



Gameplay - Warm-up, Movement, Tactics and Strategy

Warm-up

Pre-Court Warm-Up

It is important to encourage students to warm up their muscles before entering the court for the on-court warm-up. Warm-up exercises reduce the risk of injury and prepare players for activity by:

- Increasing the blood flow to muscles and the brain
- Increasing the neural responses
- Preparing the cardiovascular system

The pre-court warm up should include both general mobility exercises and specific muscle preparation for squash. General mobility exercises can include jogging, running, skipping or biking, starting at low intensity and slowly increasing the intensity. The specific muscle preparations can be done on court or in any area that allows for the real actions of squash movements.

On-Court Warm-Up

The purpose of the on-court warm-up is as follows:

- To warm up the ball for the match
- To establish timing and rhythm by playing a variety of shots
- To get a feel for the length and width of the court
- To test the pace of the walls
- To become aware of the opponents style of play (for example, does he or she have a strong forehand or play high balls well?)

The on-court warm up lasts for 5 minutes. Here is a procedure that students can follow in the warm up:

- Start near the back of the service box, and focus on correct execution of a variety of shots
- After 2 1/2 minutes, switch to the opposite side of the court so that each student has an opportunity to practice forehand and backhand strokes
- Give the opponent a fair hit with the ball. Hit no more than 2 balls down the wall to yourself before cross-courting it over to your opponent.

Cool Down

After a match a proper cool down is important as it:

- Allows the body to recover more quickly
- Maintains blood flow to help strained muscles relax

- Increases flexibility

Proper cool down activities can consist of a simple walk or slow jog, or gradual stretching of large muscle groups.

Movement

Movement on court is an individual action. Top players seem to almost glide over the court, making their movements to the ball look effortless or even choreographed. Their movement has become efficient and practical over the years from practice and experience.

Efficient court movement requires technical skill and knowledge. The following are fundamental principles that will improve a player's movement abilities:

- Move from the ready position as soon as you know where the ball is going.
- Discover your own movement pattern and the steps that are appropriate for you. Then practice these patterns and steps until you can get to the right place in as few steps as possible while maintaining efficiency, smoothness control and balance.
- To move forward, start by stepping in the direction you want to move. To move to the back of the court, twist or pivot first, and then start stepping.
- Turn the body sideways to prepare for the stroke and leaving enough space between yourself and the ball to step and swing without crowding yourself.
- Recover to the "T" (provided that ball has not returned to that area).

Basic Strategies and Tactics

Strategy is the game plan. A player's plan (strategy) is based on his/her ability to execute certain shots. Tactics are the player's ability to execute those shots at the right time.

Tactics are based on strategies put into action within the ever-changing situations found on a squash court. Tactics are also based on the players' abilities to execute certain shots. Therefore, tactics at novice level consist of mostly rallying and defending using straight and crosscourt drives to length, volleys and service and return of service in order to avoid errors, moving the opponent off the "T", and being able to recover from hazardous situations and return safely to the "T".

Rallying Objectives

Players who have mastered the art of rallying will be able to move their opponent around the court and out of position, eventually tiring the opponent out. Players begin the rally with a lob service that is used to move the opponent to the back of the court. Rallies are continued using straight and crosscourt drives and volleys to good width and length.

Defending Objectives

Players who have learned to defend will be able to recover from dangerous situations and avoid making errors. They will try to get to every ball and make some kind of return, even if it is not the best choice.

The five (5) performance keys at this level are:

- i) Play the ball to good width and length
- ii) Volley often
- iii) Watch the ball at all times
- iv) Move to the "T" between shots
- v) Clear when required

Summary

At the beginner level, most players will only have refined a few basic strokes: the forehand and backhand drives, volleys, and lob services; as a result, a beginner's tactics will be mostly limited to defending and rallying. This means that a beginner's strategy should focus on:

- Avoiding errors
- Moving the opposition back
- Regaining the "T" position

As players progress to an intermediate level and they learn new strokes (i.e. boasts), as well as how to utilize direction, distance, height, speed, and spin to their advantage, a player's tactics will also grow to include the ability to force and attack in addition to defending and rallying. The new shots in an intermediate players' arsenal increases the strategy options for that player. An intermediate player's strategy will include:

- Avoiding errors
- Moving the opposition back
- Regaining the "T" position
- Creating openings
- Forcing weak returns
- Playing winners
- Reducing time for opponents to reach the ball