



UNDERSTANDING WIDTH AND TIGHTNESS

Your crosscourts are passing shots. Here width is the key

With Tactic 1, length, we wanted to put our opponent in the back corners in a restricted position. Tactic 2 allows us to do this by using good width on our crosscourt shots and tightness on our straight drives. A good width shot is a passing shot.

An excellent example of width is on the service, as it is really clear what we are trying to do. The server is: 1. Trying not to provide an easy volleying opportunity for the receiver; 2. Trying not to provide an easy return opportunity with options; 3. Trying to force the receiver into the back into a restricted position; 4. Trying to force a boast. If a boast is forced, the server would then have the option to play a drop shot. To achieve this, the server would first try to hit the side wall before the receiver can volley.

The server's target area will be the side wall, with the ball then bouncing on the floor and from there onto the back wall, in order to provide a restricted rebound (or a dribble) off the back wall. If this is achieved, the receiver's best option will be a restricted straight shot. Once the receiver's volleying option has passed, the server can then anticipate this return.

The serve is a crosscourt shot, albeit from a standing position. For the server, width (the angle across the court) is therefore key. But how wide? Here is the principle: land the ball on the side wall at the point where your opponent would wish to play it.

So, width is a passing shot played into that delicious gap between a volleying opportunity and a shot too wide that the ball will rebound back into play. However, there is a time for extra width and that is when a volley is threatening, usually when an

opponent is well up the court.

Exactly the same principle applies to your straight shots. You will land the ball on the side wall, where your opponent would want to hit it. If a volley is threatening, maybe this will be adjacent to the serve box; if it is a return on a dying length, then aim the ball to cling to the side wall, behind the service box; if it is a full-length shot, then aim the ball to cling on the rebound off the back wall.

A good practice for width is the boast and crosscourt practice (A boasts, B goes crosscourt). Player B will target the side, floor and back. This can be developed, with B coming up to volley straight and then boast. Maybe you can turn this into a little game, with Player A trying to get the ball past their partner. The same applies to lob and boast (A drops and lobs; B hits straight – volleys or drives – and boasts). These principles also apply to the boast and straight-drive exercise.

Low crosscourts and kills need to be wide enough (i.e. angled far enough across the court) to pass an opponent. Dying-length drives, full-length drives, extra-width crosscourts and some types of lob all need to be wide enough to pass an opponent.

Straight low drives, straight kills, dying straight drives, full drives and floating drives all need to be tight to pass an opponent.

If you can't do this, your game will suffer. Practise to develop better width and tightness in your play. Remember, too many crosscourts lead to loose play. If your game is loose, straighten it up.

TACTICS MASTERCLASS:

Ali Farag plays a crosscourt shot. How is his width? Just out of Simon Rösner's reach on the volley, so he will be passed and have to turn and go to the back of the court to return the ball. Notice how Rösner is right up the court, at the short line and on his toes. He has anticipated this ball. However, Farag has put enough width on it for it to be a passing shot, hasn't he?

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

- The T is the command centre of squash. Why is it so important?
- How do you win the T?
- What do you do when you have it?
- How do you know you have lost it?