

## Court Positioning in Badminton Doubles

This document explains the system of court positioning in doubles at the Graduates' Badminton Club. The basic idea is very standard, though other clubs and individuals may differ in the detail. Because we do not expect women players to play in mixed doubles formation, the information here applies equally to men and women.

Much of the time in a badminton rally, one team will be attacking and the other will be defending. You can tell which team is attacking because they will be hitting the shuttle *down*, whereas the defending team will be hitting it *up*. Standard wisdom says it is better to be attacking, since a rally ends if you can hit the shuttle down on to the floor on the opponents' side of the court.

The key idea to understand regarding court positioning is the difference between an attacking formation and a defensive formation: see Figure 1. The most effective attacking formation is to have one person at the front of the court, and one at the back of the court. Most of the shots will be played by the person at the back, who usually smashes or plays a drop shot; they may not be good enough to win the rally outright, but will often cause the opponents to play a return that is sufficiently weak that the person at the front is able to play a kill shot and win the rally.

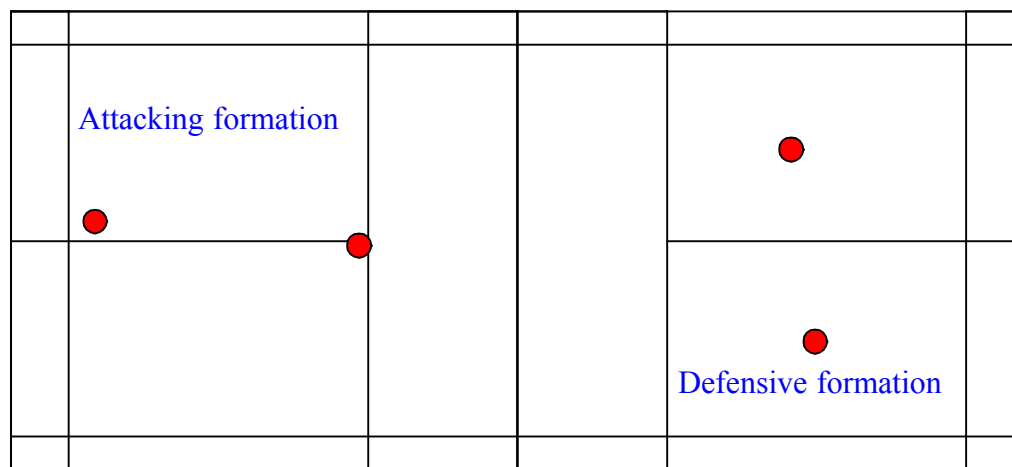


Figure 1: Attacking and defensive formations

By contrast, a defensive formation has the two players largely side by side. The reason for this is that it is very difficult to defend with one person at the front and one at the back: the opponents can simply smash the shuttle down one edge of the court or the other, or straight at the head of the opponent at the net (ouch), and will quickly win the rally.

In principle, nearly everything else follows logically from that key idea. Let's explore various scenarios to see how.

Take the start of a rally: the server and receiver will be in their normal places. Both their partners ought to be near the back and middle of the court, because they are both hoping that their team gets to attack. So the arrangement would be as in Figure 2.

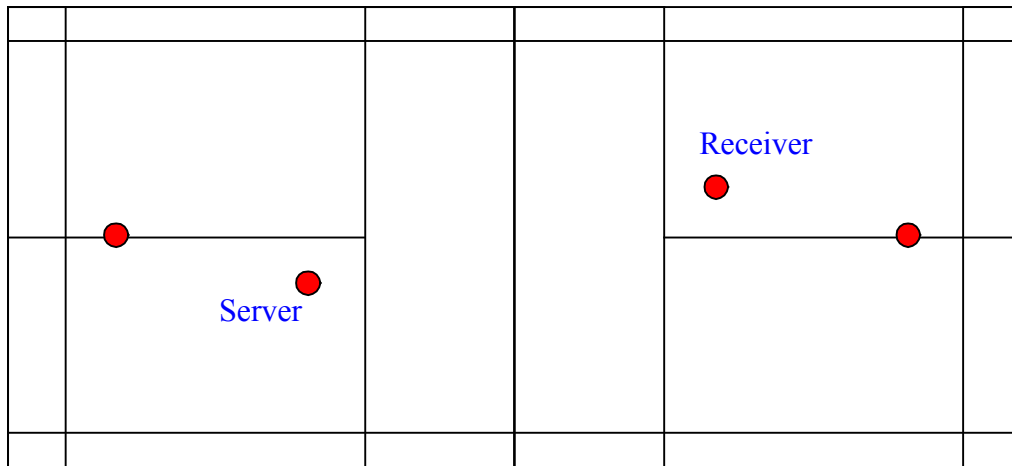


Figure 2: Formations at the start of a rally

If the server serves short (as they normally would, because serving high simply hands the attack to the opponents) then both teams will probably embark on a struggle to play shots without hitting the shuttle up. While this happens, both teams try as hard as possible to keep one player at the front and one at the back, and in particular, the server should stay at the front of the court ("serve short, stay short" is a common motto for this). When eventually one team does hit it up, they must adopt the defensive formation and the other team can adopt the attacking formation. The one issue here that causes confusion for beginners is how the defensive team choose which side of the court each player goes to. Sometimes it is obvious, because one player will already be somewhat more towards one side of the court that the other. For example, in Figure 1, if the receiver hits the shuttle up straight away when it is served to them, it makes sense for them to take the right hand side and therefore for their partner to take the left hand side: see Figure 3. But what if it isn't obvious which side each player should go? Our system for dealing with this is to say that the player who was nearer the front chooses, and the player who was at the back (and able to see which choice their partner made) takes the other side. Professional players have a different system, involving anticlockwise rotation, but we aren't that good. :-)

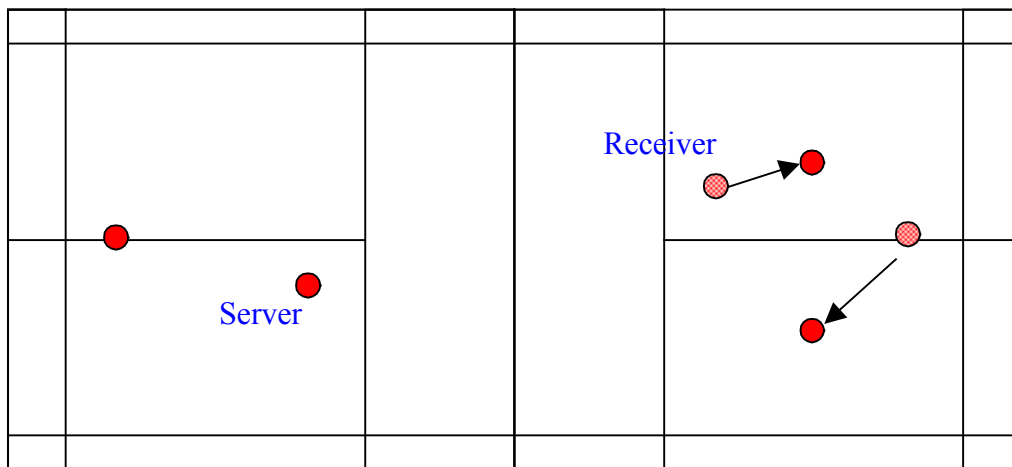


Figure 3: How to move if the receiver immediately hits the shuttle high

What happens at the start of a rally (see Figure 2 again) if the server serves high? That hands the attack to their opponents, so the serving team must adopt the defensive formation and the receiving team can adopt the attacking formation: see Figure 4.

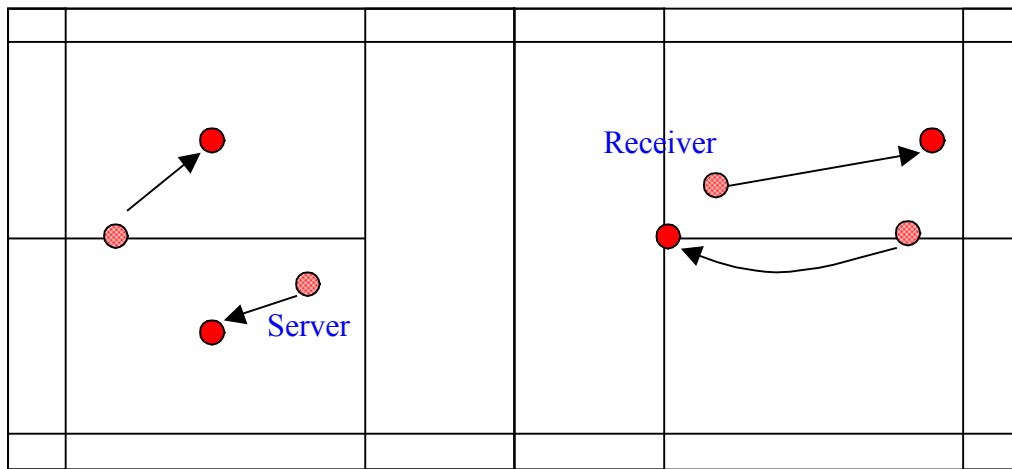


Figure 4: Server serves high

The part of this scenario that is most commonly problematic is for the receiver's partner to forget to move to the *front* of the court. If they instead just move off to the side a bit, and the receiver (as they should) smashes or plays a drop shot, then there is a huge area of the court to which the serving team can play the third shot of the rally and most likely win the rally: see Figure 5. Even if the receiver has got time to get to the front of the court after playing their shot, they are simply not expecting to have to.

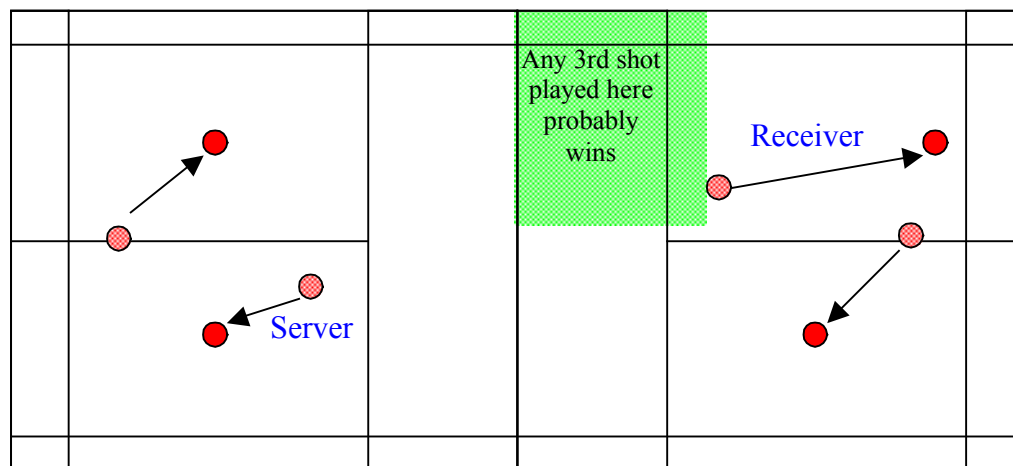


Figure 5: Wrong! Receiver's partner fails to move to front of court after a high serve

Another scenario that is worth mentioning is what happens if your team is attacking, with you at the front and your partner at the back, but your partner suddenly hits a high clear instead of the expected smash or drop shot. Your team has now handed the attack to the opponents, so you must adopt the defensive, side by side, formation. With practice, you'll develop an instinct that you have to move, because otherwise you are liable to get a shuttle smashed straight at your head, with very little time to

react. But which side do you go? This situation is similar to the one in Figure 3, and the same advice applies. If you have a sense that your partner at the back of the court is on one side rather than the other, then take the other side. But if you don't know, or haven't got time to think, just pick any side, and your partner, who can see which choice you made, will go to the other side.

Two final points: firstly, it is obviously good and useful to keep a sense of where your partner is on the court. If you are positioned at the front and your partner is at the back, you will need to be careful about looking round at them, as you can be hit in the face by the shuttle if they play a flat, drive, shot, but more generally, you may benefit from occasional glances to see what your partner is doing. Secondly, the distinction between attacking and defensive formations is not always as clear cut as hitting the shuttle down or up, as I implied above. A weak player may hit the shuttle down so slowly and flatly that the opposition are able to smash it. So you need to learn to judge more subtly whether your side is attacking or defending.

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