

Tactics in Badminton Singles

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TACTICAL PLAY IN BADMINTON SINGLES

THE GAME IS A BATTLE

- (1) The game is a battle. The battle is between two opponents who present each other with a problem. The problem is how to overcome the opponent and win the battle.
- (2) The deciding factor is 'thinking'. You have to think to solve the problem presented by the opponent who not only tries to prevent you winning the battle but also tries to win himself.
- (3) You are helped in this battle by the weapons you possess. Your strokes are the weapons but they only hit the shuttle to those places you decide the shuttle shall go.
- (4) The decision to hit the shuttle to a particular place is made according to the way you assess what is required to win the battle and is determined by what your opponent does and where he is on the court.
- (5) A player with many strokes has many more weapons to use and many more possible solutions to the problem. However these only overcome the problem if used at the right time.
- (6) A player with fewer strokes has fewer solutions to the problem and so must try to win the battle with what strokes he has. He has a bigger problem. He has to make do with what he has got.
- (7) Sometimes strokes do not work as well as usual. A player must accept this fact, adapt his game and try to solve the problem and win the battle with the strokes that do work. A STROKE IS ONLY AS GOOD AS THE RESULT IT ACHIEVES.
- (8) With humans mistakes are inevitable in a battle. In this game players have the chance to recover from a mistake and still keep in the battle. Mistakes must be accepted as part of the battle and part of the problem. A player who accepts them will try to correct them while the battle is on.

- (9) As a battle is neither won or lost before it has begun, nor is it over until the rules declare one side to be the winner, no player should expect to win or lose a battle before it begins or before it has ended.
- (10) Winning is the prize for overcoming the problems presented by the opponent throughout the battle.
- (11) Once you enter the battle you must see what you can do to win with what you have got working for you at the time. It is all you can do.
- (12) In a badminton battle, victory or defeat is never for all time. The loser always lives to fight another day.

LEARNING TACTICS

Introduction.

The purpose of this booklet is to offer some different ways of looking at tactics in badminton singles which you may find helpful in developing your tactical understanding in badminton in general and in using tactics effectively in singles.

It is written mainly for players but should be of value to coaches also in their task of trying to improve their players' tactical skill.

The booklet is divided into several parts. Part one contains an explanation of tactics and provides a simple model of the structure of the game from which all tactics derive. Part two includes several different ways of looking at singles tactics. Part three contains games and practices designed for you to try out various approaches to tactical play which should help to develop your tactical understanding. Part four explains how to obtain the information you need to plan your tactics. Part five discusses further factors in applying tactics.

PART ONE

What are tactics?

Badminton is a competitive game. It involves a contest between two or four opponents. The logical point of a contest is to try to defeat the opponent(s) – to win. Tactics is the word used to describe the various practical ways of trying to win the contest. Tactics is the practical application of your **strategy**. Strategy refers to the general overall idea or plan that you decide on to defeat the opponent(s) on the basis of which you select your specific practical tactics. For example, in Singles, you may decide that, strategically the best way to beat your opponent is to tire him out over the course of the game – ***to exploit his lack of fitness***. You now decide that **tactically** the best way to do this is to prolong the rallies and play at a fast pace to force him to travel quickly in the court. This is your tactical plan or *game plan* as some call it. You might do this by playing standard and attacking clears, sliced smashes and fast drops all hit well within the confines of the court to allow a margin for error, so that you do not make errors. ***Your strokes are the means by which you make your tactical moves.***

Another strategy may be to play to get him ***to give you the replies that you want***. You decide that tactically the best way of doing this is to ***exploit his weaknesses and/or his strengths***. For example, you know his backhand clear is a weakness, so you hit the shuttle to his forehand side to draw him out of position and then clear or lob his reply to his backhand rearcourt and travel forward to wait for the weak backhand clear or drop shot. Or, you may decide to exploit his slowness in recovering from the rearcourt to the centre. So you play a standard or attack clear to his rearcourt and hit your next shot to his forecourt knowing that he may be slow in recovering from his rearcourt and hence late getting to the shuttle in his forecourt. To exploit his strengths in this way, e.g. his habitual strong cross-court smash to your backhand side, you hit the shuttle high to his backhand side and give him time to smash

while you get ready to play a straight block to his forehand forecourt or hit the shuttle quickly back over his head to the space he is leaving.

To plan a strategy and the tactics you will use to carry out this strategy presupposes that you have the ability to do so and that you ***know what your opponent is likely to*** do in a given situation. This implies that you have sufficient technical skill, fitness and attitude to carry through your tactics to the end. It also implies that you have the game intelligence to play the ***right tactical shot at the right time*** in a fast moving game with the situations constantly changing. It could also mean that you may have to change your strategy and/or your tactics during a game as you may have misjudged your opponent and chosen the wrong tactics or your opponent may counter your tactics during the game which is something an intelligent and skilful opponent may do. Also, against an unfamiliar opponent, you may have to make up your strategy and tactics during the game as you learn how the opponent plays. This is what makes the game so interesting and enjoyable. It involves a battle of wits requiring intelligence and imagination as well as technical skill and fitness to win a contest against an equal opponent.

A player may have excellent technical skill; move fluently around the court and can perform all the strokes; have superb fitness and meet all the physical demands of the game without getting tired. He may have an excellent attitude – he may be calm, patient, determined, adventurous, competitive, fair and honest, a good sport, fearless and very tough. He may be a joy to watch but if he lacks tactical skill and doesn't know how to defeat the opponent he will never be a good player of the game. He will certainly not reach the higher levels of play.

Tactics therefore are an essential feature of the game for they give meaning to it. They are not part of the game in the same way as are the strokes and physical movement, fitness and attitude of the player. Tactics cannot be seen physically; they are the underlying ideas which make sense of everything that a player does on the court during a game. That is not to say that we cannot work out what tactics a player is using. To

the intelligent observer, be it the opponent or a spectator, it is possible to analyse the patterns of strokes being used by the player in a game and determine what his tactics are and subsequently his strategy also.

It is too easy to say to a player, "You should have done this or that". It is not always easy, however, to explain why a player should have done this or that which is perhaps why there is often disagreement between spectators or coaches on how the player should have played the game. And then, if it is possible to give a convincing explanation, it usually only applies to a specific situation against a specific opponent. A player may find himself in a similar situation in the future but because it is a different opponent, the advice about "what he should have done", will not work. What is important is that the player develops **tactical understanding** so that he can choose effective tactics in similar or different situations against the same or different opponents either prior to the game and/or during the game.

The problem therefore for any player and coach is how to develop such tactical understanding. As a coach, this was my problem and from my reading, study and practical coaching I eventually arrived at a solution. The solution was to get players to understand and apply what I have called **the principle of winning**.

The Principle of winning

If the purpose of all strategies and tactics is to defeat the opponent and win the contest, we can deduce that there is a fundamental principle to which all strategies and tactics must conform and by which they can be judged. This is the **principle of winning** which, in several of my previous books¹, I have also described as the '*principle of attack*'. This principle can be stated in two ways:

1. '*At all times try to create a situation in which it is possible to increase your chances of eventually winning the rally*'.

¹ *Winning Badminton Singles, Winning Badminton Doubles and Excelling at Badminton*

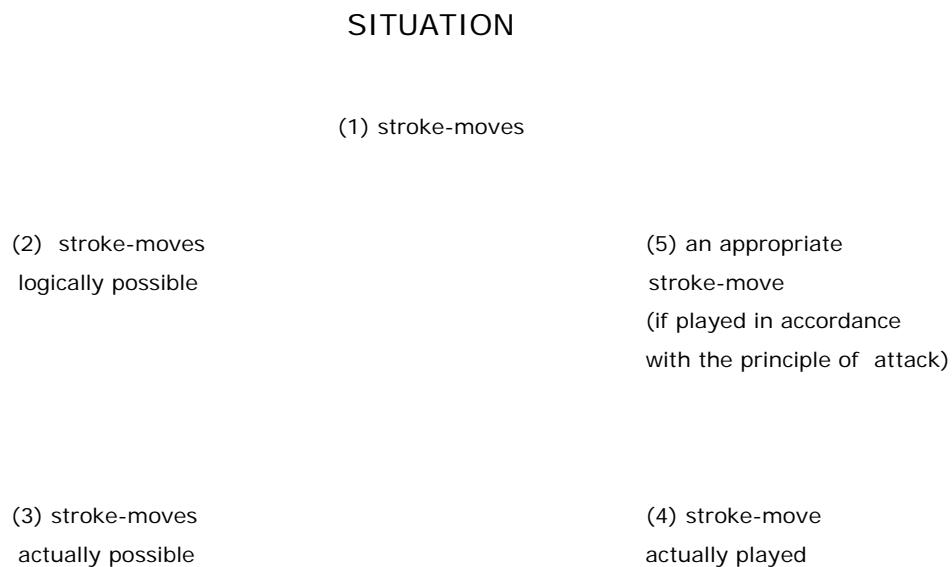
2. '*If you cannot increase your own chances of winning the rally then try to create a situation that will reduce your opponent's chances of winning the rally*'.

If your tactical moves do not create either one of these situations then you have chosen the wrong ones to use – you have made inappropriate moves.

As stated previously, your strokes are the means by which you make your tactical moves. Consequently, if you apply the *principle of winning* in your play, your strokes should cease to be thought of as just actions but rather as **moves**. Your strokes and tactics should be one and the same. For this reason it seems sensible to describe them as **stroke-moves**. The game involves a contest in which the strokes are used as tactical moves played in accordance with the principle of winning.

Think about it for a moment. In a game you will find yourself in a situation, positioned somewhere in the rearcourt, midcourt or forecourt, ready to hit the shuttle – to play your stroke-move(1) In that situation certain stroke-moves are *logically possible*(2); for example think of the full range of stroke-moves that can humanly be played from the forehand rearcourt. However, what stroke-moves are *actually possible*(3) will depend on your skill as a player – what you can actually do from the forehand rearcourt. Once you play your *actual stroke-move*(4) you can apply the '*principle of winning*' to judge whether it was an *appropriate move* (5) or not. Did your stroke-move increase your chances of winning the rally or, if not, did it reduce your opponent's chances of winning the rally? If it didn't do either of these then it was an inappropriate move. Using these features, which are inherent in the game; make it possible to construct a model of the logical structure of the game. See fig 1. below.

Fig 1. The logical structure of the game.



I have found this model very helpful when devising various approaches to tactical play. Now, as the main aim is to defeat the opponent, I would like to consider the situations in the game you will create when you play your stroke-moves in accordance with the principle of winning.

The situations in the game

The court can be divided into three main areas: the rearcourt (RC), the midcourt (MC), the forecourt (FC). You will play your stroke-moves from high positions (above net height) or from low positions (below net height) in each of these three areas. From each of these three areas you will hit the shuttle to one of the same three areas in the opponent's court with the intention to create a situation in accordance with the principle of winning. From this you can work out how many stroke-moves are logically possible from each area of your court or your opponent's court. These areas provide the location for all the situations that you will experience in the game and all the stroke-moves played to create these situations. These include:

1. The stroke-moves played from the rearcourt: the forehand and backhand smash, clear (standard, attack and defensive), dropshot.

2. The stroke-moves played from the midcourt: forehand and backhand smash, drive, push, block, lob.
3. The stroke-moves played from the forecourt: forehand and backhand net kill, push, basic net shots, lob.

PART TWO

WAYS OF LOOKING AT TACTICS

1. 'Stroke-move' tactical play

The basic tactical stroke-moves

If each stroke should be used as a tactical move it follows that there are as many tactical moves as there are strokes. Consequently it could be difficult to decide which stroke-move to use in a given situation in a game in accordance with the principle of winning. Fortunately they can all be reduced to four groups of basic tactical moves which are played with the intention to have an effect on your opponent. In playing these moves it is assumed that your opponent will usually be in a position to cover your probable stroke-moves – usually near the centre of his midcourt.

Using the four basic tactical stroke-moves against the opponent.

1. There are stroke-moves used to send the opponent into the *rearcourt*. These are: the clear, lob, long smash, push, drive, high serve and flick serve.

The reasons for playing these moves are:

- (a) To send the opponent out of position away from the centre of his court and as far away from the net as possible.
- (b) To reduce the effectiveness of the opponent. He should not be able to make things too difficult for you from the very back of his court.
- (c) To create space.

2. There are stroke-moves used to send the opponent into the *forecourt*.

These are: dropshots, block to the smash, net replies and the low serve.

The reasons for playing these moves are:

- (a) To send the opponent out of position away from his centre.
- (b) To create space.
- (c) To force the opponent to hit the shuttle upwards.

3. There are stroke-moves used to exploit the opponent in the *midcourt*.

These are: smash, long dropshot, drive, push and net kill.

The reasons for playing these moves are:

- (a) To attempt a winning shot.
- (b) To create space.
- (c) To force an upward hit.
- (d) To force a weak reply.
- (e) To force an error.

4. There are stroke-moves used to send the opponent to ***the sides of the court.***

All the strokes can be used to create this type of situation.

The reasons for playing these moves are:

- (a) To send the opponent out of position away from his centre.
- (b) To create space.

How do I know which stroke-moves to play in accordance with the principle of winning?

The answer to this question lies in how you apply the principle of winning.

So let me remind you of what it states:

1. '*At all times try to create a situation in which it is possible to increase your chances of eventually winning the rally*'.
2. '*If you cannot increase your own chances of winning the rally then try to create a situation that will reduce your opponent's chances of winning the rally*'.

If your stroke-moves do not create either one of these situations then you have chosen the wrong ones to use – you have made inappropriate moves.

How do I do choose the appropriate stroke-moves?

The term 'stroke-moves' is used to make the point that each time you hit the shuttle you should be making a tactical move in accordance with the principle of winning. A rally in a game usually consists of a number of stroke-moves played by the players. It may take several stroke-moves from each player before either one manages to create a situation which will increase his chances of winning the rally.

For this reason I have grouped the stroke-moves you may use to do this into two types. These are ***building shots***, used to create a situation in a rally from which you can ***attempt a winning shot***, which is used to try to end a rally.

2. 'Building' shots and 'attempted winning' shots tactical play

Building shots.

There are two types of building shot.

- (a) Shots that move your opponent out of position away from the central area of his court and yet which may give him time to get into position to hit the shuttle but which will certainly give you enough time to get into position to cover his probable replies.
- (b) Shots that move your opponent out of position and give him less time to get to the shuttle and yet allow you sufficient time to get into position to cover his replies.

What stroke-moves can I use as building shots?

Any stroke-move can be used as a building shot: smashes, clears, drops, lobs, drives, net replies, net kills, the serves. All can be used to outmanoeuvre your opponent as you try to create a situation which will increase your chances of winning the rally.

Attempted winning shots

You use these when you have created a situation in which you can attempt a winning hit. I have described them as 'attempted winning shots' with the emphasis on '*attempt*' as you cannot ensure that you will hit a winning shot. Consequently you should always travel into position to cover the opponent's possible replies to be ready just in case he is able to return the shuttle over the net.

What shots can I use as an attempted winning shot?

Usually you would use the downwards hits: the smash, fast sliced drop shot or net kill to hit the shuttle quickly to the floor. You could also use

the attack clear or flick serve. It depends on where you are positioned and where the opponent is positioned.

Non building shots

There are two other types of shot which do not fall within the category of building or attempted winning shots. Both you should try to avoid playing.

These are:

'Hit and hope' shots

I use this description simply to describe the sort of shot you might use when you are really in difficulty and don't know what to do. You **hit** the shuttle back over the net and just **hope** that it will get you out of trouble. You may have to improvise here and on occasion, you might develop a new stroke that could be useful in similar situations.

If your shot does surprise your opponent and catches him out then you may be successful and get yourself out of the difficult situation. After all it is a 'hit and hope' shot.

'Nothin' shots'

These are shots played without any purpose to them. You just hit clears, smashes, drops, lobs and others. It has become a habit to perform these strokes as *actions* only, in the game, without giving any thought about how to use them as *tactical moves* to create situations which will increase your chances of winning the rally. Such shots are typical of many junior players who have been drilled by coaches to perform hundreds of such strokes in mindless routines/drills doing so called 'practice'.

3. 'Hitting to the empty spaces' tactical play

Though you would obviously use your stroke-moves to hit building shots and attempted winning shots to the empty spaces on your opponent's court, it is possible and quite effective to do so, as your main tactical play, without even thinking in terms of stroke-moves and building shots. Two main tasks in singles are to try to control your centre by travelling into a position where you can cover the possible replies from your opponent;

and to try to move your opponent out of position and/or away from control of his centre. There are several ways of doing this:

(a) Hit the shuttle to the empty spaces.

- You will force him to move away from his centre.
- He may be slow moving off the spot in the centre and be late getting to the shuttle.

(b) Hit the shuttle to the space furthest away from your opponent.

If he hits the shuttle from his backhand rearcourt you could hit your next shot to his forehand forecast so he has to travel the long diagonal of the court. Or you could hit the shuttle first to his forehand FC and then to his backhand RC.

- He may be slow recovering from his rearcourt.
- He may be slow running the distance on the court.

(c) Hit the shuttle to the space your opponent is leaving.

- He may be quick recovering towards the centre and you can wrong-foot him.

(d) Hit the shuttle to the spaces at the sides of the direction your opponent is travelling in.

- He may be more of a straight line runner and not good at changing direction quickly to the sides.

Hitting to the spaces in this way can be effective because it puts the emphasis on what you do to your opponent. This is particularly helpful if you are the sort of player who performs the strokes without giving much thought, if any, to their purpose – perhaps the result of doing numerous repetitions of mindless routines. By hitting to the empty spaces you don't have to think of your strokes but simply hit to the spaces and hope that you can eventually get a chance to hit a winner. It does make you aware of one way of using your strokes effectively. Unfortunately the weakness of just hitting to the empty spaces in this way is that such tactics are very simple and limited. Without consciously or unconsciously seeing your

stroke-moves as building shots played according to the principle of winning, there is no guarantee that you will play intelligently to create a situation to increase your chances of winning the rally. It is also unlikely that you will be able to adapt your tactics relative to how your opponent plays.

If you want to hit to the empty spaces using your stroke-moves as building shots then you might ask the question: *What sort of building shots and attempted winning shots shall I play?*

The immediate answer to this question is to play shots that are in accordance with the principle of winning and that allow you time to recover into position to cover your opponent's replies. However, as your intention will be to create a situation that will increase your chances of winning the rally, it may help you to decide what shot to play if you could recognise what sort of situation you are in at the time.

The situations

In a game, whether you are positioned in the RC, MC or FC there are only two basic situations you will ever find yourself in

These are:

- (a) Situations where you cannot do much with the shuttle.
- (b) Situations where you can do something with the shuttle.

What can you do in either of these situations?

Though there are many shots you could play in either of these two situations they can all be reduced to five types only. These are:

1. *You give your opponent a shot he cannot do much with.* You could play a safety shot as a building shot - hit a standard or high clear to the centre of the rearcourt (RC). This would be an example of the first type of building shot. Alternatively you could hit the lower and faster attack-clear, an example of the second type of building shot.

2. *You do something with it.* You could play a building shot or attempt a winning shot.
3. *You try to cause your opponent to give you a shot you can do something with* (you play a faster building shot, use deception, wrong foot him, play to his strengths or weaknesses and so on).
4. *You give your opponent a shot he can do something with.* For example:
 - (a) You don't think and play a shot with no purpose to it, e.g. a 'nothin' shot or 'hit and hope' shot. For example you hit the shuttle to the wrong place at the wrong time, e.g. a drop shot when you are off balance in the RC and your opponent is waiting in the FC.
 - (b) You hit a poor length clear or dropshot, or a high cross-court smash which allows the opponent to intercept easily and play a reply to his advantage.
5. *You do nothing with it.* You make an error (hit the shuttle out or into the net).

So you see - there are 2 basic situations and 5 possible things you could do in each situation. Now look at the chart below.

Situation Chart

	1. You give opponent a shot he cannot do much with	2. You do something with it	3. You cause opponent to give you a shot you can do something with	4. You give opponent a shot he can do something with	5. You do nothing with it
Situation 1. You cannot do much with the shuttle					
Situation 2. You can do something with the shuttle					

Let's see how you can use this chart. Look at:

Situation 1. *You cannot do much with the shuttle.*

Consider the possible replies.

In this situation the least you could do would be to (1) *give your opponent a shot he cannot do much with*. It would be risky to try (2) *to do something with it*, like attempt a winner. No 3 would be intelligent and skilful badminton if you could manage it; No 4 would be rather stupid and No 5 would be very stupid

Situation 2. *You can do something with the shuttle.*

Let's consider the possible replies.

In this situation No 1 would be OK but rather negative badminton and a chance missed to put pressure on your opponent and make life difficult for him. No 2 would be positive attacking badminton if you played a building shot which gave your opponent less time and perhaps gave you the chance to attempt a winner. No 3 would be similar as you could use building shots to exploit your opponent's game in some way. No's 4 and 5 would be unintelligent and quite inappropriate (though to err is human and can happen sometimes – but not all the time). Unless, of course, you are deliberately playing to his strengths so you can anticipate his usual reply in that situation.

Summary

These are three different inter-related ways of looking at tactical play all of which comply with the principle of winning. They are all worth considering as they all can contribute to developing your tactical knowledge and understanding as you learn to apply them in practice and competition.

The idea of seeing the strokes as tactical moves, as 'stroke-moves', places the focus on what you do the opponent rather than on the stroke itself. The most important aspect of tactical play is your focus on defeating the opponent with your strokes being used as weapons to execute your tactical moves.

The idea of building shots and attempted winning shots derive from the fact that it may take time and a number of stroke-moves, a rally, to eventually create a situation which will increase your chances of winning the rally. The stroke-moves that you use, therefore, have one of two functions; as building shots or attempted winning shots. Consider them as such and you then have some means of judging the shots that you play as being the right shot at the right time in creating a situation in accordance with the principle of winning.

The idea of hitting to the empty spaces is very simple and basic. It is what players do all the time in a game. Its importance as a tactical idea is because, as with the stroke-moves, it put the focus on doing something to the opponent. It is progress away from just performing strokes in a habitual and aimless fashion. A player simply hits the shuttle to various empty spaces to move his opponent out of position or to catch him out with the intention of winning the rally. If players did this intelligently whenever they played I am sure they would win more often than not. It would not be necessary to think of their strokes as tactical moves or as building shots. Unfortunately, not all players do this intelligently. Many players may do this without any real tactical purpose; they hit the shuttle to the empty spaces in the hope that they will win the rally. They don't necessarily hit to the right space at the right time. It can too easily become a habit to hit shuttles to the empty spaces just as it can become a habit to hit clears, smashes etc and lose sight of their main purpose – as a means to defeat the opponent. For your strokes to be effective as tactical moves they should be used in accordance with the *principle of winning*. The shuttle can be hit to the empty spaces, indeed it is a sensible tactic, but only if done so as part of a rally of building shots used to create a situation in which it is possible to attempt a rally winning shot.

The situation chart provides a simple way of judging the sort of situation that you are in. It does this by reducing the variety of different situations to two types and what you can do in each of these. The idea of judging the situation can be effective in helping you to play the right shot at the right time. For example you can judge your shot as, "I shouldn't have

played an attempted winning shot in that situation as it was a situation in which I couldn't do much with the shuttle." or, "I played a poorly performed building shot (a short clear) and gave my opponent a shot he could do something with".

PART THREE

LEARNING TO USE TACTICS IN GAMES AND PRACTICES

The intention here is to enable you to try out the various forms of tactical play in practice games. This will help you to become familiar with using your strokes as tactical moves to create situations which increase your chances of winning the rally

1. 'Stroke-move' games

Game one: Learning to use the move to the rearcourt

Play one game of singles up to between 5 to 15 points. There is one additional rule:

Rule: *Before either player can attempt a winning shot in a rally, e.g. the smash, he/she must first make the opponent step into his rearcourt to hit the shuttle.*

Once the opponent has done this you can attempt a winning shot at any time in that rally. If you do so before doing this you lose the rally.

Note: This will ensure that you hit a good length high clear or lob which is essential in singles play. It will also help you to learn to watch your opponent and judge the length of your clear by where his feet are positioned as he hits the shuttle. It will also help you to know more accurately where you are in the court when you hit the shuttle from the rearcourt area

Game two: Learning to use the move to the forecourt

Play one game of singles up to between 5 to 15 points. There is one additional rule:

Rule: *Before either player can attempt a winning shot in a rally, e.g. the smash, he/she must first make the opponent step and/or reach into the forecourt with his racket to hit the shuttle.*

Once your opponent has done this you can attempt a winning shot at any time in that rally. If you do so before doing this you lose the rally.

Note: This will ensure that you hit accurate drop shots or net replies to move your opponent out of position and to hit up from near the net. It will also help you to watch your opponent to see whether he has to hit the shuttle from inside the forecourt so you will be able to judge the accuracy and effectiveness of your stroke-move.

Game three: Learning to use the basic moves to send the opponent to the sides of the court.

Play one game of singles up to between 5 to 15 points. There is one additional rule.

Rule: *Before either player can attempt a winning shot, e.g. the smash, he/she must first make the opponent travel completely into (with both feet) one side of the court to hit the shuttle and then immediately have to travel completely to the other side of the court to hit your reply, e.g. into the right forecourt and the left rearcourt.*

Once your opponent has done this you can attempt a winning shot at any time in that rally. If you do so before doing this you lose the rally

Note: This game will ensure that you exploit the width of the court as you hit cross-court shots as you use your stroke-moves to move your opponent out of position to the sides of the court.

Game four: Learning to use the stroke-moves to exploit the opponent in the midcourt

Play one game of singles up to between 5 to 15 points. There is one additional rule.

Rule: *Before either player can attempt a winning shot in a rally he/she must first force an upward hit from the midcourt. The shuttle must be hit from below the waist level of the of the opponent.*

Once your opponent has done this you can attempt a winning shot at any time in that rally. If you do so before doing this you lose the rally.

Note: This will help you to use the long dropshot, the drive, push and net kill as stroke-moves, rather than just the smash, to force your opponent to hit upwards from the midcourt.

2. 'Hitting to the space' games

Game 1: Play a game of singles and try to win by moving your opponent out of position by hitting the shuttle to the *empty spaces* on his/her court. These are the sides and centre of the RC and FC and the sides of the MC.

Advice: Remind the players to return to the centre of their MC after each hit.

Game 2: Play a game of singles and try to win by hitting the shuttle to the *space furthest away* from the opponent.

Advice: This is useful for players who are slow at getting back into a central position after playing their shot. They will be late getting to the shuttle.

Game 3: Play a game of singles and try to win by hitting the shuttle back to *the space that the opponent is leaving*.

Advice: This is useful for players who are quick at getting back into position after playing their shot. They can be caught out.

Game 4: Play a game of singles and try to win by hitting the shuttle to the space which is in a different direction to the one the opponent is leaving.

Advice: This will usually be to the sides of the player and can catch out the player who is not very agile and is slow to change direction sideways quickly. For example, if the opponent has hit the shuttle from his forehand rearcourt and is recovering to the centre midcourt you can hit your reply to his backhand rearcourt or to his forehand forecourt. Both of these shots will cause him to have to change direction sideways.

3. 'Building' shot and 'attempted winning' shot game

This game is the most important of all as the sole purpose of all the shots you play in this game will be to apply the principle of winning: to create a situation which will increase your chances of winning the rally or to reduce your opponent's chances of winning the rally. If you can consider your shots as such then you should eventually play with more purpose and intelligence. You will still use your strokes as moves and you will hit to the empty spaces on your opponent's court but now there will be a specific tactical purpose to doing so; you will be applying the principle of winning.

Consider also here the importance of the situation chart with its two basic situations and the five possibilities in each of those situations. It is important because it will help you to decide what type of situation you are in and what sort of building shot or attempted winning shot to play and where to play it.

Game. Play a game of singles of 9 or 11 points (no setting). There is one additional rule.

Rule: *Before you attempt a winning shot in a rally you must hit at least 3 or 5 building shots. You decide on the number. Any time after that you can attempt a winning shot.*

If the opponent returns the shuttle you can either attempt another winning shot or continue with more building shots until you have created another situation where you can attempt a winning shot.

Advice

Only select shots as building shots and attempted winning shots that allow you to get back into position to cover the replies. Do not play a particular shot as a building shot or an attempted winning shot if you cannot get back into position to cover the replies. If you do so it would not create a situation which increases your chance of winning the rally.

If you are under pressure and need to make time for yourself to get back into position to cover the opponent's possible replies then you can play a safety shot. Simply hit the shuttle very high towards the centre of his

rear court using a high defensive clear as a building shot depending on how much time you need.

Once you decide to play your building or attempted winning shot then **concentrate** on performing each stroke as well as you can. Don't worry about the opponent getting to it. If he is out of position and has to travel to get to the shuttle he will not be able to do much with it anyway; especially if you hit an effective building shot and you are in position and ready to cover his probable reply.

Play the game the way you like to play and feel comfortable with. It is your game. Your choice of building shots and attempted winning shots is entirely up to you. You are in charge of what you do and as long as what you do has a sensible purpose to it - then do it.

Comment

During the game only you will know whether it was your intention to hit a building shot or attempted winning shot in accordance with the principle of winning. You should also know, just as will any coach or spectator in this instance, whether you played the right sort of building shot or attempted winning shot in the type of situation you were in. Spectators will actually see it as not the right sort of shot to play in that situation. You will also know if you have hit a 'nothin' shot or a 'hit and hope' shot. You will know all this because you should be able to judge if the shot you played was in accordance with the principle of winning.

The ability to think and use intelligent tactics doesn't come immediately. You must think about it over time and practise playing in this way whenever you play singles. It requires you to judge what you do during the game and correct or alter your game as you play. In this way you will be able to plan tactics and apply tactics, or devise ongoing tactics in a game, which will increase your chances of winning. In doing so you should develop your court craft and play with more intelligence and purpose.

To play the game in this way will make you more aware of your strengths and any weaknesses you may have which will include: any lack of technical and tactical skill, fitness or a poor competitive attitude.

In fact, everything you must learn to play the game well derives from what you need to apply the principle of winning against any opponent. So let me now consider some of the things that you need to learn.

Practices to improve your skill in performing your strokes as tactical moves

The purpose of these practices is to re-emphasise the idea that your strokes are not just actions but also tactical moves. Consequently there can be two ways of practising any stroke. Usually you would learn how to perform the action for a stroke. For example, the 'standard clear'; you would learn it as a 'throwing action' with the racket starting position, the preparation, and the hitting phase as part of the stroke cycle². You would practise this action until you could perform it with fluency, accuracy and consistency. Then you would normally be expected to hit numerous clears in practice to 'groove' the stroke, to develop your technical skill. Though you may be aware that the function of the clear is to send the opponent to the rearcourt it is often the case that your focus is not on what you do to the OTHER player but on your SELF and how you perform the action. The result of this is that, even if players are told the function of the stroke, all too often they hit clears in practice which are of a poor length and too low as they try to complete their scheduled practice of 10, 20, or 30 repetitions of the stroke action. Then, in a game, they do the same thing and wonder why the opponent is able to intercept the clear and smash from inside the doubles service line, just inside the midcourt.

The solution to this problem is to consider and to practise both aspects of the clear or any other stroke from the outset: the stroke as an action and the stroke as a tactical move. As soon you can perform the action of any stroke (technical skill) you should begin to practise it to develop your tactical skill, as a tactical move with the focus on what you do to your practice partner. In fact, this is the measure of how well you are performing the stroke. You will perform a good 'clear' if you can consistently move your practice partner to his rearcourt and create enough time for you to be back into position to cover the possible replies (even though you know it is a 'clear' practice you are both doing). The clear is used here as a building shot.

² See my book, 'Excelling at Badminton' chapter 9.

The practices

The main purpose of these practices is to emphasise the difference between a technical practice and a tactical practice. To switch the focus from how you perform the strokes to what you do to your opponent. I will select a few strokes for you to learn how to do this and then you can adopt the same method for other strokes. In each stroke selected I have described one practice to develop your technical skill and one practice to develop your tactical skill so that you can compare the difference. In some practices one player may act as the feeder while the other player practises to improve his performance.

First Stroke

1. The forehand clear – technical skill.

This practice is called 'the forehand clear'.

Instructions: Perform 10 repetitions – a 20 shot rally.

A in the centre MC. B in the centre of his RC

A serves high to B.

B hits a forehand clear to A's centre RC.

A travels to his RC and hits a clear to B and then stays in his RC.

Both players continue to rally from the RC until they have completed a 20 shot rally.

This practice can be developed to make it more complex and difficult, .e.g. by adding the travel phases, but the emphasis would still be mainly on the action – the performance of the stroke - and not the outcome – what it does to the OTHER player; though of course you would still expect the stroke to be effective in what it does to the other player.

2. The forehand clear – tactical skill

This practice is called: *I am going to use my forehand clear as a building shot to make you travel into your RC and allow enough time for me to get back into position in my MC to cover your possible replies before you hit the shuttle.*

Instructions: Get it right 5 times

A and B stand in the centre of their respective midcourts.

A serves high to B's centre RC and then takes up a defensive stance ready to defend against a possible smash.. He watches B to see if he has arrived with his feet in the RC before he hits the shuttle. If not A serves again until he can do this. If he succeeds then:

B hits a high clear to A's centre RC and then watches A travel to the RC while recovering to his centre MC to arrive ready to defend before A can hit the shuttle from inside his RC. Thus A travels into position in the RC to hit the shuttle as B travels to his centre.

Note: If A has not travelled all the way into his RC and B has not travelled to his centre MC before A hits the shuttle then the practice begins again.

The players practice in this way until they can use the clear as a tactical move (a building shot) successfully. With practice they should be able to get it right for a rally of at least 10 shots – 5 repetitions each. If the rally breaks down before then, i.e. if either player fails to do the practice effectively, they stop and begin again.

Note: It is important that A and B recover to their centre each time to take up a defensive stance whilst watching the other player so that they each see the outcome of their stroke-moves; that they are building shots used to move the opponent out of position and to create a situation in accordance with the principle of attack.

Second Stroke

1. The forehand x-court drop shot – technical skill

Instructions: Perform 10 repetitions – 20 shot rally.

A (as the feeder) stands in his right MC about 1-2 metres behind the short service line.

B stands in the centre of his right RC

A serves high to B.

B hits a fast cross court flat or sliced dropshot to A

A lobs the shuttle back to B positioned in his right rearcourt.

The rally continues for 20 shots and then the players change over.

2. The forehand x-court drop shot – tactical skill

This practice is called: *I am going to use my x-court drop-shot as a building shot to make you move from your centre position to play the shuttle from near the floor at the side of your FC/MC area.*

Instructions: get it right 5 times.

A stands in his centre MC.

B stands in the centre of his right MC in a receiving serve stance.

A serves high to B's forehand RC and then stands astride the centre line in a defensive stance ready to cover B's possible smash.

B travels to his RC and takes up the smash position (to look as if to smash). B hits a fast x-court drop shot to aim the shuttle to land near the floor at the side of A's right court, near the short service line and the sideline.

A travels across and lobs the shuttle high to B who has remained in his RC and then recovers to his centre line in the MC as if to defend against a possible smash.

The players continue to rally in this way until B has hit 5 successful x-court drop shots, i.e. until B has caused A to move out of position to hit the shuttle from near the floor at the side of his court.

Note: It is important that A recovers to his centre line each time to take up a defensive stance so that B actually sees the outcome of his stroke-move, that it is a building shot used to move the opponent out of position and to create a situation in accordance with the principle of attack.

Comment

These technical and tactical practices are very basic and one would expect to develop them further to make them more difficult and complex technical or tactical practices in conjunction with other stroke-moves and by adding the elements of uncertainty and competition. For example, in the second tactical practice, B will be allowed to hit a straight smash to A's left midcourt so forcing A to get back into position to defence. Or, B may have to travel forwards towards the centre MC to be ready for a possible net reply to his drop shot. The purpose here is simply to illustrate

the difference between a technical and tactical practice. In a technical practice the focus is on the action of hitting the shuttle - on your SELF. In a tactical practice the focus is on the outcome - what you do to the OTHER player - on your use of a stroke-move as a building shot or attempted winning shot in accordance with the principle of winning.

Some more examples of technical and tactical practices.

I will explain what each practice is called and then you can construct a practice similar to the previous technical and tactical practices.

1. The forehand smash.

- (a) Construct a technical practice.
- (b) Construct a tactical practice.

This practice is called: *I am going to use my forehand smash as a building shot to make you move from your centre position to play the shuttle from near the floor at the backhand side of your MC area.*

2. The backhand block to the smash

- (a) Construct a technical practice
- (b) Construct a tactical practice.

This practice is called: *I am going to perform a backhand block as a building shot to your smash to make you travel to the forecourt to play the shuttle from below the net in your forehand FC.*

3. The forehand attack clear to the backhand RC.

- (a) Construct a technical practice
- (b) Construct a tactical practice.

This practice is called: *I am going to hit a fast low clear over your head to make you move from your central position and give you less time to get to the shuttle in your backhand RC.*

PART FOUR

PLANNING YOUR TACTICS

"Know your enemy and know yourself and you can fight a hundred battles with no danger of defeat".³

If you are going to devise a game plan prior to playing your opponent or if you are going to devise your tactics as you play then you should know something about how your opponent plays. This will include:

- his strengths and weaknesses
- his favourite shots
- what he is likely to do in a given situation

Additionally you should also know the same things about your own game as your tactics depend on what you can do in a given situation to counter your opponent's moves and to create situations in which you can increase your chances of winning the rally.

How can you get to know your opponent's game. Usually you do so by playing against him. If you play against your friends regularly in informal and formal competitive games you will usually get a good idea of what they are likely to do in a given situation and how to play against them. You will have learned this from experience even if you are not consciously aware of having done so. This is particularly the case if you are a better player and win more often than not. But if you lose regularly then you have to ask yourself why this is and then do something about it. You will have to learn about both your own game and your opponent's game so that you can compare his game with yours and work out what he can and cannot do and why he can defeat you.

The most direct way to learn about his game is by observation, recording what he does in the game and then analysing it. You can do this:

- by playing against him and then rely on your memory to complete a questionnaire

³ "Six Essays on Military Affairs", page 21, Mao Tsetung, Foreign Languages Press, 1972.

- by watching him, recording the game using a system of notation and then completing a questionnaire
- by videoing him and then watching the video to get the answers to the questions in your questionnaire or using a computer to analyse.

You can learn about your own game from:

- memory and a questionnaire
- observe yourself on video and analyse your performance using a questionnaire or a system of computer analysis.

As it is unlikely that you will have access to computer analysis then the most effective way to analyse how your opponent plays is to use a video recording and/or a questionnaire. Once you have detailed information about how you both play, you can then work on your strengths and weaknesses to improve your own performance and be aware of your opponent's strengths and weaknesses in planning how to play against him.

PLAYER ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE

This method is used to gain more information about an opponent. It is simply a questionnaire which focuses attention on particular aspects of an opponent's game. If you complete a questionnaire on all potential opponents you can build up a file which can be referred to whenever necessary. At the same time doing so will help you to learn to analyse an opponent's game. Assume you are due to play a strong opponent - a study of the questionnaire will indicate his favourite shots; his movement patterns; his replies to a particular order of shots. It is possible to be prepared with a good insight into the opponent's game and to have already worked out the opponent's possible replies in certain situations. With practice you can build up a complete picture of the opponent's game. You can print out the following questionnaire in which I have provided space for you to answer the questions.

Questionnaire

1. Name of Player
2. Age
3. Ranking
4. Physical build-tall, medium, small/heavy, light, muscular/gymnastic, athletic.
5. Results this season (only good opponents)
Won (name opponent)

Los (name opponent)

Things to look for

1. SERVE – the opening stroke-move
 - (a) Does he serve low or high?
 - (b) Does he use a backhand or forehand serve?
 - (c) Where does he serve: sides or centre?
 - (d) Where does he recover to after the serve, e.g. attack or defensive stance in the MC.
 - (e) What do you think would be good replies to his serves, i.e. building or attempted winning shots. Think of the different situations he puts you in with his serve.
2. RECEIVING THE SERVE
 - (a) Where does he position himself to receive a serve?
 - (b) Does his position vary at all?
 - (c) What stroke-moves does he play in reply to: the low serve, high serve – from his forehand or backhand sides?
 - (d) What grip does he use to receive serve?

3. REARCOURT STROKE-MOVES

- (a) What stroke-moves does he play from a high position at the sides or centre? Does it differ on his forehand or backhand side?
- (b) What stroke-moves does he play from a low position at the sides?
- (c) Is he quick or slow to recover after playing a particular stroke-move?
- (d) Where does he recover to: midcourt centre each time or in another position to cover your possible replies?
- (e) What sort of reply do you think he expects from you to his stroke-move?
- (f) What sort of reply(s) do you think would be effective against him in the situation from which you would play your stroke-move.

4. MIDCOURT STROKE-MOVES

- (a) What stroke-moves does he play from a high position at the sides or centre? Does it differ on his forehand or backhand side?
- (b) Is he quick or slow to recover after playing a particular stroke-move?
- (c) Where does he recover to: midcourt centre each time or in another position to cover your possible replies?
- (d) What stroke-moves does he play from a low position at the sides?
- (e) What grip does he use when defending in the midcourt.
- (f) What sort of reply do you think would be effective against him in the situation from which you would play your stroke-move.
- (g) What sort of reply do you think he expects from you to his stroke-move?

5. FORECOURT STROKE-MOVES

- (a) What stroke-moves does he play from above net level, just below net level, from near the floor at the sides or centre? Does it differ on his forehand or backhand side?

- (b) Is he quick or slow to recover into position after playing a particular stroke-move?
- (d) Where does he recover to, to cover your possible stroke-moves?
- (e) What sort of, reply do you think he expects from you to his stroke-move?
- (f) What sort of reply do you think would be effective against him in the situation from which you would play your stroke-move?

6. GENERAL QUESTIONS

- (a) What is his favorite stroke-move, if any, in a particular situation?
- (b) What is his strongest stroke-move in a particular situation, in relation to your game?
- (c) What is his weakest stroke-move in a particular situation, in relation to your game?
- (d) Is there any recognisable pattern of stroke-moves he uses as building shots to create a situation which increases his chances of attempting a winning shot? In what situation does he attempt most of his winning shots?

7. DECEPTION

- (a) In what situations does he use deception?
- (b) What particular stroke-move does he use for deception?
- (c) How does he try to deceive you?
- (d) How does he recover after using deception?
- (e) What sort of replies do you think he expects from his deception?
- (f) What do you think you might do if you know he uses deception in that situation?

8. FITNESS

- (a) Is he quick off the spot and does he get to the shuttle quickly?
- (b) Does he recover quickly after making a stroke-move?

(c) How does he seem physically after a long hard rally if he wins or if he loses the rally?

(d) After a long hard rally can he play another long rally or does he attempt to go for a quick winner?

(e) How does he play when he gets tired?

(f) How do you know if he is tired?

9. ATTITUDE

(a) How does he react if he is losing? Does he have a negative or positive attitude?

(b) How does he react if he is winning?

(c) How do you think you might play him when he is losing or when he is winning? Would you continue as you are or change your tactics.

10. WHAT SORT OF PLAYER IS HE:

(a) Likes long rallies?

(b) Patient, steady -tends to wait for mistake?

(c) Attacking-goes for winners, etc?

(d) Plays a fast game?

(e) Plays a slow game?

(f) Confident?

(g) What is he like in a tense situation: cool, nervous?

(h) Anything else you can think of?

COMMENTS

This is a very basic questionnaire. If you answer all the questions you should obtain a good picture of each opponent. If you want to change any questions or add to them to create your own questionnaire then you should do so.

Once you have completed this questionnaire on possible opponents you should complete it on yourself. Either use your memory or get a friend to video you when you play.

How to use the information?

There are several ways that you can use this information to improve your performance and help you to defeat your opponents.

1. Make a profile of each opponent.

Use the questionnaire to write a profile, a picture, of each opponent. This way you can build up a file on each of your opponents which you can update when necessary. A study of an opponent's profile prior to a game will remind you of how he plays and what strategy and tactics to adopt against him. You simply need to remind yourself of the sort of moves he makes in different situations and how you might counter those moves. Do his stroke-moves allow you to make use of them to create a situation in which you could attempt a winning shot? If so write down the situation and the counter move that you could make. Then think about how your opponent may counter your move.

The order is:

- his stroke-move
- your counter stroke-move
- his likely counter moves to your stroke-move
- your possible reply

With careful study and analysis it is not too difficult to plan your replies for each possible pattern of stroke-moves that your opponent uses.

2. Practice

Once you have analysed your game and your opponent's game you may find that you need to learn or improve your technical skill, your stroke actions, so that you can use your stroke-moves effectively as tactical moves. Likewise you may find that you need to practise using your stroke-moves in a particular situation so that you can counter your opponent's moves and exploit his weaknesses.

Your performance as a player depends on four basic aspects: your technical skill, tactical skill, fitness and attitude as opposed to those of your opponent. As the sole purpose of your strategy is to win the battle then your strategy will focus on exploiting one or all of these aspects of your opponent's game, which you will do by your tactical play. To what extent you can do this will obviously depend on your own skill, fitness and attitude as you can expect that your opponent will knowingly or unknowingly be exploiting your performance in the same way. This is why it is important that you should be continually trying to improve your performance through careful planning, fitness training, effective technical and tactical practices and play.

PART FIVE

THE ON-COURT BATTLE

(Getting an edge on your opponent)

By now you should have some idea of the sort of tactical moves you can make in a game and how those moves cause the opponent to travel to various positions on his court. However, with two equal opponents, your tactical moves, though appropriate, may be insufficient and you would need to think how you might play them with more effect to increase your chances of winning. In any contest between equal opponents, players who win usually manage to get an edge on their opponents. They have something extra which they bring to their play. In this Part of the book, therefore, I want to discuss some general ideas and ways of increasing your own chances of winning. – how you might get that edge on your opponent when you are on court trying to win.

As I wrote at the beginning,

"The game is a battle. The battle is between two opponents who present each other with a problem. The problem is how to overcome the opponent and win the battle. The deciding factor is 'thinking'. You have to solve the problem presented by the opponent who not only tries to prevent you winning the battle but also tries to win himself."

The ‘principle of winning’ states that you should try to create a situation which will increase your chances of winning the rally or, to reduce your opponent’s chances of doing so. Here are a few suggestions on how you might get that edge on your opponent which will make the difference between winning and losing.

1. Outmanoeuvre him:

- (a) Hit to the spaces and move him away from his centre until he is late getting to the shuttle or cannot get to it to play a shot.

(b) Lull him into expecting a shot to the same place so he that covers that and doesn't get back into position to cover other possible shots and so leaves some of the court open for you to hit the shuttle there.

For example you may hit 3 consecutive shots to the backhand rearcourt so that he hangs back expecting another shot there.

2. Exploit his lack of fitness: endurance, speed, flexibility, strength, agility. Tire him - prolong the rallies or play at a faster pace until he tires and cannot cover the court and/or begins to make errors.

3. Upset his game.

- (a) vary the direction – mix straight and x-court shots.
- (b) alter the tempo, i.e. slow the game down or speed it up.
- (c) variety- use different types of shot and speeds.

(4) Deceive him.

(a) Pretend to do one thing and then do another. Example: pretend to move in a direction before he hits the shuttle, i.e. bluff him by making a feint. Or, go as if to play a net reply and then hit the shuttle over his head as he travels forwards to the net.

(b) Delay your shot. Hold your racket as if prepared to hit and then delay the hit until he commits himself to moving before you hit the shuttle.

(c) Eliminate stroke habits. Make your preparation look identical for similar shots then your opponent will not know where the shuttle is going until you actually hit it. For example adopt the smash position for all forehand overhead shots so that you look as if to smash and then the opponent cannot anticipate whether you will smash, clear or drop.

5. Play to his weaknesses. You do this so that you can predict the return or know he is likely to make a weak return or an error. For example many players will hold the racket in a forehand grip when in

the ready position or defending in Singles. If you hit the shuttle quickly to their backhand side many players will not be able to change to a backhand grip quickly so they will still use their forehand grip with the result being a weaker shot. This is particularly the case with the smash to the backhand side. The reply of a player who is using a forehand grip is usually a block to the forecourt rather than a lob.

6. **Play to his strengths.** It is sometimes necessary to do this because you can predict what he is likely to do with the shuttle. If everything else has been tried it might be the last resort. You might for example give your opponent an easy shot on his forehand knowing he will attempt a straight smash. You can anticipate this shot and try to cut it off and play it to the open court and perhaps force him in return to give you a shot you can do something with.

7. **Get to know his body language and anticipate what he is likely to do.** Many players have particular habits which they show as they perform various strokes on the court. If you think about it you may find that you already read the body language of players who you play regularly. For example some players will drop the elbow and bend their racket arm when they intend to hit a drop shot. Others will hold the racket in a different grip for different shots. If you study your opponents while they are playing and use the questionnaire to direct your attention to specific things that they do you should begin to recognise their habits from their body language.

8. **Exploit his attitude:** impatience, recklessness, fear of losing/winning, lack of concentration. As long as you behave within the Laws and the spirit of the game you are free to exploit the opponent's attitude just as you may exploit his fitness or technical skill.

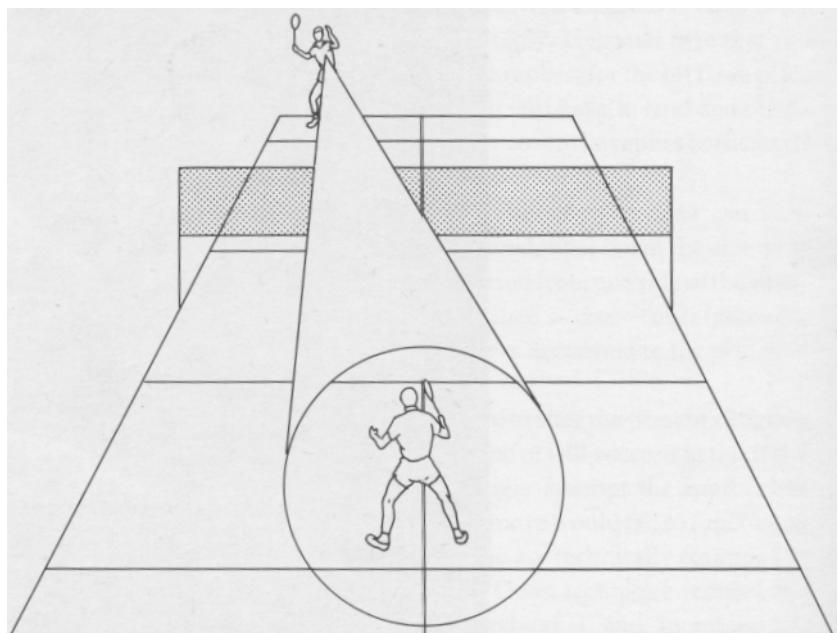
9. **Take up an effective court position**

I have referred throughout about recovering into a position to cover your opponent's possible replies. Good positional play is an essential

part of good tactical play. Usually beginners are advised and taught to return to the 'central base', the centre of the midcourt, after hitting the shuttle. This is a position which is equidistant from the front and sides of the court. This occurs in many basic practices and helps to instill the habit of doing so in players. This is good advice at the beginning but as you improve you will need to vary your positions slightly relative to where the opponent is when he hits the shuttle and the sort of shot you might expect from him. So let's consider some of the ways you might position yourself when covering your opponent's possible replies.

(a) ***The Funnel*** – dividing the angle of the possible returns. The word funnel is used to describe the position of one opponent relative to the other as he hits the shuttle. Usually a player dividing the angle of the direction of the possible returns of his opponent thinks only of shots passing on his right and left sides. However badminton is a three-dimensional game and the shuttle can be hit upwards as well as to the left and right of the player. After making a shot you should try to position yourself square on to the opponent even whilst traveling into position. You then will appear to be looking down a funnel and, like a goalkeeper, you will attempt to cover all the possible space, at the sides and above you to prevent the shuttle getting past you. You will also be a position to travel to the shuttle that is in front of you or is traveling behind you.

The funnel



(b). **Facing the hitter.** It is important to position yourself correctly in relation to the position of hitter (the opponent) as he positions himself to hit the shuttle. If the hitter is in his right court then you would turn to your left, square on to the hitter. If he is in his left court you would turn to your right. And if he is in his centre you would stand facing down the middle of his court. As suggested above while in the *funnel* you should stand as much as possible square on to the hitter so that you can move easily to cover shots that are hit to your right or left sides. In the forecourt you may stand in a *forward attacking stance* with your racket leg forward ready to attack a net reply; or, you may stand in a *backward attacking stance* with your racket leg to the rear; or, in the midcourt, you may stand in a *sides defensive or attacking-stance* with your legs sideways apart ready to defend against a possible smash.

10. **Invite a reply.** It is possible to 'persuade' your opponent to give you the reply that you want. For example if you play a net reply to his block to your smash you could 'invite' him to play a net reply also which you are ready to attack. After your net reply simply partly withdraw from the net into a backward attacking stance – the same as a receiving serve stance – as if to cover the lob to the rearcourt. This opens up space in the forecourt and 'invites' your opponent to play a net reply which you have planned for and can attack. Likewise if you play a very tight net reply you can stand in a forward attacking stance which takes you nearer the net and reduces the space between you and the net. The opponent is 'invited' to lob the shuttle high with you now ready to travel backwards to smash.

11. **Hitting to the centre or the sides.** It is often an advantage to hit from the sides of your forecourt, midcourt or rearcourt rather than from the centre of these areas. The reason being that if you hit from the sides you can hit the shuttle down the line to the side of the opponent or across the full width of the court with less risk of hitting

the shuttle out of the side lines. This is particularly the case when the shuttle is high in your rearcourt, midcourt or forecourt. The opponent will find it more difficult to cover all your replies. When you hit from the centre of the court to the sides of the opponent's court you must direct the shuttle towards the side lines and hence there is more risk of hitting the shuttle out of the sidelines. For this reason a good tactic is to try to get the opponent to create a situation in which you can hit the shuttle from your sides. One way of doing this is to hit the shuttle to the middle of your opponent's rearcourt, midcourt or forecourt. Most players will return the shuttle to the sides of your rearcourt, midcourt or forecourt and give you the angle that you want. This is particularly the case when hitting a long drop shot aimed to land close to the opponent's body on his right or left side when the opponent is positioned in the centre of his midcourt. This creates a situation in which he cannot do much with the shuttle and usually he will try to reply to the sides of your forecourt, midcourt or rearcourt. If you are ready you can anticipate and then hit your shot from the sides.

If the opponent hits the shuttle towards your centre rearcourt, midcourt or forecourt then simply hit it back to his centre until he hits it to the sides of your court. One player who used this tactic frequently was Morten Frost, the Danish All England champion in the 1980s. He used to play a long drop shot to the centre Midcourt then recover to his centre and wait for his opponent to try to hit the shuttle away from him to the corners of his forecourt or rearcourt. As soon as he did Frost would anticipate and attack the opponent's reply. The best reply to Frost was to do the same to him instead of hitting to his corners.

12. Walk or run back into position after your shot. Many practices in badminton use routines in which the player is always running forwards or backwards to a central base. This is not always necessary and is often counter productive. The only reason for running back into position to cover the replies is if you know you will be late getting to the shuttle. For example, if you jump backwards to hit the shuttle in the rearcourt then you would still travel backwards through the air after the hit and before you land. Obviously then you

will want to make up for the time taken to travel backwards before you land. As soon as you land you would try to get back into position as quickly as possible – so you would run. How fast you run would depend on where you have hit the shuttle. If you have smashed it then you would need to recover more quickly than if you had cleared it.

Alternatively if you are in balance in the rearcourt before the shuttle arrives then you would hit it with your weight coming forwards and can walk back towards your centre ready to move quickly once the opponent has hit the shuttle. If you always run then you can be caught out by an opponent who hits the shuttle back to the space you have just left or in another direction to the one you are traveling in. It is often difficult to change direction at speed.

The same applies to the lob from the rearcourt. If you hit a very high lob to the middle of your opponent's rearcourt then you have time to walk back into position to defend against his possible smash. If you perform a shallow or poor length lob then you might have to run backwards very quickly as you may have less time to get into position before the opponent hits the shuttle.

So I would suggest that if you are in balance and in position to hit the shuttle before it arrives then if you smash, clear, drop from the rearcourt then simply walk towards your midcourt ready to cover your opponent's replies. If you lob high from the forecourt then walk back to your midcourt ready to defend against a possible smash.

13. Watch the shuttle and the opponent

As suggested above many players are trained to run back to their central base after hitting the shuttle. This is practised so much that it becomes a habit. They are also usually taught to watch the shuttle all the time to the extent that they don't watch to see what the opponent will probably do. The consequence of these two factors is that some players hit the shuttle and then *focus first* on running back to the central base (hopefully to divide the angle of returns) and then *focus second* on watching the shuttle. What happens then is that the player

usually has to wait until the opponent hits the shuttle before he can move to get to it with the result that he is often late getting there.

My advice is as follows. Think of the other side of the court as a big picture occupied by the opponent. After you have hit the shuttle into the opponent's court focus mainly on watching the opponent as you travel into position to cover his/her possible replies. You know where you have hit the shuttle so you don't need to focus so much on watching the shuttle. You will see it but the main focus is on watching the opponent. If you focus on him you can see how he prepares to return the shuttle and you can then judge what he is likely to do and so prepare for it.

Alternatively when the opponent hits the shuttle towards you, you should focus on the shuttle mainly. You will still see the opponent in the picture and you should know where he is likely to travel to cover your replies. In my opinion the rule should be: '*Watch the opponent mainly when you hit the shuttle away from you and watch the shuttle mainly as it travels towards you*'.

14. Reduce your errors – percentage play.

The purpose here is to reduce the possibility of making an error and yet by playing safely to give no advantage to your opponent. Here are a few typical examples.

(a) *Clears and lobs to the rearcourt.* Too many players hit the shuttle too close to the sidelines as they aim for the corners. Length here is more important than direction. So aim your clear or lob to land in the opponent's centre rearcourt or the middle of his right or left rearcourt and allow a greater margin for making an error. There will still be sufficient angle to force the opponent to travel out of position towards the side of the rearcourt to make his reply. As you become more accurate you can aim the shuttle even wider towards the sides of the opponent's rearcourt to force the opponent further out of position.

(b) *Drops to the forecourt.* Slow drop shots should be straight or to the middle. In general a slow cross-court drop shot will give the opponent

more time to reach the shuttle and to play a shot to his advantage. You might have given him a shot that he can do something with. Cross court drop shots should be faster to give the opponent less time to reach the shuttle and maybe a building shot he cannot do much with.

(c) *Smashes from the rearcourt.* Most players only consider the smash as an attempted winning shot. In fact it is often more effective as a building shot when hit from the rearcourt. That means that it is hit hard but with more control and accuracy to force the opponent to play the shuttle from low at the sides of the midcourt on whichever side you aim it for most effect. He must therefore hit the shuttle upwards and so give you the chance to hit the shuttle downwards again. If he hits a good lob reply to your rearcourt you use the smash again as a building shot. If he hits a poor reply high to your midcourt or forecourt then you can attempt a winning shot. The closer you are to the net the more you can attempt a winning shot as more of his court space will be open for your smash.

15. Changing tactics.

The advice usually given is don't change your winning tactics. So if the tactics you are using are effective then you should keep using them.

When not to change tactics

Unfortunately players sometimes do change their tactics when it is unnecessary. It might seem appear that your tactics don't seem to be working so you change them. My advice before doing so is to consider whether or not it is your tactics that are not working or your execution of them. You could still be using effective tactics, e.g. outmaneuvering your opponent and exploiting his lack of fitness but your technical skill is letting you down. For example your clears are hit too low and the opponent is able to intercept and hit his reply before the shuttle reaches the rearcourt. Rather than change your tactic you should make sure that you hit a good length clear as a building shot. As this could apply to any stroke-move I would suggest that you give some thought to your performance of your stroke-moves before you change your tactics. For example, have you hit accurate

and effective clears, drops and smashes as building or attempted winning shots. It is also the case that you might be tempted to change your tactics because your opponent seems to be playing more positive badminton. For example, if you have won the first game or you are leading in the final game against a good opponent you should expect such an opponent to fight back. He may begin trying harder to win and in so doing exert more pressure on you. The main thing is not to panic and immediately change your tactics. What you should do is be prepared for the change in your opponent's attitude, to dig in and be prepared to work harder yourself. If you do so your tactics may continue to be effective.

When to change tactics.

If your tactics are no longer effective even when you have considered the comments above then you may need to change your tactics - to adopt plan B so to speak or devise new tactics relative to the situations that you are now meeting. For example your opponent may have realised what tactics you are using and has changed his to counter them. Alternatively he has decided that his tactics are not working and so he has changed them. You may now be confronted with new problems which your current tactics are unable to cope with. You have to devise other tactics.

Remember what I said at the start of this book.

"The game is a battle. The battle is between two opponents who present each other with a problem. The problem is how to overcome the opponent and win the battle.

The deciding factor is 'thinking'. You have to think to solve the problem presented by the opponent who not only tries to prevent you winning the battle but also tries to win himself.

Winning is the prize for overcoming the problems presented by the opponent throughout the battle"

This is what makes the game so fascinating. Enjoy your battle!