

RETURNING SERVE IN DOUBLES by Peter Farrell

Playing Standard: ITN 5 to 7

Long Term Player Development Pathway: Phase 4

In a singles match the serve is often the most decisive shot, but in doubles play most experts regard the **return of serve** as the most important stroke. Why? Well, with the servers partner already at the net, and the server possibly coming forward too, the return had better be good or it will be volleyed away for a winner...

While the standard return in doubles is crosscourt back to the server, its important for the receiver to have a full range of returns at his command in order to keep the serving team guessing:

- If the server is serving and volleying, a **low crosscourt** return is effective, aiming to make the ball bounce near the service line. You can make the server play a low volley either by hitting with topspin or a softer sliced shot.
- If the server is staying back, **deep and crosscourt** will ensure he is kept pinned to the baseline. It's often a good idea for the receiver to follow up this shot by joining his partner at the net so as to force the server to pass two net players.
- Against a serve volley player, occasionally try the **'chipped return'**, where you take the ball early and rush the net yourself. If you can make the server 'volley up', you or your partner will be in perfect position to hit a winner off the servers rising first volley.
- With the servers partner fairly static at the net, he is sometimes vulnerable to a surprise **down the line lob** return of serve.
- The occasional **down the line drive** return into the servers partners tramlines can be very effective in discouraging him from thinking he can afford to move towards the centre of the court and poach on your crosscourt return.
- One of the common mistakes coaches see when players serve and volley is the server forgetting to 'split step' as the receiver contacts the ball. If you are receiving against a server who is not split stepping, a **crosscourt lob** can often be a winner, because the servers forward momentum prevents him from changing direction quickly enough to play a smash.
- Finally, if in doubt where to return to, especially against a serve volley team, go **down the middle**. You are less likely to miss, and it may cause confusion among the opposition as to who will cover it.

For individual advice on this or any aspect of tennis, please contact your local Tennis Coach Ireland coach – see www.tenniscoachireland.ie

For more information on the ITN: http://www.tennisireland.ie/player_database/what_is_the_itn

For more information on the Long Term Player Development Pathway: http://www.tennisireland.ie/coaches/player_development_pathway