

37 Secrets

from the Pro Tour



Posted 11/04

Intimate knowledge of the court

Right now, think of your home court, how many lights are on the ceiling, six, eight? Are they rows or single squares? How high does the back wall go before there is a balcony, or rail? Is the front wall a different surface than the side walls? Are their stripes on the glass? What color is the carpet outside the court? Since I travel to many different courts to compete, I try to be completely comfortable in every court. I do this by becoming very familiar with all walls, colors, surfaces and oddities of the court. For example, Often there's a 'storage box' usually on the left side wall, (for players to put balls, keys, etc) unfortunately, it is placed right where a high z serve will hit. During my warm-up, I'll purposely hit a toss a few into the door of the box, and then hit my shot off the box. So when the ball hits it during a match, I will not be surprised, or distracted by the different sound, or different bounce.

Wallpaper balls?

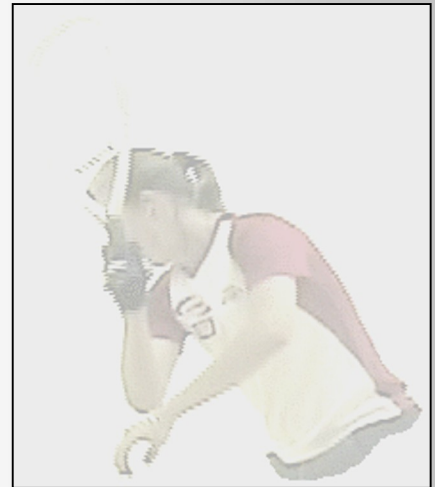
You know the ones, they appear to roll on the wall, we call them 'Glidden balls' like the paint? How in the world can I return that? Here's how to practice? Face the side wall, in the rear corner. Hold the ball in your non hitting hand, place it touching the side wall at about your head height, let it roll down the wall, and bounce. As it is rising back up, practice scraping it off the wall aiming of course, for a ceiling ball, most likely cross court one, because the margin of error is less. (easier to hit cross court, than a perfect no-side wall ceiling ball, especially if you have to scrape it off the wall in the first place. And, it's ok to hit the wall with your racquet. Don't stop your swing... just swing thru as you would any other shot. See the video clip below.

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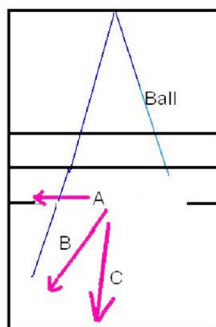


One Step Coverage and Two Bounces

Jason Mannino never lets a ball go by. You've probably seen some highlights where he will swing and miss at a ball that is going into the back wall, but he stays on his feet keeps moving, and gets a second shot as its coming back off the back wall. If he stops after one attempt, he's missing out on a second opportunity.

Players often do this with 'one step coverage'. It sounds like a good thing. But this is when the player takes a big lunging step to a ball, that's passing them at waist high. If they miss, of course the ball goes behind them and is still in play. Still in play, BUT they have stopped moving. Aaaaahhhh! That's like watching a pop fly drop right in front of you.

If you watch Mannino, often he dives towards the back wall and makes some unbelievable gets. He is speeding up, on a path almost parallel to the path of the ball. but the ball is slowing down (simple physics). The path he is taking, is called the "B" path.



There are three paths to travel to a ball. A call them A, B and C path. See the diagram. Pros use the "A" path only when the ball they are retrieving will bounce twice before the encroachment line.

Taking the "B" path, allows you to get behind the ball. Remember the ball is slowing down; you are speeding up. The "C" path is mostly used when returning ceiling balls to either side. (Visualize the same paths inverted on the right side of the court)

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Opponent s reaction to serves

.OK, so you pull out your best jam serve to the backhand, and before you know it, your opponent has rolled the ball out for a quick side out. Great, you think. Now what? Not so fast. If you can train your self to study how your opponent hits it, you may not want to discard the serve too quickly. For example, lets say I serve that jam. I notice my opponent has raised her shoulders, to get her body away from the ball, steps back ward to give her self room but is off balance, and then manages to hit it at her shoelaces for a kill shot return. Is that a bad serve choice? No. In that instance, she obviously had trouble reading the ball, was not overly prepared, and she ‘guessed wrong anyway. So I would serve that serve again, a few serves later, maybe after a kick out to left, or z-serve to right. In short, don’t just look at the quality of the return, look for patterns and trends each player has with each different serve you show them.