

## CHAPTER IX

### *Doubles : I. Side-by-side Formation.*

THE side-by-side formation is usually adopted in men's and ladies' doubles, although the present Ladies Doubles Champions, Mrs Tragett and Miss Hogarth, are an eminent exception to this rule. As regards mixed doubles a war of controversy will always be waged whether this or the back-and-front formation is the better method to follow. I do not propose to say anything on that head in the present instance as I shall express my views in the next chapter. A men's double is perhaps the game that appeals most to the onlookers. These for the most part know very little about the game which they happen to be watching, whether it be Badminton or some other form of sport. The finer points lie outside the scope of their perception, and what tickles their appreciative fancy most is a hard-hit smash or a series of close drop-shots. But what leads up to the winning stroke often passes unnoticed, although in the making of good openings lies the art of Badminton. When you are watching a double, do not pay so much attention to the actual winning shot as to the strokes that have made it possible. There is a great deal to be learned from intelligent observation—you can see what should be done and what should not be done. Also by watching carefully what methods are employed, you can increase

## DOUBLES—I

your knowledge of tactics. There is perhaps more scope for variety of shots than in a single, because you have two opponents to counter instead of one. The more varied and unexpected your strokes are, the more chance you have of 'rattling' them. But there are many shots of medium pace which in a single, owing to the fact that there is more space at your disposal, have a certain value as attacking shots, yet in a double have no such value. They depend for their success on the fact that your opponent happens to be out of position for the moment. This will rarely be the case in a double, where there are two players guarding the court. The fast shot is usually the one that scores.

The first necessity, of course, is a partner, and let me impress on you the necessity of getting a congenial partner. The best type is the one with whom you can establish a bond of sympathy, as it were, one who likes to play with you and with whom you yourself like to play. Playing with a partner that you are not in sympathy with or whom you do not like yields bad results. You do not get the best out of yourself and it is the same with your partner. The great secret of doubles is good combination and this will not be within your reach at all. A bad combination is always a failure, so if you start playing doubles with anyone with whom you do not fit in properly after practice, get somebody else. It will be better for both of you in the long run. It will be obvious soon whether your partner suits you in this respect or not. Spaces

## BADMINTON

left open unnecessarily ; collisions on the court ; each going for the shuttle and then letting it fall lamely to the ground without either making an effort to hit—all these tell their own tale. This may, and probably will, happen at first, but if conditions do not improve with practice, make a change. As far as tournaments are concerned, I think it is better not to play with anyone much better than you are yourself, at any rate in the beginning. You are liable to become nervous through the fear of letting your partner down, that is, if you are addicted to nerves. If you are afraid of letting him down, you are likely to do so, because your confidence will have been somewhat sapped. Play with somebody about your own standard, one with whom you can claim equality in the matter of ability to play, until you have acquired some experience and knowledge of tactics. This will prepare you for higher tests in the future. Try to learn something from every match in which you play, especially from those in which you suffer defeat. The one who is going to do well is he who does not mind being defeated, but tries to learn how to turn defeat into victory at the next meeting.

In practice matches, needless to say, the best way to improve is to play against players better than you are. This improves your combination immensely. It is also a good plan to play sometimes with a better player as your partner. It not only will train you not to be nervous in tournaments, but you will learn many things from closely examining his play—what tactics he employs, what shots he uses most, how he covers up

## DOUBLES—I

openings. After each match ask him to tell you what you have been doing wrong and how he thinks you can improve. This ought to be of the highest value—always be on the watch for useful information if it is given by some one who knows what he is talking about. Do not mind what unauthorized critics say—they will certainly confuse you and probably put you wrong. Above all, do not be annoyed at being told where you are weak—nobody is absolutely above criticism. Those who are annoyed at this, are usually vexed because they do happen to be inaccurate in that particular point. The worst kind are those who refuse to see their own faults. Perfection is perhaps beyond the reach of anyone, but he will approximate in time most closely to that state who, on being informed that he could improve in a certain respect, realizes the truth of the criticisms and does his best to make the repetition of the fault impossible.

Although you should always try to play with a congenial partner, he must not necessarily be of a similar type of play. In fact in some cases this will be entirely wrong. The great attacking power is the smash. So in a good pair one player at least must have a good smash. The kill wins far more aces and makes far more openings in a double than in a single. If you are good at drop-shots, but do not possess a very severe kill, your proper type of partner is one who can smash well. With a good smash yourself, it is not so important that he should be gifted in a like manner, provided that he be up to the required standard in the other

## BADMINTON

departments of the game. My *forte* is not the smash, but my usual partner, Mr Devlin, is famous for this stroke, and he and I from the first time we ever played together have fitted into each other's play naturally. In Badminton (as, so I am told, in marriage) opposites make the best union.

An essential requisite for a good doubles player is that he should have a good defence. It is important to be able to attack, but it is equally important to be able to defend. You cannot always expect to have the initiative, and the most baffling resistance that can be offered to a good attack is an impregnable defence. However, as in a single, attack whenever you can—that is the golden rule. Always be looking for the chance to turn defence into assault. You must, therefore, train yourself to pick up smashes. Hard practice will do much to make you sound as far as this is concerned. If you can, get somebody to hit smashes at you as often as possible, without necessarily playing a match, until you can retrieve most of them with confidence. It is chiefly a matter of having a quick and accurate eye and not being caught on the wrong foot.

The service in a double is much more complicated than in a single. This is only natural, as the space allowed for the shuttle to fall into is shorter. The extra width makes very little difference. There are perhaps five different types that may be employed. In what follows I am assuming that the player is serving from the right court to the left. First, there is the

## DOUBLES—I

short service, just grazing the net and falling at, or near, the angle which the inner makes with the centre line. This will come to your opponent's backhand. Secondly, there is the very similar one which also skims the net and falls near the angle made by the inner line and the outer side-line, on your opponent's right hand. Thirdly, there is the lob service, which should fall as far back as it is allowed. Fourthly, you can send the shuttle up the centre line to your opponent's backhand, timing it to fall just inside that line and as deep as possible. Fifth, and last, there is the drive service, travelling low over the net and coming to earth near the inner of the two back-lines. These are the main kinds of services that can be delivered and I shall now examine them in detail.

The first two may be bracketed together and are, I think, the usual ones adopted as a first line. They are delivered with the face of the racquet at a slight angle and the shuttle is 'cut.' This helps to conceal its direction to some extent and also to keep it low. It is very important to avoid over-cutting—this will make the shuttle go too low and it will strike the net usually. It may also go too high, but not so frequently. The hard thing about over-cutting is that it is more difficult to strike the happy medium. You must execute this serve with great delicacy of touch, but also with firmness, and there are not many players who can be said to have mastered it completely. You can choose your own position from which to serve, but let it not be too far from the centre line and not too far from the inner

## BADMINTON

service line. The great difficulty lies in the fact that the shuttle must go so near the tape. If you happen to be up against a player who is fond of rushing serves, the slightest error in height will deliver you into the enemy's hands. Even though you happen to get back his return, you will usually hit up a sitter, unless, like Mrs Tragett, you have a gift of extricating yourself with an elegant sort of *insouciance* from all kinds of positions impossible to a less gifted player. In order to prevent yourself from being placed in difficulties from the start, aim to make this service as accurate as you can, that is, making the shuttle nearly touch the tape and fall close to the intersecting point of the two lines mentioned above. Also do not forget to make a half-right turn when preparing to deliver.

Some players, and they are increasing year by year in number, favour the third type in preference to the first two examined—namely, the lob service. This has points to recommend it, and, as also applies to the similar serve in a single, good length is necessary above all things. The height to which the shuttle should go depends on circumstances. As a general rule, send it high, as it is harder to smash when descending perpendicularly. But when your opponent is standing in and rushing your serves, a cleverly concealed lob will sometimes mean the winning of a point or will so place you that you have a good opening. In this case the shuttle should not go so high as in the first instance, being more in the nature of a fast lob than anything else. There are dangers involved in its use, the chief being

## DOUBLES—I

that if it goes too low, your opponent has an easy kill, and if the reverse happens, the shuttle goes out. It therefore requires much practice to ensure accurate usage. You should be very chary of employing this type against anyone with a strong smash like Mr Devlin, unless you have full confidence in your own ability to make the shuttle fall very nearly on the line. If it lands much inside, it gives him an opportunity of bringing into play his devastating smash, which, in such circumstances, is well-nigh impossible. Any player, and there are many, who possesses a severe kill will score outright from such a serve. Take great care about your length and try to perfect yourself in practice games before using it in a match.

The fourth kind is perhaps the easiest of all. To execute this you should stand a little farther across the court, without altering your distance from the net. You must not go too far over, for then your intention will be obvious and that is the last thing you want to advertise. You will also find it not a difficult operation, if you see your opponent edging backward and close to the centre line, to employ the second type of service and send the shuttle over to the right-hand side-line. By having the face of the racquet slightly inclined at the moment of impact, as I pointed out before, you are concealing your direction and he has got little indication of the direction in which you intend the shuttle to go. This is all to your advantage. The more you keep him guessing, the better chance you have of securing an opening for a winning shot. This service must be



## BADMINTON

delivered fairly fast, otherwise the receiver will have time to bring his racquet round his head and smash. It must also, of course, go low over the net. If you should happen to give him an opportunity for a kill, it is useful to remember that the return will, in nine cases out of ten, come back to you on your right hand, that is, provided that you are not standing too far across the court. Indeed, if a return of this description catches you in the body, you may be sure that you are too far away from the centre line and you should rectify this error accordingly. You need not worry very much if your opponent takes it with his backhand. His smash will not be anything like so severe; and a drop and a clear will be equally easy to deal with. Cultivate this serve as it is very easy and very advantageous.

The last kind is somewhat rarely seen. To deliver it, you must stand farther back from the net than for the others, since it is very liable to go out if delivered from too near. Again you cut the shuttle, making it go as near to the tape as possible and then start dropping almost at once. As it has to be executed from far back, your opponent has plenty of time to see it coming and will in all probability be able to smash it if it goes too high. Only use it occasionally to confuse him—make it part of the general scheme to keep him guessing. For instance, if he is standing very close in, rushing your short serves, a fast one of this type may catch him unprepared. He may miss it or leave it, in the hope that it will go out. Anyway it will make him think before standing in so close in future.

## DOUBLES—I

You are bound to find it difficult to acclimatize yourself to all these different services for some time, but you will find that they lose much of their difficulty by practice and attention to detail. Concentrate on this branch of the game as soon as you start, for it is most important, and you will never be a first-class player unless you can use all these mentioned with confidence. Do not let failure at first make you think that a good service is an impossibility as far as you are concerned. A bad serve means bad execution. You can, therefore, discover your faults, and, that being done, there is no sound reason why you should not be able to remove them. You will be well advised to leave no doubt whether you hold your racquet too high when hitting the shuttle or not. It is a good thing to be on the safe side where this is concerned. Always keep the racquet well below the level of your wrist. Err rather in having it too low than too high. To get a reputation for this fault clings to a player and he is invariably a suspect to the umpire. Avoid it like the plague. The serve ought not to be executed in a hurry. Take plenty of time and hit the shuttle with deliberation. Never, of course, do it quickly to gain a momentary advantage, when you see your opponent not quite ready. Give him all the time he wants, and let the kind of serve which you employ on any occasion have reference to his position and his ability to deal with it. If he stands close up to the net, your short services must be well-nigh perfect, or he will smash them down beyond hope of recovery on your part. You have then three alternatives,

## BADMINTON

of which the best are the lob or the service up the centre line to his backhand. You must remember that by giving him a lob you probably stand to lose the initiative, as the chances are that he will smash. Indeed, if you do not get good length, you will lose; not only the initiative, but also the stroke at once. The safest to use is the serve to his backhand. He will usually either smash this round his head or merely hit it with his backhand. As the shuttle should not travel very high, and as he must guard against putting it out, his kill will not be too severe. Also it will come as a general rule to your right hand and you should be able to return it quite easily. If he makes use of the backhand, his return will not be any the more difficult to you. By these tactics you may succeed in driving him from his advanced position; in which case you are then at liberty to exploit the other methods.

The next point to be considered is where you should stand in order to receive the serve. Opinions differ largely as regards this, but I think that you will gain most advantage from getting as close to the net as possible and within about a foot or so of the centre line. With any sort of reach you ought from this position to deal with any kind of service except the lob. The two short services are well within the scope of your racquet, as also are the drive and the one to your backhand. For the latter, my opinion is that you ought to take it with your backhand every time, that is, if you have trained your wrist to perform the backhand smash

## DOUBLES—I

with anything approaching speed. You can take the shuttle very quickly and may sometimes catch the server before he has quite recovered and put him in difficulties. At times also you can try a drop-shot, when you think he is expecting a smash. In addition the whole of the court lies open into which to hit the shuttle. If you take the shuttle round your head, it is not very hard to hit it out and you are more or less limited to that part of the court which lies immediately to your opponent's right. To attempt to pull it farther across means loss of pace, besides leaving you in an impossible position if the shuttle is returned quickly up your right side-line.

If your opponent is using the lob service you ought usually to smash, varying this with a drop-shot now and then, when you think he is standing too far out. In the case of a drop, you should aim to make the shuttle fall as close to the net as possible on the other side—I shall give the reason for this later. When you smash, put all your strength into it. Where to aim at needs careful watching on your part, as some players are excellent at picking up smashes in certain positions, but not so good in others. Many ladies, of whom Miss McKane, Mrs. Tragett, Mrs. Head, and Miss Homan are the chief, are very nearly invincible if the shuttle comes to their left, but on the other side they become ordinary mortals and, therefore, vulnerable. This is a curious point, because most men who have a good defence are equally sound on either side. However, there is one case that seems to present some difficulty to all alike—

## BADMINTON

this is the smash directed at the body a little higher than the waist. This is probably due to the fact that unless you have time to get into position to return the shuttle either with your forearm or backhand, which does not occur very often, you are most awkwardly placed for putting any force into your stroke. It is, therefore, easy to hit up a sitter. It is convenient to remember this when you have not got a definite opening as an objective for your smash. There are two things to be careful about. First, that you must make the shuttle travel very fast, otherwise your opponent has time to prepare himself and counter with a drive. The drive travels exceedingly quickly and you would need to recover from your smash almost in the twinkling of an eye in order to return it. Secondly, you must not aim too high, or he may stoop and the shuttle may go out. Constant practice against different types of players will teach you where is the most effective place at which to direct your smash.

It is probably true to say that the best place to stand to receive the serve is that place which makes serving most uncomfortable to your opponent. This is unquestionably the place that I have just mentioned—close to the net near the centre line. Frankly, I do not like serving to anyone who takes up that position, and all my efforts are at once directed toward making him go back. I always adopt this stance myself and hope I have a similar effect upon my opponents.

In Plate B, III, you see an illustration of the special grip employed by Mr Devlin when waiting to rush a

## DOUBLES—I

service. It is also much used, I believe, by Miss Hogarth, the famous net-player. You will do well to cultivate this grip as it beyond doubt makes it easier to hit the shuttle down.

A good rule to act upon generally is to hit hard any service that you can reach at a higher level than the net and also more often than not at the server. He has to stand in to a certain extent in order to serve, so the swifter your return comes to him, the less prepared he is to deal with it effectively. It is of supreme importance to make your opponents lose confidence in their ability to serve. This is best achieved by this close-in position and by rushing every service where possible. Once their confidence is shaken, it becomes an utter impossibility for them to serve with anything like consistency, except as far as hitting the net or sending up sitters are concerned. Try every sort of serve you know against the player that stands in, and only give him the short type if you have perfect confidence in yourself. Your belief in your own powers is very quickly sapped if he smashes down three or four running. Mr Devlin has a long list of triumphs in doubles to his name, and not a few of these are due to the fact that he stands so close in. Time and again I have seen first-class players lose their nerve and take to serving like the nearly proverbial 'rabbit' against him. You cannot overestimate the importance of this. From this position you are quite able to get back in time for a lob. It must go up a certain height to avoid bad length and the danger of going out. You

## BADMINTON

will find that it means extra expenditure of energy, but you will be well repaid. Energy applied to a good end is never misspent. Some players, such as Mr R. C. Martin, Miss Elton, and Mrs Head, make a practice of serving lobs, and in these cases it is foolish to stand in. But except against these and similar players, my advice is always to be close up when receiving.

Once the shuttle is in play, the question of tactics arises, and your guiding principle should be attack. No set scheme can be given and you can only learn by experience. However, you must try to avoid giving your opponents opportunities of bringing off their best shots. For instance, if you are confronted by a player with a good smash, the less he uses it, the better it will be for you. On all occasions, then, aim to get a good length on your lobs. Even a player with just an ordinary kill can put you in a quandary off a lob of poor length. In fact, when you are looking round for openings, you will find that a clear far out will gain quite a few. The great risk, of course, is pitching them too short. You are not on the defensive by lobbing this. You are about as much on the defensive as the person who smashes from the back of the court can be said to be on the attack. You should not try these tactics unless each of you possesses a sound defence. Your lobs will not all be of good length and your defence must be equal to most situations created by a deficiency in this respect. Mr Devlin and I use the lob as a means of attack to a fair extent and find it useful. It must not be overdone. To rely on it as your sole

## DOUBLES—I

strategy will yield poor results. You must vary the bombardment.

Although men's doubles and ladies' doubles are, in the main, played side by side, this formation must be modified considerably as circumstances demand. The two main circumstances are when one player is either smashing or dropping. In each case the other should be at the net. It pays best, if your partner has a better smash than you, to let him do most of the work as far as that is concerned. He is more likely to make openings and should be allowed to take advantage of any opportunities that arise. You will find it a good thing to have a definite understanding on this point before you go on the court. This will avoid misunderstandings and lost opportunities in the actual game. Good team-work is an essential for success. To place the return off a smash is often difficult. Sometimes one has to be content with getting back the shuttle in any way at all. This is what makes it so useful to have one player at the net. There he has any loose shot at his mercy and can do much in the way of anticipation, secure in the knowledge that, if he is wrong, his partner will most likely be able to protect the exposed spot. It is surprising how few pairs make this a salient point in their scheme of play. There is nothing more paying to yourselves and more disconcerting to the opposition. If one drops instead of smashing, the other should still remain at the net. I said before that for a drop-shot in a double the shuttle should be timed to fall as near as possible to the net on



## BADMINTON

the other side, contrary to the practice which I advocated for a single. The reason is that in a double the net is guarded by the player there. He can command the whole of it and it needs to be a superlatively good drop which is not a sitter to him. By so doing you virtually compel your opponents to clear, and the closer the shuttle drops to the net, the harder it is for them to clear to the back of the court. Once the player at the back clears, or in some way loses the initiative, his partner at the net comes out at once and the ordinary side-by-side formation is resumed until circumstances repeat themselves. Each must get into the habit of doing this automatically, going in and coming out according as the need arises. While one is at the net, there is great scope for the exercise of anticipation. After a smash, the shuttle generally comes back the same side as it went over—that is a point to remember. It is not always so, but it is just as well to be mentally prepared. You can take advantage of openings and you can also make openings by anticipating shots and pouncing on the shuttle just as it is coming over the net. Quickness is most necessary. An opening, or rather the ghost of an opening, will appear for a fraction of a moment. You must be able to grasp it at once or it vanishes. There is no time for hesitation—strike immediately and strike home. It does not matter greatly how much movement you make in your efforts to anticipate, as your partner is behind you. You must, however, be careful not to intercept a shot with which he is in a better position to deal.

## DOUBLES—I

Knowledge of when to leave shots will come with knowledge of the game and of your partner.

As there are two opponents on either side, the shuttle at times attains an amazing speed in the rallies. Quickness of eye and arm are essential. It makes great difference how swiftly the shuttle returns ; so do not wait for it, go to meet it whenever you can. This is an excellent habit to cultivate within certain limits—for example, there is no very material benefit to be derived from going right up to the net when your opponent has a smash in the middle of the court. But, generally speaking, train yourself to take the shuttle as soon as possible. Badminton is the game *par excellence* in which even fractions of a second mean a great deal, so the less time you give your opponent between his strokes, the better. Some players take certain shots very late, but they do not gain any advantage thereby, and merely do it, I should think, because it is natural for them to do so. At certain times it is undoubtedly good to take the shuttle late, as, for instance, in Sir George Thomas' stroke off a drop executed from the back of the court, which I have mentioned before. But do not let it become a habit. Even if your inclination tends to this in any respect, check the tendency and compel yourself to take the shuttle sooner.

If you happen to be up against a pair one of whom is decidedly better than the other, attack the weaker. Do not let anything like sentiment interfere with the work. Keep the better player out of the picture as far

## BADMINTON

as you are able. It is said that a good method sometimes to employ is to make a dead-set on one player for a time, no matter what disparity there is between them as regards standard of play, and then to switch over suddenly to the other. Personally I have not found this very helpful, except when there has been an obvious difference between the two partners. While the assault is being conducted against the weaker player, the other may possibly relax his concentration and slacken off for the moment. Then attack him at once when he least expects it, and you will get good results. The above scheme has been tried against Mr Devlin and myself more than once, but not, I think, with any marked success. Where both are equal, it is the best policy in my opinion to attack each impartially, not letting them know which of the two is going to receive the shuttle—except, naturally, when you see an opening. This method finds out any weakness that there may be in their combination better and sooner than any other.

Perhaps the most telling form of attack is continuous hard hitting. In this the shuttle should be hit hard whenever you can get to it above the level of the net. Sir George Thomas in his book says that these tactics were employed by Mr Devlin and Mr Sautter when they won the Doubles Championship in 1922, and that he had never met a more deadly form of attack. It necessitates a powerful drive and smash on the part of each, and such a combination is not usual. As regards the two players mentioned, their overhead work was

## DOUBLES—I

their most outstanding excellence. To derive the best advantage from it, the player who is not attacking must be at the net. Although one may be superlatively good at smashing, he should not try to do too much. If he becomes even a little weary, the sting and force are lost. He will know himself when he is losing some pace and he ought then to tell his partner to do the smashing for a time, until he recovers. One does not get tired at Badminton so much as puffed, so a little rest is usually all that is necessary.

You should, if you can, have a regular partner and play with him constantly in practice matches and tournaments. Assiduous practice is the only way of securing perfect combination. Unselfishness must be studied carefully, and when making a shot you have to think of your partner just as much as of yourself. What you want to avoid is making a stroke that will land him or you in difficulties. Study both the shot that you are thinking of doing and the return which you or your partner is likely to get, before actually executing it. What leads up to an opening is quite as important as the effective use of the opening. If he has a particularly good shot, work to give him openings for employing it. Effective use for effective strokes is the principle underlying all sound tactics. It is your partner's business to do the same where you are concerned. Always be on the look-out for an opening, but do not go for one if your partner is better placed for dealing with it. This is where the knowledge gained by constant practice together is so useful. Many good

## BADMINTON

opportunities are lost by misunderstandings and lack of practice together. It will be your own fault if this occurs in your case. Study your partner's game as closely as that of your opponents. He is the ideal doubles player who knows his own partner's play perfectly, and in making his shots thinks both of the opposition and his partner.