

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

The moment the ball contacts the strings makes or breaks every shot in tennis. Getting that impact right is called 'timing' and is defined as: 'A centered impact, in an ideal relationship to your body, for the shot you intend to hit.' All other techniques in tennis revolve around timing. Top players sacrifice their stroke for their timing, not sacrifice their timing for the 'form' of their stroke. The core 'tactical mission' in tennis is to break your opponent's timing and prevent them from breaking yours.

Developing a relationship: You and your Impact Point

The impact of the ball is the most important moment in all of tennis. Setting up a good relationship between you and the ball effects balance, power, coordination, control, and a host of other critical elements.

The typical way volleys are used is to direct the ball to an open court since more angles are available when closer to the net. Since players are closer to the net, they can also take time away from an opponent and cut off their space.

VOLLEY IMPACT POINT

The 'ideal' impact point on a volley is created by imagining a 3 dimensional box floating in space. This 'Ball Control Box' is defined on 3 'planes':

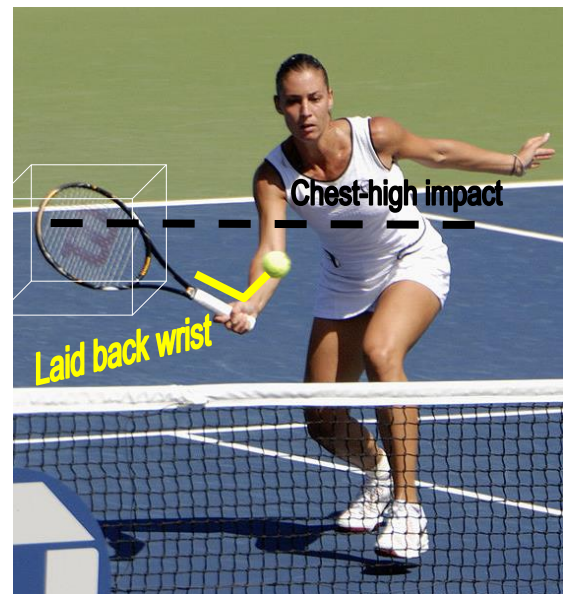
- How far out front the Impact Point is
- How far from your body the Impact point is
- How high compared to your body the Impact Point is

For example, on a typical volley, the 'Box' would be a comfortable distance from your body, slightly between your body and the net, and at chest height (See photo). To set up an ideal relationship between you and the ball, maneuver your 'Box' so the oncoming ball crosses through it. If your racquet also meets the ball in the box, that is good volley timing.

The timing must be adapted to the specific volley situation. For example:

- If more power is required (or to block a very hard shot), the ball should be impacted slightly more 'out front' (too far out front is as ineffective as a late impact), a little further from the body and chest height or above (this could be for a 'drive volley' or a 'punch volley'.)
- If a precision volley is required, or to absorb power, the ball needs to be impacted closer to the body (like you are 'catching' the ball), and between chest and waist height.

There are also plenty of emergency situations when at the net. Adaptation of timing is essential for successful net play.



Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia commons

Court Home-work

Practice Activity: 'Adapt your Timing': To feel the differences when adapting volleys, start with each practice partner at $\frac{3}{4}$ court. Send cooperative volleys to each other. Every 6 successful shots, the players take two steps forward. Keep moving forward until both partners are two steps away from the net. Once at net, work back again. Experience the adaptations required as the distance between the players changes. **Hint:** The amount of movement prior to the impact is one of the key elements that needs to adapt.