



SITUATION TRAINING: 'Build' Baseline Tactics

Situation Training 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.

The two basic building blocks of Situation Training are, **'The Point Situation'** (including: Initiate, Build, Gain Advantage, Finish, and Stay-in) and **'The Shot Situation'** (see acecoach.com article: "Situation Training: Key to Training in a GBA" for an explanation of these concepts).

In this article, we will look at the **"Build"** Point Situation. The goal is to identify what are the most common Shot Situations that allow players to dominate baseline play. Typically, players are first taught strokes. Sometime later (if at all), they are introduced to tactics. The glitch in this process is that *technique* is only a means to execute a *tactic*. Tactics (*what* you are supposed to do) must always come before technique (*how* you are supposed to do it).

Too many players complain about losing to technically inferior opponents. The reason, few are taught to *play* the game. That is why so many players like doubles lessons. Coaches seem to 'get it' when teaching doubles. They prioritize strategy and positioning, decision-making and movement. If they would do the same for singles lessons, they would have even more success. Doing this for singles requires a 'tactical framework'. A system to follow that puts the components together in a logical way.

'BUILD' FROM THE BASELINE

Because of the nature of tennis (the majority of points won through errors), attempting to hit winners from the baseline will result in more lost points than winning points. In a baseline exchange, 60-80% of all points are lost due to unforced errors.

Since this is the case, baseline play is best used to 'build' opportunities to gain advantage. Just like two boxers sparring, a tennis player needs to set things up before they unleash a knock-out punch (hit a winner).

Using Situation Training, a coach can plan practical and relevant practice sessions by identifying what are the most common situations players encounter. For baseline Building, there are 4 basic tactics that need to be trained. Each has a number of specific Shot Situations attached to them.

BASIC BASELINE TACTICS

Group shots into these basic tactical categories: (Referenced to right-handers)

1. Dominating the Centre lane
2. Dominating the FH Diagonal
3. Dominating the BH Diagonal
4. Re-Directing/Receiving a Re-Direct

When training these situations, train, 'both sides of the tactic' by learning how to receive the shots associated with these categories as well as send them. The shots listed under each category are based on the intentions and decisions required when located in specific areas of the court.

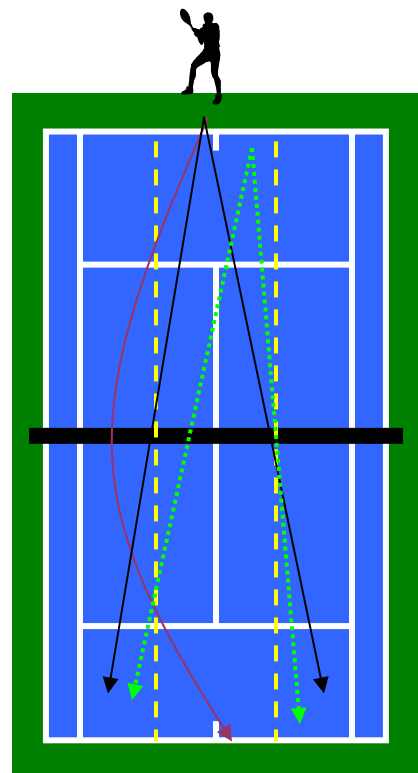
To indicate the location of the action, we will use the "Shot Situation" references which split the court into 3 lateral "Lanes" (Forehand Lane, Centre Lane, Backhand Lane. FH & BH Lanes are also known as "Deuce" and "Ad" Lanes). These are not all the shots possible from each area however, they represent a basic package that all players need to master.

1. DOMINATING THE CENTRE LANE:

Once a player progresses past the starter level, they need to have more strategies than simply keeping the ball in play. Players between 3.0-4.5 level tend to have baseline exchanges that gravitate to the centre. If they can learn to gain advantage *from* the centre, it can open the door to effective play by utilizing the space of the court.

The shots to master from the Centre Lane include :

- **Drive to the Sides:** Players can move the ball into the side lanes from the centre to get opponents on the move or pick on a weak side. Players need to be able to receive a ball in the Centre Lane and use both forehands and backhands to direct it to either side lane.
- **'Run-Around' Forehand:** They must also be able to 'run around' their backhand and use their forehand to hit inside-out (a crosscourt forehand from the backhand side) or, 'inside-in' (a down-the-line forehand from the backhand side). This can be an effective tactic which matches a strong forehand to an opponent's weaker backhand.
- **'Pinning Shot to the Centre':** Hitting to the sides is not the only tactic that is effective. Sending a higher arc deep to the Centre pins an opponent into the middle of the court minimizing the angles they can create. Players must be able to use both FH & BH for this shot.






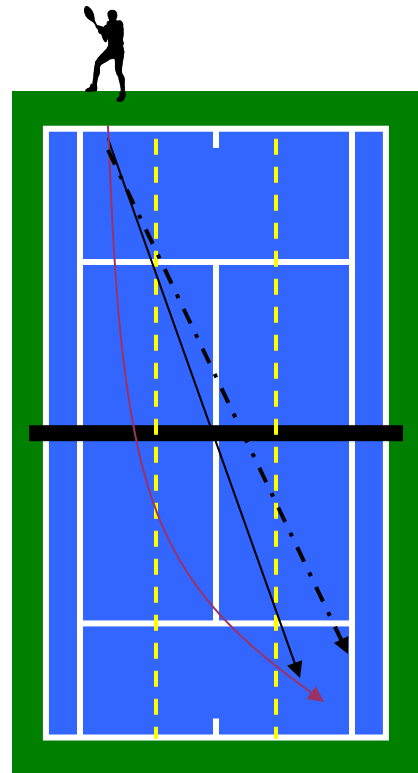
Receiving/sending from
the Centre Lane

2. DOMINATING THE FOREHAND DIAGONAL:

This is one of the most common exchanges in tennis. Gaining advantage in a crosscourt rally will set-up many opportunities to dominate.

The shots to master from the FH (Deuce) Lane include:

- **Crosscourt 'Pin':** An arced crosscourt shot can take your opponent to the side of the court (opening the rest of the space). A good 'pinning' shot has topspin and height in order to push the opponent behind their baseline. 
- **Strong Crosscourt Drive:** A crosscourt shot has the most available court space. This means there is less risk when hitting a power shot. The entire court is open if a weak response comes from the opponent. 
- **Angled Crosscourt:** If the shot received is a little weaker, or the player is outside the singles sideline, the ball can be placed with more angle. An angle shot takes the opponent well off the court. 




3. DOMINATING THE BACKHAND DIAGONAL:

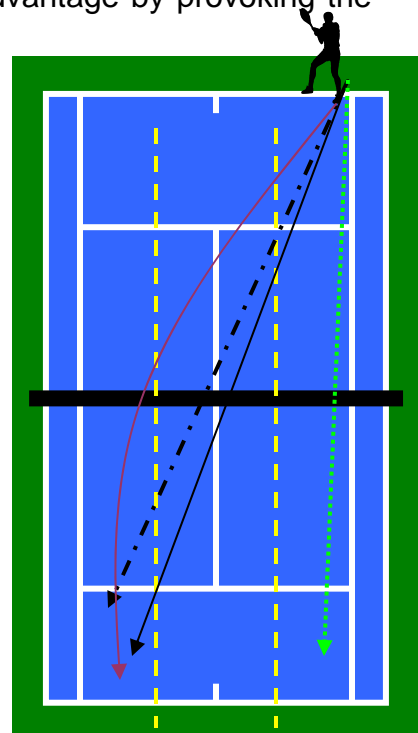
Going after an opponent's backhand is one of the most common (and effective) tactics in tennis. Players must learn to receive the ball when opponents send it to their backhand, turn the tables around, and gain advantage by provoking the opponent's backhand.

The shots to master from the BH Lane are the same as the FH:

- **Crosscourt 'Pin'**
- **Strong Crosscourt Drive**
- **Angled Crosscourt**

In addition, to dominate the BH Diagonal, it is good to master:

- **Run-Around FH:** From the far BH Lane, a player is still able to use their FH. They can play both 'Inside-out' and inside-in. 
- **Slice BH:** Changing to an underspin shot can mix things up by keeping the ball low or altering the speed to challenge an opponent's timing.



In each situation, there are technical fundamentals that need to be mastered to perform successfully:

- Grip (to control the racquet face)
- Set-up for the shot (including body & racquet preparation and the footwork to get to the shot)
- Impact point in relation to their body (based on the tactic)
- How the racquet passes through the impact (Path, Angle and Speed to create the shot)
- Recovery (based on their tactic)

These fundamentals need to be modified to fit the situation? For example, when performing a forehand attacking with power action on a higher ball, it is effective to prepare the racquet higher and level out the swing path. This is a modification from a rally action (which uses a more low-to-high swing to arc the ball).

By learning with Situation Training, players can be fully equipped to play the game. All the cycle of components required for successfully playing a shot can be trained:

- Identify the situation you are in (tactical awareness)
- Know what you want to do (tactical intention)
- Select the most effective response (decision-making)
- Perform the best shot for the situation (biomechanically efficient and effective technique)
- Recover to the best spot for the next shot

PRACTICING

Remember, tactics and techniques are relative to level. To pressure an opponent at the 3.0 level means a different quality of shot than a pro. Playing with clear tactical intention is critical. After that, if they cannot perform the shot, technical training is in order. This is far more relevant and practical than just repeating the standard forehands & backhands.

Players can even practice this way with a partner. They can start the ball with a shot that re-creates the situation they want to improve, make the appropriate decision to respond the shot, and play out the point from there. If a player can't perform the shot, they then need to get in some 'quality reps' of the *specific* skill needed (from a coach, partner, or even a ball machine).

Training the tactics and technical actions of these four basic baseline Building situations will yield very noticeably results. Players will get better at what actually happens during a tennis match. Situation Training equips players for the realities of tennis far more than any isolated stroke training could ever do.

If you would like to ask a question, give feedback, or want more information, contact us at:

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