Coaching Corner

5. Movement and Table Position.

Have you noticed when watching top players when in control of the table, they always seem to be in position waiting for the ball to reach them? I would suggest that movement is probably the biggest problem to affect most if not all players at local league level, particularly as we get tired. The most common problem is that players find themselves chasing the ball because they wait to see where it is going before moving.

It is important to recognise the difference between the ‘recovery’ position and the ‘playing’ position. Too often players only consider the playing position and find themselves chasing the ball, going from one playing position to the next. **The Recovery position is that position that will give you the best chance with minimum movement of getting to any possible playing position** which will be determined by your opponents return. The Playing position is obviously that position that you should move to in order to play your opponents return most effectively.

Consider the diagram opposite. If the ball is being played from point A the possible path of the ball will be within the **blue** lines. If played from point B it would be within the **red** lines. If you dissect the base of each created triangle you should move so that your bat is in the centre of the respective base. There doesn’t appear to be a great deal of difference but it could mean the difference of an extra step to reach your planned playing position. This increases the further away from the table you are and is especially relevant for those players that play forehands from the backhand court. For a ball played from anywhere between points A and B the triangle would be drawn accordingly.

Apart from when your opponent is serving you are in control of the recovery position, since it was you that played the ball to the respective point on the table from which your opponent is now playing the ball. **Therefore as soon as you have played your shot you should move to the appropriate recovery position** and not wait to see where the ball is returned to. You can then move to the playing position which is determined by your opponent. Failure to do this will cause you to chase from playing position to playing position giving you less time to organise your return ball.

**A**

**B**

When your opponent is serving you can position yourself in the same way to give yourself the best chance of moving to the required playing position. This all sounds so simple, and, particularly when receiving serve, we automatically do it, but often fail to do it during the rallies. A simple rhyme I tell youngsters is ‘**If you play crosscourt you can play and stay, if you play down the line you should move away’.**

Unless you are Playing a robot, no two returns will be in exactly the same position, so practice always moving after every stroke. – **Play and Move, Play and Move,** even if it is only a small adjustment.

All this is particularly relevant when playing doubles, since it is your partner, not you, that needs to be in the required recovery position. Playing cross court, unless you can make a winner will put your partner under pressure to move into your position, requiring you to also move. However if you play down your side of the table your partner will already be in the recovery position, minimising movement for both of you and giving your partner more time to play their shot. If you both play down the outside lines until you can create an opening you will need to move far less. That is partly why a left and right hand combination pair is considered a best option with both maximising their chance of playing strong forehands.

As regards the best way of moving, we used to use a ’side together side’ movement but with the game now being so fast it is best to use a two footed ’lateral jump’ and except in extreme cases when under pressure and out of position, do not cross your legs.

Remember – **Play and Move, Play and Move.**

Next time – Matchplay and minimising your unforced errors.

*For help or further information please contact Mike Prior at Ryde TT Centre.*