

*Olivia Blatchford-Clyne plays a 'default shot', straight-driving a deep shot from Nadine Shahin*



## Phillip's fundamentals

Phillip Marlowe

**Simple, practical tips to improve your squash**

# SHOT SELECTION MADE SIMPLE

**You're on the T, your opponent hits a high boast and you move forward to play your shot. But wait! What shot should you play? What is the 'best' shot? Is there even a 'best' shot?**

I'm going to introduce two systems to help your shot-making decision. I won't be telling you the best shot to play in specific situations for two reasons: 1. Because I don't believe that in every situation there is a 'best' shot; and 2. It's better to learn *how* to decide rather than simply being told (at least in my less-than-humble opinion).

Before we start, allow me to paraphrase the great Jonah Barrington. He claimed that the difference between a professional and a county-level player is that just before a professional plays a shot, he or she only has one shot in their head, whereas the county player has five.

The two important points to make about Jonah's quote are: 1. Whatever choice you make, focus fully on it. Do not change your mind. Select the shot early and commit to it. 2. Just because you are better, doesn't mean you automatically have more shots to choose from (not sensible shots anyway). In some ways, the better you are, the fewer options you seriously consider.

### DEFAULT SHOTS

I believe in 'default' shots, which means the situation almost makes the shot selection decision for me. For example, if the ball

has been hit straight and is touching the wall, I automatically try to return it straight again. Why would I think about anything else? Why would I try a shot that is risky?

Default shots constitute a significant proportion of shots in squash. In many ways, patience and fitness are key here. Players who are less fit often attempt hasty winners, knowing they can't last a long rally.

But patience is not just about fitness. As you become better, you realise that just because the ball is not touching the sidewall or your opponent is not on the T doesn't automatically mean that's an opportunity to go for a winner!

Other default shots include lobbing when you are struggling to reach a boast, like many professionals do, whereas lower-level players may go for risky drop shots or drive winners in that situation.

Yes, sometimes they get one right, but more often than not they don't. They then justify the error by saying "Well, I was under pressure, so it wasn't an easy shot", conveniently forgetting that they should probably have opted for defence.

Think of default shots as shots you play without thinking because experience has shown you it's a great choice.

### TRAFFIC LIGHT SYSTEM

Break down each shot into one of three possible objectives:

**RED** = DEFENCE: If you are under *any* form of pressure, you should be playing a defensive shot. This could be a high return to give yourself time or a wide crosscourt from the front to ensure your opponent doesn't have an easy volley. If you can't get to the T by the time your opponent hits the ball, then you didn't play a good enough defensive shot.

**AMBER** = PROBE: These should be 85% of shots you play; shots like straight drives and working boasts. You play them to create opportunities without leaving yourself too exposed. These are like the default shots mentioned above. As you get better, probing shots get closer to being 85% of all your shots; the lower your level, the more shots are either attack or defence.

(N.B. I want to highlight the 'working boast' here. This is a boast that hits the front wall near the middle of its width about a racket head above the tin and has its second bounce very near the nick. With this shot, you are attempting to create a weak return to capitalise on.)

**GREEN** = ATTACK: When you have an easy ball, and your opponent is out of position, attack! (see number seven in our Tactics series, 2020 Issue 1.) The key is to be honest with yourself and not go for winners because you lost patience. Don't over-emphasise the spectacular winner. Boring winners are still winners!

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