

Badminton Serving – is it really a foul?

by Martin Andrew

Whether a player's service is a fault or not probably generates more discussion than any other subject at club matches around the country. Matches will have often deteriorated as arguments erupt concerning the legality of an opposition player's serve. I'm sure we have all been in the position where we feel our opponent's service is coming downwards at us rather than up and over the net – it must be such an advantage to be tall!

Rules are in place to govern serving; they are the same for high, low and flick serves. From a coach's point of view a player should, and may be best to, push the rules to the limit without breaking them. This advice is probably not what an umpire would like to hear.

Photographs 1–3 below show England squad players serving. They show that players often find it more comfortable to serve and can serve better when they are not pushing the rules to the limit. It is very important that the server is comfortable when delivering a serve.

Photographs 4 & 5 show examples of fault serves.

Photo 1 – Emma Chaffin preparing to serve



Photo 2 – Sarah Hardaker immediately after serve impact



Photo 4 – Sarah Hardaker immediately after impact of a forehand serve

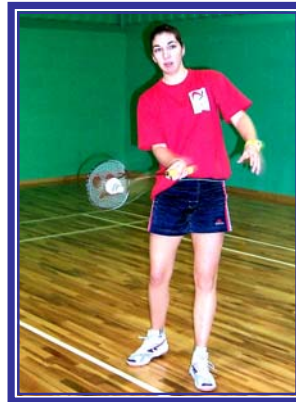


Photo 5 – Sarah Hardaker demonstrating an impact point for a fault backhand serve



Photo 3 – Nathan Robertson immediately after serve impact

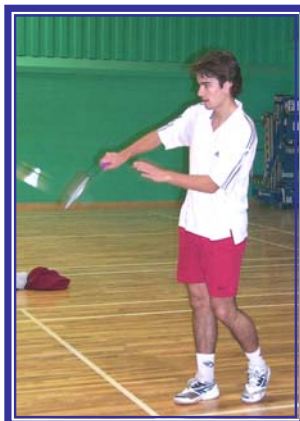
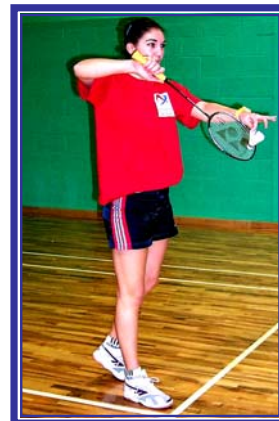


Photo 6 – Is it a fault if the shuttle was hit in that position?



In a game of doubles a good low serve can be a very attacking weapon. This coupled with a deceptive flick can set up or win a number of points in a game. I'm lucky enough to play county matches with a player who has a high quality serve, it has the ability to gain us the attack at the start of a rally and, therefore, win a number of points without having to work too hard!

In singles the service is used as a method of moving your opponent to the rearcourt or bringing them into the forecourt, it generally does not have the same importance as in doubles. However, if the serve in single is not played well enough it can easily result in losing the point. Men's singles at the top level is seeing more low serving, this is to enable the serving player to attain the attack and decrease their opponents attacking options.

When talking about low serving we must remember that a good short serve shouldn't be a useful weapon as it will land out of court! A good low serve can be a useful weapon. A good low serve can win many points, this was highlighted in the early 1980's by the Malaysian Sidek brothers. They devised a spinning backhand serve which was very difficult to return, it involved striking the shuttle feathers before the base causing an irregular flight pattern. Wu Dixi, from China, also developed a serve using the same method, during an All England she served seven consecutive times without a return being played. This brought about a change in the serving rules 9.1.4 stating that the racket shall initially hit the base of the shuttle.

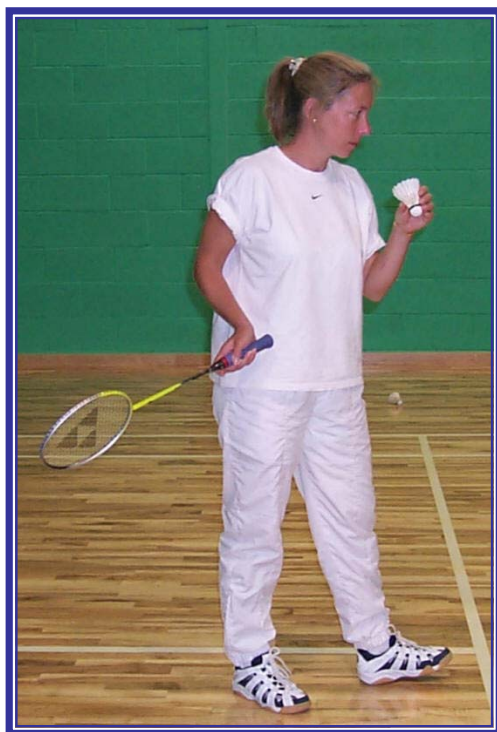
There are constant discussions concerning the benefits of forehand or backhand serving. At the elite level, doubles

players are favouring the backhand serve method. Reasons may be: greater control, more deception, nearer to their opponent therefore giving less time, quicker recovery to attack the net. Forehand servers may give the same reasons for serving as they do, many players do not manage to find a comfortable position to serve backhand, therefore making it unreliable.

So when does a serve become a fault? There are three common areas for faults: lifting a foot off the ground, not having the racket head discernibly below the whole of the servers hand (photo 4 & 5), and striking the shuttle above waist height (photo 5). The first two can generally be easily seen, the third causes a lot of problems. Players try to get round it by not tucking their shirts in or by pulling the top of their shorts / skirt up. The problem is often the definition of "waist height", where is a persons waist? Somewhere between the top of the hips and the bottom of the ribs!!

From my personal experience this definition is interpreted differently. Whilst in Australia I had lengthy "discussions" with a service judge regarding the positioning of my waist, it seemed to be considerably lower than in England! The Operational Guidelines of the Badminton Umpires Association of England states, "a level below the line of the bottom rib." *Players should not consider plastic surgery as an option.*

Coaches often talk about the importance of the first three or four shots in a rally, a good or bad serve can set the tone for the shots to follow, therefore making the serve of paramount importance.



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