



## SITUAION TRAINING: PASSING SITUATIONS

Situation Training (ST) is a practical application of the international coaching trend called the Game-based approach. It allows players to learn the tactics and techniques required for successful play in real-life situations.

ST is about learning tennis *situationally*, logically integrating tactics and technique. It helps coaches evolve from being 'stroke coaches' to 'game coaches.' In contrast to 'stroke-coaching', ST is about helping players learn to *expand the library of situations they can handle during play*.

In defining situations, ST uses two elements:

- **'The 5 Point Situations'**: These are general situations occurring during a point and include Serve, Return, Both-Back, Approaching & at Net and Passing.
- **'The Shot Cycle'**: The elements that occur during a single shot situation ('Shot' for short)

(See acecoach.com article: 'Situation Training–Core Elements' for an introduction to these concepts) <https://acecoach.com/situation-training-basic-elements/>

In this article, we will explore **Passing** situations. 'Passing' is when a player responds to an opponent approaching or at the net.

## PASSING - TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The opponent typically has the advantage in situations that call for passing shots since they are closer to the net, putting the passer under pressure.

All the shot options are geared to challenge a net player's timing by controlling **space & time**, making it difficult for them to put the ball away.

- The main tactical goal of passing is to control **space** since the net player has cut off the space. Aiming away from them (to the sides or over their head) or putting the ball low at their feet to make them hit upward.

- The second goal is to control **time**. Making the ball travel faster challenges their timing, whether it is at them or flies by them quicker through the open court.

Passing shots include two tactical intentions that flow from the **Defence** Phase of Play:

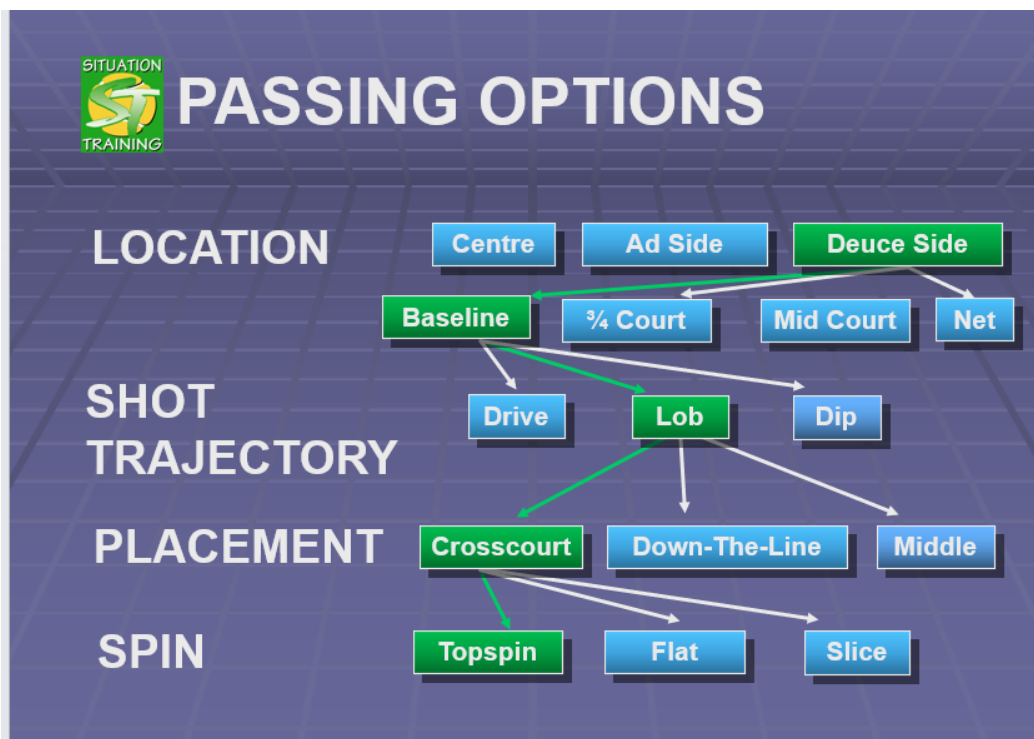
- **'Stay-in'** is the aspect of defence that occurs when the player is under extreme pressure. The player may not be able to control the quality of the shot. They are just trying to survive the point and make their opponent hit one more shot.
- **'Counter'** is the aspect of defence that occurs when the player has enough control of their shot quality to 'turn the tables' and convert the opponent's advantage to their advantage. For example, the player sends a shot at the net opponent's feet, and they pop up an easy opportunity.

### 2-Shot Pass

To alleviate some of the pressure and minimize the advantages of the net opponent, the most effective passing tactic is to perform a '2-shot pass'. This is a 1-2 combination like in boxing, where the first punch is to set up the punch that actually does the damage.

## PASSING - TACTICAL OPTIONS

The passing options 'tree' below outlines the main response options (not every possibility). For example, following the Green elements down the tree, we see from the deuce side baseline the player hits a lob crosscourt with topspin.



Here are all the elements that define a specific shot on the tree:

**Location:** Where the shot originates from on the court. This includes:

- **Zone:** Baseline,  $\frac{3}{4}$  Court, Midcourt, Net
- **Lane:** Ad Lane, Middle Lane, Deuce Lane

**Shot Trajectory:** This describes the path of the shot through the air:

- **'Drive':** A level shot with more power. Typically used to challenge an opponent's timing or send it through the open court.
- **'Lob':** A high shot designed to go over the head of the opponent.
- **'Dip':** A short arc designed to go to the opponent's feet or land short in the court at a sharp angle, making the opponent stretch.

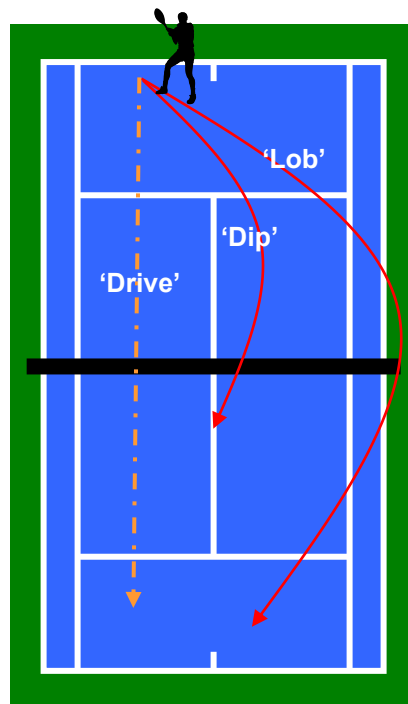
**Placement:** Where the ball is placed creates an effect on the opponent.

**Spin:** The rotation of the ball chosen to execute the intended tactic best. The spin can enhance the control of trajectory.

## PASSING - TACTICAL PACKAGES

We can combine options to create useful Passing **'Tactical Packages'** using the three 'Shot Trajectories' from the options tree in 2-shot passing combinations.

**Note:** Even though these are in 2-shot combinations, a player can continue with any other shots if necessary (three or four-shot combination). A player should keep hitting shots until a passing shot is available with a high chance of success and the least risk.



## 1. DIP COMBINATIONS

These are common shot combinations that are initiated from a 'Dip' shot:

- **Dip/Lob:** The dip needs to be at the feet of the opponent or a short angle. The goal is to pull them further into the net. This will leave ample space behind them (the court is much longer than wide). Even if the opponent reaches the lob, as long as they cannot put the ball away, the running up and back can be tiring.
- **Dip/Drive:** The goal of the dip in this combination is to be at the feet of the opponent, so they have to lift the ball upwards to get it over the net. This will encourage the ball to 'sit-up' so the drive can be hit higher than waist level, allowing for a more powerful level shot.
- **Double Dip:** In this case, the dip is best hit at an angle, taking the opponent to the side. This is followed by a dip to the opposite side. Because of the short angles, both shots can take the opponent outside the court.

## 2. DRIVE COMBINATIONS

These are combinations that are initiated from a 'Drive' shot.

- **Drive/Lob:** In this combination, the drive is hit away from the opponent, making them stretch. Because they had to handle a challenging shot, it hopefully will throw them off balance. Following up with the lob will cause them to scramble back.
- **Drive/Dip:** For this combination, the drive is also hit away from the opponent. The dip will then be placed into the open court.
- **Drive/Drive:** For this combination, the drive is also hit away from the opponent. If they respond with a weak shot, another drive can be hit through the open court.

## 3. LOB COMBINATIONS

These are combinations initiated from a 'Lob' shot.

- **Lob/Drive:** In this combination, the lob should be placed to a side (preferably the BH). This may elicit a weaker overhead back that can be hit through the open court with a drive. If the opponent cannot hit an overhead and retreats to the baseline to hit a defensive lob back, the lob can be intercepted with a drive volley.
- **Lob/Dip:** The lob in this combination also pushes the opponent back to the baseline. This will open up the space near the net to hit a dip to pull the opponent back to the net. A drop shot is also an effective option.

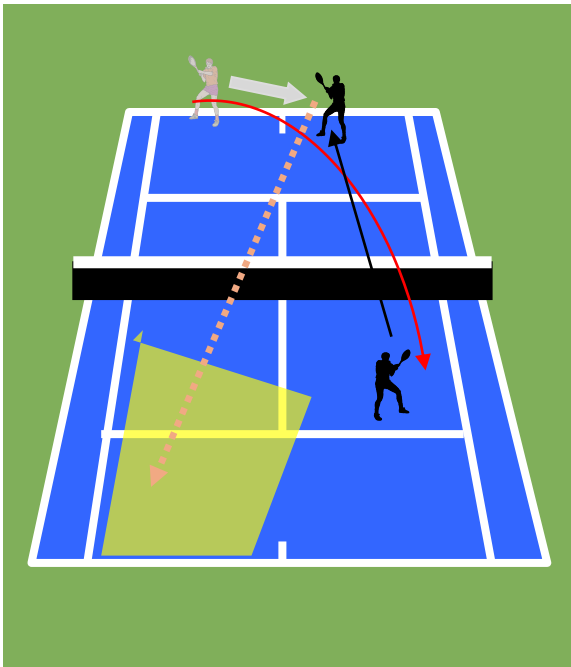
## PRACTICING

The first stage is to get players to learn the different passing shot trajectories ('Dip', 'Lob', 'Drive'). These need to be practiced when receiving approach shots or volleys. For example, when the player is pulled out wide and on the run.

Once players can execute the three trajectories required for passing shots, the 2-shot combinations should be trained. There are two key factors when training passing combinations:

- **Psychological 'Calmness':** The player must accept the pressure and remain calm since the opponent has taken time away by coming to the net. It is easy to panic and hit an 'all-or-nothing' risky pass. Knowing the 2-shot pass tactic can help since there is less pressure on the first shot, which is only to set up the next.
- **Seeing the Space:** The first shot in the combination will place the opponent in a specific location. The player must quickly determine where the space is to aim the next shot. For example, if the 'Dip' pulled the opponent closer to the net, a lob would be an effective option. If, however, the 'Dip' pulled the opponent to the side, a 'Drive' or another 'Dip' to the open court would be effective.

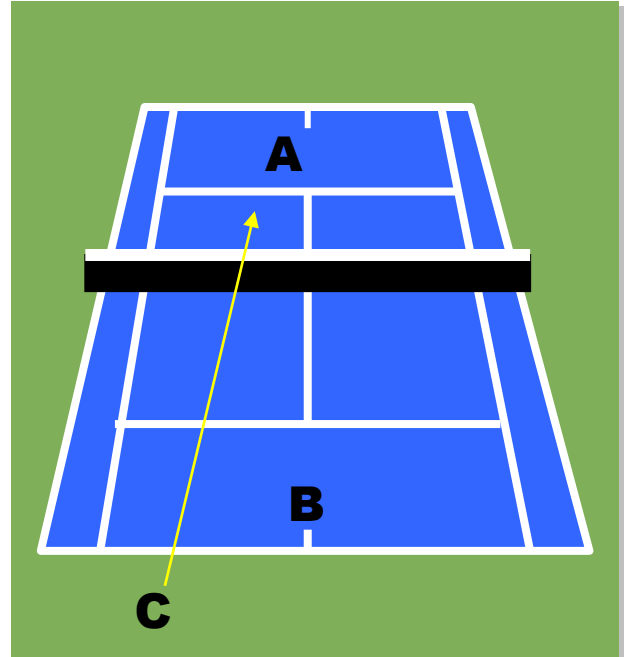
If an opponent is anticipating the opening, the player can 'wrong-foot' them by hitting behind them as they race to the opening. However, the rule is to ***'Always hit to the opening until the opponent has successfully anticipated your next shot three times.'*** All too often, players attempt to hit behind the opponent, and since the opponent never moves to the open court, the player ends up hitting right back to them.



**See space example:** An angled 'Dip' to the side (red line) opens up space on the other side (shaded area) for a 'Drive' through the open court (Orange dotted line).

### Cooperative Pattern Play:

One very effective way to practice patterns is to do the specific pattern under full control with the players cooperating. For example, the coach (or partner) feeds a shorter ball to player 'A' (the 'Approacher'). Player 'A' must hit a designated area (e.g. Down-the-line drive approach to the BH). Player 'B' (the 'Passer') also must hit a designated pass (e.g. a 'Dip' at their feet). Player 'A' then responds with a specific shot (e.g. a shot down the middle just past the service line), and player 'B' hits a specific 2<sup>nd</sup> shot pass (e.g. a lob). The players get a 'Sequence point' for completing the sequence without missing. This works well with pairs competing against each other for sequence points.



**Variation:** Play the approach and 1<sup>st</sup> passing shot cooperatively. Then, play out the point. Player 'B' must decide which 2<sup>nd</sup> shot pass option is best based on player 'A's' response to the 1<sup>st</sup> shot. Play 3 points using the three passing shot options as the 1<sup>st</sup> shot ('Dip', 'Lob', 'Drive'), then switch roles. 1<sup>st</sup> player with 11 wins the game.

### CONCLUSION

Dealing with opponents approaching or at the net means executing passing shots under pressure. The most effective tactic is to pass in 2-shot combinations. This puts less pressure on the pass since the 1<sup>st</sup> shot sets up a less risky option with a better chance of success. Practicing includes mastering the three basic passing shot options ('Drive', 'Lob', 'Dip') and using them in combinations.