4 The Doubles Game

In doubles the emphasis is on attack. It is similar to the singles game in the sense that the same situations occur in the rearcourt, midcourt and forecourt. Similar ‘stroke-moves’ can be used to win each rally. The game differs in that there are, two players on each side to make the moves and to contend with the opponent's replies. The two players must co-operate, to form a unit; for if one player makes a move and creates a new situation, it effects both players, i.e. the whole unit. The strength of the unit depends on three major factors: intelligent stroke-moves, good positional play and co-operation.

The aim of both sides is to create an attacking situation. The game is one of continual attack and defence, first by one side and then the other. Before a side can attack they must create a situation in which the shuttle is in a position to be hit downwards.

A doubles pair requires to know:
1. **Attack** (a) How to create an attacking situation. (b) How to make the best possible attack in this situation.
2. **Defence** (a) How to defend against an attack. (b) How to turn defence into attack. To create an attacking situation your side must force the opponents to hit the shuttle upwards.
There are two basic positional formations in doubles: the attacking formation - the positions the players move into for attack - and the defensive formation - the positions the players move into for defence. One way to understand doubles is to follow the development of a game from the opening move, the serve. In doubles players often serve with a forehand or backhand stroke. (The backhand serve is described in detail on page 120. Read it now if you want to try it out as a serving stroke.) The following diagrams show the logical development from the serve.

**Doubles tactics**

**Development based on a low serve**

*Stage 1  The serve (Figure 70)*

Side A and B begin the game with the serve, side C and D receive. The players stand in the positions shown.
1. A to serve, stands near the forecourt,  B stands in the centre midcourt.
2. B is in a position to attack any high return from the serve or reach any low reply that goes past A.
3. C is the receiver. He takes up an attacking stance (with the left foot forward), on the edge of the forecourt. D takes up a midcourt attacking position ready to attack high returns to the rear court or low returns to the midcourt.
4. A serves low to C and steps forward on to his right foot into an attacking stance.

*Stage 2  Receiving the serve (Figure 71, over-leaf)*

The players stand in the positions shown after the low serve and the receiver's reply.
1. A has served low and moved forwards to attack.
2. C has moved forwards to attack and pushed the shuttle past A into the right midcourt. He then recovers to take up an attacking stance at the T on the edge of the forecourt. (The T is where the centre line meets the front service line.)
3. B is in the midcourt ready to move to the shuttle.
4. D is ready to attack a high return from B to the midcourt or rearcourt.
5. A remains in the forecourt to cover the net in case B plays a return to the forecourt.

At this stage only two moves have been made, i.e. the serve and the return of serve. The players have moved into position and each side is waiting to seize the attack. B must now play a low return past C to create a situation for D to lift and allow A and B to attack. This is a typical situation in the game with both sides hitting the shuttle low over the net to the midcourt in an attempt to gain the attack.

Stage 3 Attack and defence positions (Figure 72)
A and B are in a side’s defensive formation in the midcourt. C and D are in the front and back attack formation.
1. B now clears the shuttle high to the centre rearcourt.
2. D moves and prepares to smash.
3. C moves back to the edge of the midcourt, ready to attack any reply from A and to the sides or centre of the forecourt.
4. C and D have created a situation for attack, and so take up the attack position.
5. A and B must cover the smash to the midcourt and so take up a midcourt defensive stance, as they must divide the court between them. Each is also prepared to run forwards for a checked smash or move back for the attack clear.

The simple rule in doubles is: if the shuttle is high on your opponents’ court, take up a defensive (sides) formation. If it is high in your court, take up a attacking formation.
Stage 4  Adjusting the 'sides' position in relation to the smash

(a) Defending against a smash from the forehand side (Figure 73)
1. D is in position for a forehand smash. He should smash straight or to the centre of the midcourt.
2. A and B face D down the funnel, and take up defensive stances in the midcourt. B is slightly ahead of A but the same distance from D. Both face D.
3. C takes up an attack position on the T and faces towards A and B. C is ready to attack a reply to the forecourt and also cover the whip cross-court to the backhand rearcourt of D.
4. After his smash D moves towards the centre midcourt, ready to attack the weak clear to the midcourt or the high clear to the rearcourt.

(b) Defending against the smash from the centre (Figure 74)
D is in the centre rearcourt. He can smash to the sides or the centre. A and B take up midcourt defensive positions and face D down the funnel.

They can block to the forecourt sides or centre, clear high to the rearcourt sides or centre, whip cross-court from the sides; or push straight to the midcourt. C takes up a midcourt attacking stance, ready to attack the forecourt and also to cover the whip cross-court from A or B and the push to the sides of the midcourt. (The reason C stands so deep is to give him time to see the shuttle and to cut off the whip to either side of the midcourt. He is in a similar position to a singles player who stays back to invite the net reply. C is ready to move forwards to attack the net as soon as A or B block the smash.)
1. A and B take up the defensive position and face D down the funnel. They can block to the forecourt sides or centre, push to the backhand midcourt, whip the shuttle cross-court to the forehand rearcourt, or clear high.
2. C takes up a position to attack the reply to the forecourt and the push down the line to the backhand side of the midcourt, and to cover the whip cross-court with his forehand.
3. The backhand side of the court is covered by D and C. A and B are invited to hit the shuttle to the open space on the forehand side of the court.
4. C and D hope to attack a reply to the forehand with their strong forehand stroke. After the smash, D immediately moves towards the centre of the midcourt, ready to attack a weak lift to the midcourt and a high clear to the rearcourt.

The progression on the low serve draws attention to several important aspects of doubles play for the four people concerned.

1. **The server**
   After the low serve you must immediately take up an attacking stance (right foot forward) on the T. Be ready to hit down any net reply and to move to a push to the sides of the forecourt. If you move too close to the net you will find it difficult to return the shuttle on either side of you. Vary the serve. Use the flick serve to make the receiver hesitate, and so prevent an early attack of your low serve. The high serve can be used against an opponent with a weak smash to move him back and perhaps swing him from side to side of his rearcourt to make a space in which to hit the shuttle.

2. **The receiver**
   Attack the low serve and try to meet the shuttle as it crosses the net. You should stand as close to the front service line as possible - how close, depends on your ability to move back quickly for the flick serve. You may be able to develop speed if you vary your stance for different serves, i.e. according to how good the server is. The only way to learn to play different serves is to put yourself in a situation where you must play the serve.
You learn to do something by doing it. If you cannot hit the low serve downwards, then play either a spinner or tumbler or push the shuttle gently to the side of the forecourt away from the server. Immediately recover to the attack position in the forecourt. If you must hit the shuttle upwards, then try to hit it to the sides so it will fall quickly into the midcourt or clear it deep, and return to a midcourt defensive position.

3. The partner to the server
Maintain the attack position in the midcourt, ready to smash a shuttle high at the sides of the midcourt or in the rearcourt. If the receiver hits the shuttle down past the server, be ready to move quickly and hit it back low and at speed to give your opponents less time to recover. When the receiver pushes the shuttle down the side line, move to meet it early before it drops too low. Then play either a low return to the net or midcourt to force a lift, or whip it quickly cross-court away from your opponent. Return to the attack position after each move.

4. The partner to the receiver
Maintain the attack position behind your partner. Keep alert for the fast shuttle hit low over the net by the server's partner, and also for the push down the line and the cross-court whip. If your partner clears, then move to your side of the court and take up the defensive position.

Attack
Whenever the shuttle is hit high to your side of the court you are placed in an attacking situation. The player who can reach the shuttle most easily moves to hit the smash. His partner immediately moves towards the T to attack any reply to the forecourt.

The rearcourt man can hit a variety of stroke-moves: the smash, straight or to the centre; the check-smash to the centre; the attack clear. (The attack clear is a very good move in girls' doubles.)

The front player should be ready to attack the replies to the forecourt and so must keep his racket up in the attack position, ready to hit down any weak reply, block any fast return or hit a spin or tumble shot to any reply below net height.

Using the smash
It will be clear that the smash is extremely important in doubles. A doubles side without a good smash is a very weak side. What makes a good smash? Certainly the power and speed of the smash is very important but it is not everything. The smash in doubles is used not only to hit winners but also to create openings. You create an opening when you make a space in which to hit a winner, force a weak reply, or force your opponent to mishit or make a mistake. To achieve these aims you must learn to vary your smash and be prepared to play a number of varied smashes before you create the situation when you can hit a winner. Here are some examples of the use of the smash:

(1) The power smash. If you smash with full power from the rearcourt, the shuttle will travel almost horizontally and present your opponents with a chance to whip it back at you. The quicker it goes, the faster it comes back.
The power smash is used effectively when you are within the midcourt and can aim it steeply to the ground, or at an opponent to cramp his movements and cause a weak reply or a mishit. The power smash at an opponent can be varied. You might aim below his waist, at his chest or right or left side. Vary the target according to how he positions himself in defence.

(ii) The sliced smash. This is used to vary the speed and trajectory of the smash. The shuttle loses speed and drops steeply to the ground. It is an ideal shot to catch your opponents off balance and get a mishit or a weak reply. It forces a steeper lift in reply and is good as a placement smash to change the direction of the smash and move the defence around.

(iii) Direction of the smash. A smash, in general, should be hit straight or to the centre. A straight smash is the quickest and shortest way to the midcourt. A smash to the centre is safe and creates a problem for the defence - which player should return the shuttle? Finally, it can force the opponents to hit wide or lift high, because your front man is waiting to hit a weak reply to the forecourt.

(iv) Variety. The varied smash used with the check-smash can upset a defensive side and enable you to create a situation in which to hit a scoring blow. So try to improve your smash.

Defence

If either you or your partner clear the shuttle, move into the midcourt, take up a defensive stance and face the striker. If the front man has cleared the shuttle from the forecourt, he moves back the shortest distance to the midcourt. The general rule is that the front man moves back the shortest distance to his side of the midcourt.

Replies to the attack

(a) High clears to the sides or the centre of the rearcourt are useful. Alternate the return against a weak smasher, and hit the shuttle to the corners of the rearcourt. Keep the attackers on the move in the rearcourt. They will find it difficult to smash through your defence, and eventually may hit a clear, a drop shot or a weak smash and give you a situation in which to attack.

(b) Low replies in the form of a block to the forecourt or a push to the sides of the midcourt are useful. Play for a lift and try to turn defence into attack. Direct the return to the smash on a low trajectory to skim the net and travel past the front player. Hit it low, so that he must hit upwards. If you keep alert, with your racket head in the attack position, you may be able to attack the smash and drive it back quickly before the opponents are ready.

Some variations in doubles play

The backhand serve

This is used for the low serve and the flick serve, and makes it easy to control the shuttle and to deceive the receiver. There is very little movement in the action and so it is simple to change from the low serve to a flick serve. For this reason very few receivers are tempted to rush the backhand serve.
Performing the serve (see Plates 85-87)
i. Stance. Stand close to the T with your feet a comfortable distance apart in the attacking stance. Hold the shuttle in front of you a comfortable distance away. Hold the racket in the backhand or multi-purpose grip, with the racket head pointing downwards. The multi-purpose grip allows you to give the shuttle a glancing blow and gain more control with the spin.
ii. Preparation. Tilt the racket head towards you.
iii. The hit: the low serve. Release the shuttle and hit it gently upwards over the net to the centre or side of the opponents' service court to land on the front line.
iv. The hit: the flick serve. Release the shuttle and hit it quickly upwards, over your opponents' possible reach to his rearcourt.
v. Recovery. Return the racket to the attack position. If you serve low you are already positioned in the forecourt ready to attack. If you flick serve, then step back towards the midcourt, ready to attack a weak return.

Practices for the backhand serve.
At home. Practise as for the forehand low serve (see page 62). You will soon develop control. On court.
(a) take several shuttles and practise serving low to land the shuttle in the forecourt.
(b) practise flick serves to the corners of the doubles service court.
This practice reminds me of an occasion at the first World Championships in Sweden. The world doubles champion, Tjun Tjun of Indonesia, was on the next practice court for two hours simply hitting backhand low and flick serves to various parts of the court. He was renowned for his backhand serve, but there he was still practising. Practice makes perfect what you practise. You cannot practise enough.
Sides attack

Sometimes in the game you hit a good smash from your rearcourt and your opponent hits a weak return to the side of your midcourt. It has travelled past your front man and so you move forwards to hit it. Immediately your opponents move into the sides defensive formation (see Figure 76).

What does your partner do? He is positioned on the T, ready to attack a weak reply to the forecourt. Can he remain there? Consider the replies from your opponent; a block to the forecourt sides or centre, a clear to the rearcourt sides or centre and a whip cross-court.

You are now in position to cover the replies to your own half of the court, but you cannot cover the clear to your rearcourt backhand side. That is your partner’s task. He moves back to the midcourt and takes up an attacking stance. You are now in a sides attacking formation. If the opponents should block or clear the smash, one partner moves to hit the shuttle and the other partner moves to the appropriate attack position.
The rule is: *when the shuttle is high in the midcourt take up a sides attack formation, with each player ready to move to the reply in the forecourt or rearcourt on his own side of the court.*

In this position there is a slight variation on the smash. The shuttle may not be high enough to hit an overhead smash. It must be hit from shoulder level at the side. You would hit the shuttle with a sidearm smash, sometimes known as the drive (see page 83).

**Practices in doubles**

Doubles is a fast, exciting game which requires the ability to perform basic strokes quickly. The emphasis is on attack and at speed there may be many errors, for it is possible to become skilful at speed only with considerable practice. Fortunately many of the practices are enjoyable to perform and can be highly competitive in themselves. The following practices can be performed by any player who possesses the basic attacking and defensive strokes - the better player will perform them at a faster rate and have longer rallies.

In many of the practices mistakes are going to occur. Do not worry about this. Accept the mistake and begin a new rally. Eventually you will make fewer mistakes and the rallies will get longer. When you begin to play a normal game after practice, you will be quite surprised at the improvement in your play.

*Note:* In the practices the diagrams will show four players on court. Sometimes the players will practise in pairs, using half a court for each pair. At other times the practices will involve all four players together.

**Attack and defence practices**

In these practices the attacking side should meet the shuttle early, using jump smashes whenever possible. In addition vary the smash to create openings.

*First practice (smash and defend) - 2 players (Figure 77)*

The players practise in pairs: A and D, B and C. The instructions for A and D also apply to B and C.

1. *D* serves high to A. A tries to smash through defence of D. A must use only downward hits. If D plays a low return, A hits it back and D lifts high for the rally to continue.
2. *D* serves for five rallies and then changes over. Keep the score of the number of rallies won.
Figure 77

Figure 78

Second practice (defence into attack) – 2 players
(Figure 78 – description overleaf).

123(cont.)
Second practice (defence into attack) for two players – see fig 78 - Instructions below.

**Figure 79**

2. *D* must force *A* to lift. If *A* lifts, *D* hits down and *A* attempts to play a return that will force *D* to lift.
3. The rally continues until one player hits a winner.
4. *D* serves for five rallies and then changes over.
5. Keep a score of the rallies won.

*Third practice (smash and defend) – 4 players* (Figure 79)

1. *A* and *B* attack, *C* and *D* defend. Each player remains in his own part of the court.
2. *A* and *B* can hit down anywhere to *C* or *D*, *C* and *D* can lift anywhere to *A* and *B*.
3. *C* and *D* serve for five rallies each.
4. If *C* or *D* play a low return, then *A* or *B* return the shuttle for *C* or *D* to clear.
5. Change over after ten rallies.
6. Keep the score out of twenty rallies.

*Fourth practice (defence into attack) – 4 players* (Figure 80)

1. Repeat the third practice.
2. *C* serves high to *A* for five rallies.
3. Either side can force the other side to lift until one side hits a winning smash or the rally breaks down.
4. Each player serves high for five rallies. Each player remains in his own court.

*Fifth practice (attack and defence) – 4 players* (Figure 81) *C* and *D* defend and must hit upwards, *A* and *B* attack and must hit downwards. The players can move anywhere on their side of the court in attack or defence. If *A* or *B* are unable to hit down, they must play a net return and *C* and *D* must clear.
Midcourt attack practices

First practice – 2 players (Figure 82) Each player stands in the midcourt and remains or returns there during the rally.

1. A serves the shuttle quickly at D.
2. D smashes straight at A’s head.
3. A hits back with force.
4. The players trade ‘blows’ with each other until the rally breaks down or one player hits a winner from the midcourt.

Note: The purpose of the practice is to learn to hit the shuttle at the opponent at speed with either attacking or defensive strokes. Keep the racket head up at all times and try to hit the shuttle from in front of you.

Second practice – 4 players (Figure 83) A player can hit the shuttle at either opponent, but must remain in his own part of the court.
the court. Each player serves for five rallies.
1. D begins with a fast serve to A.
2. The rally ends when one player hits a winner or the rally breaks down. Keep the score of rallies won by each side.

**Forecourt attack practice – 2 players (Figure 84)**
1. Stand in the positions as shown. A practises with D, B with C. The players in the forecourt stand in the attacking stance with the right foot slightly forwards.
2. D serves the shuttle at A to skim the net.
3. A hits shuttle back to D.
4. D hits it quickly at A, and so on until the rally breaks down. Try to keep the rally going. D serves for ten rallies and then changes positions.

**Figure 84**

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**Server and receiver practices**

**First practice – low serve and flick serve using forehand or backhand stroke (Figure 85)**
1. A serves to B.
2. B attacks the serve and hits down, either from the net or the backcourt.
3. B receives 1 point if he hits down.
4. A receives 1 point if B hits up. After 5 points, B serves to A.

**Second practice – repeat on the backhand side**

**Forecourt practice – 4 players (Figure 86)**

A and B against C and D. It is designed to improve skill in the forecourt. It is played like table tennis. Twenty-one points required to win. Each player serves for five points and the players hit the shuttle in turn, e.g. A serves to C, C serves to B, B to D, D to A, A to C and so on. The shuttle must be hit to land in the forecourt. No player is allowed into the fore-
court until the shuttle is hit by the opponent. A stands behind the T and serves to the centre of the forecourt. C moves forward to play a net shot and the game continues.

Conditioned games.

Game 1. Rules: your side must hit downwards any shuttle above shoulder height; you are only allowed to clear low shots in the forecourt; shuttles hit from low positions in the midcourt and rearcourt must be returned to the net; your opponents play a normal game. 

Note: This game is designed to improve your skill in attacking and changing defence into attack.

Game 2. Rules: your side is not allowed to hit a power smash, you can only use the variations on the smash, i.e. sliced smash, change of pace and direction, or checked smash; the opponents play a normal game.

Note: This game is designed to improve your skill in varying the attack.

Game 3. Rules: one member of each side must serve low until the side reaches eight points, then the other member serves low.

Note: This game is designed to improve skill in serving and attacking the serve.

These are a few examples. Make up your own conditioned games to emphasize the practice of some part of your game.

Mixed doubles

In mixed doubles it is assumed that the girl is the weaker player. She is not expected to work in the rearcourt and perform strong smashes and jump smashes while the opposing pair keeps her pinned back there. For this reason the mixed doubles game is based on the front and back formation, the attacking formation. This means that, in general, the girl controls the forecourt and the boy controls the remainder of the court.
Occasionally she has to withdraw from the forecourt to defend against the smash to the midcourt. The front and back formation is an attacking formation and so it is important that each side tries to gain and keep the attack. Very often it is a problem to know where to position yourselves if you are just learning mixed doubles, so I will explain how you and your partner work together as a team. A few diagrams should help.

**Serving positions**

* Serving from the forehand court* (Figure 87) The boy serves from the midcourt and so is already in the attack position. The girl stands on his non-racket side. When the boy receives the serve, his partner can stand in the forecourt to play all net shots or stand in the midcourt to allow her partner to attack the serve and play the net reply to his move. She must be ready to move into the forecourt as soon as possible. The girl can therefore stand at G or G1.

* Serving from the backhand court* (Figure 88)
The tactics and positions are similar for the forehand court, 
Girl serves (Figure 89) Normal doubles formation. The boy stands midcourt, ready to attack.

Boy serves. When the boy serves to the other boy, he should serve a good low serve to force a lift. His partner is ready to attack a net return and so helps to force the lift. The occasional flick serve is useful to prevent his opponent rushing the net. When he serves to the girl he can serve low to force the lift, or serve high to move her to the rearcourt and so create a weaker situation in the forecourt.

Girl serves. In general, apart from the occasional flick serve, serve low to the boy. Immediately move into the attack position in the forecourt, ready to hit down any net return. Occasionally serve high to the opposing girl to move her to the rearcourt and create a weak situation at the net. If you serve high to the girl, move into position to cover the cross-court smash.
Receiving the serve

_The boy_. When receiving a low serve, play a shot which allows you to return to the midcourt and your partner to take the forecourt. For example, play it away from the opposing girl to the sides of the forecourt or the midcourt. In both cases this move is designed to give you time and to force a lift. If you receive a high serve, hit straight down the line or to the centre (see Figure 90). After a high serve, travel back to smash as your partner occupies the centre forecourt. The opposing boy covers the straight smash (B1) and his partner covers the cross-court smash (G1).

_The girl_. Return the low serve to the sides of the forecourt or midcourt, or meet it early and hit it hard at the boy in the midcourt. Immediately recover to the attack position. If you must clear, then aim for the sides and move slightly beyond the forecourt to cover the cross-court smash. Return the high serve with a smash straight to the side or centre, then move immediately to the forecourt.

If you must clear, then clear to the corners and position yourself at the edge of the forecourt to cover the cross-court smash.

Throughout mixed doubles much of the play involves low returns to the midcourt area. This is the weak point in the front-and-back formation. The aim is to manoeuvre your opponents out of position or force them to hit the shuttle upwards. This is where the boy must be alert in the midcourt. He must be ready to move forwards to the side and hit the shuttle before it drops too low. He then hits a drive (a sidearm smash) to his opponents midcourt, or cross-court deep to the rearcourt, away from his opponent. A full drive will skim the net and travel horizontally to the rearcourt.
A half drive, one hit with less force, will drop into the midcourt (see Figure 41, page 83).

Summary

Role of the girl
(i) Stand in the centre of the forecourt in the attack position.
(ii) Control the net and attack all low returns, i.e. play for a lift.
(iii) Hit the shuttle down for a winner whenever possible.
(iv) If you are unable to hit the shuttle down, either hit a low return to the sides of the forecourt or midcourt, or play a spinner or tumbler. Force the opponents to hit upwards.
(v) Be ready to anticipate a cross-court move from either a drive or a low return.
(vi) Allow any shuttle you cannot reach to pass by you to your partner in the midcourt.

Role of the boy
(i) Stand in the midcourt behind the girl in the attack position.
(ii) Cover the girl when she moves to hit the shuttle, in case she allows it to pass by her.
(iii) Smash whenever possible.
(iv) Avoid hitting upwards.
(v) Hit the shuttle towards the midcourt or the corners of the court.

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