

## The Fundamentals of Court Positioning

- General rule of thumb is to work your way to the NVZ (non-volley zone) or Kitchen Line ASAP because most points are won there. So, when should you start moving? (We have the 2-bounce rule)
- Serving Team (DEFENSE) where should you be?
  - ✓ Stay back at baseline to prepare for return of serve. If you come into the court, you can get jammed up – stay at or behind the baseline so you can hit ball out in front of you.
  - ✓ Aim for a deep serve (back 1/3 of court)
- Receiving Team (OFFENSE) where should you be?
  - ✓ Receiver's partner should be watching and calling serves out of bounds (receiver is trying to return ball and has the worst angle).
  - ✓ Receiver is back behind the baseline (3-5ft) so they cannot see space between ball and baseline – focus on making a good return and let your partner call those out balls.
  - ✓ If a player has a weaker serve (consistently landing in the middle of the court) receiver can stand inside baseline.
  - ✓ Return – aim to get ball deep in back 1/3 of court. Preferably float 2-3' over net to give you lots of time to advance to NVZ. If you return serve with a hard low ball, it will give you less time to get to NVZ.
- Serving Team (3<sup>rd</sup> shot options): lob, drive or drop
  - ✓ "Y" on the court - the player not hitting the 3<sup>rd</sup> should advance a few steps (to the high part of the Y) but WATCH your partner (hitting player) hit their 3<sup>rd</sup> shot. If it's a good 3<sup>rd</sup> shot drop → advance to NVZ. Why? Because it puts pressure on your opponents!
  - ✓ If not a good 3<sup>rd</sup> shot drop (i.e. – high) – DON'T advance all the way, but maybe a couple steps and get ready to defend.
  - ✓ If you rush to the NVZ as fast as you can, likely you will be blocking your partner's 3<sup>rd</sup> shot crosscourt drop. Also, it's distracting when you run to the line. WATCH the 3<sup>rd</sup> shot, then move to one of the 2 spots in the Y.
  - ✓ If the 3<sup>rd</sup> shot is going crosscourt, move to the RIGHT dot (to cover line)
  - ✓ If the 3<sup>rd</sup> shot is going down the line, move the LEFT dot (to cover middle)

- Schools of Thoughts on how/when to advance to NVZ
  1. Move immediately to the NVZ as soon as you determine your partner will hit the 3<sup>rd</sup> shot
    - a. This gives you the most time to get to NVZ
    - b. Puts pressure on your opponents to hit a good 3<sup>rd</sup> shot
    - c. Allows you to possibly poach a poor return from the opponents.
      - A. HOWEVER, you could be “eaten up” if your partner hits a poor 3<sup>rd</sup> shot (i.e. – pops the ball up to your opponent’s overhead strike zone) – likely, you will be getting a fastball straight at you.
  2. “Wait and See Approach” – in this case you will wait until your partner hits the 3<sup>rd</sup>, evaluate whether shot is good or bad and then if good → move to NVZ, if not good → take a few steps in and get ready to make a better 5<sup>th</sup> shot. Best option in my opinion.
  3. No matter what your skill level – you/partner should always try to move in tandem. By staying together, you:
    - ✓ Close gaps
    - ✓ Cut off angles
    - ✓ EXCEPTION- if you are trying to apply pressure to your opponents such as a poach – you might charge the NVZ.
  4. Make sure you are moving to the NVZ as soon as possible **BUT** under control. If you move too wildly, you will not be in a position to properly prepare for the next shot → unforced errors.
  5. When the partner comes in and both at NVZ, you have just made the court smaller for your opposition and you have taken space away from your opponents.
  
- Who Covers the Middle?
  - ✓ Easy answer is “someone”. The worse thing that can happen is a ball that neither player makes an attempt on. Better to both go for the ball than nobody!
  - ✓ Some say “Forehand takes the Middle” 2 drawbacks:
    1. The player with the forehand will be reaching for the shot (i.e. – the ball is hit from the right side of court to opponents middle, the ball will be traveling away from the player with the forehand in the

middle – putting them out of position so ball can be hit behind him easily.

2. A gaping hole will be created behind the player hit the forehand shot.

- Respect the X Method:
  - Imaginary pair of lines (big X on court)
  - This method advocates for the player who is positioned cross-court from the return-of-serve (along the same “axis” of the “X) to hit the ball – even if it means hitting it with the backhand. This will result in no reaching/overextending and no gaping hole created after executing the 3<sup>rd</sup> shot.
- When the ball gets hit outside the center of your body (to backhand), players should shift.
- When the ball is being hit from your opponent directly in front of you, it is your job to cover the sideline and your partner should shift to cover middle, just past center
- 2/3 of court is always covered well and 1/3 you just give up. But don't give up the easy ball, play percentages – and don't give up the middle!

Other Tidbits:

- ✓ If the player hitting the ball crosses the center line; high percentage that they will be hitting that ball diagonally or through the middle. It would be a difficult shot to go back across to the other side of the court.
- ✓ If you hit a bad shot (high ball) opponent has an attack opportunity – move further away from the hitting opponent, buys reaction time when you're in trouble or on defense.
- ✓ Always IMPROVE your position. As ball is traveling away from you – don't just watch your shot, IMPROVE your position. I.e. – you get a wide ball, you return it, but don't move.
- ✓ If you're not the player hitting the ball, do something! Move and improve your position.

The better you get, the more complicated the game gets.