



MASTERSHOT

Nick Matthew's backhand volley drop

Nick Matthew has said that he was challenged to be world-class at something and he picked the volley. Being that good at a shot, however, is not just about playing the shot, but also reading the opportunities and setting them up. Here, he is dominating the T. The task is to be back in position on the T before your opponent has hit the ball, which is more easily said than done and requires a dynamic, efficient and smooth exit from the shot. You also need the ability to read an opponent's shot, allowing you to anticipate and move into position early. Here, Ryan Cuskelly's crosscourt shot is far too narrow. We cannot see why, but quite possibly it has been forced by a pressure situation.

Pic 1 shows Matthew's immediate reaction. His racket has moved straight up to the backswing position, his eyes are on the ball and he is already starting to turn his body. All this and he has yet to step into position. However, this fast preparation is necessary for a good shot, as the ball is on to him a fraction of a second later.

Pic 2 illustrates him in position, his shoulder is turning, his left

hand is providing balance and his focus is completely on the ball.

Pic 3 demonstrates the impact. The wrist is giving superb racket-head control and the racket face is open, to feel the ball across the strings, providing touch and control. This backspin will pull the ball down on the front wall. Everything is controlled and balanced at this point. Again, note Matthew's focus on the shot.

Pic 4 sees Matthew holding his position and his focus on the impact point. There is no way he is going to miss this shot. His stance is open for speed, but he has turned his body to allow a precise, straight shot just above the tin.

This is a standard combination, a volley-drop off a loose crosscourt shot. Matthew's opponent will have a problem retrieving it and if he does, he will be under pressure again.

TOP TIPS

- The volley-drop is easy enough to practise solo by feeding the ball up and hitting the shot. Also, look out for an opportunity to practise it in the knock-up, as that will help you get into match mode.
- In pairs practice the situation is easily replicated as well. From the back of the court, player A feeds a crosscourt shot to player B to volley-drop and then drive from the front of the court. One option for A is to straight-drive, then go crosscourt, giving B more time to recover to the T and prepare for the shot.

