

Chapter 8 Practice Makes Perfect

The purpose of practice is to improve your performance in a particular aspect of the game. Usually it is associated with the strokes, footwork and the use of strokes as tactical moves. The game, however, also requires that you are fit to do the work and possess the right sort of positive attitude to win. Practices can be devised to improve your fitness and attitude at the same time as you develop your technical and tactical skills.

Technical and tactical practices are inter-related forms of practice. In a *technical practice the emphasis is on you and how you perform. In a tactical practice it is on your opponent and what you do to him.* You would practise your strokes and footwork separately or together simply as a means to learn or improve them. You might, for example, extract a specific stroke or footwork pattern from the game, e.g. the forehand smash, backhand clear, the lunge and recovery, or the landing and push off after the backward jump smash. Your practice of any of these aspects would help you to reach a satisfactory technical standard. Then you could switch your attention to its use in the performance of a stroke-move in a situation in the game. You could now devise a tactical practice. Here the whole pattern of movement becomes important, i.e. your starting position, travel to the new situation, the stroke-move and the recovery to cover any possible replies. The thing that matters most is what your stroke-move does to the opponent. The difference is that, whereas before you practised 'the clear' to improve your technical execution of the stroke (as a stroke), now you hit the clear as a stroke-move to the rearcourt, and judge it by the effect it has on your practice partner or opponent. Does it go over his head quickly? Does it make him travel quickly all the way to the rearcourt? Does it place him the furthest distance from the net and so create space? Does it make it difficult for him to get behind the shuttle to smash and recover quickly? Does it force him to reply with a clear rather than a smash? Do you recover after your clear stroke-move to cover his possible replies?

It is quite easy to see how a tactical practice may include work in several different situations. This is because the stroke-move cannot be practised in isolation, as can the stroke. In a tactical practice you have to devise a practice in which you begin in one situation, travel to the rearcourt to make your clear-move and then recover by travelling to a new position to cover the possible replies to your clear.

Practice routines are quite usual in the learning of badminton these days. Unfortunately the quality of performance in practice so often falls below standard, not because players lack technical ability but because they do not relate the strokes to their function as moves against their partners. Practice only becomes meaningful when it is related to the game. This is because the 'principle of attack' provides the ultimate justification for everything you do in the game, even in practice. When you do a practice be certain that you know the tactical point of it and how you must perform it to improve your tactical play.

Here is a typical sort of practice routine.

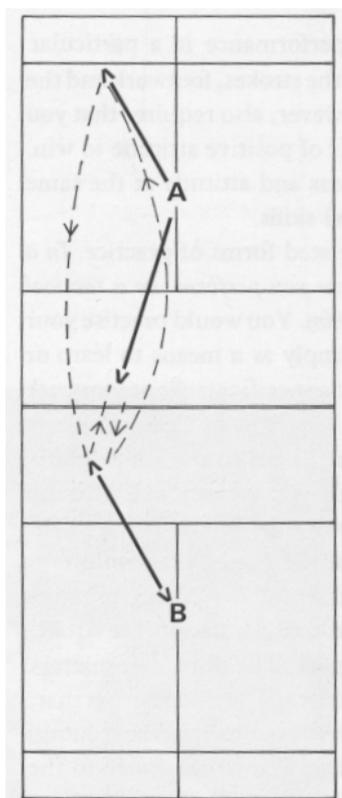


Fig. 1 S

The sequence is:

- B serves to RC
- A drops from RC
- B plays net reply
- A plays net reply
- B lifts to RC
- A travels to RC and repeats sequence

This is usually badly performed, bearing little resemblance to actual play. The main fault is that players often run backwards and forwards from rearcourt to forecourt and from midcourt to forecourt, quite differently from the way they would move in the game. They do the work and perform the strokes, not as moves in the game but simply to keep the shuttle in play. Often it is immediately obvious to any spectator that the players are only practising, whereas at first sight it should appear as if the players were engaged in a serious game. That they are not should only become apparent after a while, when the spectator realises that the players repeat the same movements and obviously are performing a set practice.

The correct way to do this practice is as follows.

1. Players stand in serving and receiving positions.
2. B serves high to A's RC.
3. A travels back to RC and adopts the 'smash position' to threaten B whilst B recovers to the MC and adopts a defensive stance.
4. A hits a check-smash to FC and walks forward towards the MC to watch B preparing to make his move.
5. B plays a net reply to the FC and recovers into an attacking stance to threaten A and watch his move.
6. A runs forwards as he sees B play the net reply and prepares to hit down from above the net. He cannot and so plays a net reply into B's FC and recovers to an attacking stance to threaten B.
7. B lifts shuttle to A's RC and recovers to the MC to adopt a defensive stance as A travels back to RC into the smash position.
8. Repeat continuously.

In such practice there are pauses as the players make stroke-moves and recover to threaten the opponent. Such a practice is realistic for it is similar in movement and attitude to the tactical play in the game.

All practice should have a tactical basis. If players and their coaches remembered this then there would be a vast improvement in the quality of practice and subsequently in the level of performance in the game.

What is practice?

The most familiar statement about practice is that 'Practice makes perfect.' As we know from experience, this is quite true. But the statement is not quite complete. It misses out a few important words. It should read: 'Practice makes perfect what you practise.' For you can practise incorrectly just as easily, *if* not more so, as you can correctly.

Practice involves the repetition *of* some part *of* the game. We repeat things to get them right. When we have done so, we no longer have to think about how we perform. It becomes a habit. Unfortunately, it is all too easy to develop bad habits. This can even occur when you are learning to get something right. For *if* it is not right initially you cannot help but repeat partially the incorrect way to do something until you eventually attain the correct way. The constant repetition can 'groove in' incorrect ways *of* doing things just as easily as correct ways. If, for example, you practised the forehand smash using a 'panhandle' grip and a bent arm pushing action, instead *of* throwing the racket head at the shuttle, then it would be the bent arm push you would make perfect rather than what you originally intended.

Try to make all practices quality practices. Develop correct habits from the start, although, as has been suggested, this can be a slow process. For in learning the correct way, you will be trying to alter some *of* the incorrect things you do, and this takes time. This is why a 'good' coach is useful, for he can pinpoint errors and guide you towards the most effective way from the start. I should point out here that there is no *one* best way *of* doing something. The best way is what works for you and enables you to play the game effectively. *If you* can make all the stroke-moves necessary to defeat any opponent by gripping the racket with your teeth or your toes then that is right for you - though obviously, since we are human, some methods are more effective than others. What is important for any improvement is *how* you practise. Most players, with or without coaches, perform stroke practices and tactical situation practices, but they do not really practise. *They do practices without practising.* It is all too easy to perform a practice routine which lacks quality, has the effect *of* making perfect bad habits, and results in a lowering rather than an improvement in your standard *of* performance in the game.

Let's take an example. A very basic practice is the forehand clear routine. The purpose *of* the clear is to send the shuttle high to the opposite rear court

to place the opponent out of position as far from the forecourt as possible. This creates space and makes it difficult for the opponent to attack. You should know this much about the clear as a move before you commence practice. During the stroke practice you learn the 'clear' and so focus attention on yourself and how you 'clear'. There are a number of ways that you can check that you are doing it correctly as a stroke-move.

1. Do you get into the smash position behind the shuttle ready to smash or dropshot as easily as make the clear?
2. Does the action feel right, smooth, easy and fluent or does it feel awkward and strained?
3. Does the shuttle reach the forecourt by travelling over the opponent and out of his reach?
4. Do you remain in balance as you hit the shuttle and are you able to travel forwards to recover immediately after the stroke-move?

If you could do these things every time you hit the clear in practice then you would always perform a quality practice. For though the emphasis is on how you hit the shuttle, the practice will only become a quality practice if it is purposeful and meaningful, with respect to how you would want to perform the clear as a move in the game. The use of the clear, or any other stroke, as a move in the game, determines how you perform it in practice. Thus even a stroke practice has a tactical basis. If all players remembered this in practice, then we would not see so many clears fail to reach the rearcourt, or players step backwards off-balance after the clear, simply due to lack of care and effort in getting into a position to smash, drop or clear.

Make sure that you practise properly. Check with the charts to find out the tactical basis of the strokes you want to practise. Give it some thought and work out how you would want to perform it in the game. If you are not sure, experiment on the court, miming without a shuttle. Ask a good coach for advice or watch a top-class player in action. Don't watch the game. Just focus all your attention on the player and you will learn much about how to perform in the game. Above all, do not be satisfied with less than your best. *Practise with quality.*

How much should you practise?

The amount and distribution of practice can vary. Much depends on the level you are at and want to reach. It can also vary with respect to the different parts of the game and whether you are learning something new, or keeping some aspect of your game up to standard. Players differ in how much they practise and, apart from accepting that you should practise, there is no fixed rule about how much and when.

You may find that you improve from doing a small amount regularly with

small intervals between each practice, e.g. daily or every two days. Or, a large amount on each occasion with longer breaks between each practice. If you have time you might overload and do a lot regularly. You must find your own balance between the amount of practice and the distribution of it. It must be borne in mind that too much practice may risk damage to the joints in the body, particularly of the shoulder and elbow which receive excessive use during stroke practices. I believe that in time there will be scientific evidence to confirm that the repetition of strokes in practice is the major cause of joint injuries. The wear and tear on the joints is increased if the technique is poor for then there is also excessive strain. One way to avoid the risk of joint injury is to emphasise the quality of work in practice to ensure good stroke production. It would help if players concentrated and tried to perform actions correctly, both technically and tactically, during the practice. For example, if you are practising the forehand clear, make a serious effort to hit the shuttle to the opponent's rearcourt accurately and with control on each consecutive hit. If you could do this ten times out of ten on the first occasion then there would be no need to perform a routine practice of 100 clears. A good standard of performance on all occasions could reduce the amount of practice by half and thus the amount of potential damage to the joints.

What can affect practice?

It is difficult to practise well if you lose interest in the practice. New practices can be interesting, making it easier to concentrate and maintain quality in your work. Old familiar routines can easily become boring and so make it more difficult to be conscientious.

To practise well takes discipline, for you must concentrate on the task and maintain the quality. Sometimes, if things aren't going right it may be best to leave that practice and do something else. At other times perseverance may be called for.

In the early period of learning new skills, you may do more practice than later when you practise solely to maintain your standard. You may get tired; it is then all too easy to become sloppy in your work and develop bad habits. If you are unable to maintain your standards at this stage then it is better to stop, rest, or change the practice. Experience, regular work and common sense will provide you with the knowledge of how much and when to practise. Use your common sense and be honest with yourself about your efforts. The test of your practice is whether you improve your game. If you don't, then examine the practice or the way you perform it, and think again. In general, I am sure that you will know what you want to improve. The difficult part is to devise practices which are meaningful and really do improve your skill in playing the game. So let's take a look at how to devise practices in the various aspects of the game.

1. Selection**How to devise a practice**

First you must decide what aspect of your game you want to improve: for this refer to the charts. Study the situations and the stroke-moves possible. Take each situation in turn and assess what you can or cannot do in each one. Then make a list of things you need to learn or improve. It is important to select practices that you are able to perform and which are interesting and meaningful. This way you will avoid frustration, if they are too difficult, and boredom, if too easy.

Each tactical situation can be broken down into a number of parts. For example, assume that the situation is in the rearcourt. You have travelled there from the midcourt to perform a backhand clear and then recover, travelling back to the midcourt to defend. To do this you complete a pattern of movement, containing a number of parts which you can practise together or separately. These are:

The push-off and acceleration from the midcourt and the travel phase to the rearcourt

The arrival to position yourself and prepare to make the stroke-move

The stroke-move

The recovery towards the midcourt

You may find that your technique is poor and you cannot hit the backhand clear effectively as a stroke-move. So you extract it from the game situation and work solely on the action of hitting the clear. To do this you could seek help from a coach. However, you may wish to work on your own by miming the action in front of the mirror; carry a racket around the house and practise hitting imaginary shuttles; or go on court with a partner and hit numerous backhand clears until you begin to get it right. Then you would return to the tactical situation and practise it as a stroke-move in the game. This process can apply to any part of the tactical situation. Once the technical practice has helped to improve your technique then quickly switch back to the tactical practice. *Technical practices help you to control and master yourself whereas tactical practices help you to control and master your opponents and are the most important with respect to the game.*

Tactical practices

A stroke-move can be learnt in isolation or in combination with other stroke-moves in a situation. Examples of these are:

1. Select the power smash and recovery, or combine it with the sliced smash. The practice would require a `feeder' who feeds single shuttles continuously for you to alternate the power smash and the sliced smash in sequence. An isolated stroke-move or a combined stroke-move can be performed in rearcourt, midcourt and forecourt situations.

2. Select two situations and perform the same stroke or different strokes in each situation. For example, the power smash could be performed from the right side and the left side of the rearcourt within the same practice; or the smash from one side and the attack clear from the other side. This would involve the addition of travelling between situations and so include footwork and balance.
3. Combine different situations and different stroke-moves. For example, you could hit a smash from the rearcourt and then travel forward to play a spinner from the forecourt. All these practices require another player who might act as a 'feeder' and who also practises his stroke-move as replies to your moves. If you look at the total picture, with you making pre-determined moves from one situation and the feeder making replies from another situation, then it would appear that the following situations can be selected for practice.

Single situation practices

Examples are: Rearcourt to rearcourt Rearcourt to midcourt Rearcourt to forecourt (And of course, the same would apply for the midcourt and forecourt.)

These practices are quite easy to perform. For example, in a rearcourt to rearcourt practice the feeder would hit the shuttle high to your forehand or backhand rearcourt. But you would not simply clear the shuttle back to him: you would have to travel from your midcourt, get into the smash position, hit the clear and then recover to the midcourt to take up a defensive stance. If you hit an attack clear then you might recover quickly. If you hit a high defensive clear you would walk back to the midcourt. However, in addition the feeder would have to work hard. He too must return to his midcourt after each clear. This is because the test of your clear as a stroke-move is the effect it has on the feeder. You have to send him back to his rearcourt, and this you can do quickly (to make him rush), or slowly. Thus, you would watch his feet, as you return to your midcourt, to see if he does place them in the rearcourt to make his reply. If he does, then you know that your clear was effective, in sending him as far out of position as possible. This practice could take the form of single repetitions with a pause between each, or continuous rallying.

Combination situation practices

An example would be:

Rearcourt and forecourt to rearcourt

The feeder would hit the shuttle high to your rearcourt. You would travel quickly from your midcourt to the rearcourt, make the clear to the opposite

rear-court, recover to the mid-court to take up a defensive stance. The feeder would hit a check-smash to your fore-court. You would travel quickly forwards, to clear from your fore-court over the feeder's head to his rear-court and then recover to take up a defensive stance in your mid-court. End of practice.

This could be repeated until you felt satisfied with your performance. Once again it could be practised in the form of a continuous rally. But if so, it is most important that you do not allow the standard of performance to fall during the practice.

Complex situation practices

Here you would practise moves in a situation and end the rally with a scoring hit. The practice will be designed to allow you to end the rally with a smash from the rear-court/mid-court area or the kill from the fore-court. An example is:

Fore-court to fore-court to mid-court

Start in the mid-court. Take up a forward attacking stance. The feeder hits the shuttle from his mid-court into your fore-court. Travel forwards and play a tumbler or spinner and then recover into the attacking stance on the edge of your fore-court. The feeder lifts the shuttle over your head towards the rear-court.

Travel back quickly and smash the shuttle to his mid-court and recover into an attacking stance in your mid-court.

End of rally. Begin again.

A complex practice includes making stroke-moves and travelling between different situations for you and the 'feeder'. You both have to work hard to perform them correctly and gain the benefit from the practice. After awhile it becomes quite easy to select situations which give you experience of making a scoring hit.

There are many advantages of working in this way. From the start the strokes are meaningful as moves in the game. There is the build-up to a conclusion, with the strokes used to create the situation in which you can make the final scoring hit. You will develop confidence in knowing that you can create situations and can go for the winner when the opportunity arises. You will also gain more insight into the connection between situations and the relevance of certain strokes as moves in those situations. This sort of practice is also more enjoyable and interesting, for knowing that there is an end to the practice is an incentive to being totally committed in going for the winner. You know that it is the successful attempt that ends the practice. If you continually practise creating situations where the end is the attempt to make a winning move you will gradually develop a positive approach to the game. You will get used to creating situations which

contribute to making a scoring hit. It will become a habit to be adventurous and to take calculated risks when the opportunity arises. A well-designed situation practice will help you to do this.

2. Construction

To construct a practice is generally simple in theory but quite difficult on the court. The difficulties arise in trying to make the practice realistic. To be realistic it must be similar to the actual game situation. Imagine a situation in which you have smashed from the rearcourt and your opponent blocks the smash to the forecourt. Thus the shuttle travels from a low position to cross the net on an upward pathway. You travel into the forecourt and hit the shuttle down for a winner.

Now assume that you want to design a practice with a lunge into the forecourt and a downward hit from the net. How do you begin? You decide that the 'feeder' will feed by hand. There are two points to clarify:

1. Where does the feeder stand in relation to the net?
2. How does he throw the shuttle?

The first question involves shuttle speed and the distance it must travel. This must be decided in order to get the timing right in the practice. The second question is to do with the trajectory of the shuttle flight. Does the feeder use an overarm throw (like a darts player) or does he throw from underarm? In a game you would see the shuttle coming upwards from a low position, so it would be more realistic to feed from that position. Whatever way you decide to feed the shuttle, by hand or racket, give some thought to the trajectory of the shuttle. Always consider the move that created the situation, and the sort of position and actions that you would adopt preceding and following the stroke-move in that situation. Here are some guidelines:

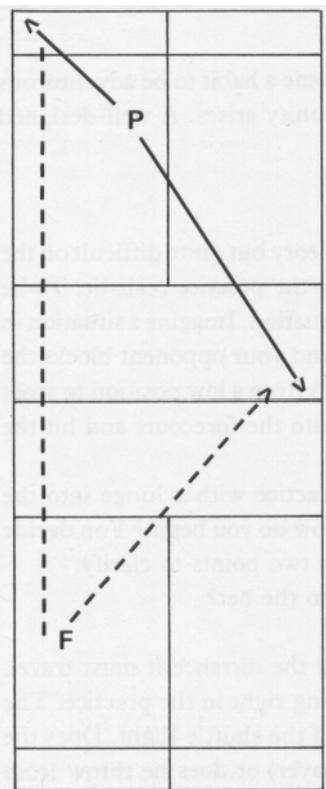
1. Decide on the situation and the stroke-move that you want to practise.
2. Explain the purpose of the practice to the 'feeder'.
3. Work out the starting positions of yourself and the 'feeder'.
4. Write out clear instructions about the order of moves in the practice.

Note: it helps to draw a sketch of the court, which illustrates the practice, with clear instructions at the side.

I often find that in designing a new practice, I work out the situation and write out the practice on paper. Once on the court it may take some time altering and modifying the design before it will work properly. This is quite usual and is to be expected at times. Below are shown two practices which are taken from typical situations in a game.

First practice

It involves a smash from the rearcourt and the kill in the forecourt. The emphasis is on connecting a rearcourt and forecourt move.



P =player F =feeder

P faces F and the players stand in the positions as shown.

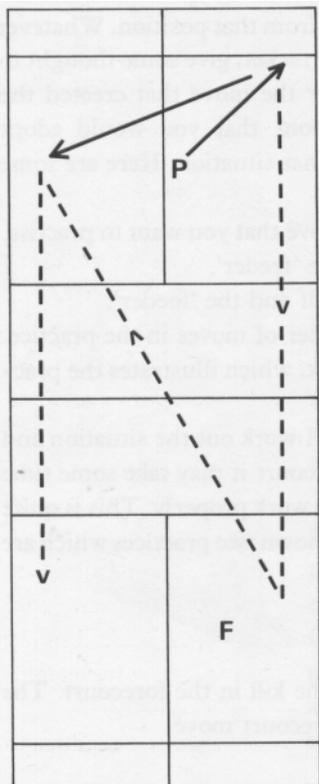
1. F serves high to the forehand side of P's rearcourt.
2. P travels across and smashes straight. P recovers by travelling towards the midcourt whilst facing F.
3. F replies with a x-court return to the forecourt.
4. P travels quickly forwards and attempts a backhand kill from the net and recovers quickly to an attacking stance in the FC. End of rally.
5. Players get back into position and start again.
6. Complete 10 successful attempts.

It may take you more than 10 attempts to get it right 10 times; so keep at the practice until *you have* got it right 10 times.

Second practice

This practice is designed for a player who is slow to recover from the smash and, therefore, late in getting to the cross-court whip reply to the smash. Players stand in the positions as shown.

1. F serves high to backhand RC of P.
2. P travels to RC and smashes straight.
3. F whips the shuttle high x-court to the forehand MC of P.
4. P sprints across and attempts a scoring hit, i.e. a smash or a drive. P recovers to an attacking stance in the MC. End of rally.
5. Players get back into position and begin again.
6. Complete 10 successful attempts.



Variations on a practice

There are numerous variations possible in these practices. Variations alter the situations and require different stroke-moves. For example, in the first practice, the feeder could make a straight return to the smash; or you could travel to the forecourt and hit straight or cross-court. Alternatively, the feeder could serve high to the backhand rearcourt. A programme could consist of a number of different practices or variations on a practice.

Evaluation of a practice

Does the practice achieve its purpose and improve your ability in a specific situation? How can you test the success of a practice? There are two basic methods.

1. Count the number of successful attempts out of a set number, e.g. ten.
2. Test it in the game.

Both of these methods are crude because it is not possible to establish ideal conditions for the test. There will always be slight variations in each attempt, i.e. shuttle speed, trajectory, timing of the stroke, etc. In the game these

Fig. 17

factors will vary even more. Nevertheless, we can measure the success or failure of a practice sufficiently to say whether it worked or not. Let us apply the methods of testing to the first practice, which was designed to improve your ability to play rearcourt and forecourt moves.

Method 1

The test is to measure the number of successful attempts in a set number of repetitions of the practice. You could do this on a number of occasions over a period of time. If there is an improvement in your degree of success in the tests then we can assume that you have improved your ability to make these particular stroke-moves.

Method 2

This is rather more difficult but still possible to use to measure your progress to some extent. Here you can condition the game to ensure that the situation arises in the game. You simply add a few new rules to the game. For example, you could stipulate that your opponent must always clear to your forehand rearcourt when he does clear, and when you smash straight he must always block cross-court. In this way, you guarantee that the situation will occur and then count the number of successful attempts and failures during the game. *Note:* there is one major weakness in this practice. Knowing that your opponent must block to the forecourt, you can rush forwards and anticipate. To prevent this, you also allow him to return your smash with a clear to the rearcourt occasionally. Now you would be forced to wait before travelling to the forecourt. As a result of the practice of this move you should be able to perform it successfully if it occurs in a contest.

Performing under pressure in practice

In a game you are often under pressure and have to do a large amount of work in a short period of time. You may have to travel quickly from one situation to another and recover very quickly from the stroke-moves you play. Consequently there should be emphasis on developing speed. The ability to perform well under pressure requires good technique and a high level of fitness.

One simple but effective way to add pressure is to speed up the rate of working. There are several methods that can be used. The most obvious way is to use faster shuttles. If you use the highest speeds, then normal reaction time, stroke production and general movement around the court all have to speed up. This also has the beneficial effect of developing concentration, increasing explosive acceleration from one situation to another and finally, in the game situation, it makes the normal pace shuttle appear to travel much more slowly.

Another way is to hit hard smashes from the midcourt and so reduce the

recovery time in defence; or hit a hard flat smash from the rearcourt and reduce recovery time to reach the reply to the smash; or hit flatter clears to the rearcourt. The rest time between each repetition of the practice can be reduced to increase pressure in fitness training on the court. For more information on this aspect of the game, refer to *Get Fit for Badminton* (seep. 83), which contains detailed explanations and advice on how to work under pressure. The most important point to remember is that all pressure training is based on the principle of overload. Once you grasp this it is quite easy to work out ways to overload your practice of the various aspects of the game.

Practice and competition

So far the practices have been constructed from situations which actually occur in the game. Various parts have been isolated and extracted from the game to enable you to practise them. Now arrives the time when you have to return to the game and apply what you have learned in practice. Unfortunately, unless you are alert, this could make your game worse rather than better. If you have been doing technical practices you may meet a problem during the game. For in technical practice, the focus is on yourself rather than on the opponent. This explains why one sees so many young players who, as a result of numerous stroke routines, seem to be more concerned with playing strokes than opponents. They do not use the strokes as moves in the game. There should be no such problem if you have been doing tactical practices for these always relate to what you do to an opponent. When you play the game you have got used to focusing on the opponent in practice.

Just to remind you of this, examine the stages below which show the progression from practice to competition.

Stage 1

Use the charts to examine your game for weaknesses and parts that should be learnt. Isolate them and extract them from the game.

Stage 2

Devise and perform practices

- a. technical - strokes and footwork
- b. tactical - stroke-moves and recovery with travelling between situations

Stage 3

Return to the game. Play games and apply what you have practised in the game.

This final stage is also difficult for other reasons. It takes confidence to try out something new or what was a previous weakness, in a contest. It doesn't follow that just because you have worked hard on something in practice you can immediately use it in the game. It would be marvellous if this was so

but, in general, for the majority of us, it doesn't happen quite like that. So, unless you are an exception to the rule, don't be surprised if your game does not immediately reach new levels of excellence. You may easily have doubts about whether what you have practised will stand the test, particularly if the game is a tough one. Then it would not be surprising if you played safe and reverted to familiar well-established habits.

Your confidence, in applying practice to play, depends on the extent to which it has become a part of your 'natural' game and an intuitive, automatic response in a situation. This, in turn, depends on the amount of meaningful work you have done in practice. The final factor which might affect your confidence is the opponent. You will certainly know if something is not a part of your 'natural' game if you meet a tough opponent. He will make you very conscious of any weakness, for he provides you with the hardest test of your practice.

So let's assume that you have worked very hard on tactical situation practices and that these have been meaningful and realistic. Now you must make the big jump between practice and play. Well, luckily, you don't have to jump all the way. There are a few ways of bridging the gap. You could devise a *conditioned game*. This is similar to a normal game except that extra rules are added to make certain that you use the practised part in the game. For example: imagine that you have been practising at developing your speed in travelling to the rearcourt to get into the smash position. You now play a game but add an extra rule, i.e. you are only allowed to smash from high in the rearcourt. If you break the rule by doing a clear or a drop then you lose the rally.

Or, assume that you have been practising the replies to the forecourt from the forecourt. This requires much skill and, often, courage to take the opponent on at the net in the game. So we make you do it. Add an extra rule to the game: 'you are now allowed to lift to the midcourt or rearcourt when the shuttle is below net level in your forecourt'. It is quite obvious that if your opponent knows the rule he will try to drop to the forecourt and then travel in and wait poised to kill any poor replies above net level. It will certainly force you to take care and play with control and accuracy in the game.

To some extent conditioned games make your practice an automatic part of your game. But you know it is not the real game, and for that you need to play opponents in competition, when you play according to the normal rules of the game.

There are two types of competitive play: friendly games and formal competition (organised games, tournaments etc.). A friendly game is the best place to try to incorporate your practice, as nothing hangs upon the result of a friendly game. This is your best chance to try out ideas in competitive play. Here you would try to win, but not at the expense of developing your game. Thus you would use your practice in play as much as possible; even though it

is still rather new and uncertain to you, and might cause you to make an error and lose the rally. But, if you are sensible and forward looking, this wouldn't matter. You would realise that the more you tried out a stroke-move in friendly competition, the easier it would be to do so in serious competition.

In formal competition, the emphasis must be on winning. Trying to win is a serious business. It is a test of your badminton skill against another player's skill. Nevertheless, there is still the occasional opportunity to practise in play. But to do so can be risky. You must be careful and sensible about it. One international player I worked with used the earlier rounds of the tournament to practise parts of his game. There were several ways he did this. If he was playing a weaker opponent and stood a fair chance of winning, he took every opportunity to practise a new stroke-move in the situation, even to the extent of putting himself into 'impossible' situations. He felt safe in doing this because he knew that his weaker opponent could not create much pressure on him. If he won the first game he would continue this way throughout the match. In fact, sometimes he went so far as to give his opponent the chance to place him under pressure. For example, he might deliberately hit a weak clear to the midcourt to allow the opponent to smash for a winner, so that he could practise his speed and control in defence. Another time he might drop to the forecourt and then stay right back to invite a return to the forecourt; then travel forwards to take the shuttle late, from near the ground, and make a return to the forecourt with his opponent waiting ready to attack the weak reply. You try it sometime, it can be quite a challenge.

If, however, he began to lose too many points and the opponent seemed to become a threat to his success then he would quickly revert to his former familiar 'winning' game against that opponent. He would continue in this way until he met a respected strong opponent. Then the emphasis was solely on winning in the most thorough and efficient way, i.e. playing the type of game with which he was most familiar.

Nevertheless, with continuous play in this way, the new stroke-move would become an accepted part of his total game. He found that he was able to use it intuitively as an automatic response in a situation. Such an approach to competition applies not only to international players: it applies equally well to anyone who wants to become a better player. So give it some thought and find ways of relating your practice in play.

A positive approach to practice

I have continually emphasised that you should make moves in a situation according to the principle of attack. Such an approach to the game is very positive. You can only play in this way if you know what you are trying to do on the court, and if you are prepared to be imaginative and adventurous. Thus in practice you should be willing to experiment, along with a total

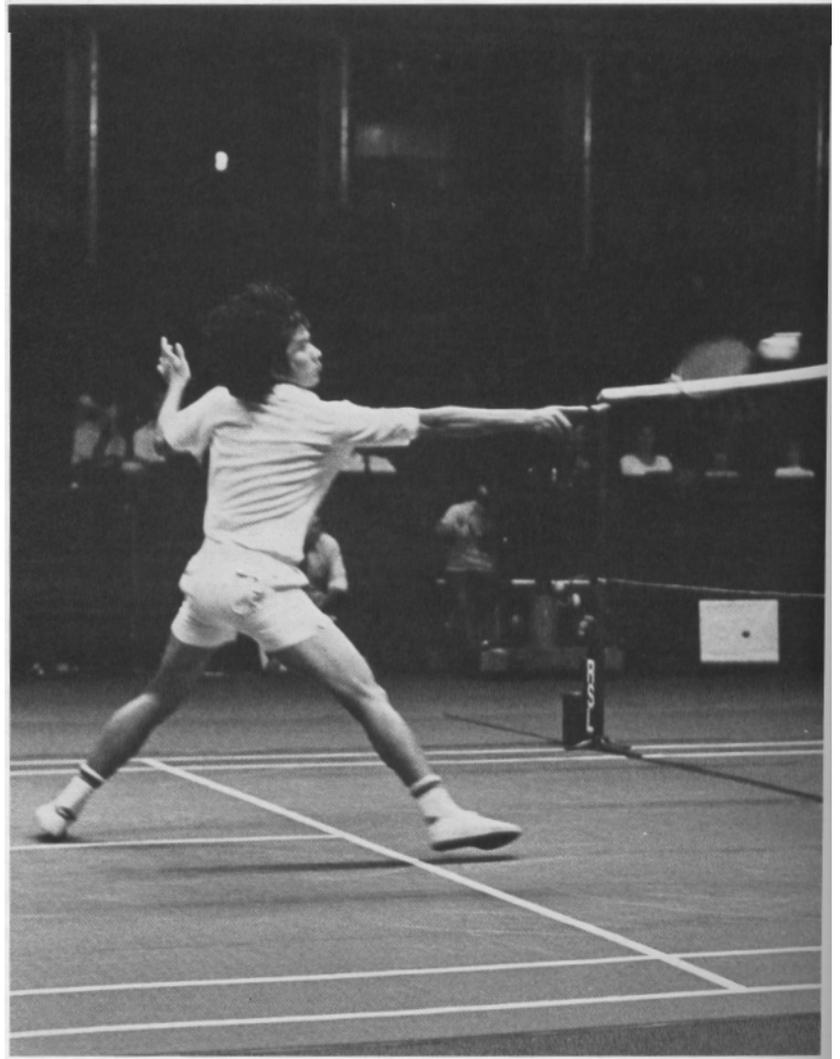
commitment to 'having a go' when the chance arises. You will find that in formal competition, there may be more safe 'percentage' play and less taking of chances. Particularly if you reckon that an extra stroke-move will serve to create a better situation in which to attack. For example, you might get a faint chance to kill a shuttle above net level in the forecourt. But you decide that this is just too risky, for the chance of making an error or not recovering to cover a reply is too great. So, you play a tumbler very close to the net, recover to an attacking stance on the edge of the forecourt and threaten the reply to the forecourt. Thus you force a possible mis-hit or a steep weak lift to the midcourt. From there you have a safe chance of hitting a winner.

In practice nothing is lost by 'having a go'. There is, however, a vast difference between 'having a go' in the sense of being adventurous, rather than reckless. Recklessness is a sign of either ignorance or stupidity. One can make mistakes in ignorance and learn from the experience. Stupidity is the mark of the fool who continually fails to learn from his experience. When you are adventurous you maintain some degree of control. Even so, if the practice is difficult, you will most probably make quite a few errors at the start. If you are practising the jump lunge and kill off the net then expect to make a few errors. As you get used to the action and learn control, you will begin to make more winners than errors. This is why practising is so important. You can repeat your stroke-moves and correct your errors until you get things right. Only by attempting something can you learn to do it. You learn to be adventurous by being adventurous. You learn to attack by attacking.

It is only by continual persistent practice in situations in which the attack is always attempted that even the faintest chance will become a strong possibility of making a winning hit. If you work hard in this way, then your confidence should increase as it becomes a habit to attack successfully when the opportunity arises.

I remember one particular tournament, when Rudi Hartono was four match points down to Sture Johnsson in the semi-final. Hartono saved the first match point, reduced them to three and then lost his serve for Johnsson to serve with three match points. The tension was almost unbearable, for everyone in the stadium had focused on this match. Hartono cleared, Johnsson smashed, Hartono blocked to the net. Johnsson came in and played a tight spinning reply close to the net. Hartono leaped forwards to attack the faint possibility (see plate overleaf). He could drop to the forecourt or lift to the rearcourt, both safe percentage moves. Instead he went for the kill and got it. The crowd were amazed. Johnsson was overawed. Hartono, match points down and going for his chances without compromise. What character! Yes, but such adventurous play could only result from the knowledge that he could kill the shuttle as was his usual custom. The years spent in practising attacking badminton on the practice court and match court paid off at the crucial moment. He won that match.

Plate 37.



Practice and the coach

If you have a coach, then be aware of some of the disadvantages that affect developing a positive attacking attitude. The majority of coaches are conventional and therefore conform to accepted safe ways of doing things, Coaching can be negative in its approach. The coach is trying to bring you up to some standard which, at the present time, you are below. Consequently, many of his comments may be on the negative side and about the things you are doing wrong rather than those you do right. Without realising it, it is easy for the coach to develop a negative attitude in your approach to the game. This will become apparent as we take a look at what the coach should do to develop a positive attitude to the game. He must create the right atmosphere

for you to be adventurous. In the early stages the attempt, not the result, is most important. You can expect to experience more failure than success when learning a difficult task. For this reason it is more beneficial for you if the coach encourages you to be adventurous and praises your efforts rather than comment on your failures. In this way, with constant exposure to the situation and careful refinement of your technique you should begin to gain success. Consequently your confidence should increase in the knowledge that you can contend with such a situation. During this period, in both practice and competition, the coach should maintain his constant encouragement, with his comments about your attempts to do the right thing rather than your results.

There are many coaches who do not praise or encourage their players to have a go in practice. These coaches usually criticise their players for failing in the attempt. As a result, such players lack the confidence or the courage to take a chance when it arises. It's not difficult to understand why. Few players are prepared to expose themselves to criticism, so few will risk getting into a situation in which there is little guarantee of success and a high chance of failure; failure only brings criticism. Criticism doesn't have to be spoken; any negative behaviour, gesture, expression and even silence can be taken as criticism. If this occurs, players know and feel it, and become less prepared to be adventurous. They fall into a 'play safe' approach in a situation unless, of course, there is absolutely no way of failing to make a scoring hit. Eventually the idea of being adventurous, going for the winner when the opportunity arises, is neglected, and so is the positive approach to the game. The strokes are not used effectively as moves designed to create situations which eventually increase one's chances of making a scoring hit. The player ends up a safe player whose future development is limited. The game at the present time is filled with coached players who possess skilful strokes and footwork. They are a credit to the work of the coach on the technical aspects of the game. Unfortunately, for the majority, that is all that can be said for them. The rest of their game reflects a negative approach, 'play safe', dull, mediocre, conformist, monotonous, unexciting play which, tactically, is boring to watch. If you are a coach, look critically at the implications of your teaching methods and your attitude to the game. Reflect on what is required to play attacking badminton and whether your work actually achieves that effect - that is, if you agree that badminton is an attacking game.

If you are a player there are several alternatives open to you. You can ignore, educate or leave your coach. It is important that you do something. For in the competitive arena, all things being equal, it is the player who is positive and takes his chances who will be the winner. And even if you do not win you will certainly have a more exciting and enjoyable game.