

DOUBLES PLAY BASICS

RULES

The same basic playing rules apply to doubles and singles. There are a few differences:

1. Serves:
 - a. Each team must serve in the same order throughout a game once it begins. The order can be changed between games. (If there is a referee, you must notify him/her of the change beforehand.)
 - b. On the first service of each game only one partner can serve. When he/she is out, the team is out. After that, each player on the team gets a chance to serve before it is "side out".
 - c. The server's partner must stand upright with his back to the side wall from the beginning of the server's service motion until the ball passes the "short line". Moving out of the box early by either the server or his/her partner is a fault that causes the server to lose his/her serve. No second serve is allowed.
 - d. If either partner serves out of order, the points that have been scored by that server will be subtracted. If the designated 2nd server accidentally serves first, it will be noted and the first server will lose the opportunity to serve. The 2nd server will then resume serving.
 - e. If the server's ball hits the partner when the partner has moved outside of the box, the server loses their serve.
2. Blocking:
 - a. If an offensive player moves in front of an opponent and impedes him/her from retrieving the ball just hit, he/she can be called for a penalty hinder and will lose the point.

There are some basic etiquette rules to be observed in doubles.

1. Don't serve to your partner's side of the court. Ever. Unless you are an Open or A level team who has thoroughly discussed the option before beginning play. Serving to your partner's side of the court makes your partner feel pinned against the wall and out of position. They also run an increased risk of being hit by the return of serve. This is a sure fire way to lose your doubles partner.
2. Do not "take" shots that belong to your partner. If you have little faith in their ability to return a shot, then you are playing with the wrong partner. Taking shots that are clearly your partner's frustrates and demeans your partner, and can pull you and them out of position in the rally.
3. Give room for both of your opponents to retrieve your team's shot.
4. Communicate with your partner. Yell out "yours" or "mine" if you are not sure who will be taking the shot.

COURT POSITIONING

Generally speaking there is a left side and a right side player in doubles. (It is usually not recommended to play an "I Formation" in doubles, unless you are an Open or Professional level team. It can cause an increase of hinders, and leave holes on the court that make it tough to retrieve balls for either teammate.) The left side player is usually someone with the better backhand or a lefthander. The best right side players are those with great forehands and quick reflexes for retrieving balls in front court. You and your partner have to objectively decide which category you fall into.

It is helpful to think of dividing the court in half a little bit differently than straight up and down from front to back. The court shown below is a more likely way to succeed at doubles play. It is a staggered side by side positioning.

By giving a right handed player a larger area of the court in the back half, they are able to use the forehand in center court more. By giving the right side player a larger area of front court, you have helped to decide who will move forward for those low shots up front in the center. The left side player can then concentrate on covering back court when it occurs. Exceptions to this positioning always occur in doubles, and teammates have to be ready to cover for their partner when they are pulled out of position to retrieve a shot. Always assume to back up your partner and fill in the "hole" left on the court when they are forced to move. You may even find yourselves on opposite sides of the court! By playing your side properly in predictable rallies and adjusting to the unexpected, your team's ability to win points increases.

Do not "hide" in the back of the court. The team who plays in back court generally loses.

GAME STRATEGY AND SHOT SELECTION

1. Serves:

- a. Repeating: Do NOT serve to your partner's side of the court.
- b. When serving to an opponent's forehand, it is good to learn a well executed lob serve down the wall. It deters them from hitting an offensive shot and gives both you and your partner time to position yourselves for the rally.
- c. Work at assuming correct court positioning following your serve. You and your partner should avoid standing on the side wall. You will feel trapped and will be out of position. You will actually find yourself in your opponent's way more often because you don't have the freedom of movement you need when you're next to the side and/or back wall.
- d. When your team is returning serve, be sure that the non hitting player moves forward as their partner returns the serve. Both players in back court is a sure way to lose a rally.

2. Choosing the Right Shot:

- a. "Down the Wall" passes and kills are one of the most effective ways to get the ball by your opponents and score a point. Crosscourt passes are rarely recommended in doubles (they look like banking the 8 ball to the corner pocket on a billiards table). Your opponents will probably have these lanes covered, and your partner will have to move and lose court position if you hit it.
- b. Pinch shots are invaluable in doubles. If your shot is kept low enough, it is tough for your opponents to retrieve, and if one of them does succeed, it usually opens up an undefended hole on the court for your next shot.
- c. Ceiling balls are a successful defensive shot in doubles. You have to remember that you must have patience to play out the rally, which can last much longer when four players are covering the court. A ceiling ball pulls your opponent out of front court and can elicit a weak return. It should also be used when your opponent is totally out of position from retrieving a ball in front court. The ceiling ball will give them time to recover position and keep them safe from an opponent's shot. When playing a lefty righty team, ceiling balls to center court can work to your advantage.
- d. Wide Angle Pass Shots are another way to pass the ball by your opponents and move them to back court without forcing your partner to give up too much court position. This shot takes practice, and your partner needs to work on moving into the correct position when you hit it. He/she needs to move into center court a little more and let the ball travel around them to your side of the court.

ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT MOVING YOUR OPPONENTS TO DEEP COURT AND MAINTAINING CENTER COURT IS CRUCIAL.