



SITUATION TRAINING: POINT SITUATIONS SUMMARY

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**. It logically integrates 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 the general situations that occur during a point and include:
 - Serve
 - Return
 - Both-Back
 - Approaching & at Net
 - 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/>

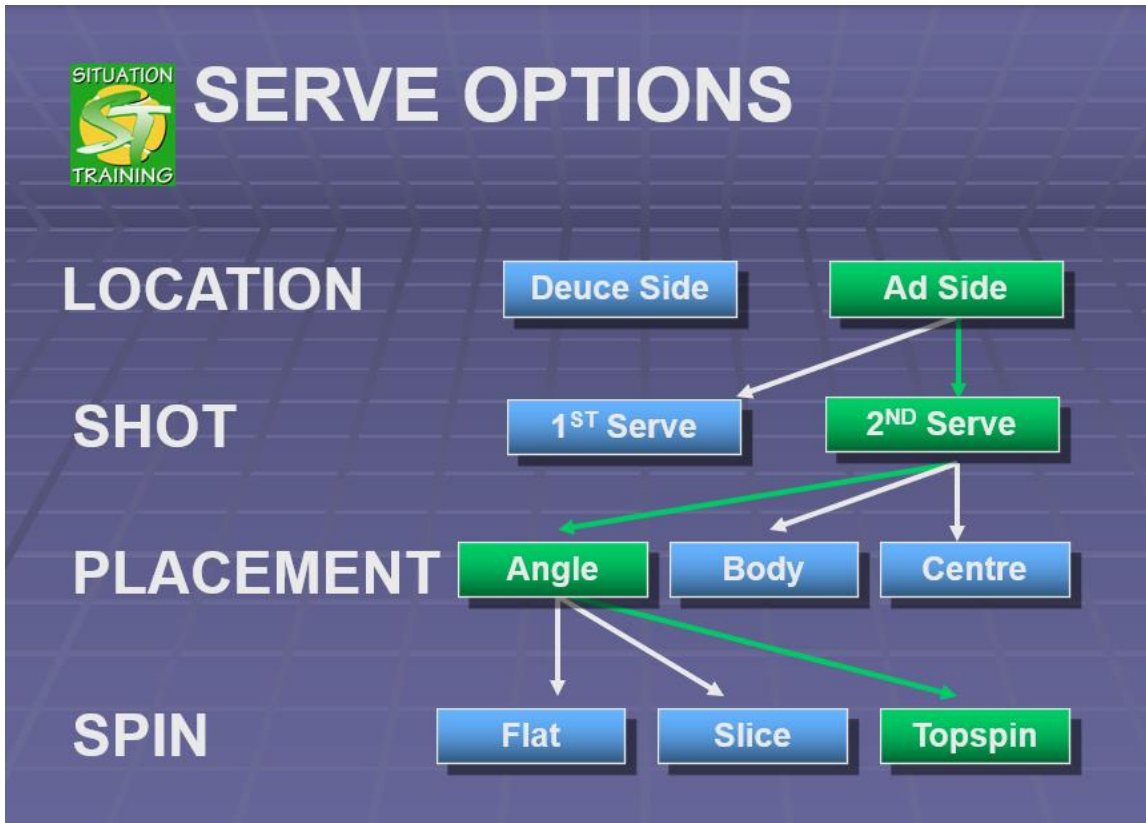
“In contrast to ‘stroke-coaching’, ST is about helping players learn to expand the library of situations they can handle during play.”

This article is a summary of all the previous Point Situation articles. In each situation, we can group shots to form more extensive 'Tactical Packages' that can inform our training and help planning.

SERVING POINT SITUATION

There are actually 36 different serves that players eventually need to develop.

Specific serve situations can be traced by following a sequence of options on the 'options tree' below. The situation identified here (in Green) is an Ad Side/ 2nd Serve/ Angled/ with topspin.



*“In my opinion, it is not about developing ‘the serve’ but, developing **serv**ing. The true goal of the serve is **tactical**.”*

Wayne Elderton – Coaching Educator

Serves and returns start every point in tennis. Statistics demonstrate that over 75% of all points end within the first four shots (in our programs, we call this the ‘Golden 4’). Therefore, serving development must also include a recovery and a plan for the next shot.

The serve then becomes part of a combination (like a ‘combination’ of punches in boxing). These combinations are commonly called ‘patterns’. All of the 5 Point Situations are useful for grouping patterns.

SERVE TACTICAL PACKAGES

Serve development must progress from isolated practice to practicing serve patterns where the player must perform the serve and the follow-up shot. The Tactical Packages are wrapped around the patterns of play:

1. SERVE & COME-IN

- **Serve & volley** (initiating the point with serves that will set up a 1st volley)
- **Serve & approach on the first shot** (initiating the point with serves that will produce a shorter return)

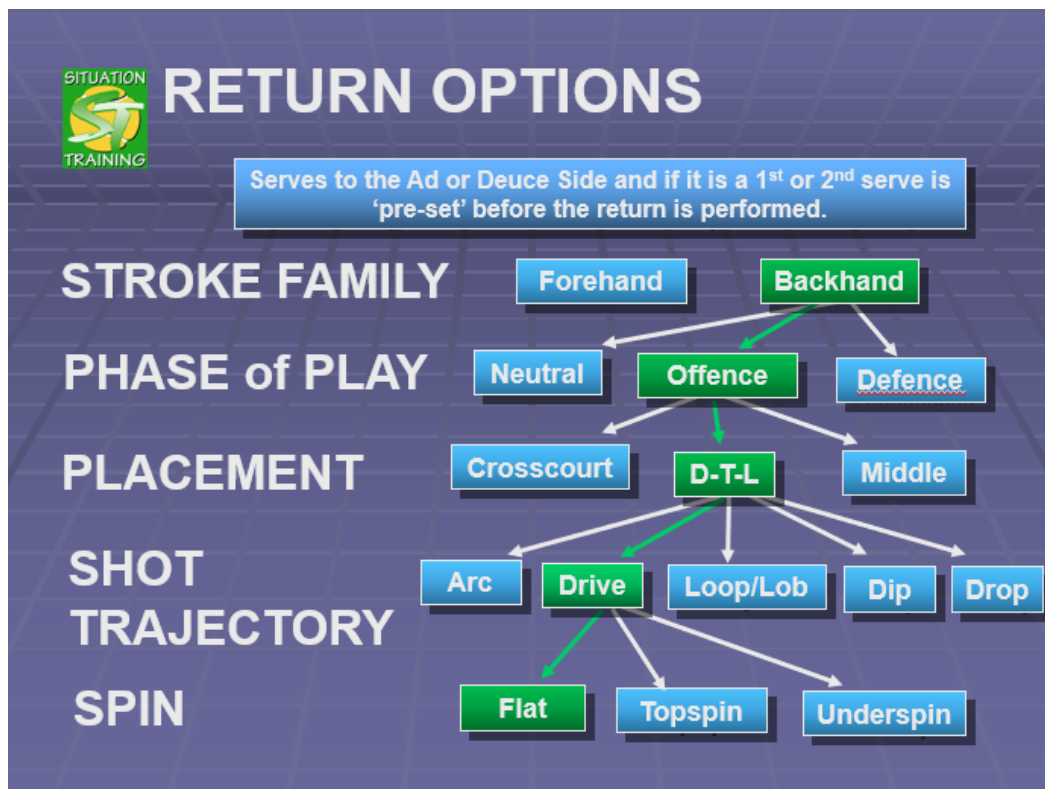
2. SERVE & STAY BACK

- **Serve & control the centre** (initiating the point with a body or centre serve that produces more returns back up the middle)
- **Serve & control the crosscourt** (initiating the point with wide or centre serves that produce more crosscourt returns)
- **Serve & re-direct** (initiating the point with wide serves that produce more crosscourt returns)

[Click here for the full Serve Point Situation article.](#)

RETURNING POINT SITUATION

There are multiple options available on the return. For example, the shot traced down the options tree here is (in Green) a backhand/ on offence/ DTL/ with a flat Drive.



The return is challenging since one can have a clear idea of what they want to do tactically; however, the strength of the serve can flip the choice to an emergency.

In many programs, the return is woefully under-trained. The return is one of the most common situations encountered in a situation training system since it is part of the Golden 4. Barring an ace or double fault, it happens every point.

RETURN TACTICAL PACKAGES

We can combine options to create useful return Tactical Packages that are wrapped around Phase of Play decisions (Neutral, Offence, Defence).

1. OFFENSIVE RETURNS

Offensive returns are more common off 2nd serves but can be performed off any serve considered 'weaker'. Once a weaker serve is identified, the returner must look to move inside the baseline to better their potential angles and take time away from the server. Using the offensive return as a set-up for the next shot is more effective than attempting an overly aggressive winner (Return +1). The shots in the package include:"

- **Crosscourt 'Dip'**
- **Run-around FH 'Drive'**
- **Down-the-Middle 'Drive'**
- **Down-the-Line 'Drive'**

2. DEFENSIVE/NEUTRAL RETURNS

Stronger serves challenge timing, so selecting the appropriate Phase of Play is critical. Trying to do too much (over-risking) will lead to too many 'free' points. However, not doing enough sets the server up to dominate on their next shot. Shots include:

- **Defensive 'Arc' Down-the-Middle**
- **'Neutralizing' Slice Crosscourt**
- **'Counter' Down-the-Middle**

“The 2nd serve return is the critical hinge matches swing on as 2nd serves provide the most opportunity to take points. For most recreational players, match success is more a matter of ‘holding return’ than holding serve.”

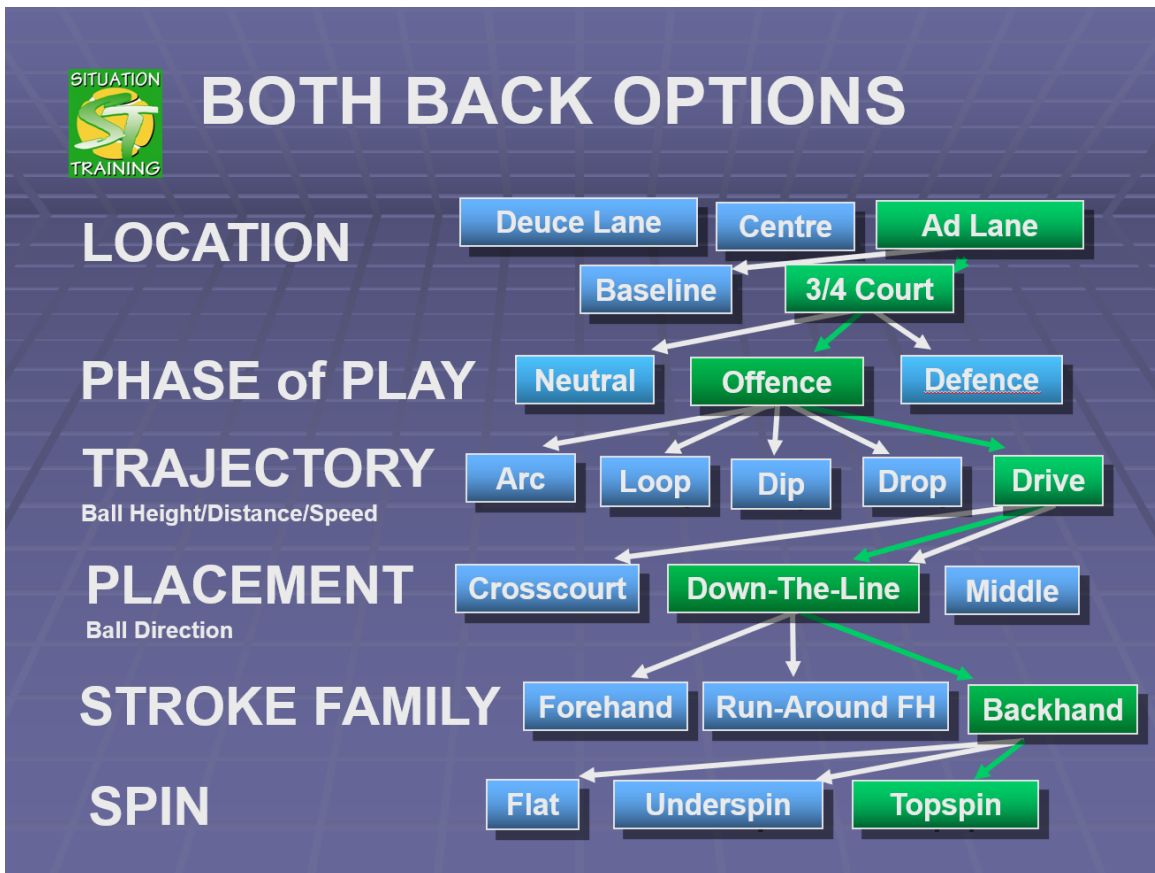
[Click here for the full Return Point Situation article.](#)

BOTH-BACK POINT SITUATION

When Both Back, the predominate Phase of Play is Neutral (neither player has a clear advantage). Players often trade back and forth to try to create an advantage. Once an advantage is gained, they can be more on offence. If the opponent is on offence, they must switch to defence.

Many options are available. For example, we can trace down this options tree a shot from the Ad Lane/ from $\frac{3}{4}$ court/ Offence/ Drive/ D-T-L/ BH/ with topspin.

To indicate the location of the action, we will split the court into three lateral 'Lanes' (Deuce Lane, Centre Lane, Ad Lane).



BOTH BACK TACTICAL PACKAGES

For Both-Back situations, three basic tactical packages need to be trained that are connected to the Lanes:

1. CONTROL THE CENTRE LANE

Being able to dominate exchanges that occur from the middle of the court with these shots:

- Drive to the sides
- 'Run around' FH (Inside-out & Inside-in)
- 'Pinning' shot to the centre

2. CONTROL THE CROSSCOURT

Dominating when in a crosscourt exchange (from the Ad and Deuce Lanes) with these shots:

- **Crosscourt 'Pin'**
- **Strong Crosscourt 'Drive'**
- **Angled Crosscourt**
- **Run-Around FH**
- **Slice BH**
- **'Re-establish 'Arc' (crosscourt or, in the centre)**

3. RE-DIRECT/RECEIVING A RE-DIRECT

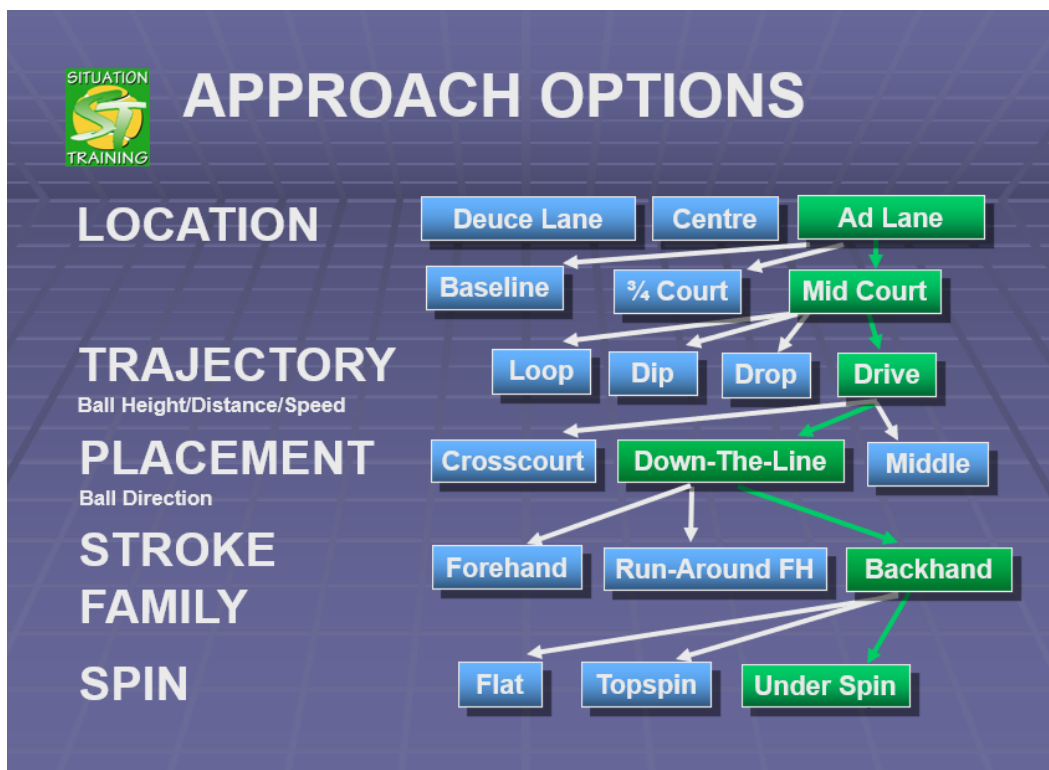
Dominating when turning crosscourts into Down-the-lines and when receiving Down-the-lines with these shots:

- **Re-direct Down-the-Line 'Loop'**
- **Re-direct Down-the-Line 'Drive'**
- **Receive a DTL Re-direct and return D-T-L**
- **Re-Direct a D-T-L back crosscourt**

[Click here for the full Both Back Point Situation article.](#)

APPROACHING & AT NET POINT SITUATION (Approach)

The goal for approaching & at net is to set up the advantage at net. For example, the shot traced down the options tree here is from the Ad Lane/ at Mid-court/ Drive/ down-the-line/ backhand/ underspin approach.



APPROACHING & AT NET TACTICAL PACKAGES

The Tactical Packages are based on whether the player is being 'pulled in' to the net by an opponent or they chose to take the opportunity to come in

1. PLAYER INITIATED APPROACHES

These are options for when a player chooses to approach the net and includes these shots:

- **Crosscourt 'Dip'**
- **Run-around FH' Drive'**
- **'Drop' Shot**
- **D-T-L 'Drive'**
- **Crosscourt 'Intercept' 'Drive' volley**

2. OPPONENT INITIATED APPROACHES

These are options for when an opponent pulls a player in to the net. The player will be under pressure since they didn't plan to approach but are forced into the situation. Hitting and moving back will likely result in a poor response and location, so continuing to the net is the best option. The package includes these shots:

- **Slice 'Drive' deep**
- **Sharp Topspin Crosscourt 'Dip'**
- **Lob** (if the opponent hits a drop shot and comes to net)
- **'Drop' Shot**

[Click here for the full Approach Point Situation article.](#)

APPROACHING & AT NET POINT SITUATION (At Net)

The Net-play options tree below outlines the main possibilities. For example, following the elements (in Green) down the tree, we see a volley/ from the Centre Lane/ at mid-court/ flat/ defensive/ 'block'/ sent down-the-line.



VOLLEY/OVERHEAD OPTIONS

STROKE

LOCATION

PHASE

FEELING

PLACEMENT

Ball Direction

SPIN



NET PLAY TACTICAL PACKAGES

We can combine options to create useful Net-play Tactical Packages. These include some of the most common volley & overhead options players should have in their 'toolbox' (But not every possibility). Each Tactical Package is wrapped around the 3 Phases of Play:

1. OFFENSIVE SHOTS

These are options for when the reception is not as challenging, and the player can gain the advantage with **power** (hitting with more pace to challenge the opponent's timing) or **precision** (hitting with more accuracy to move an opponent or hit away from them).

- Power 'Punch' volley
- Precision 'Touch' Drop-volley (or 1/2 volley)
- Power 'Swing/Drive' volley
- Precision 'Catch & Carry' volley
- Overhead 'Smash'

2. NEUTRAL SHOTS

These are options for when the reception is somewhat challenging, and the goal is to prevent the opponent from having an advantage. For example, if the net player is further back and the ball is received net level or below. The package includes:

- Crosscourt 'Dip'
- Run-around FH 'Drive'
- 'Drop' Shot
- D-T-L 'Drive'
- Crosscourt 'Intercept' 'Drive' volley

3. DEFENSIVE SHOTS

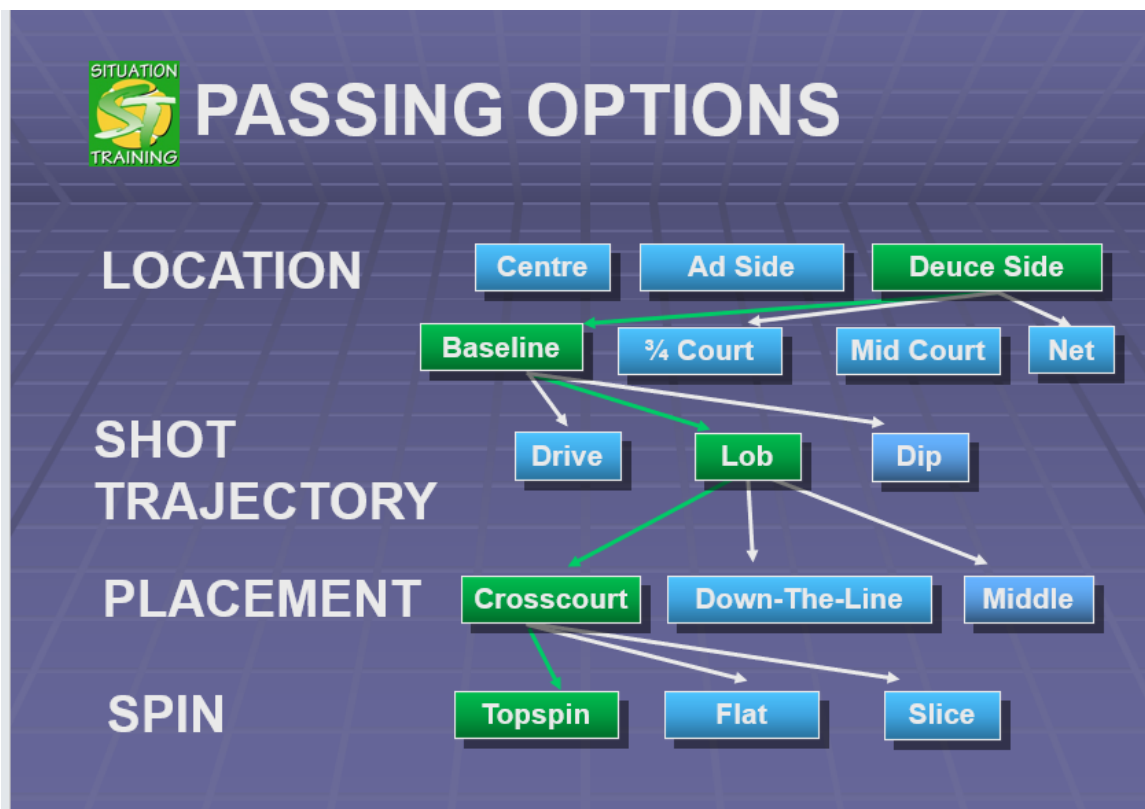
These are options when the reception is very challenging, and the player tries to neutralize the opponent or survive the shot. Defensive shots can sometimes be converted to a 'Counter' which 'turns the tables' on the opponent.

- 'Block' volley
- 'Block/Stab' volley
- 'Catch' Lob volley

[Click here for the full At Net Point Situation article.](#)

PASSING POINT SITUATIONS

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/ lob/ crosscourt/ with topspin.



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:

- **'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.

Note: Even though these are in 2-shot combinations, a player can continue with any other shots (three or four-shot combination) if necessary. 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**
- **Dip/Drive**
- **'Double Dip'** (2 Dip shots in a row)

2. DRIVE COMBINATIONS

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

- **Drive/Lob**
- **Drive/Dip**
- **Drive/Drive** (2 Drive shots in a row)

3. LOB COMBINATIONS

These are combinations initiated from a 'Lob' shot.

- **Lob/Drive**
- **Lob/Dip**

[Click here for the full Passing Point Situation article.](#)

CONCLUSION

The 5 Point Situations are a practical and useful way to categorize tactics. Each Point Situation can be further subdivided into 'Tactical Packages', which are a grouping of shots needed to succeed in the specific Point Situation.

These categories inform tactical planning and allow coaches to identify and systematically train many of the most common situations that occur so players can build a library of situations they can successfully handle.