

## **Drills and Tips from the Pro Tour**

### **David Nalbandian's Change of Direction Drill**

By Rufus Keown

David Nalbandian has been the strongest member of golden age of Argentinian tennis. The country has 13 players represented in the top 100 at the time of writing, while Nalbandian led Argentina to within one rubber of their first ever Davis Cup in 2006. Nalbandian himself won his two singles matches but Russia's Marat Safin heroically won the 5<sup>th</sup> rubber and tie for his nation.

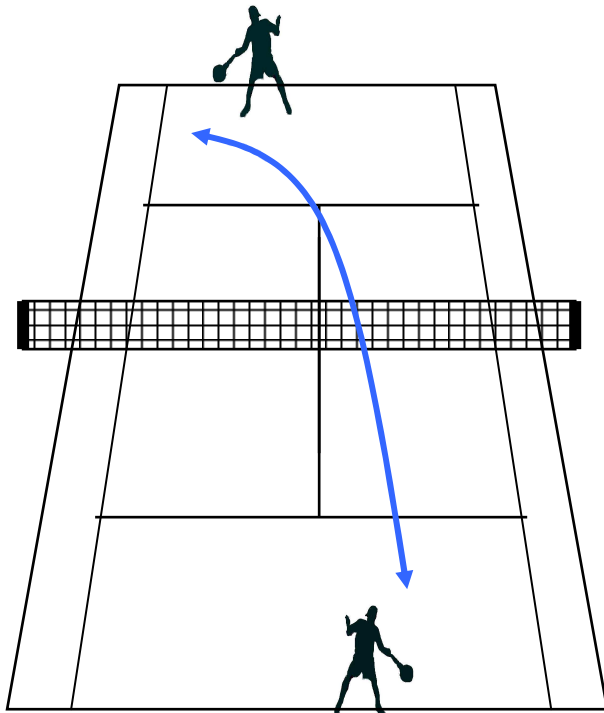
Nalbandian has been a constant member of the top ten since a break through season in 2002, during which he reached the Wimbledon finals. The Masters Cup champion in 2005 (defeating Federer in five sets), Nalbandian has been unable to win a major title in his career despite his consistency.

He finished the 2007 season superbly with consecutive Masters Series victories, including victories over Federer and Nadal. If his form continues 2008 could be the year he challenges for a Grand Slam again.

His game is built around his strength and fitness. He demonstrated these attributes at the 2007 Australian Open, winning two matches from 2 sets to love down in brutally hot conditions. His steady baseline game has delivered him results on all surfaces and an even career record with Roger Federer. Most recently he defeated Federer twice in a row at important Master Series events in Paris and Madrid

To sharpen his style of play Nalbandian uses the change of direction drill; developing cross court neutralising skills, creative change of direction shots and decision making skills. The change of direction is one of the most important aggressive baseline tactics in the game and this drill is a great one to develop all competitive players.

## Baseline Change of Direction Drill



*“Neutralise cross court”*

The drill commences with Nalbandian and his hitting partner rallying cross court keeping good depth, speed, spin and margin for error. This is a typical scenario in any pro match with two players waiting for the other to “blink” and give a weaker return. Hitting heavy, penetrating cross court shots is a crucial high percentage play in Nalbandian’s armoury and must be developed in any young player whose game is based around the baseline.

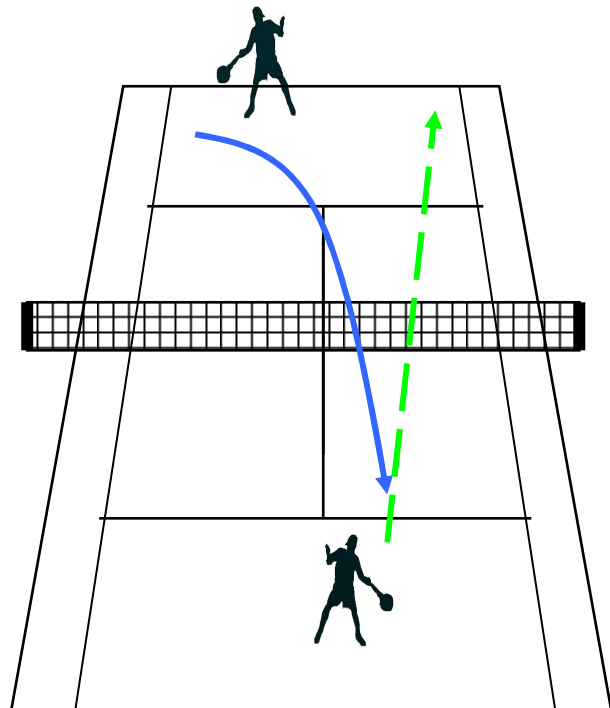
Nalbandian decides to hit down the line if the situation is right:-

- if the ball is slower
- if the ball is shorter
- if the ball is at a comfortable height
- if the ball is not too wide.

At first the point is not played out and Nalbandian concentrates on his shot execution. The re-direct has an element of risk:-

- it is hit flatter (less spin)
  - with more pace and
  - with less net clearance
- and therefore needs some mastering.

After some practice, play the point out after the redirect and also work from the backhand court.



*“Attack down the line”*

When using this drill to the backhand court also consider using the “inside – in” forehand to aggressively redirect the ball. The key is identifying which ball is the right one to attack.

Introduce a scoring system to test your players. Perhaps award double points for a successful re-direct.