

APPLY PRESSURE AND VOLLEY

Apply pressure to force weak returns and mistakes

Without pressure squash is about as challenging as mini golf, so why is it so important and what do we mean by it? As we are discussing tactics here, let us define pressure as a lack of time to be ready to hit a shot where our movement, anticipation of the impact point and timing of the swing are disrupted.

A clear example from the professional game is not players' brilliance at getting to the ball, but their ability to recover their position on the T before an opponent has hit the ball. If you can take the ball early before an opponent is in position, they will be short of time, their movement will be more rushed and their stroke will be looser. Recovery will be more difficult, more demanding and more energy-sapping.

We deprive an opponent of the time they would like by hitting the ball hard, taking it early on the bounce and volleying.

Pressure compounds, but it is not so much about a single pressure shot as about a series of shots. Your whole game does not have to be about constant pressure; you can build pressure on an opponent over a number of shots and it can be applied in bursts. For example, a weak or easily-anticipated return can provide an opportunity to take the ball early and apply pressure, which can be increased.

Your game-plan sequence is a simple 1-2-3 – defence, pressure, attack. We have already looked at the tactics involved in step one, defence. They are: 1 length; 2. width; 3. win the T; 4. vary the pace. In step two we apply pressure. We hit the ball hard, take it early and volley. In step three we attack. We take opportunities to win points and create those opportunities with attacking shots, disguise, surprise and variation.

Of course, all sorts of opportunities present themselves in our rallying game; you may be able to move straight on to the attack or to apply pressure before worrying about defence.

When you consider your tactics, don't forget about structure. Build your game plan, moving in and out of defence when you need to.

We apply pressure to force weak shots and mistakes. Then we build on it. Volleying is a key part of applying pressure. It is going to be hard to beat an opponent who volleys more than you.

If your opponent is a little out of position and struggling to recover the T, you will play more dying (rather than rebounding) shots and this increases the pressure. Squash is not so much a shot-making game as a rallying game, where you earn the right to play your best shots. Pressure is the ingredient that creates that right.

TACTICS MASTERCLASS:

Karim Gawad applies pressure on Mohamed ElShorbagy in the Allam British Open in Hull.

YOUR GAME: KEY POINTS

1. Take opportunities to apply pressure on an opponent
2. Hit the ball hard, take it early and volley
3. Build pressure. Don't let your opponent escape
4. Take opportunities to volley

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

- Why is squash said to be physical chess?
- How do you know where your opponent is?
- Do you hit away from an opponent or wrong-foot them?