

Ball Control Basics

"Making the little round fuzzy ball do what you want is what tennis is all about". Controlling the ball is how players create and solve tactical problems on court. To master tennis, players must learn to receive and send variations of the 5 Ball Control characteristics (Height, Direction, Distance, Speed, and Spin)

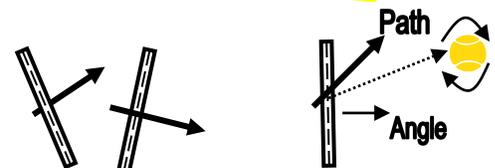
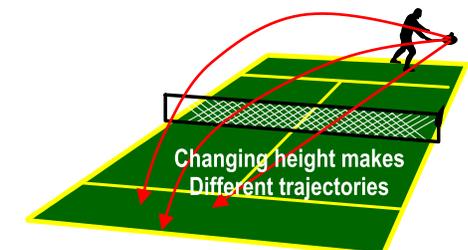
HEIGHT CONTROL ON GROUNDSTROKES

Sending different Heights

Height is controlled by what I call, the PAS Principles. At ball contact (impact point), the **Path** of the racquet, the **Angle** of the racket face and the **Speed** of the racquet create a 'recipe' that determines height.

To make height practical, imagine three 'trajectories' (path of ball through the air). There are *Arcs* (high, medium, and low), *Level* (e.g. attacking drives), and *downward* trajectories (e.g. overheads and some volleys).

For flat shots, simultaneously opening the racquet face with a low-to-high racquet path will send the ball higher. When the racquet angle is different from the path, spin results. On spin shots, the racquet angle tells the ball to go one height, the path tells it another. The height will be in-between those two influences. However, the racquet speed makes the path influence the ball more (e.g. even with an 'open' racquet, leveling out the path with speed will level out the height).



On flat shots, the Racquet face and path are the same for controlling height

On spin shots, the Racquet face tells the ball one height, the path tells it another and it goes in between those two influences.

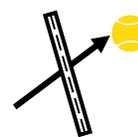
Receiving different Heights

The goal is to quickly move to impact the ball at 'optimal' height (between thighs and shoulders). Impacting above or below, will take away shot quality. For high balls, move back until it drops to a comfortable level, or forward to 'intercept' the ball. For low balls, move forward.

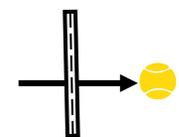
Kinesthetic Key (Key feeling when doing it)

The racquet path is easier to feel than the angle. Keep the angle stable with a firm grip. Feel the racquet path going low to high to add height. Level off the path to send the ball on a horizontal path. Only change the angle when extreme height is required (like on a lob).

Low to High Path



Level Path



Court Home-work

Practice Activity: 'Sending & receiving different Heights': Tactically, controlling height controls time. Play a groundstroke 'matching' drill where one player sends the ball a certain height over the net. The second player attempts to match the height. To measure height, look at how many 'racquet lengths' the ball crosses over the net. To measure time, start counting when the ball is contacted (e.g. one thousand, two thousand, etc.). Stop counting when the ball hits the court on the opponent's side. Lower 'attacking balls' will typically be one racquet height over the net and take one second to land. Rally balls will be 2-3 racquets over the net and take 2.5-3 seconds to land. High, defensive shots will take 4-5 seconds.

Next, play a competitive game where the feeder starts the point by sending any height. Play out the point. First to 7 wins.