

Ball Control Basics

"Making the little round yellow fuzzy ball do what you want is what tennis is all about". Ball Control is the way a player solves problems on the court. For example, controlling the height of the ball in a rally allows shots to clear the net. To master tennis, a player must learn to receive and send variations of the 5 Ball Controls (Height, Direction, Distance, Speed, and Spin)

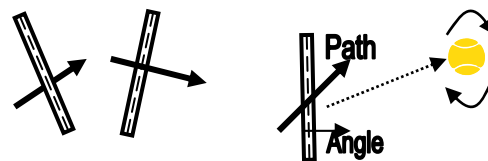
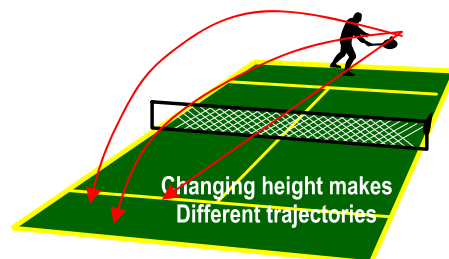
HEIGHT ON GROUNDSTROKES

Sending different Heights

Height is controlled by what I call, the PAS Principles. At ball contact (impact point), the vertical angle of the racquet face, the path of the racquet, and the racquet speed together determine the height of the ball.

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

For flat shots, simultaneously opening the racquet face and making the racquet path go low to high 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 controlling the 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

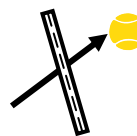
The goal is to quickly move to impact the ball at 'optimal' height (between knees and chest). Impacting above or below, will take away shot quality. For high balls, move back until it drops to a comfortable level, or forward to 'intercept' the ball. For low balls, move forward.



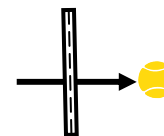
Kinesthetic Key (Key feeling when doing it)

On groundstrokes, 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, leveling off 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

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.