helps them play well when under pressure as it brings support, balance and direction to the team.

From a tactical perspective:

- If there is one strong player he/she should usually play in the ad side as this side deals with more game points.
- A left hander should normally play on the ad side unless both players have better backhands than forehands.

Match Preparation:

- If you do not know your opponents try find out as much as possible before the game and have a plan. It is imperative to scout the opponents

on their shots, positions and tendencies. The players have to be constantly observing and anticipating and discussing what they see and change plans if necessary. If you know your opponents identify their technical and tactical strengths and weaknesses and prepare a plan on this basis:

1. Are they good at the net?
 2. Do they play aggressively or cautiously?
 3. Do they cover the court well?
 4. Who is the slower and less fit player?
 5. Have they a good overhead, forehand, backhand, lob, serve, etc.?
- Once the toss has been made you need to decide:
 1. Is there is a preferable side (e.g. sun, wind, etc.)?
 2. Who should serve first (most confident player, consider environment and tactics)?
 3. Should you get your opponents to serve first?
 4. Where is the best place to hit the serve in order to put my opponent under pressure causing an error or a weak return?
 5. How will we return (power, precision, crosscourt drive, angle, down the line at net player, lob)?

(Note: the most important thing is to get off to a good start and to keep the momentum going).

Strategy and Tactics:

- Achieve high 1st serve percentage. Keep serves deep. Vary the serve to maintain uncertainty. Your partner should not overly cover down the line as this will give them little opportunity to poach and will give your opponents a bigger court to return into (down the middle of the court or out wide). They should be active at the net, ready to put away any weak ball coming their way. If the serve is hit out wide they should cover the down the line shot and if the ball is hit successfully over their head they should move to

the opposite side of the court as quickly as possible. If you feel that the ball is constantly going over your head, move back a little as the chances are that you are standing too close to the net.

- Every return should be into play. If the serve is weak focus on hitting an outright winner be it a down the line shot, crosscourt forehand or backhand, drop-shot or angle. If the serve is manageable make your opponents play their most uncomfortable shot i.e. backhand, forehand, lob, volley etc.
- All good volleyers use a split-step just as the opponent is about to hit the ball as part of their preparation. The player jumps into a position where the feet are shoulder width apart. The feet are aligned with the net. The player forms a base from which quick movement can be initiated. The split step balances the player. It also allows possible movement in all directions i.e. turning to hit a forehand/backhand volley or moving back to hit an overhead. The pre-stretch of leg muscles stores elastic energy to allow explosive movement on landing which enables quick movement towards the ball.

Communication:

Some key components of doubles are effective communication, mutual respect, understanding, appreciation, support and acceptance. It is important to encourage your partner, talk to them when they get nervous, build up their confidence by congratulating them when they hit a good shot, discuss things tactically rather than criticise and keep irritations to a minimum on court. Compliment good shots. It is important to learn to deal with situations that arise on court such as:

- Your partner makes a mistake on a big point.
- Your partner is playing badly.
- Your partner is nervous.
- Your partner is angry.
- Your partner is not motivated.

Positive affirmations such as the following will hopefully get your partner going:

- Let's go, next point, you will get it next time, no worries!
- Come on, you can do it!
- Hang in there!
- Use humor to help them relax. There is a big bar of chocolate with your name on it if we win this match.
- Don't be angry, it's time to have some fun!
- Here we go!

The key to winning a doubles match is by taking opportunities as they arise i.e. playing the big points well. It is important to get into the mindset that you are good in these situations as self-doubt will lead to anxiety. If you have won these points so far it is necessary to keep the same tactic.

Don't change a winning game.

Use changeovers to communicate with your partner:

- Take your time, sit down and talk.
- Discuss the strategy for the next two games.
- Make sure that you keep hydrated.
- Remember that you are a team; you cannot do it on your own.

It is important as a player to win more doubles matches. As a player our intentions are to improve our grading within the club and at a Munster level. The best way to boost our grading is by playing successful doubles both at club and provincial level. The Munster winter league and club winter league are about to start so:

- Plan your season.
- Set your goals.
- Identify strategies to facilitate the achievement of these goals.
- Invest commitment and effort.
- Remember that it is important to practice new shots in order to bring them into a match situation.

Hopefully this article will enable you to play good doubles and achieve your objectives as a tennis player.

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