

CHAPTER VII

The Lob

THE lob, or clear, is *par excellence* the defensive shot, although it may frequently be employed as a means of attack, mainly with the idea of tiring an opponent out. The great essential for this stroke is that it must have good length. The shuttle must drop at the most within a foot of the back-line and you must be able to do this accurately, from any part of the court, whether with the forearm or with the backhand. Many players seem to find a difficulty where the latter is concerned. A variety of things may be the cause of this. You may be too near the shuttle when you strike, you may not be swinging back far enough, etc.—it is not necessary to go into all the small errors that you may be committing. Every man has the physical strength to hit the shuttle with his backhand the whole length of the court quite easily, and if he is failing to do this there is something wrong with his production of the stroke. When you find your clear on this side lacking in length, examine the way you are performing it carefully and you will find some fault in execution that is spoiling your shot. It will probably be some small mistake that is quite easy to amend.

Lack of sufficient length is a very common fault with a forearm clear also, and even first-class players are very

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inaccurate in this respect. The real reason is, as a rule, the danger of sending the shuttle out. This is a serious risk, to be sure, but it is no worse than the alternative risk of tossing up a nice sitter to somebody like Mr Devlin to smash. In the latter case you have no chance at all. He smashes and you merely pick up the remains of the shuttle. But if you clear out far, the risk of losing the ace through putting the shuttle out is not so great. Your opponent may possibly misjudge the flight of the shuttle and hit it when, if let fall, it would land outside the line. Not every player, especially in a tight match, has the temerity to let a shuttle fall to the ground, if he has any doubt in his own mind as to whether it is going to be in or out. Further, if he happens to have been mistaken over a couple—and the only man that is said to be infallible does not play Badminton—and they have fallen inside the line when he has expected them to fall outside, there will not be much in the neighbourhood of that back-line which he will leave. So I would advise you always to try for good length, without minding too much the danger of whether you are cutting things too fine at the back-line or not. You must apply this advice within common-sense limits. If the shuttle falls well outside, it would be suicidal policy to continue hitting with the same strength—you will have to experiment until you find the exact amount of force required. If it is falling in most cases very near the line, do not trouble if you send a few out, just carry on, except when a considerable number just miss the mark. This will not be often, as it necessitates a very good eye on

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the part of your opponent and there are not too many that are really first-class in this respect.

The action for a clear, either backhand or forearm, is a combination of arm and wrist, but the latter should be the predominating partner to as great an extent as possible. This is obvious, as the more use you make of the arm, the more you have to put your weight into the stroke, and the more you are draining the reserve of physical strength which you ought to be conserving against a possible third set. Many seem to have neglected the training necessary to make the wrist perform this part, especially in the backhand, and for this reason the backhand corner has become a favourite objective for attack. But if you are able to send the shuttle the whole length of the court with your wrist as the main driving force behind, you are gaining a good advantage, because you are not drawing on your bodily energy to anything like the same extent as the use of the arm necessitates.

Besides this, the actions for a backhand clear and a backhand drop can be made to resemble each other very closely in appearance, the only difference being that you hit the shuttle when it is slightly nearer the body for the drop than for the lob. This is because you have to get over it and hit down in order to bring off a drop. The same applies to a very common type of forearm clear. Most players, I think, usually play the clear (on the backhand) from a much lower position, and it is undoubtedly possible to get a very good swing at the shuttle this way. My only objection is that it is

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hardly possible to bring off any stroke but a lob with this action and, therefore, your opponent will always know what you are going to do. That is a state of affairs to be avoided, when possible. There will be many occasions on which you will have to clear when the shuttle is fairly low, so this method has to be practised and mastered like any other.

The rules that govern the execution of a clear are broad in outline and are embodied in the regulations given in the chapter on stroke-production. The follow-through is not to be neglected and is just as necessary for this shot as it is for the smash or the drive. If you can, place yourself in the position most convenient to yourself for hitting and have plenty of room to swing freely at the shuttle. You should practise the clear constantly so as to be able to place it wherever you want from wherever you are. It is a great match-winning asset to be able to clear with accurate length and accurate direction confidently. To have acquired this ability will extricate you out of numerous difficulties and afford you numerous opportunities of making openings for yourself. One of the main aims of a player should be to possess an impregnable defence, and the lob is the chief defensive stroke.

The forearm clear can be performed no matter at what height the shuttle happens to be, provided that it is within your reach. It is fairly safe then to say that every position offers at least two alternative strokes, either a drop or a clear. It does not matter whether it is a drop from the back of the court, a drop near the

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net, or a drop from the side-lines. In each case it is also open to you to clear, if you like. Hence it is important that your method of executing a lob should be the same as that employed for a drop, as far as is possible. The peculiar flight of the shuttle renders it easy to clear even when it is falling quite close to the net ; indeed, if this were not so, much of the charm of Badminton would depart. Sometimes, of course, it does fall so near as to rule a lob entirely out of the question as a return. This, however, does not occur very frequently, and your own powers of observation will inform you on the subject. Here also let your wrist be the determining factor in the actual striking. When you are casting about for an opening and there is no immediate advantage to be gained by a speedy return, it will often pay to take the shuttle very late, and try to lure your opponent into believing that you are going to drop, when in reality you are going to clear, and *vice versa*. This may be done very effectively when the shuttle is falling near the net. It is a favourite device of Sir George Thomas and one that he has caught me with on more occasions than I would like to remember.

The height, and also the length, of your lob will depend on circumstances. Generally speaking, you send the shuttle high when you want to gain time for yourself to get back into position, but not so high if you have some object in view which you wish to attain quickly. When you have an opponent manifestly out of position near the net, a low lob travelling slightly

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faster than the ordinary lob will often be of advantage, but it depends entirely where he is and you will usually be able in such a case to employ the drive, a much faster and more effective shot. The ordinary reply to a smash is either a drop or a lob. If you respond with a clear, you may generally hit it high. The action of the smash tends to make the performer come forward after it is finished, and it is very trying to have to pull up with a jerk and chase a lob out to the back of the court. Nothing, I may say, tires and discourages an opponent so much. Against a wily player you will not often have this opportunity. He will attempt to smash only when the smash offers the almost certain prospect of an additional ace to him. But all do not reach the same degree of subtlety and all at times are subject to the changes and chances of Fortune. If this were not so, the better player would always win and there would be no such thing as the 'glorious uncertainty' of games. You will probably be out of position frequently in a match, the only safe shot left to you being a lob. In such an event, clear as long and as high as you can. Both of these will give you plenty of time to gain position again before the return comes. In all phases of the game you will find the clear a useful stroke and you must aim to obtain complete control over it, so as to be able to use it with confidence either for attack or defence.