

TRAINING TIPS



PUBLISHED BY THE UNITED STATES BADMINTON ASSOCIATION

VOL. 1, NO. 1

OCT. 1992

The Singles Serve

by Donald C. Paup, Ph.D.
George Washington University

THE SERVE AND SERVE RETURN ARE arguably the two most important shots of a badminton rally. Consistency and accuracy are the trademarks of an effective serve.

While agility, stroking finesse, quickness, stamina and power are the attributes of great badminton players, this is not the case for execution of the serve and serve return. This part of one's game can be mastered by players of all abilities with appropriate practice. Unfortunately, most players fail to devote adequate practice time to mastering serve and serve return techniques.

Due to service rules and net height, the serve in singles is considered a defensive shot. The basic goal of the server is to minimize the serve returner's ability to: (a) hit an outright winner or (b) control the rally with an effective attacking shot.

SINGLES SERVICE POSITION

Most players serve by standing at a position within inches of the center line and about three to six feet behind the short service line. From this position the server needs to make only a minor movement to a base position to anticipate the return of serve. In addition, the player may wish to move forward or backward in the court to adjust for serves in which the depth is consistently too short or too long, respectively. It is generally easier to change service position than to change stroking technique to compensate for the serve's depth.

HIGH, DEEP SERVICE

This is the basic serve in singles and, as the name implies, the higher and deeper this shot is hit, the more effective it will be. This is the most difficult serve to return effectively because the shuttle is falling straight down on the back boundary line and all attacking shots (smash, attacking clears, and drops) must hit the feathers of the shuttle before the base, thus greatly reducing the speed and accuracy of the return. Therefore, players will generally return this serve with a slow (loop) drop or a high, deep clear. These latter returns give the server much more time to reach the shuttle and perhaps an even chance to control the rally (reverse the attack). To

even further enhance the effectiveness of the serve, it should be hit into the court areas depicted in Figure 1 (right handed players, reverse for lefties). In the even court (a), serves directed to the center of the court (a) minimize attacking returns to the server's backhand and hard smashes down the sidelines. In the odd court (b) any deep serve can be effective because the quick attacking clears are directed at the server's forehand. An effective serve can be hit against many players by placing the shuttle to the deep sideline of the odd court (c) because it moves the serve returner as far as possible from the central base position. This is especially effective against players who lack deceptive cross-court smashes and straight ahead attacking clears.

After executing the serve, the server(s) should take a court position equidistant from the opponent's power shot returns (smashes or attacking clears) (Figure 2, line 1). Other difficult returns are the cross court drop or off-speed smash or the straight drop (line 2), but the server must play as deep (far back) in the court as necessary to return the attacking clear. Although positioned deep in the court, it is easier to move forward, and there is more time to return the drop than the power shots.

LOW, SHORT SERVICE

The low, short serve is generally the first alternative to the high, deep serve. This serve should be hit three to four inches above the net and directed not more than 1 foot over the short service line. Many players do not hit this serve with good accuracy and lose

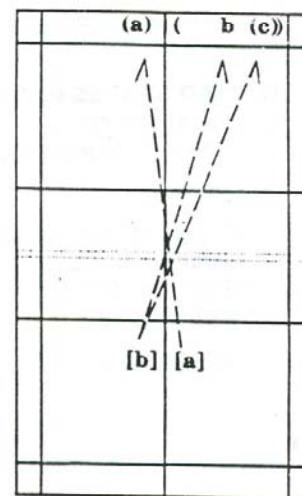


Figure 1

control of the rally. This serve might be introduced if: (a) your opponent hits deceptive drops and attacking clears off your high, deep serve that you are unable to return, (b) you are serving out of court or have poor depth on your high, deep serve, or (c) you want to test your opponent's skill in returning this serve. When serving to the even court, the prime target area is the center half of the court (Figure 3-a). When serving to the odd court, the entire front of the court can be used with about equal success (Figure 3-b) (reverse for left-handers). The purpose of the wide short serve is to pick off a low drive on the forehand and hit a cross-court smash return.

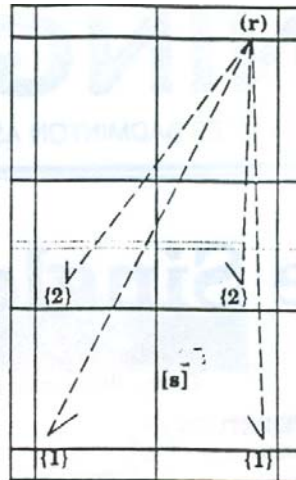


Figure 2

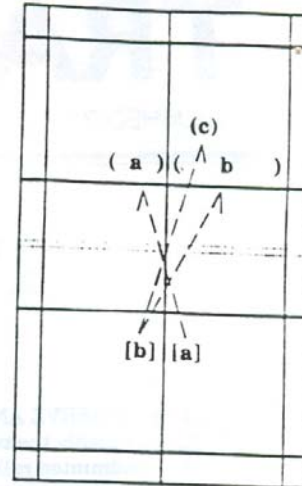


Figure 3

Some serve returners do not charge the net to hit a quick or deceptive return, but hit high deep clears or well-placed drop shots. In this case, the server should be at an advantage. For the slow charging serve returner, the low serve should be used, but high much deeper into the court and right at the returner's right hip (Figure 3-c). This strategy generally prevents accurate drop shots, and drives and clears are generally hit with poor accuracy, allowing the server to immediately gain control of the rally with a smash or attacking clear. A good strategy for the server is to hit the next shot into the serve returner's deep corners with as low and flat a trajectory as possible, in order to gain control of the rally.

DRIVE AND FLICK SERVES

A second but more risky alternative to the high, deep serve is the drive or flick serve. The drive serve is generally directed low and flat with high velocity

right at the body of the serve returner. This serve often results in serve return errors, especially if the returner is caught off guard or is not concentrating well. However, if the serve returner is ready for this return, he or she will generally be able to hit the shuttle away from the server to control the rally. The flick serve is designed to carry back to the back boundary line, but with a lower trajectory than the high, deep serve. The purpose of hitting this serve is to force the returner to move quickly and perhaps force him or her off balance in returning the shuttle and thus reduce the accuracy of the return. The server should be wary of hitting the drive and flick serves in singles to taller players, who generally have very effective steep-angled smashes and lots of range.

In conclusion, take the serve as a serious part of your game. This first shot generally determines your chance to score a point. Practice, practice, practice.