## Doubles Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are the two basic strategy principles?</strong></td>
<td>1. Keep it away from the opponent net player. 2. Get your net player involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>When should you try to win the point from the baseline?</strong></td>
<td>Rarely – only when there is a clear gap that a high percentage shot can win. The general goal from the baseline is not to win the point, but to try to setup your net player. Note: sometimes it is necessary to be aggressive and unpredictable.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How do you setup your net player?</strong></td>
<td>Hit shots that make the opponent’s baseline player weak (off balance, hitting outside of their comfort zone, running to the side or forward, strong flat, skid slice, drop shot, high bouncing top spin or base line shot, deep lob).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When should you hit at the net player or alley?</strong></td>
<td>When you are confident that there is a high percentage of success. When it is wide open. When the net player is weak and these shots are effective. When the net player is poaching frequently and you feel strong. When the serve comes in right to you and you feel strong. When they are standing in no-man’s land.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When should you NOT hit at the net player or alley?</strong></td>
<td>When it is a low percentage shot. When you are not strong/confident. When you are deep behind the baseline. When you know your partner is not ready/strong.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When should you lob?</strong></td>
<td>When you are on defense and feel weak. When you are strong and can use the lob to make the opponents cross, especially to make the baseliner run to a backhand. When the opposing net player is bad at overheads. When both opponents are at the net or in crosscourt-terminator.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When should you talk to your net player during the point?</strong></td>
<td>Say “cross” anytime you end up on the same side of the court (I-formation) Say “get back” if your shot is heading to the opponent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When should you move off the baseline and approach the net?</td>
<td>When you prefer to be at the net. When you are pulled forward on a weak ball and you need to get out of no-man’s land.</td>
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</table>
| When should you play aggressive at the net (poach)?      | When you sense the opponent is weak (off balance, back foot, stretched out, on the run, too deep, ALL SLICES) When you know the opponent cannot hurt you in the alley. When you need to help your baseline player by becoming active (take pressure off). When you are not involved - you should be in motion and be ready to surprise the opponent with a poach. Be unpredictable. Remember:  
  - Read your baseline opponent.  
  - The more active you are the more errors you will create from your opponents.  
  - Try to attack diagonally towards the ball.  
  - Hit your target: crosscourt behind the feet of the opponent net player. |
| When should you NOT play aggressive at the net?          | When your opponent is strong (balanced, in a set position, hitting a forehand). When you are too far from the net. |
| When should you change strategies?                       | Always change a losing game plan. Never change a winning game plan. Possible changes:  
  - both up  
  - both back  
  - crosscourt-terminator  
  - get stronger net player up every point  
  - slow the game down with lobs  
  - attack more aggressively  
  - lots of poaching  
  - Australian or I-formation  
  - Change who receives from Deuce/Ad at the end of the set.  
  - Change who serves from north side/south side at the end of the set. |
| When should you target one player?                       | When there is a clear difference between abilities – keep your shots to the weaker player. |
“Splitting the Angle” from the net in Tennis

In Each of these diagrams, you (the net player) started on the left.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>They Are Strong</th>
<th>They Are Weak</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced</td>
<td>Off Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight on front foot</td>
<td>Weight on back foot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting on the ball</td>
<td>Running or stretched out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball bounces and they hit waist high</td>
<td>Ball bounces at their feet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most Forehands</td>
<td>They have to hit below knee or above shoulder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Many Backhands</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Diagrams showing the positions of the players in each scenario.
**Planned plays off the serve:**
1. Serve to the backhand and net man poach.
2. Serve to the T or body so net man can take big step to the center.
3. Serve and volley.
4. See the Australian and I formation

**Poaching signals:**
Fist = poach
Open hand = guard
Peace/2 fingers out = fake
The Bryan Brothers: Principles of Winning Doubles

Holding Serve
You need a higher first-serve percentage in doubles than you do in singles: "In singles you can serve 50 per cent and be fine, but in doubles you need to serve high 70s."

Breaking Serve
You have to hit an aggressive return. "In doubles, it's not just about making the return. You have to go for it."

Poaching
The key to a good poach is being close to the net. It's about exploiting the middle of the court:
"In doubles, poaching will always be relevant. Even when you watch all the guys who rip from the baseline, their net play is still pretty accurate, moving towards the middle. The key is getting across the middle and exploiting the middle of the court."

Basic Errors
One basic error is lack of communication. Another error is being passive: "You mustn't be slow and fearful. You shouldn't be on your heels. You need to be on your toes. Your weight should always be going forwards, and you should be hitting the ball in front of you."

How to Treat Your Partner
Always be positive when speaking to your partner on the court.

Training for Doubles
You shouldn't train for doubles in the same way you train for singles. You don't need cardio as much in doubles. In doubles, the points are much shorter. You need a strong core and strong legs.
Break Serves to Win Close Doubles Matches

If you look back at last year’s matches and look at individual set scores, you might be surprised to see how many sets you lost 3-6, 4-6, 5-7 or 6-7.

Add up the number of sets those sets were lost by only one break, and you may be surprised to see how many close matches you really had.

While you may have lost to another team 5-2, you may see that most of the sets your players lost, even in straight-set losses, were lost by only one break.

What would have happened if your players had won one or two more key points per set during receiving games, resulting in just one more game? They would have had a chance to break for the set, and possibly a match win.

If you haven’t analyzed last year’s matches like this, you may really have your eyes opened.

Often, sets come down to a few points won or lost.

One way to increase your chances of winning more sets, individual matches and dual matches is to improve your players’ ability to break serve.

The key to breaking serve is to win second serve points.

When an opponent is serving a first serve, the receiver is on the defensive, both mentally and physically, usually playing farther back in the court and often dug in on his heels.

As soon as the server misses the first serve, the receiver relaxes and the pressure shifts to the server. Now, the receiver is ready to attack a weaker second serve, and the server is aware of this.

Or so it should go.

One of the problems you will find if you watch your players play practice or real matches, is that recreational players rarely take advantage of weak second serves.

Many players keep the same position in the court that they do for the first serve, either waiting for the ball to come to them in the backcourt, or acting surprised by a short serve and running forward to hit a defensive shot.

In fact, many second serves never even go back into play, because the receiver is either out of position, or is so overconfident, he tries to hit a winner off the return.

In order for your players to break serve more often, they will have to take advantage of second serve opportunities.

First, review with your players the five tactical priorities when hitting any shot in tennis.

It’s critical that your players put the ball back in play. As odd as that sounds, until you alert them to the fact that many second serves do not even go back into play, they will continue to pound their balls into the net, long or wide.

Second, it’s important to be able to hit crosscourt. Lobbing off the second serve is effective, but will need to be complemented by crosscourt shots.

Controlling the depth of second-serve returns will be your key to winning.

We’ve reviewed the return for singles players in the drill, The Attacking Return.

Let’s now focus on how to break serve in doubles.

Deep Returns

Usually, recreational players do not serve and volley on their second serves, staying back at the baseline.

This gives the receiving team the opportunity to take the net with a deep return, especially on a short serve. A deep return also forces a defensive shot by the server, who may hit a short ball the receiver can attack, or hit a weak ball the net player can poach.

Be aware that deep balls often force opponents to lob, so your players must be ready for this. This means the receiver should stop just as the server hits the receiver’s ball, so the receiver can react to any shot.

Short Returns

When a server serves and stays back, a short, crosscourt return is the most difficult shot to get. Many high school-level players will be so flat-footed after a serve that they won’t be able to even make it to the ball. Players with semi-Western or Western grips will have difficulty hitting the ball on the deuce side, and players with two-handed backhands will struggle on the ad side.

Even when the server is able to get to the short ball, she will usually have to hit the ball far out in front of her and pop up a weak ball the net player can attack.

Additionally, once your players have demonstrated that they can hit a short, crosscourt return, both the server and her partner will begin to cheat with their positioning to cover this shot, and will completely open up the court for the down-the-line lob from the receiver.

The drill, Return of Serve Practice for Doubles, will discuss more tactical options and provide technical suggestions for returning second serves.

Loabs

Aggressive poachers can be kept honest with lob returns. Additionally, the deuce court player can hit a deep ball to a server’s backhand by lobbing straight ahead (assuming the serve is right-handed). Making the server run crosscourt for a deep backhand can produce errors, short balls and weak sitters for the net player.

Summary

Make sure to analyze, as a team, why points are won or lost on second serves.

Have your players play short sets using only second serves and no lobs, and they will begin to see how the return of serve ultimately sets up the win or loss of the point. Count how many weak returns are never even put back in play!

Remember, the proof is in the numbers.

Look at last year’s dual match scores. Count up the number of sets lost by one break, and you’ll see how your season may have been completely different if your players had more aggressive returns.
**Doubles Plays**

*Play #1: Normal Formation, Net Man Poaches*

**Normal Formation:**
Baseline players trade shots until one hit the ball out OR hit to a net man who will end the point.

**How to play the baseline:**
- Hit high percentage shots – Don’t miss – Don’t hit to their net player. You do NOT have to win the point.
- Hit annoying shots that set up your partner at the net:
  - Hit to the backhand.
  - High Bouncing Balls.
  - Wide Balls
  - Low skid slices
  - When in trouble, lob to the center or the backhand.
- Be careful not to be pulled to the center – cover the angle shot.
- Keep the opponent net player guarding the alley by occasionally hitting at the alley or player. Do this on the first second serve that comes to your forehand.

**General Rules of Net-Play**
Any ball you can hit you should hit. Be active. Do NOT stand there watching the ball go back and forth. Good doubles teams are always in motion. Keep your racket up.

*You are always reading the opponent’s player on the baseline.*
- If they are strong: guard you alley.
- If they are weak: GO GET THE BALL.

If you see the opponent net player going for the ball, you must backup and take away the angle shot.

**Traditional Poach:**
A Poach is a planned cross from the net player. It is an attempt to surprise the opponent’s who are attempting a standard cross-court shot.
- Communicate with your partner about when to poach (signals)
- Go when the ball bounces in front of your opponent. At this point they must focus on the ball instead of you.
- Once you have poached successfully, work in some fakes. This is where your opponent sees you move out to poach and then tries to hit to the alley – BUT, by the time they hit, you have returned to the alley for an easy put-away volley.
- Make your opponent’s account for your position. When you are active, they will try harder to keep it away from you and will hit more balls out.

**Flying V Modification**
One option is to have the poacher moving forward from the service line during the serve and either angle left or right at the bounce.
Hitting the Ball at the Net
You are Strong, Balanced, and Ready:
• You want to be close to the net so you can hit the ball down at an angle.
• Your target is the opponent net player’s shoe or behind them.

Hitting the Ball at the Net
You are NOT Strong, Balanced, and Ready:
• This includes when you are hitting the ball below the top of the net or if you are generally unable to hit the ball down and an angle.
• Keep the ball to the opponent on the baseline.
• Try to keep the ball deep and to the center (takes away their angles of attack) or to the backhand (takes away their offense).
• Your goal is to keep the opponent’s on defense and to NOT commit an error.
Doubles Plays  

**Play #2: Criss-Cross Stay (Lobber stays back)**

Goal: Make them cross to a formation were we have the advantage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Lob directly over the net player. They will be forced to cross.</th>
<th>Step 2: The baseline opponent will think the safe shot is straight up the line.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 3: Net player poaches when the ball bounces and the opponent is forced to watch the ball.</th>
<th>Step 4: Net player volleys at an angle to win the point.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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**Notes:**

- If the net player cannot get to the ball on the poach, then shift to the alley on the backhand side so future poaches are to the forehand.
- This strategy may take patience. It is ok to repeat the process many times to get the desired result.
**Doubles Plays**  
**Play #2: Criss-Cross Go (Lobber Approaches net)**

Goal: Make them cross to a formation where we have the advantage.

| Step 1: Lob directly over the net player.  
They will be forced to cross. | Step 2: The lobber rushes the net (split step in the middle of the opponent’s shot window) while their partner holds the service line. The baseline opponent will think the safe shot is straight up the line. |
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<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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If the opponent hits a shot our net person can reach then it will be hit to the open courts.  
If the opponent hits CC then our service line player can (A) hit an angle shot or (B) straight lob.

| ![Diagram](image3.png) | ![Diagram](image4.png) |

If the opponent lobs to the add court, service line player move back and hits an overhead.  
If the opponent lobs to the deuce court, and players cross and the service line player hits an overhead.

| ![Diagram](image5.png) | ![Diagram](image6.png) |

**Notes:**
- Player on the service line takes all lobs. Hopefully as an overhead.
- This strategy may take patience. It is ok to repeat the process many times to get the desired result.
- This is the crosscourt-terminator strategy.
Crosscourt-Terminator Strategy:

Terminator: The person with the ball in front of them. Split the angle of possible returns of the baseline opponent. When strong, end the point by targeting the opposing net player. When weak, go back to the baseline player.

Crosscourt: The person crosscourt from the ball. Always position yourself in a straight line between you, then center strap, and the opposing baseline player. Hit short angles to set up the terminator. Get ALL lobs, preferably as overheads.

If the ball is in front of the CC player, then the CC player shifts forward and becomes the Terminator while the Terminator shifts back and becomes the CC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positioning</th>
<th>Role of CC</th>
<th>Role of Terminator</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Positioning Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Role of CC Diagram" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Role of Terminator Diagram" /></td>
</tr>
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</table>

The CC player tries to take all lobs as overheads.
Doubles Plays

Play #3: Pull Them To Center, Hit Groundstrokes At Angles

Goal: take away their ability to hit at angles by keeping the baseline opponent in the center while bringing your net player into play and creating groundstroke angles for your baseline player.

Step 1: Start with Criss-Cross

Step 2: Hit a groundstroke or lob that move the baseline opponent to the center of the court.

The opponent must decide how to keep the ball away from your net player.

See the picture to the right→

IF the opponent hits straight, our net player should poach and end the point.

IF the opponent hits straight and our net player cannot get to the ball, then repeat the lob to the center OR drive a ball to the backhand side at an angle (if you are strong on a forehand).

IF the opponent hits cross-court, then repeat the lob to the center OR hit more aggressive by hitting crosscourt behind the opponent net player OR drive a ball to the backhand side up the line.

See the picture to the right→
**Their Strategy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagrams</th>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Diagram 1" /></td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Diagram 2" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Diagram 3" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

They rush both players to the net

We hit Crosscourt Lobs

They are both back, lobbing and playing defense.

We shift our net player back to get more lobs as overheads (smart hits). Role: hit angles!
Judge if they will lob: get back for an overhead
Or if they will pass: get closer to the net

Our baseline player mirrors the CC player using the strap. Role: don't miss, that is what they are counting on.

Our strategy: hit to the deep middle and let our net player poach.

They are in I formation. They will serve up the middle and their net player will poach left or right every time.

We watch the ball, not the player and play to our strengths.
If we have strong groundstrokes, hit aggressive to the middle.
One trick is to move back to see the poach easier.
If necessary, we can lob.

Strategy: Straight lobs.

They are in Australian formation. They are taking away the CC return by putting their net player right there.

We watch the ball, not the player and play to our strengths.
If we have strong groundstrokes, hit aggressive to the middle (weakness of Australian).
If necessary, we can lob.

Strategy: Straight lobs.

They poach a lot and have a very aggressive and active net player.

We watch the ball, not the player and play to our strengths.
If we have strong ground strokes, we can pass.
One trick is to move back to see the poach easier.
If necessary, we can lob.

Strategy: Straight lobs.