

Serve and Volley Drills

Although baseline tennis has become the predominant style in modern tennis all coaches should train their students to use the serve volley. While it is uncommon for players to adopt serve and volley as their main playing style it remains a very important tactical weapon, changing up the pattern of a match and keeping opponents off balance.

With the short grass court season in progress, it is appropriate that serve and volley is a topic for discussion. The great grass court players of all time... Sampras, Becker, Navratilova and McEnroe are amongst the best serve volleyers of all time. Historically it was only the very best baseliners and returners Borg, Agassi and Graf that were able to take Wimbledon from the serve and volleyers.

Depending on your point of view the decision of Wimbledon officials to slow down the balls at the tournament in recent years has meant longer more entertaining rallies; or the near death of wonderful playing style. Roger Federer has been able to win the past three Wimbledon titles with an all court game despite being a more than capable serve and volleyer. Federer decided attacking the net often was an unnecessary risk given he was so good from the baseline.

The excitement of watching a player like Taylor Dent attack the net fearlessly is a wonderful part of the game and good coaching can keep the serve and volley alive. Even as a “change up” the serve volley can complete a player’s tactical repertoire making them a more complete competitor. The variety it offers as well as its effectiveness on fast courts means it still has an important role in player development.

Use the drills and exercises in this article to improve the serve & volley of your students who have mastered the basic strokes, can rally and serve and are beginning to play matches and competitions.

Serve and Volley Coaching Progressions

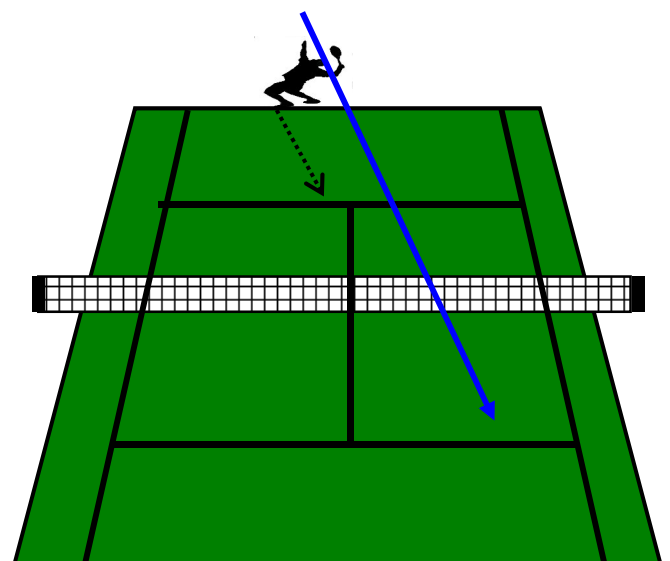
Progression # 1 – Serve and gain net position

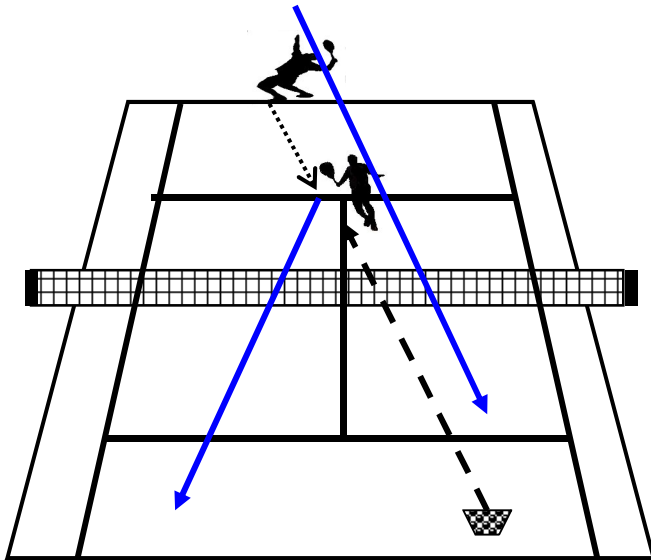
The student serves and then moves towards the net as quickly as possible, there is no return at this stage.

Key coaching points include:-

- Pushing the ball toss out in front of the body;
- Smooth transition between the service motion and pushing forwards to the net;
- Following the path of the ball forwards; and
- Correct split step and balance.

Correct movement is the most important aspect of this progression so the coach should observe from the serving end to make corrections.





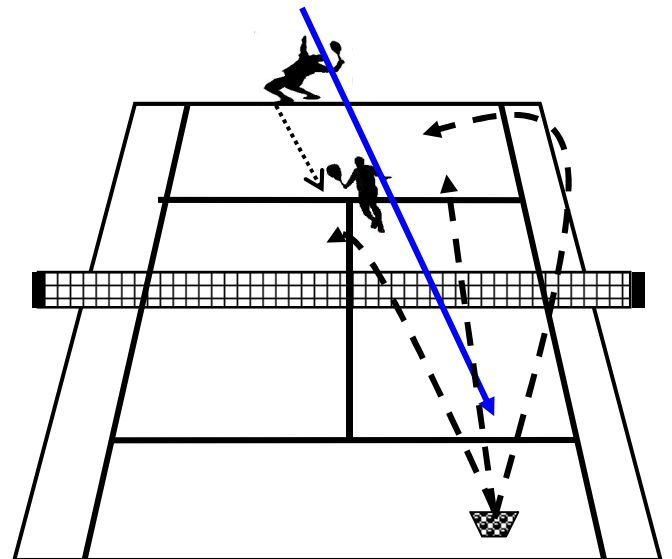
Progression #2 – Serve and low volley

- The student serves and moves towards the net quickly.
- The coach feeds a low volley to the approaching player.
- Applying all the movement instructions from the progression #1 the player should split step and make a volley into the open court.
- Timing the split step is a crucial skill so give the students a cue at which they should split step. During a match the split step should occur just before their opponent hits the ball, for this drill the players should split step just as their coach drops the ball to feed.

Progression #3 – Serve and three volley's
The student serves and then moves towards the net as quickly as possible. The coach will then feed a sequence of shots to the approaching player:-

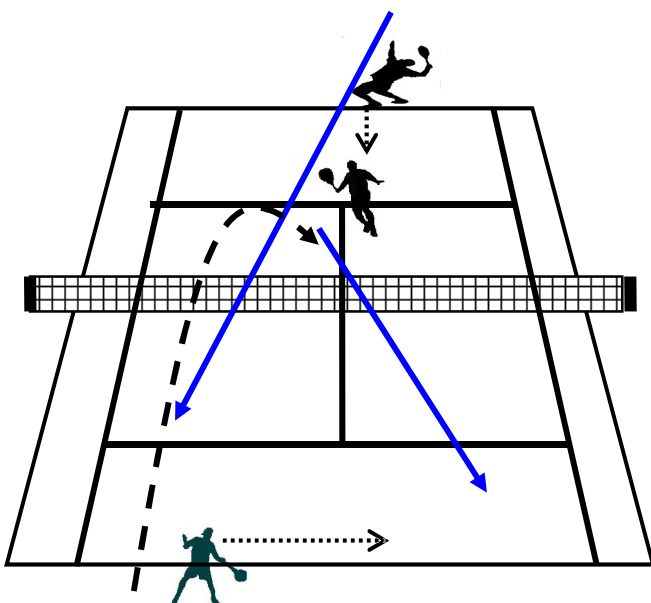
1. Low volley
2. Shoulder high closing volley
3. High overhead.

While the students may not be confident enough to use serve and volley in an open match situation, this combination of shots is realistic to match situation and will test their movement skills. Mixing up between forehand and backhand volleys will train their anticipation.



Progression #4 – Serve, volley play out the point

- The student serves and then moves towards the net as quickly as possible. The coach will then feed a low, difficult ball to the approaching player.
- The player hits their volley into the open court and then plays out the point against another student.
- The students playing out the point should start in the corner served to and can work at their passing shots, lobs and low dipping shots to pressure the net rusher.



At the successful completion of these progressions players will have practised the crucial skills needed for serve and volley:-

- Transition from serve to net;
- Correct technique and timing of split step;
- Handling the difficult low 1st volley;
- Closing in to cut off the angles and create an easier second volley;
- Managing any lobs and putting them away empathically.

The students are now ready to try their skills in point play. Three “controlled” variations can be used to introduce serve and volley into points:-

1. **Coach vs Player.** The coach can direct their returns and allow the serve and volley player to practice their volleys and overheads.
2. **Doubles or limited court area.** By playing doubles, or using markers to cut down the court area the coach can manipulate the play to reduce the movement required by the serve and volley player.
3. **Block return.** The coach can instruct the return player to only “block” the return ensuring the approaching player gets a first volley.

These three measures increase the likelihood of success amongst the serve and volley player which is very important if the student will ultimately utilise the skill during a match. Particularly young players will abandon serve and volley if they initially fail with it, which is highly likely in an open match situation where they lack the physical skills to cover the net and lack the experience to anticipate passing shots and lobs.

In this article we explored some “closed” drills and point variations to introduce the serve and volley. The aim is to introduce the basic skills and concepts required for successful serve and volley for intermediate players. By acquiring the necessary skills early in their development, players can then use the serve and volley tactic when they graduate to a higher level of tennis.

In the next article the basic serve and volley tactical patterns are analysed as they apply in match play.