

CHAPTER III

The Serve

THE serve is perhaps the most deceptive stroke in the game. It appears to be very easy and yet is surprisingly difficult. Too much time cannot be spent in attending to this department of your play, for a bad service is a great handicap at all times, but especially in a men's double. Here the type chiefly employed is that which skims the net, at a medium pace, and falls just outside the inner service line. Only really good players shine at this, because the correct striking of the shuttle involves great delicacy of touch. 'Striking,' is possibly the wrong word to use. The shuttle has to be persuaded to go over the net and refuses to learn this doctrine of sweet reasonableness except under very gentle treatment. Although the margin between a good and a bad serve is very small, a player like Mr Devlin, who rushes the serve with a relentless ferocity, will score off it nearly every time, if you make the slightest error.

When the serve is being delivered, the body ought not to be directly facing the net. There should be an inclination to the right—not too much, about a half-right turn. This leaves the left leg in advance of the right, as is proper for all strokes executed with the forehand. To stand directly facing the net is a fault

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which is very common, and it is a fatal fault. If you watch players who serve badly, you cannot fail to notice that the vast majority have fallen into this mistake. But it is an error quite easy to mend, and if you have it, alter your stance according to the directions above and you will be surprised at the difference that it will make.

Again, you must be on your guard not to serve higher than your waist. It is so much easier to serve from a high angle than from a low one that this must be carefully guarded against. Nothing causes more unpleasantness than when an umpire feels compelled to call a player to order for improper service. The player invariably considers it an injustice, arguing that the umpire cannot see such a thing with any accuracy from his elevated position, while the umpire suspects the player of serving wrongly more frequently than he really does, and therefore faults him at times incorrectly. It is best to be on the safe side and, by serving from a fairly low position, to avoid any chance of such a misunderstanding.

Always take your time over your serve. Do not hurry it on the off-chance of rattling your opponent or putting the shuttle into a place unexpected by him owing to the rapidity of your delivery. No experienced player will be put off by such tactics, and the result will probably be unexpected to you instead of to him, for the shuttle will very likely hit the net or fall outside the court. Slipshod execution of a stroke means a bad stroke. Watch some good player and

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you will realize the care and attention with which he takes up his position to serve. Take the greatest possible care over it, for the result of a rally often depends upon the initial stroke.

There are a number of different kinds of serves, which must form part of your stroke-equipment, and I am dealing with these in detail in the chapters on singles and doubles (side-by-side formation). It will doubtless take a long time before you can obtain sufficient mastery over them to enable you to use each type regularly with accuracy. Practice is the only teacher. Do not be discouraged if your short service, which is the hardest to perfect and the most useful, perhaps, when perfected, is rushed every time at the start. The more you play, the more you will improve, if you conscientiously try to improve. Especially do not allow yourself to be put off by any rushing tactics on the part of your opponent. One of Mr Devlin's great assets in a mixed double is the way in which, by consistently rushing the service, he reduces some of his male, and most of his female, opponents to such a state of nerves that they are totally unable to serve to him. There is no greater handicap in a double than to be deprived of one hand. This, of course, is his chief object—to make you lose confidence in yourself. Once you lose confidence in your own powers, a good serve is out of the question. Therefore keep your head and do not allow your *moral* to be shaken. If one kind is resulting in disaster, try another. This is why it is so advantageous to have

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every kind at your disposal. By mixing them, as the phrase goes, you will be bound to confuse the enemy to a certain extent, and prevent him from doing exactly as he likes.

The knack of being able to conceal until the last moment where you intend the shuttle to go is very helpful in the matter of making an opponent treat your service with respect. You must try as early as you can to cultivate the ability to conceal the direction of your shot. Let there be "no art to find the mind's construction in the face." To acquire this power will be of incalculable value to you in everything connected with Badminton. Watch closely your method of playing various shots, and if you think you are making your intention obvious to your opponent, alter their production. A little change will effect wonders. For instance, many players in executing a drop high-up with their forearm from the left-hand side at the back of the court, intending the shuttle to cross the middle of the net and fall fairly close to it on the other side near their opponent's left side-line, make a half-right turn in the required direction. This action gives the shot away to a vigilant player, and before the shuttle is hit, he has already moved, or is prepared to move, to the proper place. If they did not make this turn, it would be far less easy to divine their intention. The stroke-production need not be altered, only the stance. Judicious use of the wrist will be of much assistance to you in cloaking your design, and I shall have more to say on this point later. Remember that from any

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given position there are usually at least two shots, and aim at making your production of these as similar as circumstances permit. You can train your wrist to give at the last moment the necessary flick in the required direction.