

SERVICE-THE OPENING GUN OF TENNIS.

Service is the opening gun of tennis. It is putting the ball in play. The old idea was that service should never be more than merely the beginning of a rally. With the rise of American tennis and the advent of Dwight Davis and Holcombe Ward, service took on a new significance. These two men originated what is now known as the American Twist delivery.

From a mere formality, service became a point winner. Slowly it gained in importance, until Maurice E. M'Loughlin, the wonderful "California Comet," burst across the tennis sky with the first of those terrific cannon-ball deliveries that revolutionized the game, and caused the old-school players to send out hurry calls for a severe footfault rule or some way of stopping the threatened destruction of all ground strokes. M'Loughlin made service a great factor in the game. It remained for R. N. Williams to supply the antidote that has again put service in the normal position of mere importance, not omnipotence. Williams stood in on the delivery and took it on the rising bound.

Service must be speedy. Yet speed is not the be-all and end-all. Service must be accurate, reliable, and varied. It must be used with discretion and served with brains.

Any tall player has an advantage over a short one, in service. Given a man about 6 feet and allow him the 3 feet added by his reach, it has been proved by tests that should he deliver a service, perfectly flat, with no variation caused by twist or wind, that just cleared the net at its lowest point (3 feet in the centre), there is only a margin of 8 inches of the service court in which the ball can possibly fall; the remainder is below the net angle. Thus it is easy to see how important it is to use some form of twist to bring the ball into court. Not only must it go into court, but it must be sufficiently speedy that the receiver does not have an opportunity of an easy kill. It must also be placed so as to allow the server an advantage for his next return, admitting the receiver puts the ball in play.

Just as the first law of receiving is to, put the ball in play, so of service it is to cause the receiver to fall into error. Do not strive unduly for clean aces, but use your service to upset the ground strokes of your opponent.

Service should be hit from as high a point as the server can COMFORTABLY reach. To stretch unnecessarily is both wearing on the server and unproductive of results. Varied pace and varied speed is the keynote to a good service.

The slice service should be hit from a point above the right shoulder and as

high as possible. The server should stand at about a forty-five degree angle to the baseline, with both feet firmly planted on the ground. Drop the weight back on the right foot and swing the racquet freely and easily behind the back. Toss the ball high enough into the air to ensure it passing through the desired hitting plane, and then start a slow shift of the weight forward, at the same time increasing the power of the swing forward as the racquet commences its upward flight to the ball. Just as the ball meets the racquet face the weight should be thrown forward and the full power of the swing smashed into the service. Let the ball strike the racquet INSIDE the face of the strings, with the racquet travelling directly towards the court. The angle of the racquet face will impart the twist necessary to bring the ball in court. The wrist should be somewhat flexible in service. If necessary lift the right foot and swing the whole body forward with the arm. Twist slightly to the right, using the left foot as a pivot. The general line of the racquet swing is from RIGHT to LEFT and always forward.

At this point and before I take up the other branches of serving, let me put in a warning against footfaulting. I can only say that a footfault is crossing or touching the line with either foot before the ball is delivered, or it is a jump or step. I am not going into a technical discussion of footfaults. It is unnecessary, and by placing your feet firmly before the service there is no need to footfault.

It is just as unfair to deliberately footfault as to miscall a ball, and it is wholly unnecessary. The average footfault is due to carelessness, over-anxiety, or ignorance of the rule. All players are offenders at times, but it can quickly be broken up.