



1. UNDERSTANDING TACTICS

In a new series, Squash Player presents the key tactics you should be using in your game and explains how to develop them

There is a lot going on when we are tearing around the court, whacking balls against walls in what Jansher Khan called “a small room”. However, the aim in all the mayhem is to make good returns and win points by playing shots an opponent cannot get back.

A young professional recently explained the modern game to *Squash Player* like this:

“It is about attacking. To win, you just need to hit more winners than your opponent.”

This is a popular fallacy and wrong. You need to win more points than your opponent, not necessarily hit more winners. Really, you need to win more games! Try answering this question. What is the greatest percentage of points a player can earn above an opponent’s points total and still lose the match? The answer is at the end of this article. The points you win are a total of your winning shots and your opponent’s errors.

Often in *Squash Player* we look at some simple winner/error analysis. This is very useful in understanding matches, because they are often won and lost on mistakes. If you get every ball back and don’t make mistakes, it is impossible to be beaten.

If your opponent does hit a winner, what is the question you should ask yourself? Where did he play it from? Deprive him of these opportunities. This is the defensive part of the game which we consider in the sections on length and width, movement, recovery to the T, and variation of pace.

So, in tactics we are not just looking at the winning and losing of points, but crucially at how they came about. They don’t come out of a void, even if hit by Ramy Ashour.

Tactics are what are behind points. To understand this, we need to consider the rallies and the tactical rules.

We don’t just wait for opponents to make errors; we try to force errors and weak shots with tight play, by making opponents run and pressurising them with hard drives and volleys, which we consider in the sections on pressure play and positional play.

In this series we will look at establishing a clear tactical vocabulary, basic tactical rules and a game structure, highlighting 10 key tactics in more depth.

Answer: 48%.

TACTICS MASTERCLASS:

There are two conditions you require before you attack – an opponent out of position and an easy ball. Tarek Momen has the easy ball and Mohamed ElShorbagy is out of position a little, although he is explosive in the front court. Momen is hitting away from his opponent. He should allow a little margin for error above the tin to minimise his chance of a mistake. Then he needs to quickly recover position at the T to cover all ElShorbagy’s options.

TOP 10 TACTICS

1. LENGTH

Use length to put your opponent in the back corners and deprive them of attacking opportunities. Minimise mistakes. Start with defence.

2. WIDTH

Use width to get the ball past your opponent and force weak shots.

3. WIN THE T

Move to and take control of the T. Recover here quickly before your opponent hits their shot.

4. VARY THE PACE

Tactics involve a balance between hard and soft shots. Use the lob and other high shots to create time to recover the T. Vary the pace of your play to break an opponent’s rhythm.

5. APPLY PRESSURE AND VOLLEY

Apply pressure to deprive your opponent of time by taking the ball early, hitting it hard and volleying. Volley to keep control of the middle.

6. POSITIONAL PLAY

Hit the ball away from your opponent when openings occur. Make your opponent run. Play into the gaps.

7. ATTACK

Look for opportunities to attack. Attack when you have an opponent out of position and an easy ball.

8. VARIATIONS

Use surprise, disguise and deception to catch an opponent out. Set up patterns and then suddenly change them.

9. RALLY

Squash is a rallying game, so set them up and try to control them. Look for opportunities to play winners and force errors. Return to defensive play whenever you need to.

10. MATCHPLAY

Adapt your tactics to your opponent’s strengths and weaknesses.

NEXT ISSUE

- Should you aim your length to the back of the service box or into the back corners?
- What is the key rule you should follow so that you never lose your length?
- How do you practise length in matchplay?
- Where should you aim your crosscourts - on the floor or into the side wall?