

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)

SPEED CONTROL

There are two *secrets* to controlling ball speed: **Racquet speed** and **body momentum**. There are three main categories of speed control:

Add Speed (When receiving weaker/slower balls): By accelerating the racquet through the impact, power is added to the shot. You can also add power through body momentum. Prepare by using your body (e.g. coiling your shoulders and trunk) for a greater range of motion (see photo 1) . You need to create more space to accelerate the racquet. This challenges an opponent's timing or allows you to firmly hit the ball through an open court so fast, the opponent will have a hard time getting it.

Maintain Speed:

When receiving a neutral ball (like a rally shot): By keeping the racquet speed constant through the impact, you can use the power of an opponent's shot without having to generate your own. Over-risking may produce inconsistency.

When receiving a faster ball (like a strong serve): You can also 'counter' when receiving a faster shot by simplifying your timing with a preparation that is closer to the impact (see photo 2). This allows you to keep your racquet accelerating and 'turn the tables' on your opponent.

Take Off Speed: By decelerating the racquet through the impact and 'absorbing' the speed, you can slow down the opponent's shot to create a more accurate placement and challenge the opponent's movement (like on a drop shot).

TACTICAL CONNECTIONS: Increasing speed takes time away from an opponent and allows hitting faster through an open court. Decreasing speed gains you time for defence or allows more accurate shots to make opponent's move more.



Top players prepare with a greater range of motion to add racquet speed (power) to a shot (this does make the timing more of a challenge)



Preparing the racquet closer to the ball simplifies the timing when receiving harder shots (like a strong serve)



Kinesthetic Key (Key feeling when doing it)

The biggest 'speed trap' in tennis is to think that it takes *strength* to add power to a shot. Trying to hit 'stronger' increases muscle tension, which slows down racquet speed. A feeling of loose, explosive, momentum is the goal. Feel the power transfer through your body from the ground up. Speed just from arm action makes a 'slap' and leads to inconsistency.

Court Home work

Practice Activity: 'Sending & receiving different Speeds': Players can play singles or two against two (doubles). All players start on their respective baselines. The 'Defender' sends a weaker rally ball to the 'Attacker'. The ball should land about the serviceline and bounce up to the Attacker's shoulder height. The Attacker then practices increasing racquet speed and sending a faster ball. They can place the ball anywhere. The Defender practices maintaining racquet speed (or taking pace off the ball) and plays out the point. Play first to 5 points and switch roles.