

VARY THE PACE

Use the lob to create recovery time

Before squash, there was real tennis and rackets played with hard balls, more like a golf ball, that flew around the court. The boys at Harrow School, waiting their turn on the rackets court, amused themselves with a softer ball on the courtyard walls and squash was born, with a key advantage being the ability to hit the ball hard and soft.

This scenario fits well into the fourth tactic on our list. We start our matches, from a theoretical and structural point of view anyway, by establishing our basic game and defence, before looking to apply pressure and to attack. We have covered length and width, which allow us to put our opponent in the back corners and to win possession of the T. To these first two tactics, we must add 'vary the pace' – or play both hard and soft shots.

The lob is the most under-rated shot in squash and this slower shot is key to giving you recovery time when you need it most. Watch the top players and you will see the experienced ones fitting lobs into their game whenever they need them.

Every shot can be played at a range of speeds and we have a variety of lobs: aimed wide for the side wall or directly to the back wall, so that the ball clings to it on the rebound; a straight lob or high softer drive; a high crosscourt shot, beating the volley, floating out of reach and dying in the back of the court; a straight, softer volley and a

YOUR GAME: KEY POINTS

1. Lob to create recovery time
2. Lob to test an opponent's volley and positional play
3. Vary the pace of your shots to disrupt an opponent
4. Practise lobs and varying the pace in your practice games

volley lob. These shots can create recovery time, allow you to keep the T and, being softer, the ball tends to die more readily. Softer shots can disrupt an opponent's movement and momentum as well.

Lobs are also used to expose or threaten a particular area, such as weak volleying or poor positioning.

We also have a range of slower attacking shots to the front of the court – drops and counter drops, volley drops and angles or trickle boasts.

When we are under pressure, we create time with slower shots. When we have the opportunity, we deprive our opponents of time by applying pressure. The key way we create time is to use slower shots and vary the pace of our play.

Tactics provide a structure or pattern for our games. They provide some tactical rules, but within this structure we try to create opportunities to disrupt an opponent's rhythm and play, to provide problems for them. A key way to do this is to vary the pace of your shots.

TACTICS MASTERCLASS:

Nick Matthew (pictured left) has just lobbed from the front right of the court and he and his opponent, James Willstrop, assess the shot to see if it is high and wide enough to pass Willstrop's volley and make the back corner. Matthew has created time to recover the T.

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.

Practise using different speeds of shot in your pairs practice (maybe one hard and then one soft; or two hard etc) and in your practice games, so you have this important tactic at your disposal.

NEXT ISSUE

- What does 'apply pressure' mean?
- How do we do it?
- What are the advantages of volleying?
- When do you apply pressure?