

ITF Coaches Education Programme Level 2 Coaching Course



Tactics and patterns for the serve and return game situation

By the end of this session you should be able to:

- Understand and explain the main tactics and patterns for the:
 - First serve
 - Second serve
 - Return of serve



General

- Use the serve to dominate the point from the start.
- Have confidence with your own serve.
- Vary the serving position and target to create uncertainty (20% variation creates uncertainty).



First serve

- Hit, usually, to the opponent's weak side.
- Don't forget to use the serve to your opponent's body.
- Don't hit too hard, 70% - 80% power is usually enough.
- Be consistent: try to make 70% first serve.
- If it's a big serve: Move in to the net and volley.



First serve

- If it's hit at medium to high power (no winner) but angled and directed to a target: Run around and hit an inside-out with your best shot (forehand).
- If it's a weak first serve (defensive serve): Stay in the backcourt. Wait for the opponent's return. Expect it to come to your weakest side.



Second serve

- Be consistent: 100% second serve.
- Be aggressive with your second serve.
- Don't forget to use the serve into your opponent's body.
- Don't drop it short make the fault long rather than in the net.
- Vary spin and pace.



Second serve

- If it's a good serve move in or go to the net and volley. Or run around the backhand to hit the off-forehand
- If it's a weak second serve (defensive serve): Stay in the backcourt. Wait the opponent's return probably which will probably be to your weakest side.

Direction, spin, etc.



- Vary in order to keep the opponent guessing.
- Serve into the body when it's a big point.
- Angle the serve on big points against an opponent two handed on both sides.
- Use spin depending on court surface.
- Serve slice wide to the left box and to the centre in the right box.

Direction, spin, etc.



- Serve flat to the middle in both sides.
- Serve topspin to the centre in the left box and out wide to the right box.
- Note if the opponent is left handed or plays two-handed shots.

Serve and volley



- On clay: as a variation and to surprise the opponent
- On fast courts: on almost every point in order to attack the opponent
- Move in quickly to the volley/Split step as opponent hits return
- Move in along the line of flight of the likely return.

Serve and volley



- Keep the serve hit down centre or into their body as deep as possible.
- Vary your serve placement
- When it's a big point and you're hitting a second serve
- Serve and volley can be a good surprise tactic.

Serve and groundstroke



- Serve and then attack with the forehand.
- After serve take up position to the left and centre (for right hander)

Return

general guidelines



- Make the opponent play. Make the return.
 - Try to hit the return to a specific part of the court (e.g. the weak point of the opponent).
- Vary the return.
- Change the speed and the spin if possible.
- Vary your returning positions according to server's position.
- On big serves, use blocked returns.

Return

General guidelines



- On weak or high serves, attack by hitting with pace or by chip and charge.
- On angled serves, use anticipation. Move diagonally to the ball. Play cross court. Stay in the backcourt.
- Try to hit the return long rather than in the net.

Return

General guidelines



- Use topspin and flat for offensive returns and slice and blocked for defensive returns.
- Try to anticipate and ‘read’ the server’s intentions (watch the toss).
- Move forward into the serve



First serve return

- Consistency on first serve return. Intention of no “free” points off first serves.
- If the opponent stays in the backcourt:
Blocked return deep down the line or angled or very high to the backhand. Depending on the type of return: move in to volley or stay in backcourt.

Second serve return



- Intention should be to attack the second serve at every possible opportunity.
- Counter-attack second serves by playing the return on the rise and at shoulder height to retain a dominating court position.
- Move forward or move towards the backhand side to set up an attacking forehand as opponent serves.

Second serve return



- If the opponent goes to the net attack the return, with a short topspin crosscourt or deep down the line. Depending on the type of return move in to volley or stay in backcourt.
- If the opponent stays in the backcourt - Attacking return deep down the line or short cross court. Move in to volley or stay in backcourt.

Return against good serve and volley

- Low return into the opponent's body to close off angles. Stay in the backcourt. Use the 2 ball pass.
- Blocked return to the opponent's feet deep down the line or short cross court. Stay in the backcourt.

Return against good serve and bad volley



- Try to make the opponent volley.
- Stay in the backcourt for indirect passing-shot.
- Lob or move in to volley.