

Dear Glen,

During a doubles match, my opponent hit a ball around the net post for a winner. It was below the net level, but went in our court for a winner. Is this a legal shot?

Roderic

Dear Roderic,

According to USTA rule 25 c., the ball may be returned outside the net posts, above or below the level of the top of the net, provided that it hits the ground in the correct court.

Dear Glen,

I enjoyed your article last week on left-handers. Any suggestions for playing singles against a southpaw?

Jerry

Dear Jerry,

Being a left-hander myself, there are several characteristics that I can share with you about lefthanders. First, just like right-handers, we don't like playing lefthanders. Most lefty contingency have overdeveloped forehands that hit effectively to the right-handers backhand. The other strength issue is the spin of the ball on the serve. The serve spins left to right which causes all kind of problems for all returners. Lefties also are generally more effective serving to the ad-court which is where most game points are played.

As far as weaknesses, most have underdeveloped backhands in comparison to their forehand. This is usually hidden by not recognizing that a player is a lefty or the lefthander hitting runarounds to the opponent. My advice is to get a left-handed practice partner to figure out how to play them effectively.

Dear Glen,

I take doubles lessons on a regular basis and work often on staying together as a team. The reality of my league matches is that we are still one up-one back, ninety percent of the time. Are there any suggestions to getting rid of this cross-court rally predicament?

Sally

Dear Sally,

This is a very good question and applies to most league players. The simple answer is for a player to practice volleying more frequently and gain more experience at the net. Winning more points will give him the positive feedback to continue attacking the net. Practice on a wall or ball machine will give you the volume of hits needs to improve.

Second, strategically, it is a very hard play to intercept the volley off of a crosscourt groundstroke. It is a great strategy to serve the ball down the center or into the body of an opponent to eliminate the angles. This creates many opportunities to volley. Thirdly, if your partner from the back court will hit down the center when he gets short balls, this will pay great dividends on your tennis investment.

Dear Glen,

While watching the Australian Open, I notice a lot of one handed and two-handed backhands. Which is better?

Dear Backhand Lover,

This is a personal preference as well as what works best for a player. Many that have a one handed backhand find it to be more flexible in situations as well as having the ability to cover the net more effectively. The one hander also has the ability to hit a number of different spins. On the down side, the stroke is harder to learn and lacks power when pressed with an aggressive shot.

As far as a two-handed shot, this shot is easier to learn and can be used quite effectively as an aggressive baseliners tool. Its major strengths are in the return of serve and having the ability to hit passing shots in distressed situations. In my opinion, using both shots is the best of both worlds. The objective with the backhand side is to have offensive and defensive abilities against a number of playing styles.

Dear Glen,

Our opponents generally don't get a lot of first serves in during doubles play. What are my opportunities as far as taking advantage of their weak second serve?

Bryan

Dear Bryan,

There are a number of things that can be done to pressure your opponent. At the top level of doubles, it is important to get 70% of your first serves in. If this is not happening and you're not breaking your opponents serves, this is a missed opportunity. The goal is to take advantage of the shorter, softer second serve and impose your will on your opponents. The first thing that can be done is to step in and take the ball on the rise. Cutting the reaction time is a big key to keeping the upper hand in doubles play. The second thing that could be done is to come to the net behind the return. The serving team will be separated and should create several possibilities for the attacking team.

If you don't want to come to the net, another possibility would be to run around the backhand and hit a forehand. This is a very prevalent tactic in today's game. Beyond these tactics, it's not a bad tactic to hit the ball directly at the server's partner. In most cases, the groundstroker is better than the volleyer.

Dear Glen,

As a senior player, I have noticed in the last couple years, that my ability to play the game has deteriorated. Is this something that I should just accept or are there specific skills that I can practice to improve?

Emilio

Dear Emilio,

As a wise man once told me, "Your best tennis is still in front of you." There are a number of things that you can do to improve. Hitting a lot of balls off a particular shot is one of the easiest or hardest ways to improve. To "perfect" a skill, 10,000 hours of

practice need to be performed. Most seniors are not willing to invest in their game to make a particular stroke better.

Next, one can improve their tactics verses trying to hit a player off the court. Using quadrants of the courts with different spins and speeds may disrupt even the best player's rhythm. Adding angles with short shots, lobs, and dropshots can be effective tactics to expand your game.

Third, working on your focus and mental toughness can be a great attribute when competing. When is the last time you heard someone say that they were going to work on the mental part of their game? Counting the number of hits and watching particular parts of the ball will improve focus with practice.

And last, improve your fitness to be the best you can be. This will not only improve your chances to compete effectively, but it will also make you mentally strong in a pinch.

Dear Glen,

My doubles partner is right-handed and I am left-handed. In your opinion what is the best side for a left-hander to play?

Sammy the Southpaw

Dear Southpaw,

There are a couple of different schools of thought with a left-hander on a team. I am left-handed and have done better on the ad-court due to my forehand hit crosscourt and forehand return of serve. While in college, I played the deuce court and found it to be effective because our forehands were in the center, which is where most of the balls came. We also found that when we attacked the net, we were able to cover behind our partner more effectively when the ball was lobbed.

There is not a particular side that is better for this tandem. It is more due to the player's abilities and preferences whether the team will be effective.