

Backhand Slice (for Quads)

Playing an opponent's backhand is one of the most basic tactics of the game. For Quad players, this tactic becomes especially effective since many have their hand taped in a forehand grip. This means the backhand is in a 'weaker' mechanical position. One important way for a player to handle shots to their backhand is to master the backhand slice. There are many situations a slice can be used and many variations on the slice. For this article we will focus on the crosscourt rally slice.



Top Quad player Sarah Hunter demonstrates that, with the hand taped in a forehand grip, flat or topspin shots become very difficult

The Situation

To help players with their decision-making and problem solving, set shots into a context. If players can recognize a common situation that the shot occurs in, they can use it more successfully and often. Let's imagine a frequently encountered situation that would present a good opportunity to use this shot (situation represents two right-handed players):

"Players are at the centre baseline in a rally. The opponent sends a deep ball at medium height to the backhand of the player. The player slices the ball crosscourt and deep to 'pin' the opponent into the backhand corner and keep them from gaining any advantage."

Quad players need to be able to hit the ball with enough pace and penetration to keep the opponent neutral. They must learn not to 'pop the ball up' or just 'poke' it back.

The Challenge ...

The challenge of using slice is that it is easy to 'pop-up' a weak 'floater' ball. The disadvantaged strength of the backhand (when taped in a forehand grip) makes it difficult to send a strong ball.

The Advantage ...

The advantage of the slice is that, when mastered, a player can control the trajectory of the ball. They can keep it lower and more level or let it 'glide' deeper. The slice also has the advantage of being able to be performed in a variety of impact points. For example, if a player wants to hit a topspin ball, they must create a precise relationship between them and the ball. A little stretched, jammed, late, early, high or low, will kill the shot. Slices on the other hand can still work when the impact is a little out, closer, higher, etc. This is a big advantage for wheelchair player since they often find themselves in 'emergency' situations.

Learning progressions

Here are some suggested steps that have been used successfully to help players master the slice backhand.

Step #1: Spin Science:

The trajectory and spin of any ball is determined by what I like to call the P.A.S. Principles.

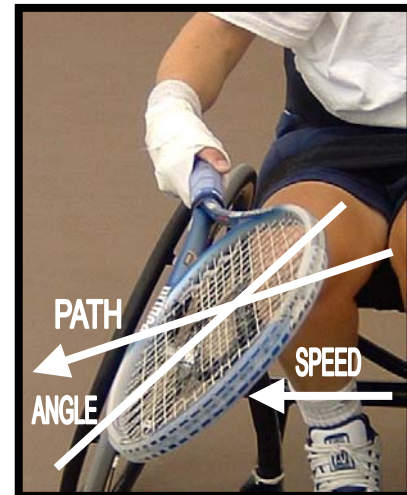
P.A.S. stands for:

P= Path of racquet through the impact
(low to high, high to low, level)

A= Angle of Racquet at the impact
(Open to the sky, closed, straight up and down)

S= Speed of racquet through the impact
(accelerating, maintaining, decelerating)

These principles are critical to understand when creating any shot (especially a slice). Every shot is a specific 'recipe' of P.A.S. principles. For example, a deep rally slice is created when the racquet is slightly open and the path is slightly high to low (nearly level). Another type of slice would result if the racquet angle was more open and the path was more exaggeratedly high to low (chip shot when receiving more power).



Knowing how to manipulate these principles can make the quad slice a solid shot even though the racquet is taped to the hand. Since the angle of the racquet ("A") is taped in an open position, this is a 'constant'. Any shot or trajectory must then be created by changing the path ("P") (key element) and speed ("S"). It is important to note that the speed of the racquet will intensify the influence of the racquet path. For example, if the racquet path is level (with an open angle), a slow speed will allow the ball to 'reflect' off the strings upward (the typical 'pop-up'). Increasing the speed (keeping the angle and path the same) will make the path influence the ball more and the trajectory will 'level-out'.

This is the key to making a solid slice. The path and speed must be adjusted.

Step #2: Motor Pattern:

Since the racquet path is the key element, it is critical that a player becomes kinesthetically aware of the path they create:



High to low racquet path

1. Place a target area for a deep crosscourt slice. The ball must also stay no more than 1.5 meters over the net.
2. Keep the racquet angle and speed constant
3. Use the key racquet path phrases, “High to low” and “level”. After each successful shot, ask the player which path they felt. Help them zero in on the correct feel.
4. Finally, help them to increase their racquet speed and keep the ball in the target area by adjusting the path accordingly.

Tactical Objective

To challenge the opponent with the shot, it needs a medium arced trajectory and good speed. For variety, the player can learn how to send an angled short low bouncing slice that pulls the opponent wide, or even a ‘drop shot’. These are created by manipulating the P.A.S. principles.

Conclusion

A strong slice is a requirement for Quad players so they can handle a variety of balls on their backhand. A strong slice also prevents opponents from exploiting a weaker backhand. Creating it when the hand is taped in a forehand grip is possible if the P.A.S. principles are understood and employed.