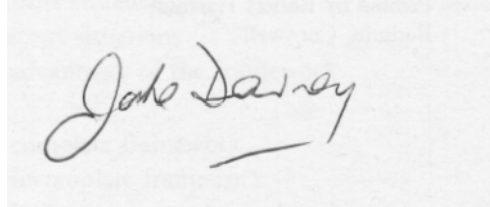


*Winning
Badminton
Singles*

JAKE DOWNEY

Photographs by Louis Ross



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To the enquiring sportsperson

Badminton is a game and games are a part of sport. The point of the game is to win. However, man created sport for his enjoyment and to enrich the quality of his life. It is fundamental, therefore, that it matters how we participate in sporting activities. In this respect the means matter more than the end. Thus the means of winning in badminton should not lessen the value of the game as a sport.

Preface

Since 1963 my involvement with badminton has been mainly as a teacher and a coach. During that time I have been fortunate to have experienced teaching the game to young players in schools and youth centres and to have seen the same players progress from beginners to a good standard of play at club and county level. In recent years my work has been mainly with international players. The experience of working with the same player for a number of years, whether that player is a youngster in school or a world class competitor, is invaluable for any coach, for it takes time to experiment in the game and try out new ideas in practice.

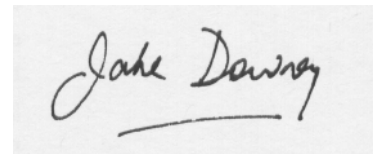
Not surprisingly, as you learn more about the game you acquire more knowledge to transmit to the players. It is always a problem to decide how to start and progress, and what to include or leave out. Consequently, much time is spent on preparation in an attempt to strip the game down to its bare essentials and then put them into some sort of meaningful order. When this has been done it becomes possible to show how the different parts of the game are connected and to explain clearly why a player should do one thing rather than another. In brief, it becomes possible to theorise about the game. Since the true test of any theory is to try it out in the actual situation one moves constantly to and fro between theory and practice. Practice entails a pragmatic approach to theory: if it works, use it.

I doubt if anyone ever reaches a position in badminton where they can stop and decide that there is nothing more to be said about the theory of the game. It is a dynamic game and change is built into-it. There will always be new ideas and theories which develop out of the practical situation. However, it is possible to establish a framework in which theory and practice can develop together. The framework outlined in this book provides a basis for such development. Furthermore, it has been well tested and works successfully in the practical situation.

This book is primarily a practical book; detailed explanations are provided to help any player to improve his performance in the game. It is divided into three parts to make it easier to follow. Because it describes a new approach to badminton, it is important to read the book right through before using it as a reference work to be consulted when advice and information on specific problems are required.

I should like to acknowledge my debt to the many players who have helped me to develop my ideas in the practical situation. The players in the national squads I have worked with since 1970 have co-operated willingly in my experiments on various aspects of the game, both in practice and competition. My especial thanks go to several players who worked closely with me for a number of years during this period - Margaret Lockwood, Gillian Gilks, Paul Whetnall, Ray Stevens and Andy Goode. For a player to work with a coach who continually experiments with new ideas and new ways to improve performance is very demanding and risky for the player. It requires a love of, and genuine interest in, the game; in this situation critical thinking and comments from the players in the evaluation of ideas in practice and competition are vital. Often the value of an idea is not immediately apparent and the player must possess confidence and determination to persevere. These qualities in the players I have worked with have made this book possible. The players were the testers of the theory underlying their practice. And fortunately, in practice all were very successful.

My particular thanks go to Paul Whetnall, who has continually helped me to develop new ideas and try them out and modify them on the practice court prior to completion. In addition, his comments and constant encouragement to complete the work have finally led to the publication of this book.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jake Dawson". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background. There is a horizontal line drawn underneath the name.

Introduction

Imagine the singles player in action. The athlete leaping backwards through space to twist and smash the shuttle away from the opponent. Then landing, sinking lightly, before explosively powering forwards to cover the reply. The kill from the net as he leaps, lunging high, to swoop down on the 'bird' and lash it to the ground. Or, with smooth backward flowing steps, pausing to threaten, holding the opponent still before hitting the gentle dropshot. Now hanging back, inviting the net reply, then gliding into the forecourt to tumble the shuttle tightly over the net.

This is Man not machine, with more to his movement than mere action. There is the underlying purpose. For the body, athletically trained to the highest pitch, serves only to give expression to thought. The movement, so necessary to hit the shuttle, climaxes with strokes used as tactical moves designed to outwit the opponent and gain victory. Through the action we gauge the measure of intelligence, imagination and creative ability. With insight into the tactics of the game we look beyond the action and enjoy the contest between two intelligences, the battle of minds. Though never forgetting nor failing to appreciate the athleticism and the beauty of the movement, we move on to a deeper level of understanding and appreciation.

There is more, for the battle is decided over the duration of time, and thought and skill are only part of the struggle. Can the effort be sustained and fought through with quality until the end result, success or failure, is realised? Can thought be focused singlemindedly on the task in hand, persevering with purpose regardless of the struggle's ebb and flow? Is it possible to ignore the pain of tired body, dismiss the doubts raised by the relentless probing of weaknesses and the negation of strengths, in order to seize opportunities and create victory? Thus we become absorbed with the human element and live with the player, his doubts and fears, his excitement and endeavour. In him Man becomes exposed. The harder the struggle the more we see Man as he is. The expression of his attitude gives colour to his character. Is this the adventurous spirit roaming free to seize its chance or is it tentative caution? Do we see fierce determination, concentration and strength of will glowing forth in the quest, or subdued spirit which succumbs

to human frailty? Whatever it is we identify with the players, and recognising what we see in them, we experience ourselves through them.

***Above all, we acknowledge the arena in which the battle has its setting.** We realise (although we may forget at times) that it is but a game; the rule that governs all games within the world of Sport applies equally here. That is, all such contests should be conducted in a fair and sporting manner. It is this feature that adds the one element of control so necessary to make the occasion an enjoyable one and thus enriches the total experience for the player and us.*

This description illustrates the different aspects of the game with which you will be familiar. The intention of this book is to delve deeper into these different aspects and to give you more insight into the game, and thus to show you, beginner or world champion, how to become a better singles player. By knowing the game you will get some idea of what counts as a 'good' player, which is the standard you must aim for. Obviously such a player must play the game well before you would call him 'good'. So, know the game and what counts as 'good' and you will be able to take the steps necessary to become a better player.

What makes a 'good' player is always a favourite topic for discussion. Various suggestions are put forward and supported by referring to the attributes of great players from the past. I have read about Dr Dave Freeman who made few errors, if any, playing with absolute control and accuracy. I have watched Wong Peng Soon with his impeccable backhand and masterly courtcraft; Eddy Choong with his speed, agility and dynamic leaps to smash from all parts of the court; Erland Kops, who personified strength and power; and I have admired the speed, finesse, artistry and character of Rudi Hartono. The Ladies game has had its share of 'good' players, too. I believe the greatest of these was Judy Hashman (Devlin), who showed marvellous control and accuracy, great determination, concentration and a fine understanding of badminton. During the 1970s, Yuki, Lena Koppen, Gillian Gilks and Margaret Lockwood ruled the Ladies game. Yuki showed imaginative tactics and positional play; Koppen, supreme fitness and speed about the court accompanied by superb tactics and a joy of playing; Gilks, a sound technique and a powerful and dominating overhead game; Lockwood played with marvellous fluent speed and agility to hit shots with great control and accuracy.

A summary of these comments would show that opinions about great players, as examples of what makes a 'good' player, include references to every aspect of the game. A combination of these features would appear to be necessary; indeed it is doubtful, as will become apparent later, whether any one of these attributes is sufficient on its own. So when you read or hear

that a particular player was 'good' because he possessed a big smash, superb fitness, or had character, do not assume that such a feature was the sole reason for that player's success. It is most unlikely that any player, without exception, can become a 'good' player without reaching a high standard in all the various aspects of the game. This book will demonstrate how the different aspects of the game are related and connected into a cohesive whole to form the game that you intend to play successfully.