

# Badminton Articles

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Compiled by Badminton Friends

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## **How to better your badminton game while having fun in the process**

*Source: Washington State Badminton Association Newsletter Newsletter, Spring 1996*

*Author: Rob Brown*

Do you like to play badminton? Do you love the thrill of an exciting match? Do you want to improve your game? But does the thought of doing hours of boring drills sap any enthusiasm right out of you?

Believe it or not, there is a way to have all the fun of competition and improve your game. It's called half-court singles.

Half-court singles is a game whereby the players use only one half of the standard singles court from the center line to the inside alley line, and all the way to the back singles line. Games use standard scoring to 15 with setting allowed. The object is to win the rallies, score the most points, and win the game.

The consequences, however, are:

1. better footwork;
2. improved consistency and more accurate shot placements;
3. increased stamina;
4. killer drops and net play;
5. stronger smashes;
6. wall-of-China defense.

Sound too good to be true? Here's how it works: Normally, in a standard game of full-court singles, many players rely on cross-court shots to gain time or to get themselves out of trouble. Additionally, many players who are proud of their singles game have a repertoire of unorthodox shots that help them get the bird back but do nothing to improve their game (e.g. skidding faceplants into the gym floor while stealthily dinking the bird back just barely over the net, or clever deceptions such as feigning a pulled muscle or a detached arm, accompanied by a blood curdling grunt, and then sneakily dinking the bird back just barely over the net, etc.).

These crafty tactics are often just plain desperation maneuvers employed by players who instead of mastering the basics have relied heavily upon years of in-bred bad habits to skank themselves out of one bad situation and into the next rally.

### **Better Footwork**

In half-court singles, the shots are quicker because the luxury of the cross court has been eliminated. Likewise, the need for backhand shots is greatly diminished. With only half the court to cover, one focuses on taking everything with the forehand. This means that your footwork has to be functional. By virtue of wanting to win the rallies, you are forced to abandon many of the old bad habits and instead concentrate on basic shots and footwork.

### **Improved Consistency and More Accurate Shot Placements**

Half-court singles promotes consistency and accuracy. Because you have fewer options about where to hit the bird, and because the court is relatively narrow, you are forced to

hit more accurate shots in order to win the rallies. Many full-court singles players aren't that accurate in their shot placement. They know that if they hit the shuttle in the general direction of where they want it to go, it has a decent chance of staying in the court. In half-court, again, one is not afforded this luxury. You have to abandon shots that don't work or go out, and replace them with shots that stay in. This narrowing of your focus further hones your accuracy, producing much more consistent play.

### **Increased Stamina**

So now you're hitting more accurate and consistent shots, and your footwork is better. A strange thing is about to happen your stamina is going to increase. Rallies in half-court singles tend to be longer. Both players usually hit the so-called "high percentage" shots, i.e. shots that are more likely to stay in and keep the rally going. This translates into longer rallies, particularly of the up-and-back variety. Lots of clears followed by drop shots, net play, and then more clears mean that in order to win the rallies, you'll have to hang in there. Because it's fun and competitive, you're less likely to become bored or tired. Instead, your focus improves your stamina.

### **Killer Drops and Net Play**

With less ground to cover, your opponent will always be a fraction of a second closer to any drops you hit. It follows then that in order to win the rallies, you're going to have to hit tighter net shots. Anything less will give your opponent the advantage. You will naturally begin hitting drops that are quicker, rather than of the "floater" strain. And when at the net, fearful that your opponent will pounce like a rabid tiger on the typical lethargic, plump, and juicy sky-high net shots that've become your full-court singles game's calling card, you'll again be forced into hitting more razor-sharp and accurate net shots.

### **Stronger Smashes**

One consequence of better footwork, improved accuracy, and increased stamina is that when you do smash, these factors help you maximize the effectiveness of your shots. That is, by getting your feet and body into the correct position, and by hitting a clean, crisp stroke that you know will be more accurate, your smashes tend to become stronger and more effective. Also, in order to conserve energy, smashes are used sparingly, and usually only when the opportunity arises (a weak clear by your opponent, or you see they are slightly out of position, etc.).

### **Wall-of-China Defense**

Accountable for a smaller area of court, you are better able to anticipate and return your opponent's smashes. Since all smashes by definition of half-court singles are straight ahead, you will be able to concentrate on pure defense rather than running to retrieve them. And, if you're going to win the rallies, you'll soon find yourself getting those smashes back. Your options are limited: either clear the shuttle deeply, drop it, or drive it back straight at the smasher. I favor the last approach, because someone who has just smashed has some forward momentum that can be used against him to elicit a weak return.

So, if you want to improve your game and have fun in the process, play half-court singles.

# The Backhand

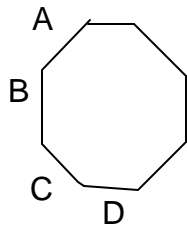
Source: WSBA Newsletter Spring 1997

Author: Eugene Kumekawa

I thank Anders Linden, Geoff Stensland, and Jean-Pierre D'Zahr for their contributions to this article. I acknowledge the following who have passed on some of their knowledge of the backhand to me: Sheryl Yeary (CT), Noel Fehm (CT), Dottie O'Neal (CT), Rosemary McGuire (CT), Dr. Don Paup (VA), and Peter Lim (Tasmania).

Most teachers of the backhand in badminton preface their remarks by advising players not to learn it; to develop, instead, a "round-the-head" forehand stroke. This article follows tradition: the advantages of using proper footwork to the backhand corner and taking the shuttle on the forehand do outweigh using the backhand. The player can see the net, and can make stronger, technically easier, and more types of shots using a round-the-head. The best players, however, all seem to have good backhands anyway, and all players eventually have to use their backhands at some point. Here, then, is how to hit the overhead backhand.

## Grip



There are eight bevels to the racket handle (see Figure). Most players extend the thumb so that it and its mount (the fleshy part of the palm below the thumb) lies flat along a bevel (Geoff Stensland does not change his grip for the backhand). One teacher (Don Paup) puts his thumb on bevel B; another (Peter Lim) told me it has to be on bevel A, since if placed on the popular bevels B or C the racket face would naturally face out away from the backhand line, so that the shuttle would easily go wide. Most of the early works on badminton suggest putting the thumb on bevel C, but if you stroke using forearm rotation (supinating for the backhand - described below) this position is constricting, and the racket face does not square naturally at impact. Lastly, Gord Smith (Badminton News, 6/96, 6(4):10) says the position of the shuttle at impact in relation to the body determines which bevel to use: if the shuttle is closer to the net than you, the thumb should rest on bevel C; if the shuttle is next to you, choose bevel A; if the shuttle has traveled past you, use bevel D.

## Positioning

Get your racket side of your body close to the flight path of the shuttle. You want to strike the bird before it goes past you. You should be completely turned around (but see below for a contrasting position) with your back square to the net, looking over your racket shoulder at the oncoming shuttle. Just before you begin your stroke, your racket foot should be planted. Your racket elbow should be pointing to the floor, held in front of your torso; the racket itself should be pointing upwards, with the racket hand close to your non-racket shoulder. Your trunk and shoulders should be rotated away from the shuttle.

## Stroke

The stroke starts with a quick jerk of your hip, shoulder, and elbow toward the shuttle. (I believe all shots, including drop shots, are best executed quickly for deception.) Your

thumb should be pointing downwards on the handle; your forearm is still close to the bicep. As your elbow rises past your shoulder, the forearm starts straightening and rotating clockwise for right-handers (counterclockwise for left-handers). The stroke ends with a violent twist of the forearm so that at impact the racket face is square to the shuttle, with the arm fully extended. You should try to meet the shuttle as high as you can, to give yourself the most offensive options, and since any stroke with a bent arm at impact is inefficient.

## **Follow-through**

Except for the racket head (some players end the stroke at impact), there is very little follow-through with the arm. I was told that swinging your arm beyond the shoulder actually dissipates power. The classic analogy of the backhand swing is snapping a towel at a fly: the arm does not need to follow through to achieve the snap. At impact, your tricep and bicep should be flexed and strong, to counteract hyperextending the elbow.

## **Variations**

Jean-Pierre D'Zahr follows an older English style: the thumb is extended along bevel C, the body and feet are stable and sideways to the net, the trunk and shoulders rotated towards the backcourt. The stroke starts by uncoiling the shoulders, followed by the elbow and wrist, much like how a whip uncoils. The thumb snaps forward and downward at impact, which must be in front of the body for effectiveness. Anders Linden does not extend the thumb on backhand drops or smashes, as he feels the extended thumb prevents the racket head from fully following through quickly enough to hit downward. You can slice a backhand drop by quickly sweeping the racket head towards the sideline, clipping the shuttle downwards to the tape.

## **Getting more length**

Most beginners don't get length on their backhand clears because they don't take a full stroke. The mechanics of the backhand make it mostly an arm/wrist shot (unlike the forehand, which uses more of the hips and shoulders as well), so starting the backhand with the elbow pointing up toward the shuttle is like patty-caking it across the net. Although it is easier contacting the shuttle this way, once you get used to timing the impact high at the end of the shoulder-elbow-wrist uncoiling sequence, the shuttle should travel noticeably farther.

The racket head should be moving quickly at impact. The backhand is a wristy shot; you should be thinking of flicking at the shuttle, rather than taking a sweeping, muscular arm swing at it. Many beginners overswing this way, and do not turn completely around when setting up for the backhand. The shot literally ends with your back still to the net with your arm up in the air.

Whether or not you rotate your forearm to hit shots, the thumb does a lot of work near the end of the stroke. Pushing and snapping the racket head forward with the thumb are big keys to the backhand. Think of quick-clearing the shuttle low and deep. All backhand clears do not necessarily have to be defensive; perhaps getting more length is a simple matter of changing tactical attitude.

The pitfall of learning the backhand is that once you get good at it, you will become more lazy and start to rely on it. Remember, the round-the-head is much more dangerous to the opponent. It is much better if you practice shots using this stroke rather than the backhand.

# **Badminton Strategies and Tactics for the Novice and Recreational Player**

*Source: Washington State Badminton Association Newsletter Newsletter, Fall 1996  
Author: Eugene Kumekawa*

Now that you have graduated from backyard badminton, you can no longer rely on physical ability alone to win games. It is time to develop tactics and strategies to out-think and beat your opponent. By identifying and focusing on his or her weaknesses, you are beginning to use your mental acumen to win. If you play without thinking you will lose without realizing why you lost.

## **In general**

Study your opponents. Discover what shots they are prone to make errors on, which shots are their favorite ones, and which shots they are limited to in specific situations. You are looking for patterns and tendencies. Perhaps by their body language and movement they telegraph what shot they are going to execute. Correctly anticipating what the opponents will do with the shuttle will help your own game enormously. Even feeding the shuttle to an opponent's favorite put-away shot will work to your advantage because you gain time: you will be ready for it and may return it before he has recovered.

Your opponent has other qualities that dictate how you play. I play quickly and aggressively against a player who has more stamina and patience than I do, likewise I play more conservatively against a player who has less stamina or is more inconsistent. One coach I knew classified players according to how they moved, and hit shots that he thought would upset their timing and rhythm. I, on the other hand, know only enough to hit fast, low shots against slow-footed players and try to fake more against quick players.

## **Singles**

Use the length of the court and pin your opponent to the back line before trying a drop shot to the net. It is much easier to retrieve his shots when he is forced to hit from deep in his court. Move your opponent to all four corners to tire him. It is much easier to hit winning shots against a tired player, even a fresh player who is slightly tired from a long rally. Dart in and out of your own corners so that you can cover your court for his next shot.

Singles is a mental and physical battle. A lapse in concentration can easily lead to losing a run of points, which in turn is discouraging and may lead to losing even more points. To win in singles one must be fit, focused, and hit good clears and drops without errors. Smashes should only be used for ending the rally within the next two shots. The classic singles rally would use drops and clears until the shuttle is too far away from the opponent to him to effectively clear a return, and then with a smash win the rally outright.

## **Mens and womens doubles**

Avoid lifting or clearing the shuttle, which is like punting in football. By clearing, you are giving the opponents a chance to win. If you do clear, your team should adopt a side-by-

side defensive position. The whole point of the rally, starting with the service, is to hit shots that force the opponents to lift. This is why when you are serving your partner stands behind you because you hope to make the receivers lift with your good short serve. This is also why when you are receiving serve your partner stands behind you because you hope with your aggressive return you will make someone on the serving team lift to your partner.

If your opponents clear to your side, the person who will hit the shuttle must hit downwards (either smashing or dropping) while the partner must be moving to the front as soon as he realizes the shuttle is not his. This is the up and back offense position, the better to control the net. From now on the smasher gets all the deep ones, while the net man cuts off or puts away everything else.

If you have the offense, it is safest if you do not smash cross-court, since their down-the-line return will be directed at your undefended open space. Find out how your opponent directly across the net from you waits for your smash. If he waits on his backhand, smash wide to his forehand or close to his forehand hip or shoulder. If he waits on his forehand, smash to his body or his backhand. If he stands deep, hit drops or cut smashes. If he stands close and waits with his racket up, try a quick clear.

If you are on defense, try to flatten the smash out so that the smasher cannot smash again. You can return cross-court with the aim of tiring the smasher or forcing him to hit a laterally off-balanced shot, but the cross-court must avoid the net man.

## **Mixed doubles**

In the classic mixed formation, the woman stays in front of the man, playing along and just behind the short service line, while the man retrieves shots hit to his half-court or backcourt. In mixed it is even more imperative not to lift, since the woman is so close at the net and vulnerable to smashes. Classic mixed is a slower game with more finesse than in regular doubles, the better to bring both partners into the rally. Again, each team is trying to hit shots that make the other team lift. Avoid shots that your opponents can meet above the tape, unless you manage to get the shot behind the striker.

If you do lift, the woman should not stay at the T and duck, but run away cross-court from where the shuttle is on the other side and take a position about 2-3 feet behind the short service line, squatting down and keeping the racket head up. She is only responsible for smashes and drops directed at her; the man gets everything else, including the down-the-line drop.

Since you are playing in an up-and-back formation, hitting cross-court is risky since you are vulnerable to a down-the-line return. Hit cross-court only if both opponents are on the same side of their court as the shuttle is on your side, or if you know you can hit a winner through the opposing woman.

For more details on playing mixed doubles, see the winter and spring issues of 1996.

# O.B.A. Doubles Strategy I (Men's & Ladies')

*This document was prepared for the O.B.A. by Mr. John Gilbert, Level III Coach*

- Introduction
- I (a) Service
- I (b) Reception of Service
- II Offensive zone and play
- III Defensive zone and play
- IV Movement from offence to defence
  - (a) Situation #1
  - (b) Situation #2
- V Movement from defence to offence
  - (a) Situation #1
  - (b) Situation #2
  - (c) Situation #3
- Conclusion
  - The ten commandments of doubles

## Introduction

Note that no differentiation is made between men's and ladies' doubles. In both games the same basic principles apply.

Doubles in badminton can be the most exciting game of all if played well by both teams involved. Often, however, it degenerates into two players monopolizing the play under the impression they are brilliantly exploiting their own strengths and covering their partners' obvious inadequacies. A team has strengths and a team has weaknesses, but a team is composed of two players interacting together. It is not composed of one player with an animated handicap. Therefore, a team's selection of strokes and strategies should not be haphazard at any level of play. Doubles -- whether men's or ladies' -- must be discussed under five headings:

- I (a) Service and (b) Reception of Service
- II Offensive Zone and Play
- III Defensive Zone and Play
- IV Movement from Offence to Defence
- V Movement from Defence to Offence

Let us look at these in order.

### I. (a) Service

Although the Level I Coaching Program does not require a knowledge of the "flick" serve -- i.e. a service which begins identically to the short service and then goes deep in the court because of a sudden "explosion" of the wrist -- all doubles players find this variation of serve essential. At any time in badminton, on any stroke, you must have at least some alternative stroke or

your opponent will always be in the right place at the right time. Therefore, when serving, develop the ability to (1) short serve close to the top of the net and landing just at the junction of your opponent's front service line and centre line, (2) flick serve to the back of your opponent's court. If these two serves are made to look as similar as possible up to the point of contact and if they are carefully mixed, you will do well.

In better levels of play the short service is used much more frequently.

## I. (b) Reception of Service

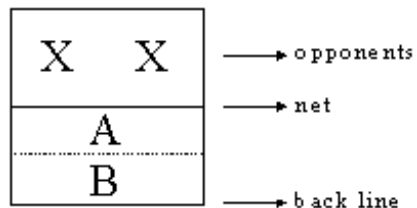
If your opponent does not disguise the service, lay in wait and ambush it. Remember, your opponent can not score points if you kill the serve instantly whenever it appears. However, if your opponent does disguise the service your work is cut out for you. Try to penetrate the disguise: often there is some little difference which a keen eyed observer can spot. Be that person, or hire a coach to do it for you. If your opponent serves long, smash it. If your opponent serves short, try to hit to one of the following spots:

- 1.flat or downwards directly at your opponent
- 2.to the alley nearest you
- 3.to the alley farthest from you

Obviously, if your opponents have major weaknesses, they should be exploited. Return number one expects you to get to the net fairly quickly. The second and third returns would like you there quickly but will allow you to be a little slower. How far from the net down the alley you hit the bird depends on your opponents' offensive and defensive zones.

## II. Offensive Zone and Play

When a team goes on offence in badminton it divides the court to maximize offensive power. The best division yet developed is the "up and back". In this division one player covers approximately the half of the court closer to the net and the other player covers the half closer to the back line:

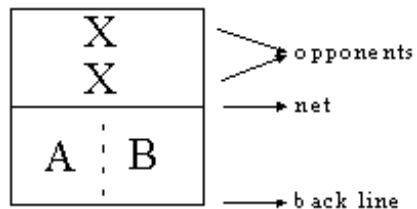


Note that in this type of zone offence, each player has a definite area of responsibility. This is an important concept for good offence and for the team defending against it. Let's assume player A is on offence near the net and player B is on offence near the back line. Players A and B should generally

be in the centre of the areas they are responsible for. If either moves too far from this centre base, the other player moves immediately to balance. Player A should act as the set-up person in volleyball, trying to force the opponents to lift the bird so player B can smash it. Player A will smash, of course, whenever the opportunity arises, but generally will play net shots and flat pushes. In the "up and back" system, the "up" player must try to intercept all shots which will not be high enough for the "back" player to smash. Thus, when on offence the racquet should be kept up at about head level and the bird should be hit down whenever possible or flat or, if unavoidably taken low should be crosscourt dropped at the net. Player B when smashing must not hit crosscourts unless there is an easily exploited weakness. Note the emphasized statements are absolutely basic principles in this type of doubles.

### III. Defensive Zone and Play

The court division for the defensive zone in badminton is almost a complete opposite. In this case the players adopt a "side by side" stance using the centre line as their dividing line:



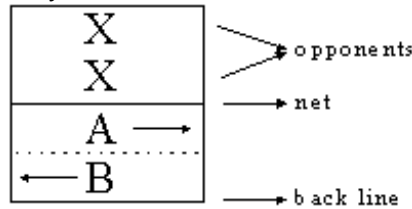
Since they are on defence and therefore expecting smashes, they take their position about two thirds or three quarters of the way from the net to the back line with their racquets held about waist level and as far in front of them as is comfortable. When returning your opponents' offensive smashes, drops and flat pushes, try to avoid merely lobbing or lifting the bird back -- this merely allows your opponents to remain on offense and leaves you on defence. Instead of lifting, try either underhand drop returns to the net or flat drives. If you have to lift the bird, hit it high and deep to the back corners. A careful mixture of these three alternatives will keep your opponents off balance and may even force them to lob a bird back high allowing your team to go on offence. Remember that the final test is whether it works: a high lob may be very effective against a team that can not smash, or if hit into a particularly bright light.

### IV. Movement from Offence to Defence

The next problem to consider is how a team moves smoothly from offence to defence. For this, let us return to the discussion on service and return of service. When service is about to be delivered, both teams take up offensive positions. Obviously this situation will not last, as each team attempts to force the other to lift the bird.

### Situation #1

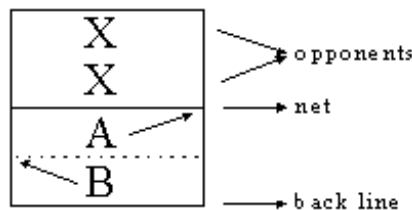
Let us assume that the team receiving service hits the bird deep down their opponents' backhand alley. Remember the principle of balance and counterbalance and you should visualize the situation as follows:



Since B has moved to the backhand alley to get the return of serve, A is forced to move to the right and perhaps back. If B chooses to lob the bird, A will retreat into a full side by side defence formation. If B plays a net drop or a flat shot, A will return to his/her original position.

### Situation #2

Let us assume the receiving team net dropped the bird to their opponents' forehand alley off the serve. Apply the principle and the following should result:



If A lobs the bird, A will retreat straight into a full side by side defence. If A manages to avoid lobbing, A will retreat to his/her original position. Note that the player lobbing the bird from the forecourt has the option of which side to retreat to, but in almost every situation he/she should retreat straight back. Note also that the principle of balance and counterbalance should not be interpreted in precise terms. Often other variables such as judgement and anticipation will alter the equation and the player may only be prepared to move in the direction indicated by the principle and may not actually move until the next shot is hit.

## V. Movement from Defence to Offence

The principle involved here is the same but the situation tends to be more complex and involve a great degree of anticipation.

### Situation #1

You are on defence with your opponents smashing. One is smashed at you which you manage to return without setting up the smash again. You must immediately assume the "up" position for your team's offence. Speed is important here, since any delay will allow your opponents to drop return your shot, forcing

your team to lob the bird up again whereupon they resume their attack. Note that the player who returns the net drop or flat shot takes the "up" position.

### **Situation #2**

You are on defence and your opponent, instead of smashing, hits a flat clear which you smash or drive back. Since the mechanics of the execution of this shot prevent you from moving quickly to the "up" position, your partner should take that position.

### **Situation #3**

Identical to #2, except your opponent drops. If the opposing "up" player does not cover the net carefully, you may be able to "sneak" a hairpin net shot in. If so, you remain in the "up" position you are now in.

## **Conclusion**

Remember that doubles is team work, and try to develop your play to complement one another. Many good doubles teams are not overwhelming in any category except team work. Obey the "ten commandments" and you will make a good team:

1. Serve short and low.
2. Return service with the three strokes given earlier.
3. Do not lift the bird.
4. Smash all overhead birds.
5. Hit round-the-heads rather than backhands.
6. Do not crosscourt smash.
7. When on offence keep your racquet up.
8. When on defence be in the ready position.
9. Underhand drops should be crosscourt.
10. Overhead drops (only very occasionally as a change of pace) must be to the centre of the court.

Good luck.

# The Offense in Doubles

Source: *WSBA Newsletter Summer 1998*

Author: *Eugene Kumekawa*

The offense in doubles is more than smashing and dropping your way to victory. There are things the attacking team can do to minimize their vulnerability to counter-attack and induce the defense to hit a weak return. Gaining the offense while shots in the rally are still low and flat is also an important part of playing attacking doubles. This article will focus on tactics in doubles offense rather than on how to develop rally-winning shots.

## Gaining the Offense

The first team that controls the net has the best chance of seizing the offense. The attack-minded team controls the net by hitting a shot that the opposing team cannot smash, then following the shuttle to the net. Claiming the net on an unsmashable shot forces the other team to clear. The unsmashable shot can be any shuttle that is too low, such as a net shot or a half court, or is lifted or driven behind an opponent or to his backhand. One can anticipate a net shot also by hitting a quick drive to the eyes, so that the opponent doesn't have time to hit it back hard. The player who claims the net should be ready for half-court shots and both cross-court and straight drops.

## Shot Location

Once a team is on the offense, the shot of choice is the smash. Once the smash is established, other off-speed shots become more effective. Even if the defense is impermeable and counters the smash with outright winners, the smasher has options that should be tried before dropping or clearing.

Since about 90 percent of the smashes are directed at the defender directly in front of him, the first thing the smasher should do is to study how the opponent defends. If he is a backhand defender, the smasher should aim anywhere on the defender's forehand side from knee to shoulder. If the defender waits on his forehand, the smasher should hit to the defender's body or backhand. Frequently too a forehand defender backs up against a sideline (or the center line) so that a wide smash out of reach is also effective. There is no sense smashing to a defender's strength.

In general, the smasher should try to cramp the defender by hitting close to or at his body. Hitting away from the body allows the defender to take a fuller swing; it is then easier for him to drive the smash cross court. Flat or high smashes are also easier to drive-return for the same reason. The effective smash is one that results in a return that is weak enough for the partner at net to smash. These are induced by overpowering velocity or by cramping the swing of the defender by smashing at his forehand hip.

It is usually a bad idea to smash cross-court, even if the smash is directed at the defender's weaknesses or at a weak defender. The cross-court smash is not as effective since it travels farther, and it gives the defense a wider angle to attack. The cross-court smash and the down-the-line return would travel faster than the smasher can run. Since a cross-court smash induces the net man to stay wide and even vacate the net to cover a deep down-the-line return, the defense can safely hit any cross court return

which often surprises the offense anxious to cover the vulnerable down-the-line court. Cross-court shots that expose one's own backhand are particularly ill-advised.

The wider the smash is, the riskier it is. The safest cross-court smashes are those from the smasher's backhand court (assuming everyone is right-handed) to the body of the cross-court defender. They must be steeply angled so that the shuttle has to be lifted higher, giving either the net man or the smasher time to cover the forehand court.

Smashing down the middle between the two defenders is best when they stand far apart or when the shuttle can be smashed from the center of the court (so the smash does not have to travel cross-court much to split the defense). Each defender may depend on the other to return the smash, afraid of clashing racquets. Placing the smash in the middle, across the net in front of the net man, also reduces the angle the net man has to cover, thereby increasing his chances of cutting off the smash return.

### **Shot Selection**

The offense is not all smashing, although smashes "set up" other shots. Drop shots and half smashes are effective against quick defenders or those who play deep. Drop shots are most effective to the middle: the defense has more time to be confused, and the offense has to cover less angle on the return. Cut smashes throw off the timing of the defender so that the return is frequently wide. Quick attacking clears may also be effective, especially against players who defend closer to the net, crouching and waiting with the racquet head up.

### **The net man**

The partner at net is crucial to the offense. He protects the smasher, wins the rallies, and forces the defense to continue lifting. To accomplish this, the net man must do more than stand in one place at net with the racquet up, bent over from fear of getting hit in the back of the head.

The net man's position in front is fluid, depending on where the smasher is and what type of shot the defense favors. In general, if the defense returns smashes with drives, the net man should play deeper, almost as if he is playing singles. Conversely, if the defense is softer, the net man can play closer to the net but still a couple feet behind the short service line. He should still be able to get to net returns of smash before the defense gets to the net, so that he has the advantage in a rally at net.

The deeper the shuttle is lifted to the back, the deeper the net man moves away from the net, though still staying in the front half of the court. The net man also stays on the same side of the court as the shuttle is on. He is anticipating the smash straight ahead to the forehand hip and so stands in a position that reduces the angle of the likely return. If the smasher drops, the net man moves forward to cover a possible net return, intimidating the defense into lifting the shuttle. When the shuttle is lifted, the net man moves back again—it could be tiring for the net man to play with a person who continuously drops. If the lift is weak, only to mid court, rather than play in front of the smasher, the net man should move out of the way to the vacant side of the court. The smasher can cover the net for weak returns, while the net man covers the empty court.

When the net man does get a shuttle to hit, he should try to maintain the quick attack by driving the shuttle to the body or face of the closest defender. The net man is much closer to the defenders than the smasher, and so does not have to hit hard or take a big swing to make the defense hit a weak return. Merely blocking the shot to the net may be effective against deep defenders, but usually it gives the defense another chance to clear deep.

Many players at net move to the back if the smash or smash return is hit cross-court. This is fine if the net man is a stronger back court player, or if the smasher is tired, or if the net man can get to the shuttle in a better position to smash than the erstwhile smasher. This type of rotation underscores the importance of proper positioning of the net man (i.e., not too close to the net) and a steep downward angle of the smash.

### **The ideal offense**

The smasher should be behind the bird, properly balanced so that his mass should be going forward when he strikes the shuttle. Against a good defense, velocity is not as important as angle, both in terms of the steepness of the smash's angle, and the lateral angle of possible returns available to the defense. Some smashes are safer than others and some smashes are harder to return than others just from the location alone. The offense does not have to hit smashes until arms start falling off, but usually they win the rally faster. If the smasher is in trouble, or off balance, the shot to try is a drop or a half-smash to gain time and to set up the next smash.

The net man should be aware of what the smasher is doing, whether he is out of position or out of balance. Being aware of the smasher helps the net man to anticipate return shots and cut off potential winners. The net man is not passive, just looking for the weak return he could put away; he is constantly moving and thinking. He should stand tall, taking up space, scaring the defense to clear the shuttle away from him.

## Receiving the wide serve from the alley in doubles

*Source: WSBA Newsletter Fall 1997*

*Author: Eugene Kumekawa*

Once when I was young and athletic I and my partner were ahead 14-3 in the third game against two old guys. I forget the tournament but it was a big one for me; our opponents were from another state and had been playing a long time. They won the serve and we, foolishly, relaxed a little. The server, with nothing to lose, stood wide in the alley to serve and started to serve long. Pretty soon it was 7-14 and we said to each other it was time to stop fooling around. At 10-14 we began to get a little worried. At 12-14 we started to look at each other wondering what was going on. At 14-14 we didn't exactly panic, but now we doubted we were fated to win.

We didn't. It was my worst loss, I still remember it, even though it was over 20 years ago. All because we didn't know what to do against a flick serve from the alley. After the match the happy winners said they thought they would try something different.

There are servers today who believe that they can get a few cheap points standing wide and serving to the back T. That service position may work against C players, but it is actually very vulnerable to attack if the receiver knows what to do.

### Receiving in the even court

The first thing to do is to draw an imaginary line from the server to the back T. This line is your new center line. Stand as close as you can to this line while still standing in the receiving court. Remember to orient yourself to the server's position. Take your regular forehand stance; there is no need to give away your next shot by waiting for the serve on your backhand.

Imagine the path of the shuttle if the server serves short and wide to your alley. You should be able to intercept this shot with one easy step. The server doesn't want to serve short and wide, however, because his side will have to scramble to get the anticipated down-the-line return in the alley. Your main concern as the receiver is the flick serve to the middle.

As soon as you recognize the serve is in fact a flick to the back T, step into the odd court. This first step takes away any advantage the server has in standing so wide. If necessary, take your leap backwards, but in most cases, you can cut off the serve with just stepping wide.

What shot should you hit? If you think about it, almost anything puts the server team on the defense. Strangely, perhaps the riskiest shot is a smash cross-court toward the server, because this is the return he is expecting: he would be waiting naturally for it on his backhand because he is standing wide, and any of his returns would be effective, since the smasher's partner is frequently caught just behind the receiver.

More effective returns include a drop to any part of the net, or a quick clear cross-court behind the server, not too wide since you want to make him use his backhand. But a smash down the middle to the server's partner's forehand hip is

also fine. The secret is not to try to do too much with the serve. This flick serve works because many receivers make mistakes just getting the bird back. If you are having trouble, simply clear it back over the server's head. If the serve was a low flick, and you intercepted it early by stepping into the odd court, chances are the server cannot cover his back court well.

You have two obvious returns off a short wide serve to your alley. The first, a net return straight ahead to the alley, is a little tricky, because the shuttle has a tendency to ricochet off your strings wide and may easily land outside the alley. You have to meet the shuttle not with an open face square to the net, but slightly turned toward the shuttle so that it will bounce off your racket toward the alley. The second obvious return is a drive down-the-line to the server partner's backhand.

Sometimes, however, if the server is covering his short serves along the net you can fake down-the-line and then hit cross-court, either another net shot or a drive to the back cross-court corner. A cross-court serve is a bad shot for the serving team because it opens up their court. The server is gambling that his short serve will fool the receiver, who will have to lift if he does manage to get to it.

### **Receiving in the odd court**

The same principles apply for the odd court. Stand as close as you can to the imaginary path of the shuttle to the back T while still being able to intercept the short serve wide to your alley with one step. The flick serve from the odd court is obviously less of a problem, since the serve is going right to the receiver's forehand, and the serve is not really from the alley if the server is using his (right-handed) forehand. Here any return is effective, including the smash cross-court, since at least the down-the-line return of the smash is to the receiver's forehand. Here, however, the unexpected service return is down-the-line wide of the server's partner. Most people tend to return fast shots toward the server who has flicked and is therefore tantalizingly close to the net.

### **What to do if you are the receiver's partner**

Stand deeper towards the back when you see the server stand in the alley. Be prepared to help the receiver by calling the serve. As soon as the bird is in the air heading towards you, step away from the center line out of the receiver's way. If the receiver intercepts the bird before it goes to the back, stay wide and square because the receiver may follow his return to the net, moving behind him if he does. If the receiver has to go back to return the serve, your route to the net has to avoid your partner's swing.

### **What to do if you are the wide server's partner**

After you stifle your mental groan, stand ready to play singles for the service return. Your serving partner is so out of position you may have to cover all alley shots away from the server, as well as all the back court. I had a doubles partner (Howard, now Tedd, Bunce of California) who frequently served from the even alley. We set up who was going to cover what return, depending on where he

stood (sometimes he served from the alley, other times he stood just inside the singles line). Sometimes his serve worked, especially when the receiver did not like around-the-head shots, but usually we were instantly on the defense, even against the most simple returns.

### **What to do if you are the server**

Serving from the alley is worth a shot, but only against novices and C players. Evaluate your return of their return of serve. If your team is not killing the shuttle, give it up. Although you may be putting pressure on the receiver by threatening a flick serve to his backhand, you are also putting pressure on yourself and your partner. Concentrate on making your standard short serve unrushable.

# O.B.A. Mixed Doubles Strategy I

*This document was prepared for the O.B.A. by Mr. John Gilbert, Level III Coach*

1. Introduction
2. Service (a) Woman (b) Man
3. Reception of Service (a) Woman (b) Man
4. Offensive Play, Role of (a) Woman (b) Man
5. Defensive Play, Role of (a) Woman (b) Man
6. Conclusion

## 1. Introduction

Men, if you want to play singles, play singles; if you want to impress the girl, take her to dinner or a movie; but, if you want to play mixed, play mixed. You will note that all three are alternatives and do not necessarily co-exist. In this discussion of mixed doubles, I am assuming both men and women wish to play mixed doubles and are prepared to accept their proper responsibilities. For purposes of organization, I am going to discuss mixed doubles under the following headings:

- I. Service (a) Woman (b) Man
- II. Reception of Service (a) Woman (b) Man
- III. Offensive Play, Role of (a) Woman (b) Man
- IV. Defensive Play, Role of (a) Woman (b) Man

## 2. Service

### **(a) Woman**

Many men in mixed doubles have a habit of intimidating the opposing woman by smashing her serve directly back at her. This tends to have a compounding effect as the fear of the smash leads to a poorer service. The consequent effect is an intimidated woman and her irritated partner because of her inefficient service. Therefore, the woman in mixed must practise (1) a short service which is very low to the net. What is important is that the serve is close to the top of the net, how far back it lands in the court is largely irrelevant. (2) The woman should also develop a second serve - either a flick or a flat drive service - which is disguised until the point of contact to appear as a short serve.

A judicious mixture of these serves should keep the opposing man off balance so that his rush loses its effectiveness. Try not to show you are afraid of the rush - look him in the eye before service and then calmly decide on your service. After short service, keep your racket up and follow your serve part way to the net until your position is roughly at the "T" formed by the centre court line and the front service line. After a long service, take the defensive action described under "Defensive Play, Role of Woman".

### **(b) Man**

Since the man in conventional mixed covers the court area bounded by the front service line, the side lines and the back line, he must serve from

the centre of this area so he will be in position for the ensuing return. This will seem more apparent when it is remembered that the service being struck below the waist is therefore a defensive stroke. The man should serve, therefore, from about four or five feet back from the front service line and standing very close to the center court line. Since he is further back, his serve takes longer to cross the net and thus allows the opponents more time to rush in and smash it down. Therefore, the man's service must be particularly close to the net and should be hit fairly quickly to obviate the speed question already mentioned. Again, it is largely irrelevant how far back of the front service line the bird lands, provided it passes close to the top of the net. Like the woman, the man should practise variations of service disguised as much as possible and should mix these serves in a game. Of course, both women and men should consistently exploit any obvious weakness in their opponents' reception of serve.

### 3. Reception of Serve

#### *(a) Woman*

If **short served**, a woman should vary her return, using the following:

- 1.net dribble to the alley closest to her
- 2.net dribble to the alley furthest from her
- 3.push the bird directly back at the server

You should then follow this return in to the net with your racket up and either force the opposing woman to lift the bird or, if she net drops the bird back, you can pounce on it and knock it to the floor. Note this shot should be hit as steeply as possible to the floor.

If **long served**, a woman should smash the bird as follows:

- 1.at the opposing woman
- 2.straight down the sideline

You should then follow the bird to the net as soon as possible. Your partner should cover everything except the bird hit directly back to you.

#### *(b) Man*

If the man rushes the serve well he should have his partner straddle the centre line about half court. If she takes this position, he must rush the serve to either alley or the opposing man's body forcibly enough to make the opposing man return it weakly either to him at the net for an easy put away or half court to the lady where her smash well placed should be most effective.

If the man does not rush serve well, he should leave his partner in her normal position and should use the returns recommended for the lady. Immediately after hitting such a shot he should return to his position at three quarter court. If the opposing man attempts to anticipate these returns and moves too far forward, you should hit the occasional lob to the backhand deep corner.

#### **4. Offensive Play, Role of:**

##### ***(a) Woman***

In conventional mixed doubles the offensive court is divided into two zones with the woman responsible for the up zone from the net to about a foot behind the front service line. I would suggest that women encourage their male partners on occasion to gain respect for the difficulties of this position by playing it themselves in practice. It is difficult position and involves almost endless crouching, anticipation and quick movement and is a suicidal spot if the bird is unexpectedly lifted. In this "up" position, the woman is responsible for all net shots and cutting off as many flat shots as possible, especially the cross court ones. She must avoid lifting the bird at all costs. Therefore, she must become very proficient at net play and blocking drives. Keep you racket up and angled slightly forward so any shots hitting it will fly in a flat or downward trajectory. Take all net shots as high as possible, preferably with overhead strokes. When blocking flat shots, block: do not swing at them to any noticeable degree, it will cause faulting. Remember, your job is to set up your partner by forcing your opponents to lift, and to finish some rallies off with put aways from the net. A put away is just that, it must never come back. Be certain you are able to smash that bird very sharply downwards to the floor rather than hitting it towards the floor at three quarter court where the opposing man easily handles it. The result of this premature "smash" is often to lose the offensive advantage you had been developing. In fact, it would be a good idea for a woman to play mixed without ever hitting a bird to the opposing man.

##### ***(b) Man***

The man is responsible for the rest of the court not assigned to the woman (see above). Let me suggest, men, that if the women appear to be weak and thus ineffective (on the court of course!), hit the bird to them and exploit those weaknesses. Do not hit back and forth with the opposing man: it may look good but it is not the way to win mixed doubles. Play the woman, forcing the opposing man to come closer to the net to help her out. As he comes closer to the net, he will be increasingly out of position. Then hit quick, flat, straight drives down the sidelines, preferably down the backhand. Be careful with crosscourt drives: a good opposing woman will cut there of and almost inevitably they are winners or lead to winners. Once you have the opposing man in the backhand corner, leave him there. There is very little he can do from that position and you should definitely be able to win the rally.

#### **5. Defensive Play, Role Of:**

##### ***(a) Woman***

Defensive play in mixed doubles is defined as whenever the opposing team is in a position merely to push the bird downwards from the net. The latter situation results instantaneously from the net play and a woman is in position to do anything other than protect her face of flail blindly at the bird.

The bird should never be lifted in mixed except in emergencies. If you do lift, try to lift it as high and deep to a back corner as the gym permits. The woman should position herself a few feet back of the front service line diagonally to the smash. Because of the greater distance on the diagonal, her position now is the same distance as her partner is:

If she is capable, she should crouch and return the bird by overhead blocking. If she is not quick enough for this, she should retreat further down the crosscourt sideline and square off with her back to the sideline and retrieve entirely with a backhand or forehand, depending on the side of the court she is on. If she is in the further up position, she is responsible for the smash and as much of the possible drop shot area as she can. If she is in the further back position, she is responsible for the smash, the drop in front of her and a flat clear in her direction. For all intents and purposes, a long service should be treated as a deep high lift. Whatever the case, always cover as much court from a side line in on a smash and drop as possible and return the bird with a net drop or flat push.

**(b) Man**

For the man, the defensive court is obviously the area not covered by the woman. As well, the man is responsible for a high clear hit over the woman's head. Because of the time factor in its trajectory, the woman should be able to move back into her offensive position and the man should be able to move quickly enough to smash the bird. Note that when the bird is lifted in mixed, both the woman and the man have a very difficult job ahead of them. Therefore, avoid lifting and, if necessary, attempt to flatten your return of the smash.

## **6. Conclusion**

Here are just a few final reminders. The woman at the net in mixed is in a very vulnerable position. She cannot see the play developing as can the man from the back court. She is almost always in a crouch. The man in mixed should be considerate in this regard and avoid a style of play which will make her task more difficult. Like men's or ladies' doubles, mixed is a team game. Partners must complement each other and work to be greater than the sum total of two individuals. There is no room for the woman's libber or the male chauvinist on the mixed court.

# O.B.A. Singles Strategy I (Men's & Ladies')

*This document was prepared for the O.B.A. by Mr. John Gilbert, Level III Coach*

1. Introduction
2. Drill on Return of Service
3. Singles Base & Court Dimensions
4. Offence & Defence
  - A - Using overhead strokes
    - (i) definition of defensive & offensive zones
    - (ii) selection of strokes from defensive zone
      - (a) high clear
      - (b) slow drop
    - (iii) selection of strokes from offensive zone
      - (a) smash
      - (b) fast drop
  - B - Using underhand strokes
    - (i) definition of defensive zone
    - (ii) selection of strokes from defensive zone
      - (a) return to net
      - (b) lob to back line
5. Conclusion
  - (a) high service
  - (b) short service
  - (c) preparation for a match
  - (d) match play

## 1. Introduction

Badminton singles is a game which can be as demanding physically and mentally as its participants desire. The object of this pamphlet is to enable a player to put more into the game and thus get more out of it.

By careful utilization of the strokes discussed in the Level One Coaching Manual, it is possible to play a very good brand of singles. Do not underestimate the importance of these basic strokes – clear, fast and slow drop, smash, backhand clear, forehand and backhand lobs, netshots, short service, high service, drives. These shots are the foundation of all good quality singles play. Let us begin with a simple demonstration of the importance of the clear and drop and return of service.

## 2. Drill on Return of Service

Select four shuttles of legal speed. Serve high singles serves to the player and have him/her practice once and then try to return a shuttle to each corner of the court. Stand these shuttles up at the point where they hit the floor. If you were to connect these shuttles with an imaginary line and calculate the square footage of the court (374 sq. ft.) you will obtain an idea of the percentage of the court the player is attacking off the serve. It will be a surprisingly low percentage -- especially when you consider that in returning serve the player begins in the readiest position he/she will ever be in during a singles match (other than when

serving) and also is defending less than half a court. Fairly obviously, as a rally progresses, the pressure builds, and the player becomes increasingly caught out of position, the percentage of square footage attacked on the court will decrease until the player hits virtually nothing but shots to the middle of his/her opponent's court. If the player can not return service efficiently, how can he/she play effectively? thus, one must practice clears and drops until one can place them in any corner of the court consistently.

### **3. Singles Base & Court Dimensions**

Theoretically, while waiting for an opponent's shot, one should stand at the point which best enables to defend the whole court. Usually this will be the centre of the court. Variations do occur, however, for two reasons: (1) a player's speed (2) the court dimensions

(1) If a player moves forward more easily than backwards or vice-versa, it may be advantageous to shift the base backwards or forwards. How one plays as a result of this change, of course, is the acid test of its effectiveness. (2) Most players and coaches think of a court's dimensions in terms of length and width. Remember, the most important of all may be neither, but height. Birds hit on a flat or downward trajectory reach their target much sooner than do those which reach a peak and fall vertically on their target. Also, the latter can not be intercepted. Strokes in badminton are like clubs in golf -- each has a different trajectory. A player's decision on how soon he/she wants the bird to hit its target should be based on:

(1) the opponent's position on court (2) the player's position on court (3) the speed of movement of both players

A rally, almost without exception, ends because a player has selected the wrong stroke. Poorly executed strokes really fall into this category also.

### **4. Offence & Defence**

Badminton singles is a remarkable game of two opponents attempting to manoeuvre each other out of position or away from his/her base. thus, players should always be aware of offence and defence when selecting their strokes. A stroke is of limited value if it results in an opponent winning the rally either immediately or some shots later. One job of a coach is to identify when the player is hitting a "nothing" shot. In the heat of a rally a player, especially an inexperienced one, is incapable of analyzing "nothing" shots. Perhaps this whole concept can be simplified in the court is divided on offensive and defensive principles, first for overhead strokes and then for underhand strokes.

#### **A. Using overhead strokes**

(i) definition of defensive & offensive zones

Lucio Fabris' coach, Ev Staples, divided the court very simply in this matter with regard to overhead strokes. The defensive zone in singles is from the doubles long service line to the back line. The offensive zone is from the doubles long service to the net.

(ii) selection of strokes from defensive zone

On this principle the following strokes should be selected in order of preference when a player is striking a bird while standing in the defensive zone:

(1) high clear (2) slow drop

Note that the slow drop should be used very sparingly. It is a difficult stroke to execute well and if mis-hit almost always results in the loss of the rally. A player should concentrate, therefore, on using high clears hit to the back corners of his opponent's court. If the opponent is weak on the backhand, obviously that should be the corner selected to hit to. Remember that if the opponent is lefthanded, his/her straight return will also attack your own backhand.

(iii) selection of strokes from offensive zone

When standing in the offensive zone a player should select the following overhead strokes in order of priority:

(1) smash (2) fast drop

A player uses a smash to win rallies. Its speed and placement make it effective. Thus, a player uses it when in the offensive zone and when in a balance position to hit it efficiently. There are three places to hit the smash to: (a) at the oppoent (b) at the oppoent's backhand sideline (c) at the opponent's forhand sideline Vary the placement: the element of surprise is important. Do not hit so hard that you lose your balance so that any return by the opponent becomes a winner. After smashing, try to move forward since, if your smash is hit well, most often your opponent's return will be a weak set up to the net area. Often when one is in a position to smash, the opponent will retreat in the court and will thus be in a better position to return the smash since its speed will have decreased significantly by the time it reaches his/her new position. At this time utilize the fast drop. If it is hit well -- identical to the smash and clear until the point of contact -- it will catch the opponet "glued" to the floor expecting the smash and will often be a winner. More often, however, it will force a very weak return which can then be smashed to the floor. Note that a player should mix smashes and drops as well as the area of their placement. Keep your opponent guessing.

## **B. Using underhand strokes**

(i) definition of defensive zone

On underhand strokes the whole court is a defensive zone, although a "smart" player can turn defence into offence.

(ii) selection of strokes from defensive zone

Basically, a player has two choices on all underhand strokes:

(1) return to net (2) lob to back line

A player must choose which of these returns to use and to which corner of the court on the basis of his/her opponent's position and his/her own. The earlier discussion on singles' base and the dimensions of the court should be considered in this regard. Let us look at net shots. One of these hit to either corner on a trajectory shaped with a peak at the net and a vertical fall immediately past is so that the bird will land within inches of the net will force your opponent on to the defensive and will reduce the number of possible

returns. If the bird is very close to the net it is impossible to lob it to the backline - the net is in the way -- even when it is possible to lob it, it can only be done by using great height. thus, you can take your base very close to the net and still get back in lots of time to cover the lob while attacking any net shot very effectively -- watch for the crosscourt net shot: it is the only one which can really catch you off guard. Let us now look at lobs to the back of the court. These shots are fully defensive in nature but are necessary (1) when your opponent is in position to attack a net shot and (2) when a net shot would put you out of position. It is very important that these lobs should be hit as high a peak as possible so that they fall vertically on the back line allowing you plenty of time to return to your base. (See the earlier discussion on singles' base and court dimensions.)

## **5. Conclusion**

What remains to be considered in basic singles are:

- (a) high service
- (b) short service
- (c) preparation for a match
- (d) match play

Let us consider these in order.

### **(1) high service**

Since the object of the game (within sportsmanship limits) is to win and to prevent your opponent from winning, therefore, you should place the opponent on the defensive at the very outset of the rally. The high singles service dropping vertically very near the junction of the back line and the centre line is very effective. As seen by the discussion thus far, your opponent's strokes are limited and the rally quickly develops into a contest waiting for someone to make a weak return into his/her opponent's offensive zone.

### **(2) short service**

This is an effective serve at an advanced level of play (see the Level II Manual) but should be used sparingly by the less experienced player. Ideally, it should go very low to the net to land just past the front service line near its junction with the centre line. It is a dangerous service since (1) the margin of error is small – if it is too high, the bird can be smashed; (2) it allows the net returns discussed earlier. The opposing player, by mixing net returns and lob judiciously, can often quickly win many rallies begun by a short service.

### **(3) preparation for a match**

It is always difficult to assess the relative importance of stroking versus conditioning. At various levels of play the ratio changes. I would advise players at this stage to concentrate more on stroking. Be fit, but do not be a conditioning freak. Instead, be in good enough condition to do

justice to your ability to execute strokes. Work on your strokes enough that you can make the bird do what you want it to do when you hit it.

#### **(4) match play**

Once the match has begun, concentrate on one stroke at a time. Remember, though, that your mind is analyzing what has happened and is projecting what will happen. Learn from your mistakes -- do not fall into the same trap over and over again. Discover predictable patterns in your opponent's play so that you can be in the right place at the right time. Discover your opponent's strengths so you can avoid them and his/her weaknesses and exploit your strengths. Every opponent can be beaten provided he/she is handled correctly. Badminton is a game not only of power, but of brains. Good luck.

