



# Strategy and tactics in preparation for a doubles Grand Slam.

Wayne Black.

International Tennis Federation.

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses some important strategic and planning elements in the preparation stages of a doubles Grand Slam event. Surface specific strategy is broadly discussed in terms of the changing role and importance of the serve and volley. Finally, examples of tactical doubles patterns are offered that were used successfully against world class pairings such as the Bryan Brothers.

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**Corresponding author:** Wayne Black, International Tennis Federation

Email:

[wayneblack@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:wayneblack@hotmail.co.uk)

## PREPARATION

When leading up to a Grand Slam, by far the most important preparation is not what is done during the event, but what is done the weeks and months prior to the event. By far the most important aspect of preparation is to become 'match tight'. It is paramount in the weeks leading to a slam to get enough matches in, so that a player is very sharp. Leading up to the tournament players should play enough events, but also factor in enough rest time - although not too many days off (see Miley, 1998). To reach the latter stages of a Slam, or compete with partnerships such as the Bryans, a doubles pair needs to be super sharp, well rested, and have effective strategy and tactics planned.

## STRATEGY

### Disrupt the opponent's rhythm

Playing big favourites can be intimidating. It is important to show them as a player that you are not scared or intimidated by the challenge- that you are going to take the match to them, and not let them dictate the points. Really try to break their service in the first game. Strong favourites like to come in to the match very confident. Coming out with a quick break of serve can put the opponents on the back heel. When playing a top ten partnership, it is imperative to work on the weaker player, and study their partnership well. For example, plan to hit up the line if one player likes to poach, and just generally try to get into their heads early on in the match.



### Risk taking and variation

Whoever takes the most risks, especially near the end can often gain the upper hand. However, playing low percentage and erratic tennis is not what is meant by this. Instead, partnerships need to keep poaching and trying different things on key points. It is important not to stay only with steady habits. Keep the opponents guessing and do not just hit to weakness every time on a big point.

### PLAYER POSITIONING- WHICH SIDE SHOULD YOU TAKE?

There are no hard rules to which side you should take. A good example of this is the Bryan brothers- during their career they

have switched sides when they were initially the other way, so there are no rules.

Generally speaking, returning is an important factor when making this decision- right handers on the deuce side can cut off wide serves better and the same can be said for left handers on the advantage side. This is a good reason to position left-handers on the left side and right-handers on the right. However, there are other important factors in this decision which include:

- One player's preference to a particular side
- Who has more experience on one particular side
- Who is better returning from a certain side
- Try to avoid both back hand volleys in the middle court.

### SURFACE SPECIFIC STRATEGY

#### Grass

Grass court doubles can definitely be considered more 'old fashioned' and holds more characteristics of the previous era- particularly in terms of the dominance of serve and volley. The first two players at the net on grass are most likely to win. It is so essential for your first serve to be in because when it does go in, it really goes. Therefore a good strategy is to slow the serve down a little, go more for the corners, and give yourself that little bit more time to get into net. The second serve, which is usually a kick, can sit up on grass and therefore be punished.

#### Clay

On clay, going for more on the first serve to hurt the returner is much more lucrative. Why? Because if it is missed, the second serve is much more of an asset on clay as it grips the surface better. This means that the second serve can actually become more of a weapon on clay, whereas on grass it can be a liability. Furthermore, a kick serve has the added benefits of giving you more time to get into net if you wish or just to stay back (which is more acceptable on clay than grass). It is therefore advised to adopt a very aggressive first serve strategy on clay, more so than on grass.

On grass, a deep volley is very effective and doesn't allow the opponent to do virtually anything with the ball, whereas on clay, deep volleys can sit up and give the baseline player the opportunity to wind up and punish the ball. The regular use of short volleys on clay are therefore a very effective strategic variation. Move the opponent up and back instead of trying to keep them camped on the baseline. It is difficult to do and can be risky because a badly hit short volley really sits up and invites the opponent to drill you, but it is a strategy that will bring success if executed well.

#### Hard court

With the wide variation in hard court surface speed, it is difficult to outline specific strategy that can be applied. As a general rule, if the court speed is fast, the strategy should be more similar to grass court style doubles. If the court speed is slower, the strategy should resemble that of clay.



### SERVING TEAM TACTICAL PLAYS

The following are examples of two successful tactics and patterns used when playing against the Bryan brothers.

#### Pattern 1- Deuce side, first serve

Adopt the 'i formation'. Proceed with a serve into the body/forehand of the left-handed player. In this example the player is Bob Bryan, who is returning. If the serve is good enough, it restricts the returner so that they can only hit up the line (moving over to hit an inside out forehand that is swinging into your body is very difficult!). This allows the net player (in i formation) to move to the left and put away the volley with a high level of confidence and conviction.

#### Pattern 2- Advantage side, second serve

Adopt the standard 'one-up one back formation'. Proceed with a big kick out wide. The serve should be 'slowish' but with decent kick. The net player should put in a big fake while serve passes by the ear, and then go back and cover the line. The slow wide serve, in combination with the fake should hopefully induce the returner to hit the ball down the line. The net player will be there for the volley and can place it safely in the gap created by the wide serve. The server should follow in as normal.

### CONCLUSION

Strategic principles of doubles are arguably quite similar across all levels of play, and across all surfaces - serve and volley for example is appropriate at all levels, all surfaces and against any opponent. However, in order to elicit success on a continual

basis and at the highest level in the modern game (Crespo & Reid, 2002), these common strategic principles must be tailored to suit the surface, suit one's own game, and not suit the opponents' game. When these tactical principles are altered and adapted well, doubles can be a fascinating tactical battle. To conclude, this article has attempted to outline some of these ways in which tactics can be tailored to ensure success. It has also outlined some successful patterns, and given general advice for players aspiring to compete at the Grand Slam level.

## REFERENCES

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