



## MASTERSHOT

### *James Willstrop's backhand volley*

James Willstrop demonstrates perfect technique with this excellent backhand volley. He is well positioned, balanced and an ideal distance from the ball. This is not some instinctive reflex shot, but a situation he has set up. He was probably on the T, dominating, with Chris Simpson behind, endeavouring to straight-drive past him. However, Willstrop has read the situation superbly. His set-up has given him three things: time for an outstanding shot, options and disguise.

Simpson's shot is not loose and it is not especially easy for Willstrop to hit the ball crosscourt, but because he has time, he has options to go short or long. Simpson must cover both. Initially, we see him working hard to cover the short shot and then, in picture 4, the brakes suddenly go on as he realises Willstrop has played long with a volley drive. There is little chance of Simpson cutting this ball off, so he will have to scramble back. Willstrop's best option is to play a dying length to the back of the service box, forcing Simpson to take the ball before the back wall – if he can get there, for he is late, as he hasn't anticipated the shot.

Willstrop has his feet apart and wide, that is not in line. His weight is moving forward into the shot (picture 2) and his body is steady as the shot unwinds. As he follows through, he steps out of the shot.

From his set up position one of Willstrop's options is to go short, cutting down on the ball, or long punching through the shot more. The racket preparation is clean and simple. The volley is generally played with a shorter swing and a firmer wrist, and here we see Willstrop's exemplary rackethead control.

We also see his intense concentration and eye on the ball. Thanks to his excellent balance, his head is in a perfect position to watch the ball. Time and good technique allow consistency and accuracy, and here he has the feel to put the shot in the right place and at the right pace.

#### TOP TIPS

- Practise your volley in the knock-up, picking up some of your opponent's crosscourts.
- Practise solo continuously, feeding to yourself and hitting to a dying length.
- Practise with a partner, feeding and volleying. Play condition games down the side wall, perhaps driving behind the service box and volleying behind the short line. An extension to this practice allows volley-drops, perhaps when your opponent is behind you.

