

Developing a Relationship: You and the Ball

*At first glance, tennis seems to be all about sending the ball somewhere. As important as this is, the real challenge for players is **receiving** the ball. "Reception" is a critical skill in tennis since poor reception translates to sending the ball poorly. To master good reception skills, players need to train their "set-up" which includes judging the ball, positioning, and preparing for the impact.*

For the Beginner... (Tennis rating level 1.0-2.0)

To set-up well, the first key is to judge the ball. Will it be to the forehand or backhand side, high or low, deep or short? This identification will allow a player to move as early as possible. The goal is to judge the ball before it comes over the net.

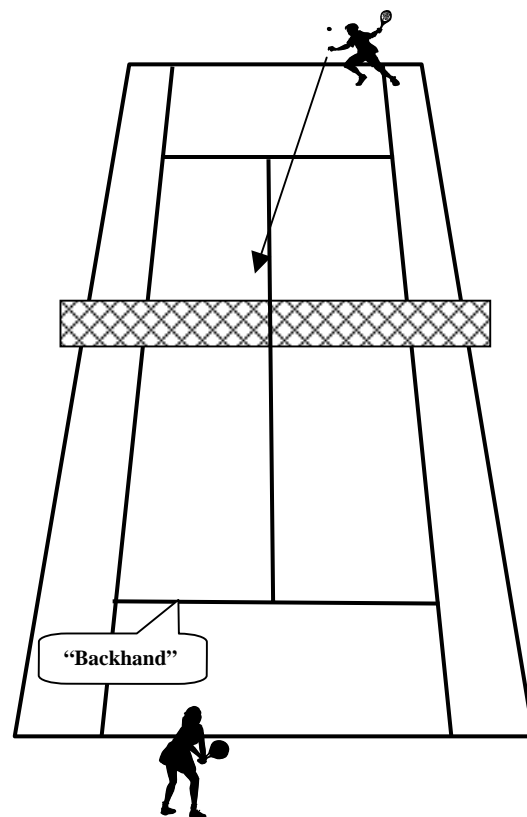
The next move is to position for the shot. Where do you need to be to make a good shot? The goal is to be "behind the ball" (not reaching for it or having it too close to your body). Ideally, this should be done before the ball bounces on your side on groundstrokes and returns and before the ball comes over the net on volleys.

Finally, the body and racquet need to be prepared for the shot. Preparing both body (sideways to the net) and racquet is key. Avoid the "take the racquet back" mentality. The preparation depends on the characteristics of the shot you judged. For example, a high ball would be received easier with a sideways body position and a higher racquet preparation.

For the Intermediate... (Tennis rating level 3.0+)

More experienced players need to judge much earlier. For example, in a baseline rally, identifying the characteristics of the ball received before it crosses the opponent's serviceline is the goal. Training this skill will even lead to anticipation of the ball before the opponent hits it.

Positioning and preparing earlier flows from an early judgment. Setting-up early promotes consistency, control, and power.



~~Home-work~~ Court

The goal on all these drills is to help players focus on "Reception" rather than sending the ball

Groundstrokes: Training to judge the ball early is critical. The first judgment to train is which side the ball is coming to. Have a partner drop a ball to themselves and send it to either your forehand or backhand side (they should only make you move 2-3 steps). Call out "Forehand" or "Backhand" as soon as you can determine where it is going. Your partner should score your efforts. 1 point for judging before the ball bounces on your side. 2 points for judging before the ball comes over the net. Play to 10 points then switch roles. Next, connect your positioning and preparation to your early judgment by saying the word "set" when you have finished preparing for the shot. Try to get "set" before the ball bounces on your side.

Serves: Even on the serve, reception is important. Many players have difficulty tossing the ball well in order to set themselves up. It is more important where you toss that how you toss. Give yourself a target to aim for (an impact point 6 inches to one foot over as high as you can reach up with your racquet is recommended). Another good target is to keep your tossing hand up and aim to place the ball so it falls into your extended hand. When the ball is at its peak, you can easily judge whether it will fall into your hand (go ahead and hit it) or not (let it drop and start your serve again). Practice hitting good tosses and leaving poor ones.