

DEVELOPING YOUR BRAIN GAME

How often do you take time after a match to reflect on how it went, what you did well and which areas still require a bit of work on the practice court? If you do this, how much of your time is spent agonising over the smash that went into the net and the dropshots that caught you out time and time again?

What are you going to do about these problem areas? How many times would you go away from these situations determined to work on that problem smash or some footwork drills to get you to the net quicker, only to find that your smash technique is all right and works fine in practice, or that you are pretty quick around the court generally?

Having discovered that your technique is pretty sound and you move around the court well, where do you go next in order to develop your game a bit further and eliminate these errors? How much time do you spend considering whether you play a good tactical game and in actual fact what does that really mean? Maybe the reason that your smash kept going into the net was because either it was the wrong shot to play or you weren't in the right position to play it. Similarly the reason you weren't getting to the net quick enough could have been because your base position wasn't right or your previous shot selection was poor, making you 'easy pickings' for your opponent - an Olympic sprinter wasn't going to get to that shot from where you were!

When we talk about tactics, what are we actually thinking about? Tactics covers a lot of areas but is essentially about planning and decision making:

Before the match (and between points) - It is about developing a strategy for the game about to be played and this plan will be defined by what you know about your own game (and that of your partner in doubles) - we've all heard the phrase 'play to your strengths'; it is also about the game of your opponent: if you know they have a really weak backhand overhead, where are you going to play the shuttle?

During the match - throughout the match you have to make decisions

- What shot should I play?

- Why should I play that shot?
- When should I play it?
- Who should play it?
- Where should I play it?
- Where should I move to?

In order to be able to make these decisions effectively it is necessary for you to be aware of what is around you. Awareness can be broadly broken down into four key components:

• Spatial awareness

This involves being aware of height, depth and width and being able to use them effectively. It also includes being able to cover space well and to do that you will need to choose an appropriate 'base' that will position you best to respond to your opponent's shot. The position of this base will vary depending on the shot that you have just played, the position of your opponent and therefore their likely reply.

• Personal awareness

Knowing whereabouts you are on the court, whether you are on or off balance, as well as being aware of your own technical strengths and weaknesses.

• Partner awareness

If you are playing doubles, in addition to being aware of yourself you also have a partner to think about, which adds in the decision about who should play the shot, as well as where is your partner positioned, what are their strengths and weaknesses, what implications will your shot have on them with regard to the next shot?

• Opponent awareness

This includes being aware of their court positioning, their strengths and weaknesses as well as reading their game plan. Is their game plan predictable? Do they always move to a certain part of the court or play a particular shot?





Okay, so now you understand what you need to be aware of in order to make effective decisions, and it's all common sense really, but how can you actually practise awareness so that it becomes second nature when you play a match? When we are learning a new skill or technique there is a tendency to limit the external factors and make the skills quite closed, i.e. a multi-feed to the same place allows you to hone your technique, which is important to allow our muscles and nervous system to learn the movement correctly. However once you are getting a reasonable success rate, this is the time to introduce a few more variables. Here are some very basic tips and ideas for making the practice sessions that you take part in a little bit more tactically focused:

Spatial awareness

Accuracy - Set up targets on the court to practice accuracy: this will change your focus from how you play the shot technically so that you begin to think about where you are playing the shot. How tight was your dropshot when it crossed the net, do your clears reach the back tramlines, do your drives make full use of the width of the court?

Depth/height and base position - one player uses a dropshot continually, the other player lifts continually. Both players should work hard to get back to an appropriate base. The lifting player should

focus on working out the amount of height required on a lift that allows them to move successfully back to their ideal base.

Width and base position - just by developing the previous practice the lifting player can work out whether there are differences in the heights, bearing in mind the place they want to get back to is different.

Opponent awareness

Ask your partner to lift the shuttle to you and then stand with their racket deliberately to one side of their body or the other. You should aim to smash to the side of the body where the racket isn't.

Personal awareness

Play a series of clears, then one player deliberately puts in a shorter clear. If the receiver of this short clear is aware of their position and is on balance, then using a smash could be a good choice. Once the smash is played, then the rally could be played out to see the outcome of the rally: did the choice of smash prove effective?

Partner awareness

Devise a set routine of shots that allows you and your partner to interact efficiently on court. For example, using only straight shots initially, half-smash, block to net (and follow) and then lift straight should begin to make you interact with your partner to flow between front and back and defensive formations.

Where next?

Clearly there is a limit to what we can cover in this article, but if this is something that you want to understand better you might be interested in the BADMINTON England Tactics DVD. This DVD is a follow-on from the highly successful BADMINTON England Technique DVD. Whilst the Technique DVD hopefully helped players and coaches alike to develop good badminton technique, the Tactics DVD will help you to put these techniques to better use tactically!

The DVD will show how tactics can be used effectively for all elements of your game: singles and doubles. There are also interviews with top players and coaches who will tell you about how they use tactics effectively. This is a must for anyone keen to improve their game,

The Tactics DVD will be available from late spring and can be pre-ordered NOW from the BADMINTON England online shop (www.badmintonengland.co.uk) at a special introductory price of £17.99* plus p&p.

If you haven't already got a copy of the BADMINTON England Technique DVD, this can also be ordered from the online shop.

*normal price will be £19.99 from 1 May 2008 onwards.

