



MASTERSHOT

Gaultier's backhand crosscourt drop

In the mad dashing about that normally happens on a squash court, here is a moment of stillness, of complete focus and precision.

Mazen Hesham has got himself into all sorts of trouble and he is working hard to extricate himself from it. He is right up the court, alert, ready to take off and completely focused on Gregory Gaultier's shot, to try and anticipate where he has to move.

Tactically, the obvious shot for Gaultier is the backhand straight drop into the large gap left by Hesham, which he is desperately trying to cover. This is one of the basic axioms of the sport: hit the ball away from your opponent. Another is attack when you have the opportunity and two conditions: your opponent is out of position and it is an easy ball.

Hesham's rhythm has certainly been disrupted and so Gaultier has an opportunity. The Frenchman knows he can go straight and knows Hesham is going to find it really hard to read his shot.

Hesham probably has to move early, shift his weight and take a chance. Gaultier knows all this, but he is backing himself, as he has practised this a thousand times. The ball comes out perfectly and he goes crosscourt for the nick.

Gaultier uses both touch (soft hands coming behind the ball) and cut, dragging the strings across the ball to impart backspin and feel, to take the pace off the ball. See how far his racket has come down, almost hitting the floor, and how perfectly controlled the racket head is.

In our main shot Gaultier has remained still at the point of impact. His stroke has been smooth, across his body with perfect control, and he has kept focusing on that impact point. All the practice tells him that this is right for the precision he wants.

TOP TIPS

- It is practice that has allowed Gaultier to execute this shot with such precision. An easy practice is to use the figure-of-eight exercise, hitting the ball to the front and then to the side, to the front and then to the side – in order to rebound the ball into the middle of the court and cut it across your body
- Focus on impact and hold your head steady at this point
- Use both touch and cut on the ball, and keep control of your racket head
- Face the corner of the court and keep the ball away from your body and a little in front of it

