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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Tennis Canada would like to thank....

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"Every Athlete Deserves a Certified Coach"

"Printed in Canada"

"The real doubles hero is the player who knows his strengths/weaknesses, understands his role, and executes on the court."

- Rick A. Draney

Wheelchair Tennis
DOUBLES

2006
First edition

TENNIS CANADA

Louis Lamontagne-Müller

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Tennis Canada is pleased to present the first manual written worldwide on wheelchair tennis doubles. The manual is intended to assist coaches and athletes in developing their doubles knowledge and skills.

We hope that you will find this manual helpful and would like to congratulate you on your ongoing commitment to the development of wheelchair tennis.

Yours truly,

Janet Petras
Manager, Wheelchair Tennis

"Every Athlete Deserves a Certified Coach"

"Printed in Canada"
 February 2006

Author's Bio

Louis Lamontagne-Müller was born in Quebec, Canada in 1963. He started playing tennis at age 11, and was the number one player in the Quebec region in the 1980's. He played college tennis at the University of North Florida from 1986 to 1989, and was awarded the Arthur Ashe Sportsmanship Award in 1988.

He started coaching at age 16, and worked in Quebec and Montreal in the 1980's and 90's. He began coaching wheelchair tennis in 1997, and was part of Tennis Canada's Touring Coaches staff until 2004. He also coached a number of athletes personally at different times between 1997 and 2000 (Claude Brunet, Yan Mathieu, Helene Simard, Marco Dispaltro, Isabelle Lamontagne-Müller). He is now based in Switzerland, and still supervises a group of players during the year.

He works part-time at the University of Fribourg Switzerland on a sport psychology project, while finishing his PhD work on the influence of written material on the attitude toward people with a disability and school inclusion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Let's get started and explore wheelchair tennis doubles !

Contents

Introduction

This project began when it was decided to develop more aggressive doubles teams, and to start training the movement of the net player at a National camp in Canada. We observed the best teams directly first, and then organised the training drills. The first images were taken in Boca in 1999, and then I realized that there was enough material to create a manual about wheelchair tennis doubles.

I asked for input from several players and coaches to ensure I didn't create another manual about wheelchair sport written by a non-wheelchair user. Some of the input received inspired the creation of the various parts of the manual. You can find the quotes and stories in Appendix 3.

I have also included the differences - and their explanations - between stand-up tennis[1] and wheelchair tennis to show the unique strategies required for wheelchair tennis doubles.

The manual is not all inclusive but intended to be useful and easy to read. I hope that other players or coaches will dig deeper into some sections, and write articles, manuals or books about them. This further research will help the sport grow.

Useful information before you start reading

The manual is divided in two main parts: BUILDING THE TEAM and TRAINING THE TEAM.

Part One (BUILDING THE TEAM) includes three chapters. The first is called "*Basic Styles*" and lists and defines the various team styles. The second chapter, "*Picking a Style*", helps to guide the choice of style and positioning which will bring most success to the team. The final chapter of Part One, "*Communication*", discusses the importance of routines including communication strategies before, during and after matches.

Part Two (TRAINING THE TEAM) also includes three chapters (4, 5 and 6) preceded by a short introduction about training ("*Training/Learning Tips*"). Chapter four is called "*Implementing the Given Style and Positioning*" and specifies guidelines to help decide on the team's most effective position and chosen doubles style. The fifth chapter, "*Taking or Regaining Control of the Point*", has five sections describing the various strategies used to dominate, and the tactics and patterns linked to them. Chapter six is called "*Last Thoughts*" and lists ideas for the future of the sport relating to style and tactics, and playing the net and the backcourt.

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[1] I decided not to use the words "able-bodied" or "disabled" in the manual. To me, "disabled" means "not functioning at all anymore", which is not the case for the athletes I have observed . The term "able-bodied", points to its counterpart, thus I have replaced it with "stand-up". This manual is about tennis played in a wheelchair with some comparisons with stand-up tennis. Both sports are played by very able people.

Three appendices follow the last chapter. Appendix one discusses basics of court coverage. Appendix two contains tables listing the different switches as they relate to phases of play and game situations. Finally, appendix three is where you can find the quotes and stories I gathered from the many players who wrote to me.

Please note that the picture quality varies due to the camera and the facilities (indoors vs outdoors).

————————

PART ONE

BUILDING THE TEAM

CHAPTER 1

BASIC STYLES

BASIC TEAM STYLES

The style of the team should reflect both the personalities, and the desires of the teammates. Within the chosen style, each player will have a specific role that corresponds to the amount of time s/he spends in given zones of the court.

Contrary to stand-up tennis, where top doubles performers come to the net at every opportunity to have an attacking edge, wheelchair tennis doubles often reflects singles styles. This is the result of the context of wheelchair tennis. The sitting position combined with the difficulty of quick and effective backward mobility limit the players' court coverage against the lob, therefore forcing the teams to keep at least one player in the backcourt much of the time. Because of this, a good backcourt player can be very successful in wheelchair tennis doubles without having to sacrifice his singles style. This difference may be why so little has been previously written about doubles.

The three basic styles listed below have been identified by observing successful doubles teams in all divisions (quad, women and men). There are winning teams in every category so it is difficult to point to a *better or desirable* style. Players have to be comfortable with their role on the court so that their effectiveness is maximized. This more than style will make the difference. The three styles are the backcourt team, the all-court team, and the net player team.

1) The BackCourt Team (BC)

Recommended for beginning teams. This team will only venture to the net on short balls or if drawn in. They try to provoke mistakes <u>or</u> set-ups by being consistent, playing deep, or moving opponents with precision and/or power. When attacking a short ball, they will try to finish the point with a groundstroke as opposed to approaching the net and finishing with a volley. The team will be a combination of any of the four singles baseline styles[1].

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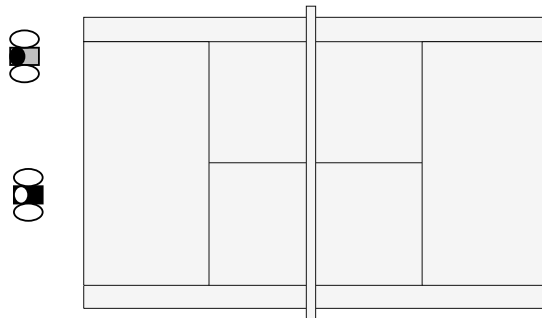
[1] As I was unable to locate information on <u>singles styles</u>, I inspired myself from a presentation by Severine Tamborero (National Wheelchair Tennis Coach, Tennis Canada) at the ITF Coaches Workshop in Christchurch (NZ) in 2004. The singles styles are listed and described in chapter two ("Picking a Style").

2) The All-Court Team (AC)

For more advanced players. This team will spend most of its time with both players in the backcourt, but will purposely send a player to the net occasionally to put pressure on the other team or to follow a set-up shot. The net player can be either player although some teams will have a specialist (according to singles styles). They will build their points to win from the backcourt or by setting up the net player. The team will combine a baseline player and an all-zone player, or two all-zone players.
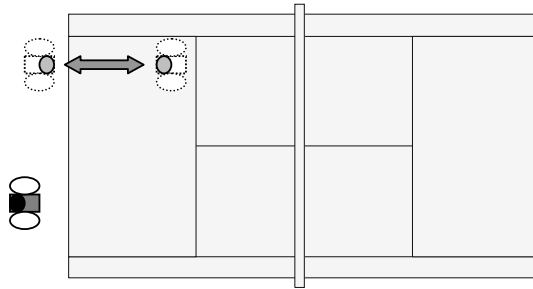
3) The Net Player Team (NP)

For more advanced players. This team will send a player to the net most of the time. They may have a specialist who advances the majority of the time, or the role may be shared. They need a solid backcourt player to build the point so that the net player can dominate and win points with volleys. The team will be a combination of singles styles[2] including a baseline and an all-zone player, or two all-zone players.

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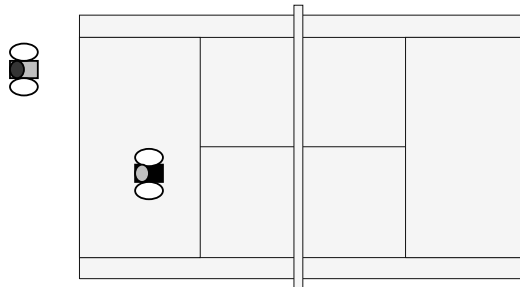
[2] As previously indicated, the limitations of a wheelchair tennis player (at the time of writing) explain why there isn't a pure net rushing style yet. The doubles net player will primarily be an all-zone singles style player. This player can spend more time at the net in doubles as compared to singles since there is less court to cover, and a partner to assist.

<u>Notes:</u>

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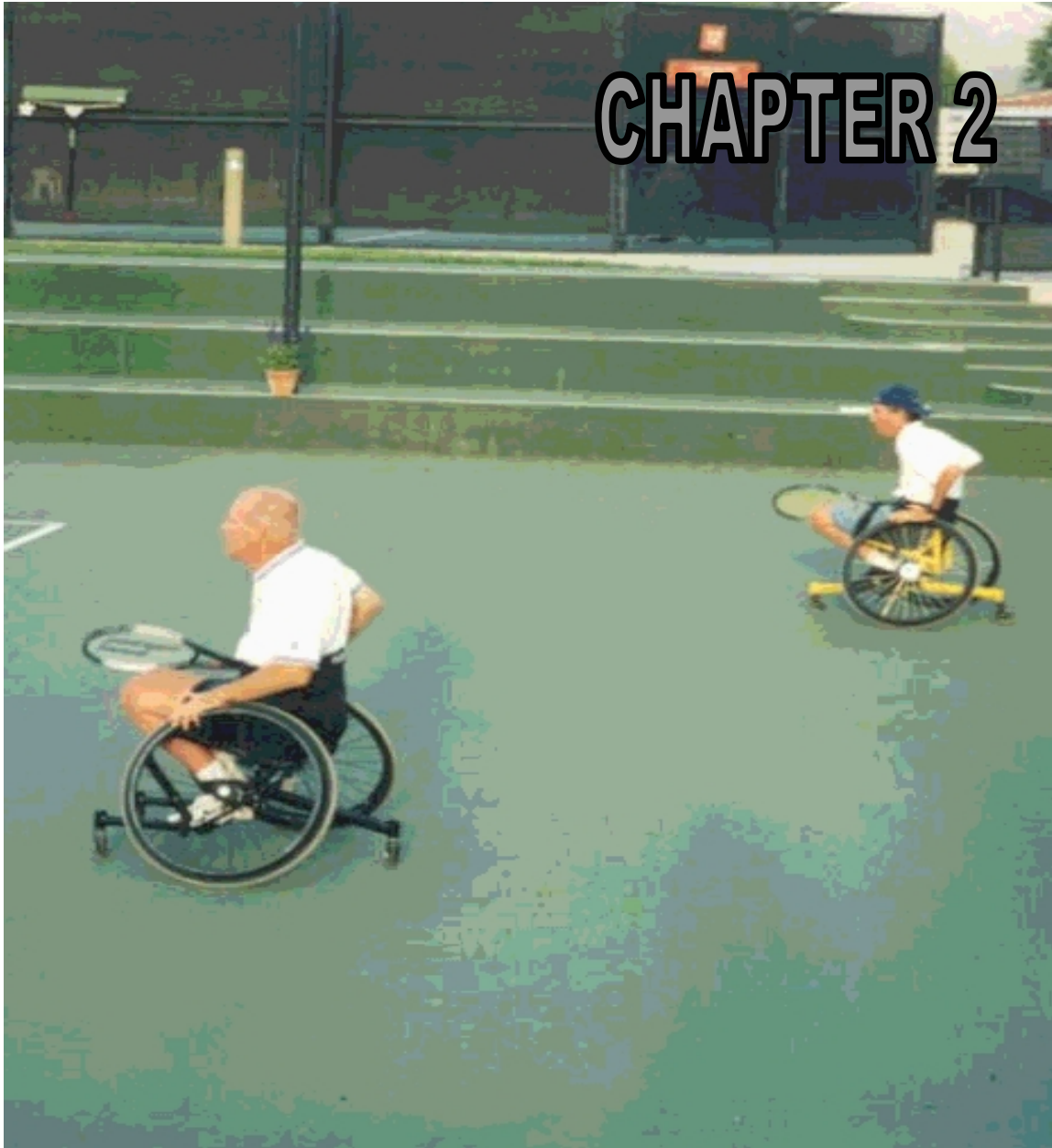
Picking a Style

CHOOSING THE STYLE OF THE TEAM

2.1 Singles Styles and Doubles Teams

The singles styles of the partners will help guide the team style chosen. For example, if a consistency baseline player pairs up with a power baseline player, their first choice is to train and play as a backcourt team. Forcing one or both of them to go to the net, when their instincts, abilities, confidence or desire do not support it, would weaken the team. The reverse is also true if a player who likes to spend time at the net is asked to stay at the baseline. The goal is to take each player's strengths and weaknesses and build from there. This is better than completely remoulding a player's singles style to fit into a doubles style. A player may be forced to spend some time in a given zone that does not fit the team's style depending on the game situation. In this situation it is important to reintegrate the preferred positioning and style as quickly as possible.

> ## Singles Styles
>
> 1) <u>The Consistency Baseline Player</u>: player takes very few risks, and waits for the opponent to miss.
>
> 2) <u>The Precision Baseline Player</u>: player uses different spins, depths and directions to build points, and move the opponent around the court.
>
> 3) <u>The Forehand Baseline Player</u>: player uses strength as often as possible (usually the forehand) to dominate the rallies.
>
> 4) <u>The Power Baseline Player</u>: player hits the ball early and/or uses powerful groundstrokes to win points.
>
> 5) <u>The All-Zone Player</u>: player can play the point from the backcourt or move up to the net to end it.
>
> <u>*Source :*</u> *Tamborero, 2003.*

Table 2.1 - The five singles styles for wheelchair tennis.

Fifteen doubles combinations may be created from the singles styles. Remember that the specific abilities of the players will guide the team style chosen.

Once players have agreed on a style, they must determine how best to position themselves to maximise their strengths and minimise or hide their weaknesses.

2.2 Determining the Most Effective Positioning

Establishing the style of the team is important, but determining who should play on each side is central to making the team competitive. Specific positioning can maximise a team's effectiveness within their chosen style. Singles styles helped determined the doubles style, but the strengths and weaknesses of the team will influence who plays each side.

Things to consider:

- o   Who is the strongest player and what are his strengths? (maximizing strengths)
- o   Who has the weakest shot and what is it? (hiding weaknesses)

Here is an example (players are right-handed):

A **Forehand baseline** player is paired with a **Consistency baseline** player.

		Players and their Singles Styles	
		Forehand baseline (FBp)	*Consistency baseline (CBp)*
Considerations	*Strongest player & strength*	**X** (stronger FH)	
	Weakest shot of the team		**X** (BH)

Table 2.2 – Factors affecting the most effective position.
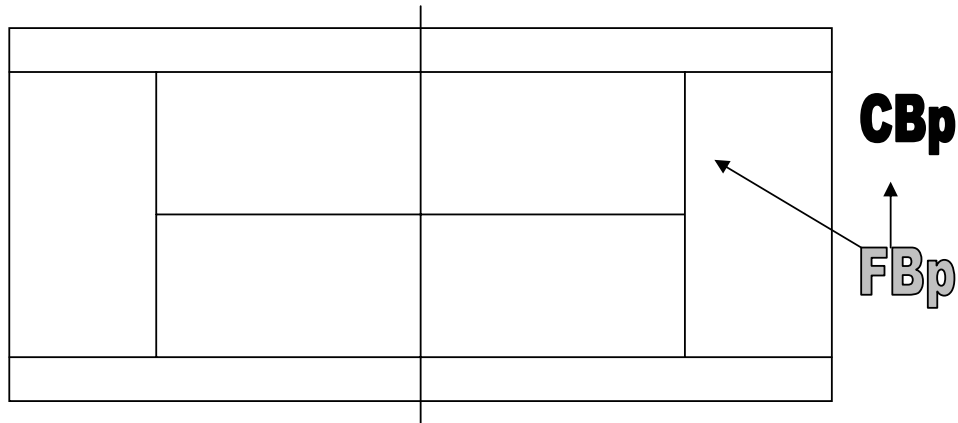
Figure 2.1 - The strongest shot can be played even from the partner's side.

- The **FBp** can take balls in the middle and even on his partner's side (maximising strength).

- The **FBp** has his forehand available to play short, slow balls on his partner's side (hiding his partner's backhand as much as possible).

- The **CBp** will hit more forehands than backhands (hiding weakness).

This is an example of the logic guiding the decision behind the most effective positioning. The reasoning can change from individual to individual and from team to team. The key point is that everyone agrees with the principles and the final decision. As we will see in the next section, the last segment in building a strong team is effective communication, which means agreeing on communication patterns on and off the court.

CHAPTER 3
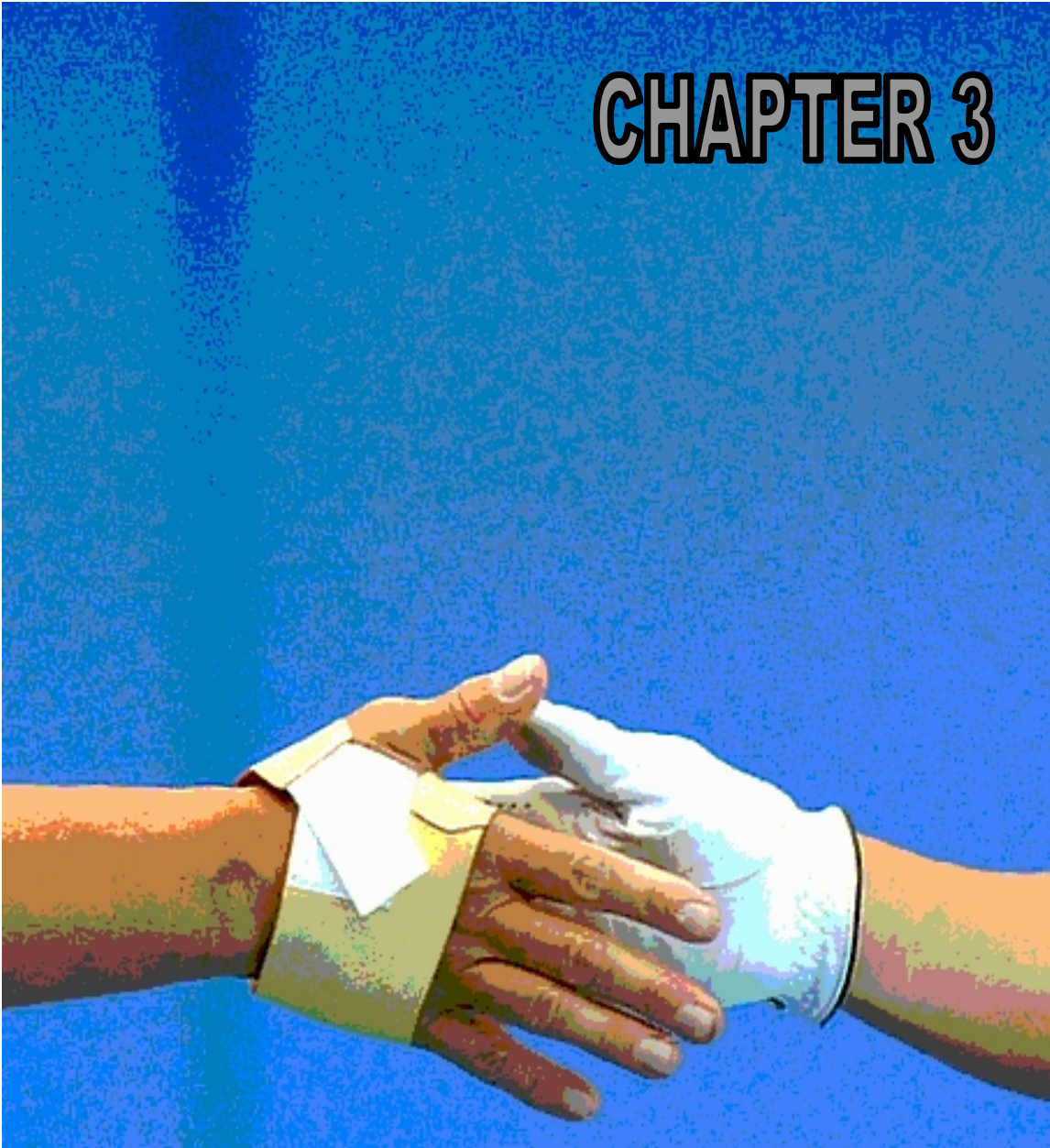
Communication

CREATING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Picture 3.1 - Helene Simard and Yuka Chokyu (CAN) slapping hands after a point at the 2004 Paralympics in Athens.

Communication is a key component to build a team. Working toward a desired goal implies that the partners agree on the path to get there. The mode and content of their exchanges will be relevant in their quest for success. A doubles team is the smallest form of team, and of *community*. The partners should choose to use communication to strengthen and enhance the bond that generates their synergy.

A plan is ineffective without a **team** to implement it. Sometimes, talented performers play average doubles because their interdependent skills are less than average. On the other hand, wheelchair tennis doubles can sometimes accommodate two excellent singles players who happen to "click" without communicating, but this is rare. Communication skills can be "created" in two ways:

1) Making a <u>decision</u> to communicate with, and support your partner, regardless of the situation.
2) Raising interdependent competence skills by learning and practicing specific communication skills during practice and tournament matches.

You are in control of the way you communicate with your partner. There are no guarantees that it is going to lead to victory, but you can commit to being a team player. Make it a priority. **Commit** <u>to the team</u>.

3.1 When to get together

There are three instances when a team may benefit from communicating:
(1) before the match, (2) during the match (during and between points, changeovers), and (3) after the match.

3.1.1 Before the Match

Partners should discuss the basic strategy and tactics they plan to use during the match. This can be done at different times, but most players agree that it has the most impact when done *at least* two hours before the match so that it has time to "sink in". If the team is playing early the next morning, they should meet the night before.

3.1.2   During the Match

3.1.2.1 *Between Points or Games*

Teams will communicate after/before points <u>on average</u> on 2 out of every 3 points (66% of the time).** Many doubles players attribute much of their success to that skill. Words, contact (hands, racquets) or looks may be used, as long as they are supportive and positive. You may play with a partner who speaks another language, therefore any gesture can influence a behaviour. The **changeovers** are useful times for assessing how the plan is going, whether adjustments need to be made, or to relax or re-energize silently before going back on court.
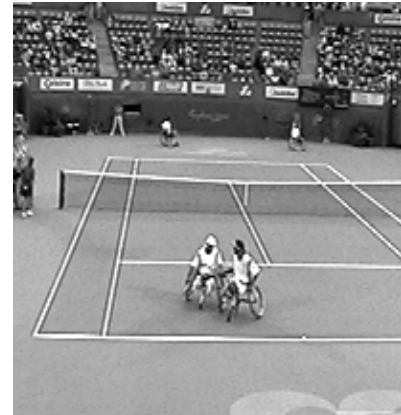
Picture 3.2 - David Hall and David Johnson meet briefly after a rally in the semi-final in Sydney, 2000.

Most players agree that it is important to get to know your partner, and learn the best way to support him. Be sure also to know how you and your partner want to interact at different stages of the match (behind, close, ahead). Some players are very specific about what they like and dislike, and it benefits the team's performance to respect these individual differences.

** Here is a surprising statistic that makes sense when we consider the context of wheelchair tennis. The faster pace of the game and the net player in stand-up tennis explain the focus on the first shots (serve and return) and the intentions of the net player. These intentions account for the majority of communication between points (approximately 95%) in stand-up tennis. Wheelchair tennis doubles teams that send a net player to the net when serving or during the rally will communicate the most. The player's personalities and the style of the team seem to influence communication patterns. Regardless of the team style, partners should communicate their first intentions on every point. This helps court coverage, consistency, and maximization of strengths and territory. It all starts with a plan.

Pictures 3.3 and 3.4 – Communication on changeovers.

3.1.2.2   *During Points*

In the heat of "battle", most of the talking is done to:
- let your partner know if you need **help**,
- decide when the two players should **switch** sides,
- decide when you are going to take the next ball (**mine/yours**),
- decide when the ball is going **deep**, **short** or **out**.

Use <u>quick short words</u> (like the ones in bold above) so that communication is clear and concise. This helps avoid misunderstandings, and maintains the trust, confidence and performance levels. Be sure to discuss it with your partner if misunderstandings happen frequently.

3.1.3   After the match

This is the time to share the positives and the negatives. Discuss and reinforce the good sequences to boost the confidence of the team. Examine the moments when the team got in trouble so that the partners do not repeat tactical errors. Partners should review the things that bothered them, **and** what worked well. Whatever the final score, take the time to evaluate the <u>team's</u> performance.

3.2 Momentum within the Team

Communication will help make your doubles performance more consistent. You may remember a match when you and your partner were taking turns playing well and poorly (or bad!!). Momentum is that invisible force that controls the flow of the match (Higham, 2000). When your team does not have momentum, it is important to keep the communication alive. "Momentum can be harnessed and turned to your advantage, provided you can identify and use the flow of momentum in the present" (Higham, 2000, p. 3). It can shift suddenly against you if you do not plan ahead. Although he is

referring to singles, Higham mentions that "turning points all have one thing in common: they have the potential to **cause a change in the balance of the mental energy** of one player or the other, which then causes a change in the momentum flow of the match" (p. 9). There are many turning points during a doubles match, and a steady communication between partners will help counter or take advantage of this. Stick together through the good and bad times whether your team…

…needs to turn the page on a bad game or set**;**

is playing as if both players were in the "zone"**;**

has to work hard to stay positive**;**

feels "bigger and taller" than usual**.**

Maintain your usual or planned routine of contact/meetings during a match. If you feel that you need more then discuss and do it. <u>Multiply them</u>.

Communication may also be a tool to slow the pace of a match (and shift the momentum) if things are not going your way. Be sure to do this within the rules of the game.
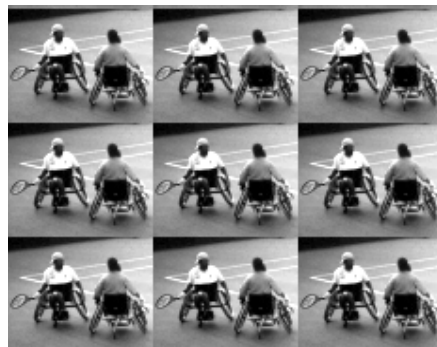
Always be **honest** with your partner. Do not hide the truth or act as if s/he is playing well if it is not the case. Conversely, do not overdo it if s/he is playing a great match. A famous sport psychologist once said that the best way to disturb great concentration is to notice it. Plan how you are going to support your partner, and stick with it. Routines are the basic elements of great performances, even where communication is concerned.

Many situations will arise to test the strength of the bond between you and your partner. When you agree on how you want to interact as a team, you will develop a strong base that will allow your team to face adversity with more serenity.

It has been written that failing to plan is planning to fail. The same goes for communication in doubles. Failing to communicate might be communicating failure. Assess your strengths and weaknesses before, during, and after the match. Work on improving your communication to help make your performances as a team more consistent. You will learn to handle and control momentum shifts with more poise. Be aware of the momentum within your team, and between teams. Use communication to keep your performance as steady as possible. Do not let bad momentum flow get worse by isolating your partner (unless it has been discussed and agreed that it is the best communication strategy). Stick to your routines, as building a good team can take time. The next chapter will introduce the training associated with implementing the chosen style.

Chapter summary:
- Use singles styles to determine doubles style when forming a new team.
- Discuss strengths and weaknesses to find the most effective team positioning.
- Use communication properly to define and improve the style of the team.
- Clarify the role of each player, and be sure it is clear through the on court positioning and movement.
- Agree on communication patterns on and off the court as the basis for your problem-solving strategy.

PART TWO

TRAINING THE TEAM

<u>TRAINING/LEARNING TIPS</u>

Open the door to improving yourself

<u>**To Train**</u>: *"to make proficient or qualified by instruction, drill, etc.; educate" (Funk &Wagnall's).*

<u>Ok… what kind of player am I?</u>

Ideally, you want to find a style that best fits your personality and ability by observing yourself, discussing it with your coach, or trying them. This manual will assist you in determining yours, and in training it specifically. Effective doubles **players** know their role on the court. Successful **doubles teams** know their style and how to best use their strengths to complement each other. Playing matches will help you develop, but training specifically is a better and faster way to build a stronger team.
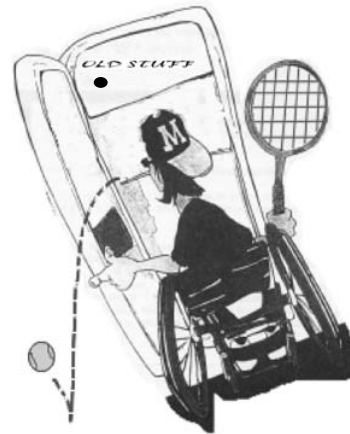
<u>Training</u>

When <u>you</u> are training, you are *educating* <u>yourself</u>. Some players believe that the less they know the better they are; but one has to be exceptional to take that route. Just imagine learning to write by trial and error…exceptional (and long). This manual will provide ideas that you can implement during training sessions so that you can bypass the "exceptional route". The purpose of training is to develop responses (shots) and effectiveness adapted to concrete situations. Once these specific shots are learned, you won't have to think them through as they will be automatic. Your execution success rate will be what "makes or breaks" you. Be creative and open-minded in the process of training to improve. It will make the difference between just maintaining your level and making progress.

<u>Improving</u>

Sport is dynamic. Do not forget about your *old stuff*, as it is what brought you this far. Try to use the new tips you find in the manual to make your game evolve. Work on specifics and don't try to do it all at once. Pick the tactics that are priorities for the game style you or your team want to develop. Once you have improved an area test it in match play situations. Be patient, assess results repeatedly, and obtain as much feedback as possible. Clarify the feedback from your partner or coach. Begin with the end in mind, believe in the end product of your efforts, and enjoy doing your best to reach your performance goals.

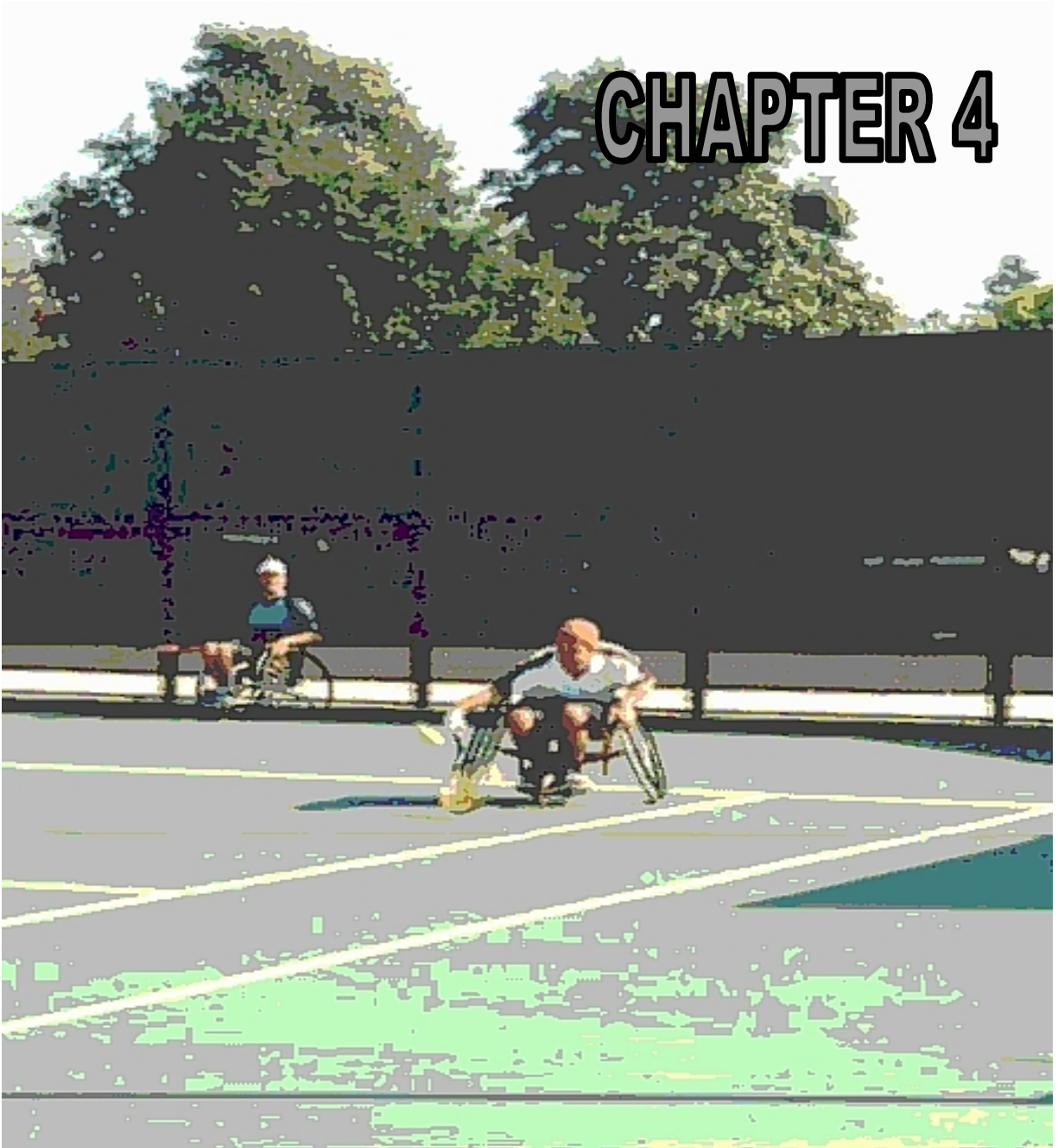**<u>Notes</u>:**

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CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTING A GIVEN STYLE AND POSITIONING

IMPLEMENTING THE CHOSEN STYLE AND POSITIONING

Once the team has clarified its style, MEP[1], and communication patterns, it is time to train. Since it's part of their basic team identity the partners must determine how to maintain their most effective position within their chosen style. Three tools are necessary to achieve this: (1) The team's <u>initial positioning</u>; (2) the specific <u>movement</u>; and (3) <u>shot selection</u> .

Use the three tools to <u>implement</u> the most effective positioning for the team in the five game situations[2]. It is important to train the ability to <u>keep</u> or <u>re-integrate</u> the most effective position **during a point**. The following table summarizes the chapter:

Game situations / Intentions	*Serving*	*Returning*	*Backcourt*	*Approaching or at the Net*	*Countering or Defending*
Implement **MEP**	• make an MEP switch	• return from MEP side			
Keep **MEP**			• play a higher ball to keep from having to switch • choose not to switch on balls in the middle		
Re-integrate **MEP**			• switch on a moonball • switch on the next ball in the middle		
Implement <u>Style</u>	• position yourself from the start of the point				
Keep <u>Style</u>			• do not approach unless you have to	• stay at the net unless your partner is in trouble	
Re-integrate <u>Style</u>			• execute a moonball • play short and move in	• wait for the next ball going to the partner • execute a lob	

Table 4.1 - MEP, doubles style and the game situations.

To illustrate the process consider the team composed of the Consistency Baseline player (**CBp**) and the Forehand Baseline player (**FBp**) (Fig. 4.1 on the next page):

---

[1] **MEP**: **M**ost **E**ffective **P**ositioning.

[2] The five game situations are: (1) Serving, (2) Returning, (3) Rallying from the baseline, (4) Approaching or at the net, and (5) Hitting a passing shot or a lob (countering or defending).
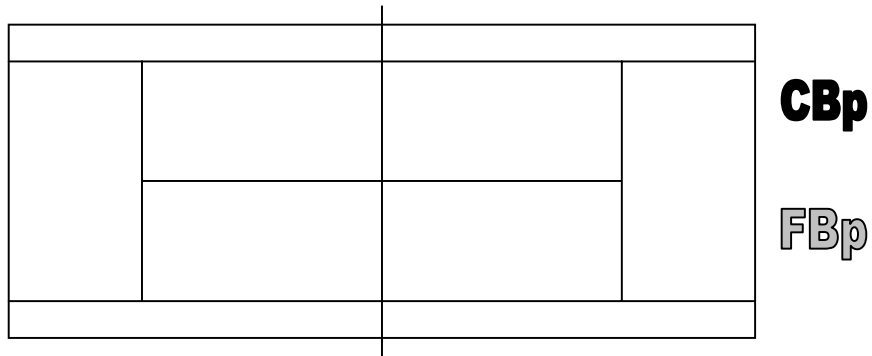
Figure 4.1 - Most effective position chosen for the team composed of a forehand backcourt player and a consistency backcourt player.

4.1 How will this team implement, keep, or reintegrate the Most Effective Position (MEP)?

a)   When serving (*implementing the most effective position***)**

Initial positioning: if the server is on the opposite side of the MEP for the team, then the serving position should be close to the center of the court. His partner positions himself behind so that he is already on the desired side (Fig. 4.2).

Movement: after the serve, the server switches sides while his partner stays on the same side (Fig. 4.3).
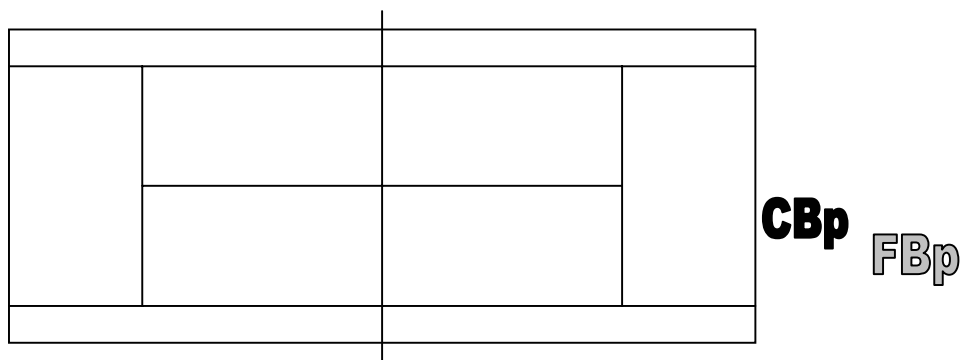
Figure 4.2 - Example of initial positions of the
serving team to facilitate a switch and regain the most effective position
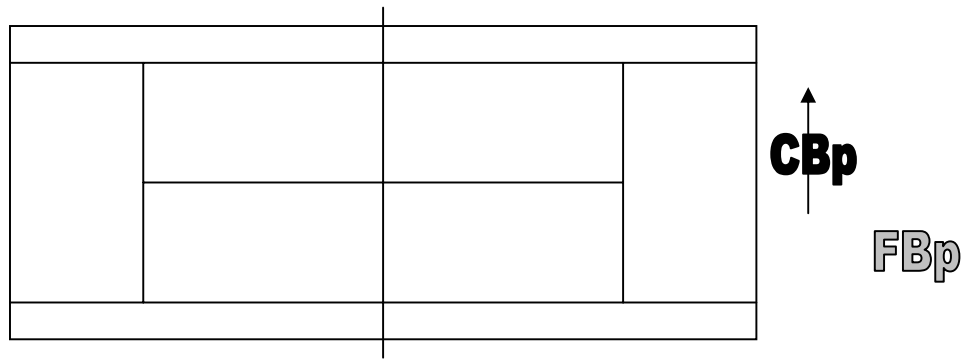
Figure 4.3 - Example of movement of the
serving team to complete a switch and regain the most effective position

The following sequence (4.1) shows how two players have chosen to reposition themselves after a serve. Notice the initial positioning of both players.
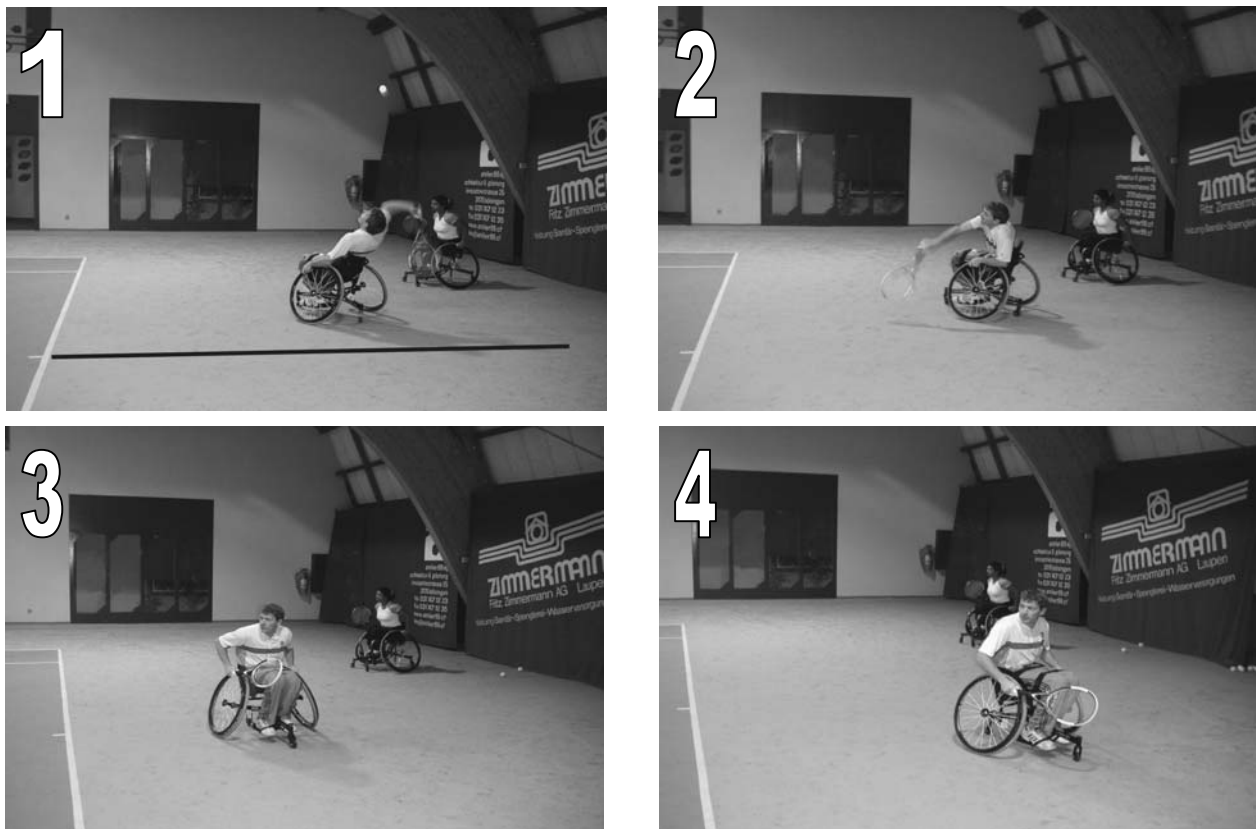
Sequence 4.1 – Repositioning after a serve.

b) **When returning (*<u>implementing</u> the most effective position*)**

<u>Initial positioning</u>:

This team should have the players receive from their regular side.

c) From the backcourt, or when approaching

c.1) *To <u>keep</u> the most effective position*

<u>Shot selection</u>: Play a higher ball so that you buy some time, and do not have to make a momentum switch when you are countering or defending on a ball in the middle[3].

<u>Movement</u>: Choose not to switch on balls in the middle or when the **FBp** comes slightly on the **CBp**'s side (see figure 4.1).

c.2) *To <u>re-integrate</u> the most effective position (after the team has been forced to switch sides)*

<u>Shot selection</u>: Train to switch sides after one of the players hits a moonball.

<u>Movement</u>: Train to switch sides on the next ball that is played in the middle. Have one player call the switch first.

These are only examples. The principles can be applied to any doubles combination. Once the team is used to maintaining and regaining their MEP, it makes specific training easier to organise since the number of possible situations are reduced.

4.2 How will the different teams implement, keep, or reintegrate their own specific doubles style[4]?

4.2.1 Bringing a player back behind the baseline (for the BC and the NP teams)

If both players on the team belong in the backcourt (BC), or if the wrong player on the team is at the net (NP); to be true to their style, the teammates needs to find a way to get the player who was forced to the net behind the baseline again.

4.2.1.1 Wait for the next ball going to the partner
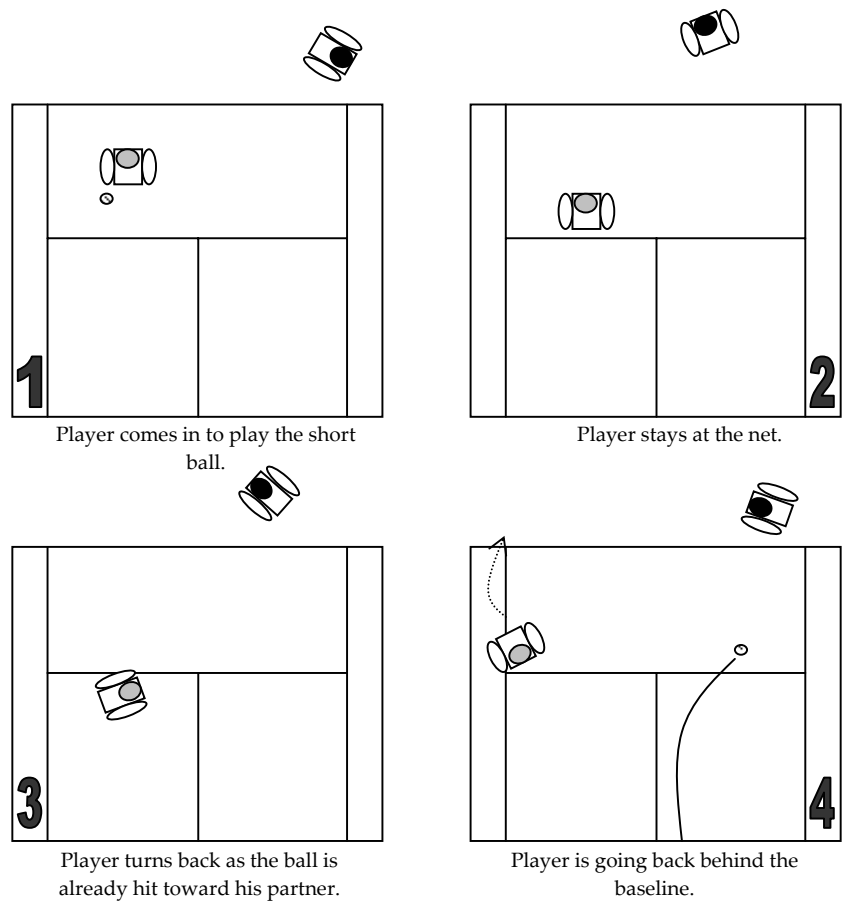
<u>Movement</u>:
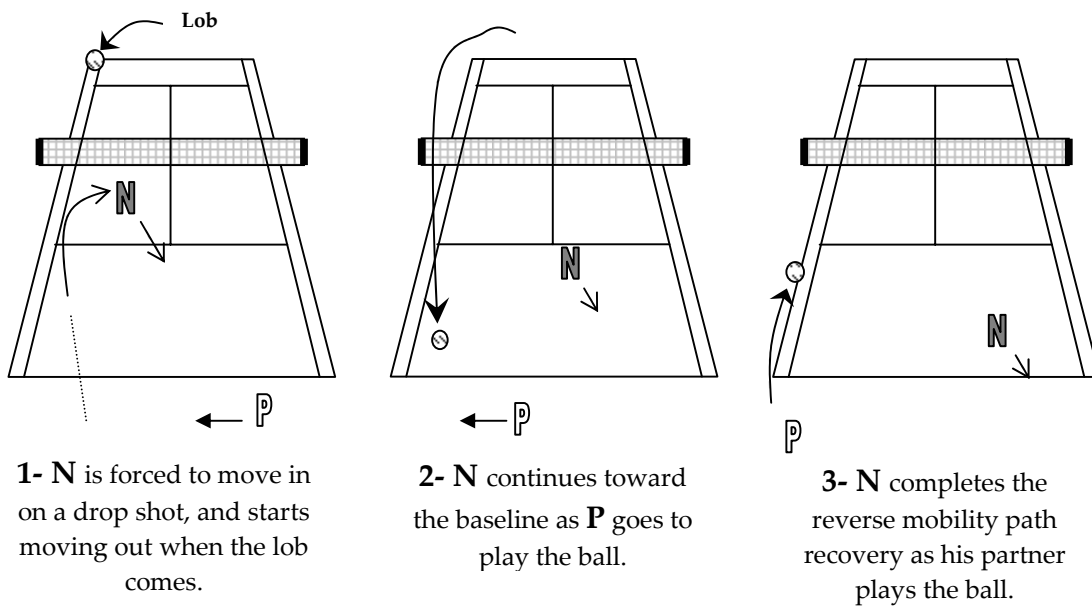(Text on next page)

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[3] But train to make switches when space and momentum will make it a safer decision to protect the court.

[4] *Implementing* and *keeping* the style is self-explanatory (see table 4.1), therefore this section deals only with re-integrating the style.

It makes sense for the player to stay at the net after he retrieves the short ball rather than turning his back to the opponents. If his shot is effective and neutralizes the opponents, they will probably not hit back to him but send the ball to his partner instead. He can then use that time to move behind the baseline so that the team style is restored. Your partner can buy you time by playing a slower or higher ball. The sequences 4.2 and 4.3 show two possibilities. The following page also gives details of the reverse mobility recovery path.

Player comes in to play the short ball.

Player stays at the net.

Player turns back as the ball is already hit toward his partner.

Player is going back behind the baseline.

Sequence 4.2 -Reintegrating the backcourt during a rally.

1- N is forced to move in on a drop shot, and starts moving out when the lob comes.

2- N continues toward the baseline as **P** goes to play the ball.

3- N completes the reverse mobility path recovery as his partner plays the ball.

Sequence 4.3 - Reintegrating the backcourt after a lob.

The path on which you choose to retreat will depend on: (1) where you were when you had to turn, and (2) the position you want once you are behind the baseline. The fastest route to a specific spot is a straight line so that path will be called **reverse mobility recovery.** The following figure shows the stages of this type of recovery (the direction of the backcourt and the net are indicated).
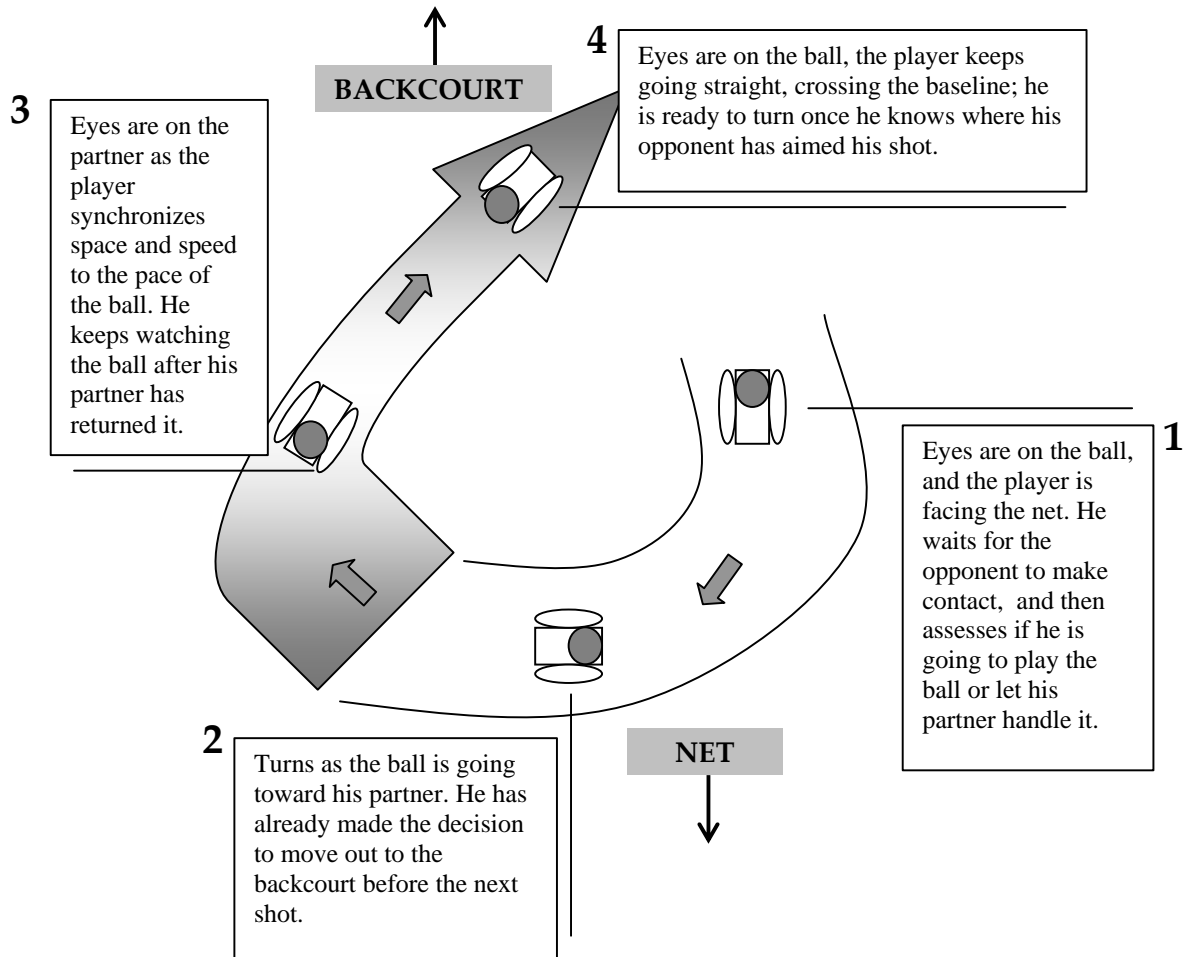
3 Eyes are on the partner as the player synchronizes space and speed to the pace of the ball. He keeps watching the ball after his partner has returned it.

BACKCOURT

4 Eyes are on the ball, the player keeps going straight, crossing the baseline; he is ready to turn once he knows where his opponent has aimed his shot.

1 Eyes are on the ball, and the player is facing the net. He waits for the opponent to make contact, and then assesses if he is going to play the ball or let his partner handle it.

2 Turns as the ball is going toward his partner. He has already made the decision to move out to the backcourt before the next shot.

NET

Figure 4.4 - Reverse mobility recovery.

4.2.1.2 Execute a lob

Initial positioning:

This may be done if the player drawn inside the court has **not committed beyond the service line**.

Shot selection:

- **Lob as you retrieve** the short ball, or
- **Lob on the next ball**

Movement:

Execute **reverse mobility recovery** right after making contact. Find an angle in your exit path that allows you to **watch your ball land**. Sequence 4.4 shows it done with a lob-volley.
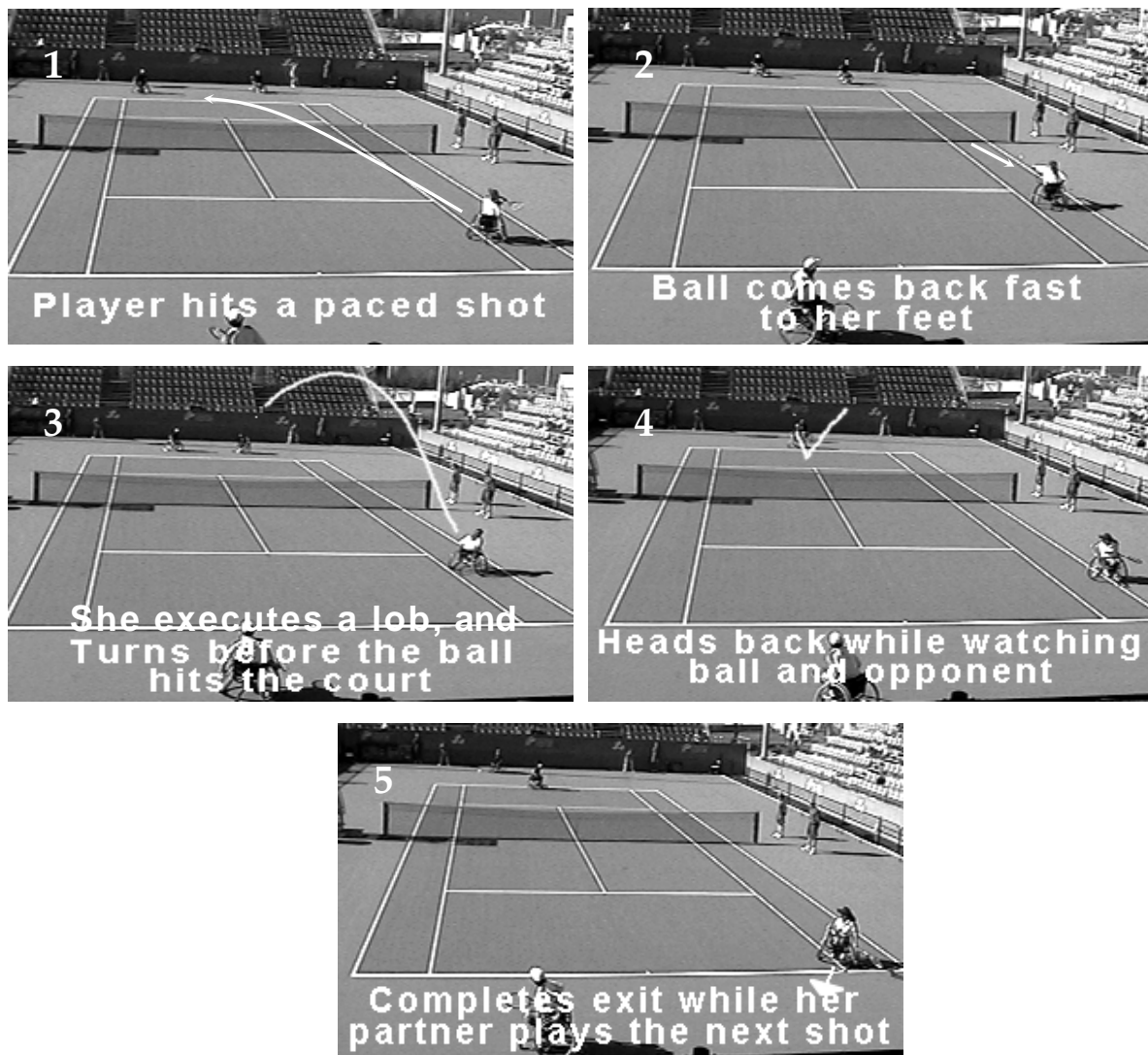
Sequence 4.4 - **Reintegrating the baseline after a lob-volley**. Notice that this player is left-handed, and made a smart outside recovery turn with her racquet-hand. She was able to see the entire court with more ease, and since she found herself moving along the doubles line, she became a much tougher target than if she had turned inside, and had been in the ¾ court, inside the singles line.

4.2.2   Sending a player to the net (for the NP team)

The opponents might try to "pin" the net player in the backcourt by playing deep shots to his side. When short balls are scarce, and a player wants to come to the net, he can hit shots that will buy him **time** to move in. This is done by slowing down the pace, or by forcing the opponent to move a longer distance before he makes contact.

Shot selection:

- First option is to **play a moonball and follow it into the court**. The height of the ball should give you enough time to reach a good net position (just behind the service line) at the opponent's impact.
- Second option is to **play short and follow that shot into the court**. The goal is to have the opponent hit a low ball on the second bounce inside the service line. The time before the opponent's impact should give you enough time to reach a good net position.

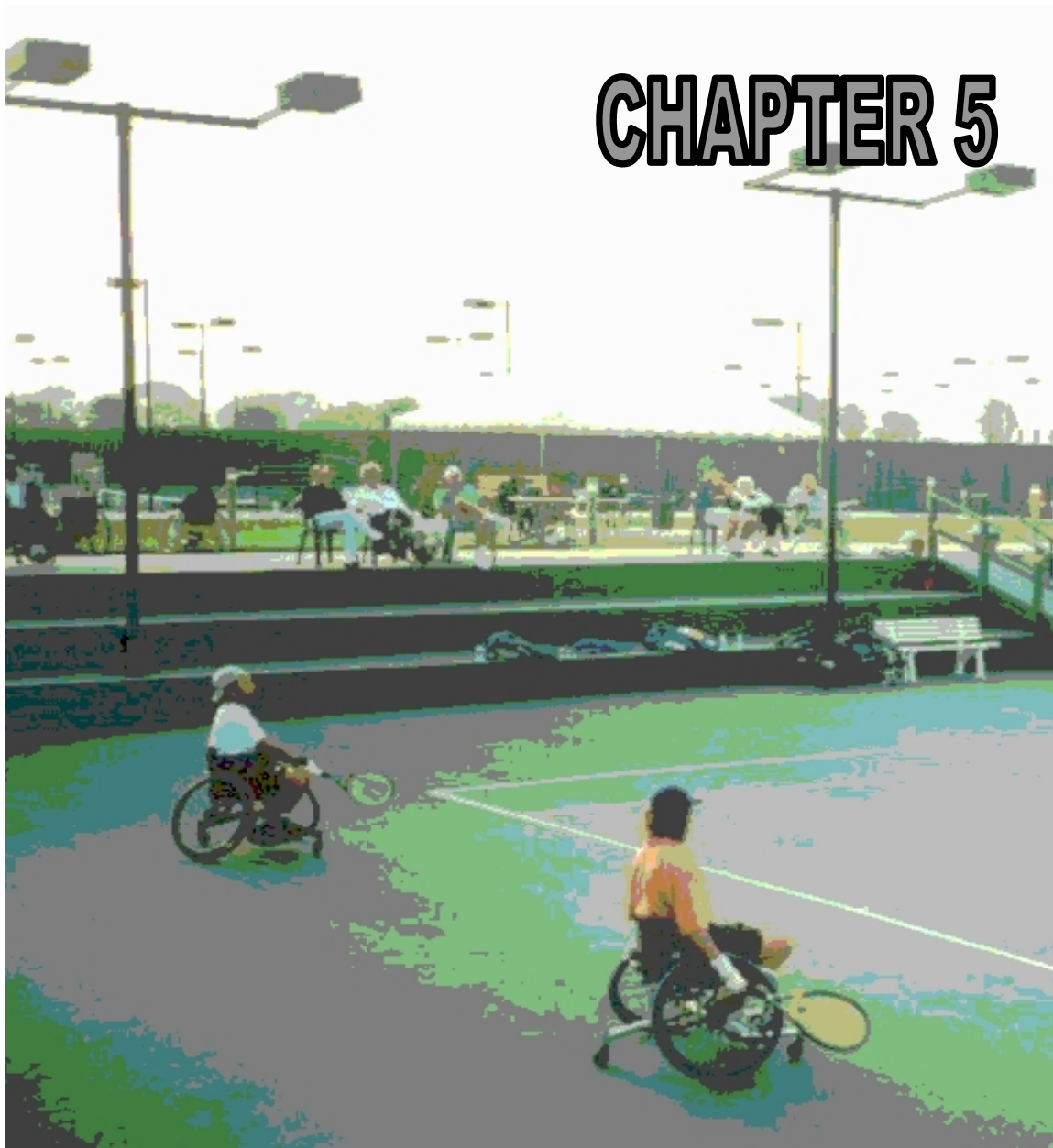**<u>Notes</u>:**

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CHAPTER 5

TAKE OR REGAIN CONTROL OF THE POINT

TAKE OR REGAIN CONTROL OF THE POINT

The three tools used to keep or regain the most effective position (initial positioning, movement, shot selection) are also useful to take or regain control of the point. The many ways to take or regain control of the point will be explored within given strategies, tactics, and game situations.

Strategy #1 -   Keeping the ball in play

To dominate points consistency is important as the ability to hit outright winners in wheelchair tennis doubles is scarce. Tactics related to consistency include:

1.1	Aiming at large targets
1.2	Playing more crosscourt shots
1.3	Aiming high over the net
1.4	Playing your best shots
1.5	Playing percentage tennis

The table below summarizes these tactics:

Game Situations / Tactics	*Serving*	*Returning*	*Backcourt*	*Approaching or at the Net*	*Countering or Defending*
1.1 **Aiming at large targets**	• center of the service box • well inside the lines		• targets at ¾ court • inside the singles line		
1.2 **Playing more crosscourt shots**	(the net is lower and the court is longer)				
1.3 **Aiming high over the net**	(before you reach a target on the other side, you have to "beat" the net)				
1.4 **Playing your best shots**	(play the shots that work best for you: style vs. ability vs. situation)				
1.5 **Playing percentage tennis**	(assess the risks to play shots that have a better chance to stay in play)				

Table 5.1 - Tactics and patterns to keep the ball in play.

It is easier to be consistent when in attacking or rallying modes. To be effective good court coverage is required. Initial positioning and movement will lead to better court

coverage and good tactics for consistency. Please not that Appendix 1 includes a description of effective court coverage within the five game situations.

1.1 Aim at large targets

a) When serving

<u>Shot selection</u>:

- Keep it simple and aim for **the center of the service box**.
- Aim **well inside the lines** when serving wide or to the "T". If you miss your target you will have a large margin for error.

b) When returning, from the backcourt, when approaching or when countering or defending

<u>Shot selection</u>:

- Aim for the **centre of the backcourt** which is the largest and safest target. If you miss a couple of meters left or right it is still in play. For depth, aim **midway between the service line and the base line** to increase the margin of error.
- To play to one opponent or keep the ball away from the net player, aim at a **large target down the line or crosscourt** (targets 1 and 2 in fig. 5.1).
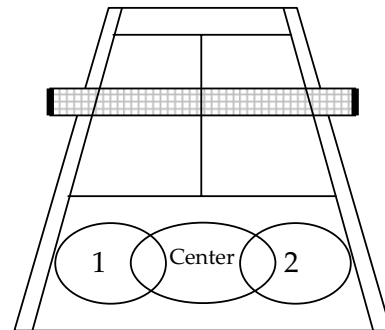
1.2 Play more crosscourt shots

This applies to all game situations.

Figure 5.1 – Large targets.

<u>Shot selection</u>:

Why play more crosscourt shots? When hitting crosscourt the **net is lower in the middle** and the **diagonal is longer**. This combination gives you better odds of keeping the ball in play even if you miss your height and/or depth targets.

1.3 Aim high over the net

This applies to all game situations.

<u>Shot selection:</u>

Imagine your first target as the height you want the ball over the net. The second target is a spot on the opponents' side. If your target is too low over the net and you misjudge it then you are likely to increase your errors. The same shot aimed at a higher target will still be in play. Remember that a shot in the net has no chance of challenging your opponents.

1.4 Play your best shots

This applies to all game situations.

<u>Shot selection:</u>

"Know thyself". Know your game, and hit the shots you feel **most comfortable with** the majority of the time. Be sure to use spin, direction, height, speed, depth in the different game situations and the phases of play. This links directly with **your playing style**. Do what you do best as often as possible.

1.5 Play percentage tennis

This applies to all game situations.
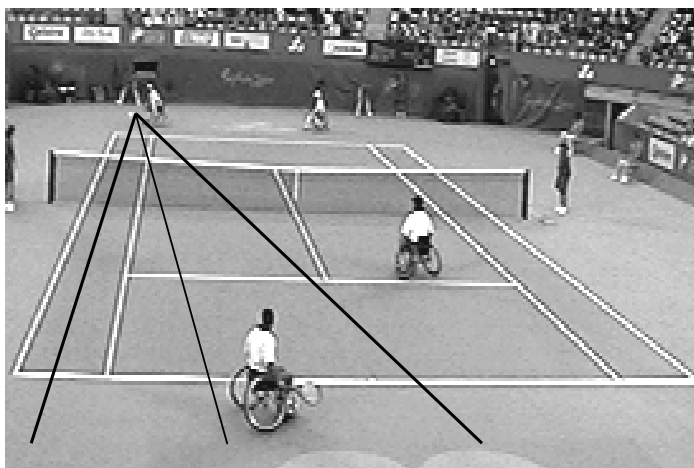
<u>Shot selection:</u>

Gutsy players usually win the matches, but there is a thin line between having guts and taking too many risks. Percentage tennis is playing the shots that have the **best chance to work**. For example, if you are changing the direction of the ball when you have to counter a powerful shot, you will probably miss more often than not. To hit a **higher percentage of balls in the court** (percentage tennis), play the ball back in the direction from which it came. Learning when it is best to take risks is a good way of keeping more balls in play.

Movement:
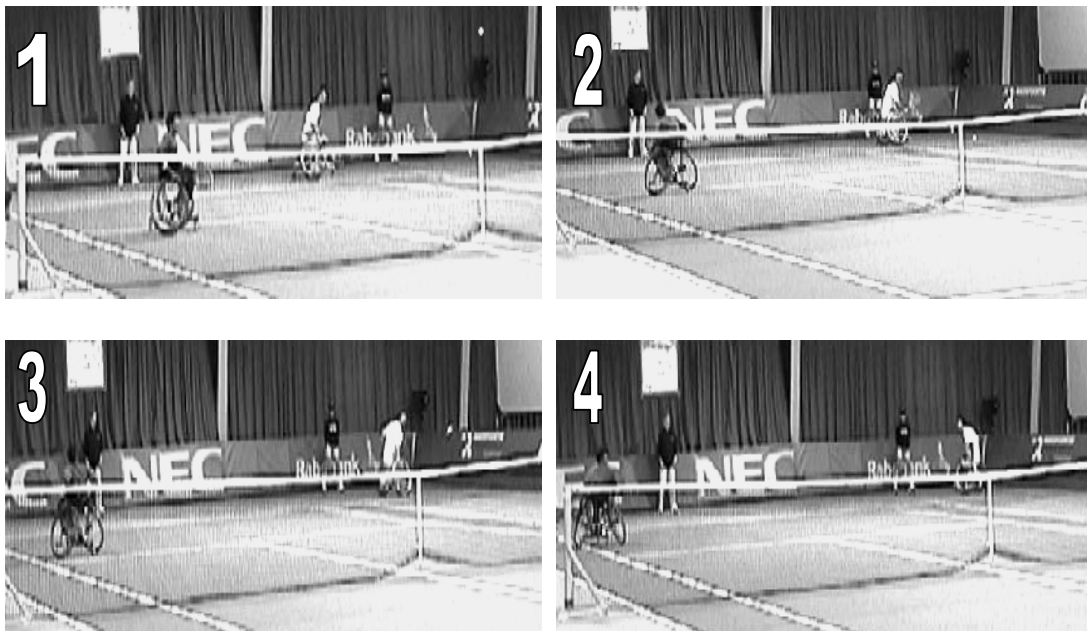
Sequence 5.1 – Moving out when the partner has to counter or defend.

The partner should **be aware of a potential threat** and move accordingly to protect himself and the court. The sequence above (sequence 5.1) is an example of the net player electing to move behind the baseline (frame 4) when his partner is pulled wide off the court (frames 2 and 3) and might hit a weaker shot. The exiting player will cover more court, and thus protect himself against powerful shots. This movement is guided by percentage tennis.

Picture (5.0) shows the backcourt partner modifying his angle coverage when he anticipates the ball might be hit over his partner. He has moved slightly over the middle of the angle he is responsible for to better cover the possibilities. Movement, as much as shot selection, makes it easier to keep the ball in play.

Picture 5.0 – Modified angle coverage.

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Strategy #2 -   Maximise the use of a strength or weapon

Every player has shots he prefers to hit because he knows that he can dominate with them. It is important to train these abilities within a tactical framework. The main tactics to maximize a strength or weapon are:

2.1	Moving around your weakness
2.2	Using your strength in the diagonals
2.3	Hitting moonballs to set up your strength
2.4	Leaving part of the court open
2.5	Forcing the opponent to hit to your partner's strength
2.6	Making use of switches

The table below summarizes this section:

Game Situations / Tactics	*Serving*	*Returning*	*Backcourt*	*Approaching or at the Net*	*Countering or Defending*
2.1 Moving around your weakness	• N/A (*N/A:* Non-Applicable)	• shift position before or during the serve	• use time and space to move around your weakness		
2.2 Using your strengths in the diagonals	• N/A	• make it difficult for your opponent to change the direction of the ball			• for more safety (even when working with a strength)
2.3 Hitting moonballs to set up your strength	• N/A	• recover more to one side or be ready to intercept the ball if you are at the net			• to buy time and neutralize opponents
2.4 Leaving part of the court open	• position behind the baseline (server and partner) or at the net (partner)	• position behind the baseline (server and partner) or at the net (partner)	• recover more to one side (bait)	• recover more to one side (bait)	• faking • baiting
2.5 Forcing the opponent to hit to your partner's strength	• partner at the net blocks part of the court	• partner at the net blocks part of the court	• N/A	• partner at the net blocks part of the court	• N/A
2.6 Making use of switches	• most-effective-position switch	• N/A	• strength/ weapon switch • target switch • piston	• target switch	• momentum switch • retrieving switch

Table 5.2 - Tactics and patterns to maximise the use of a strength or a weapon.

All backcourt situations suggested in the following sections are based on a right-handed player with a stronger forehand, but they are applicable in other situations as well.

2.1 Moving around your weakness

a) When returning

<u>Movement</u>:

A **shift in position** is done before the serve is hit (as the server tosses the ball), or when the ball is coming on a slower serve. The shift could be a push toward the backhand side.
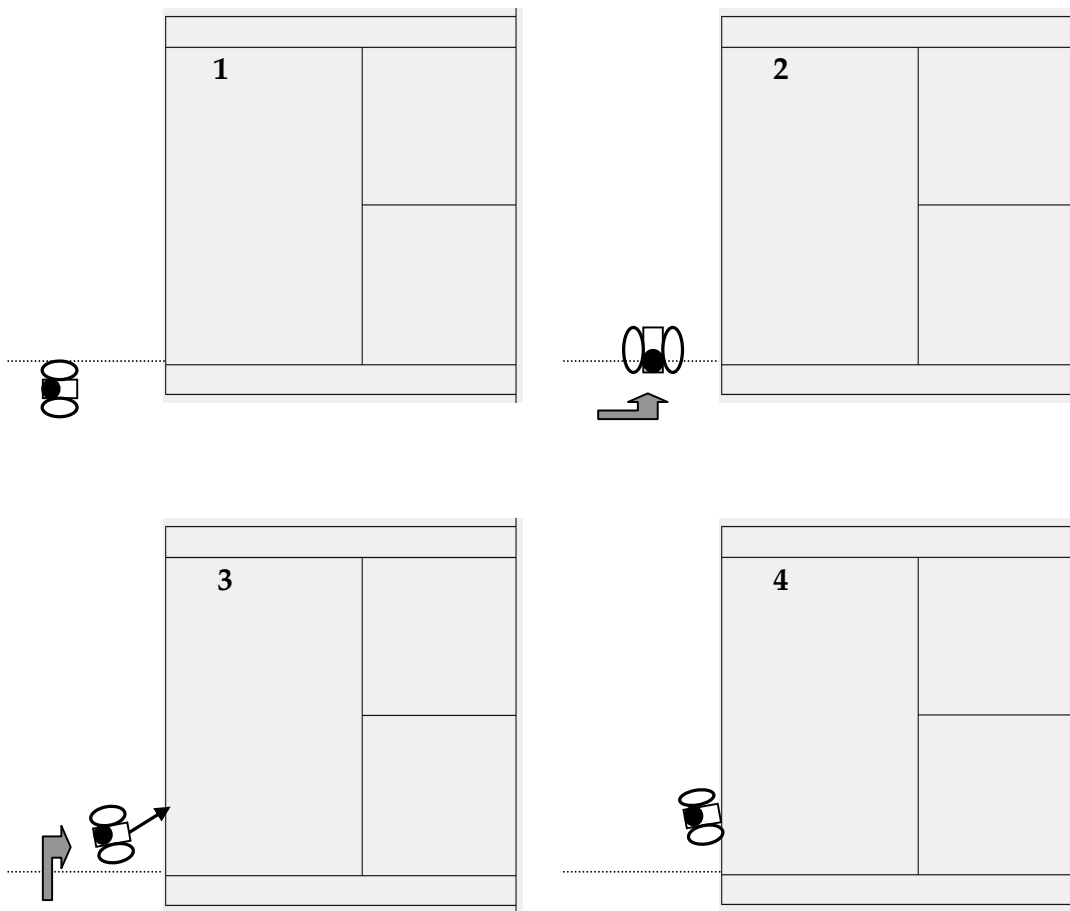
Figure 5.2 – Opening up the forehand on a return of serve in the deuce court.

b) From the backcourt, when approaching, or when countering or defending
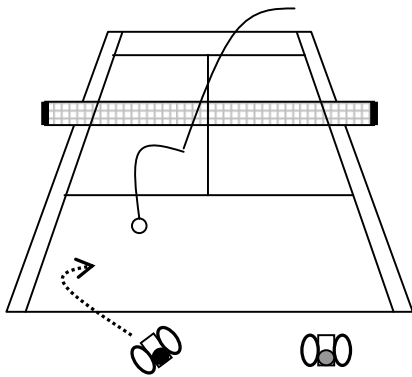
Figure 5.3 - Moving around the backhand on an approach shot.

<u>Movement</u>:

This movement may not be done on a regular basis as lateral movement can be difficult. This fact stands out even more when countering or defending because you have less time to react. Regardless of the phase of play effective decision making must be trained. If time and space permit, position yourself to hit the next ball with your stronger shot by **executing a straight line and a turn** close to the anticipated impact zone.

2.2 Using your strength on the diagonals (inside-out and crosscourt[1])

a) When returning, or from the backcourt

<u>Shot selection</u>:

Hit a crosscourt shot. If the quality of your shot **makes it difficult for the opponent to change the direction** of the ball, then you will create opportunities to use your strength/weapon or hit a winning volley. If the opponent is playing well behind the baseline, aim the ball to bounce a second time close to his chair. The main goal is to challenge his control.
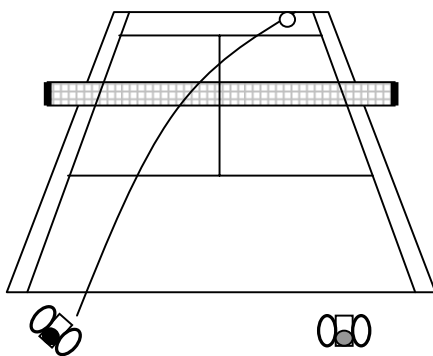

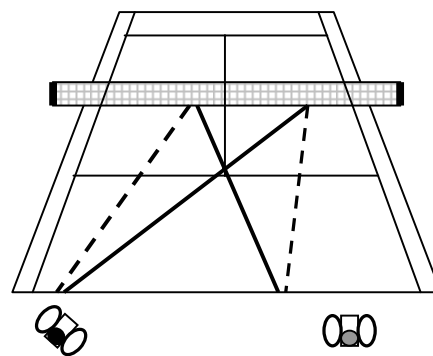**Figure 5.4** – Hitting a deep inside-out crosscourt shot

Figure 5.5 – The zone (**X**) where the ball is expected after an effective deep crosscourt shot.

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[1] All the examples in this section are for an inside-out set-up, but the same principles apply for the crosscourt shot.
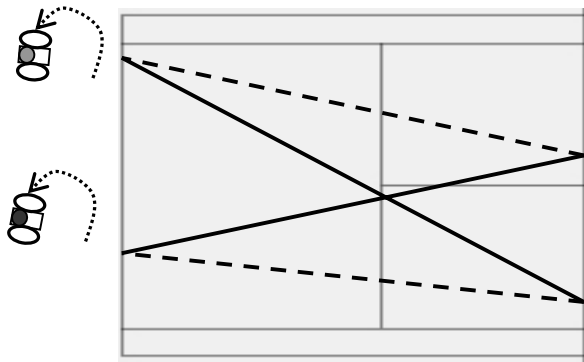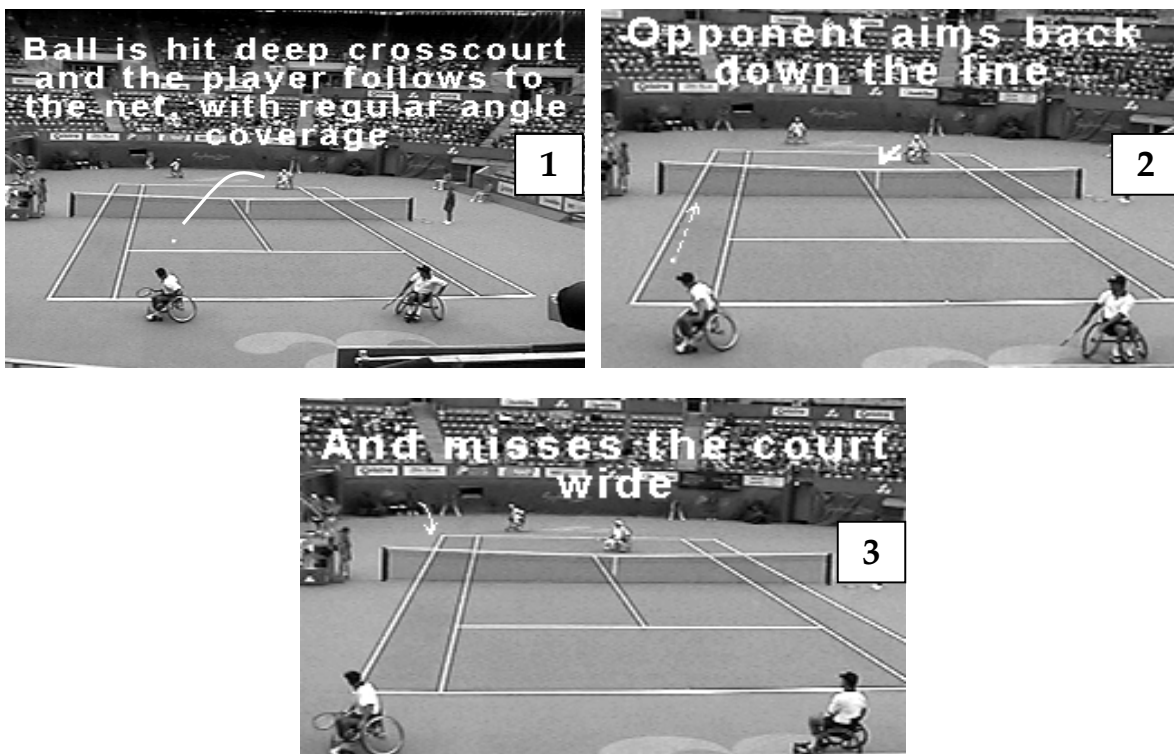
Movement:

Recover slightly more to one side after your shot to open up your strength.

Your partner also moves more to one side. This increases the probability that either player will hit a forehand on the next ball.

Figure 5.6 – Recovery after a deep crosscourt shot.

b) When approaching

Shot selection:

A **deep cross-court approach**, which challenges the opponent's control, is another good pattern to force an error or to volley into the open-court. You might also force an error if the opponent decides to try to change the direction of the ball.


Sequence 5.2 – A player approaches deep cross-court.

<u>Movement</u>:

Follow **the same path as the ball** when approaching the net. Refer to the white line and arrow in frame 1 and 2 of sequence 5.2 on the previous page.

It is also possible for the **net player to intercept a ball** coming through the middle and put to hit a winner to the open court (frame 2 of sequence 5.3 below) **after an effective deep diagonal.** The players should switch sides in this situation if the momentum dictates it. (frame 4, below).
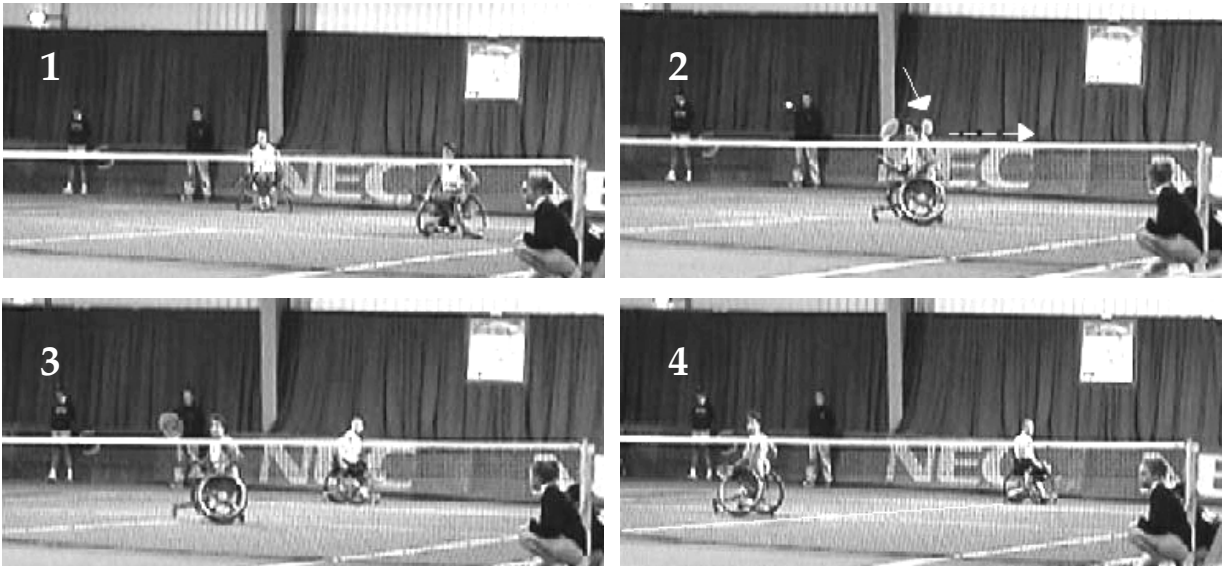
Sequence 5.3 – Taking a ball in the middle after an effective diagonal shot from the partner.

c) When countering or defending

<u>Shot selection</u>:

You will increase the chance of **neutralizing your opponent** by using the diagonals with your strongest shots. Remember that the court is longer, the net is lower in the middle, and there is less court to cover when you recover.

2.3 Hitting moonballs to set up your strength

a) When returning, from the backcourt, or when approaching

<u>Shot selection</u>:

Hit a moonball preferably to the opponent's weakness. If the effectiveness of your shot **makes it difficult for the opponent to control the direction and depth** of the ball, then

you will be rewarded with opportunities to hit your strength/weapon or a winning volley. If the opponent is playing close to the baseline, aim your moonball for the ¾ court. The goal is to challenge his control.

<div align="center">
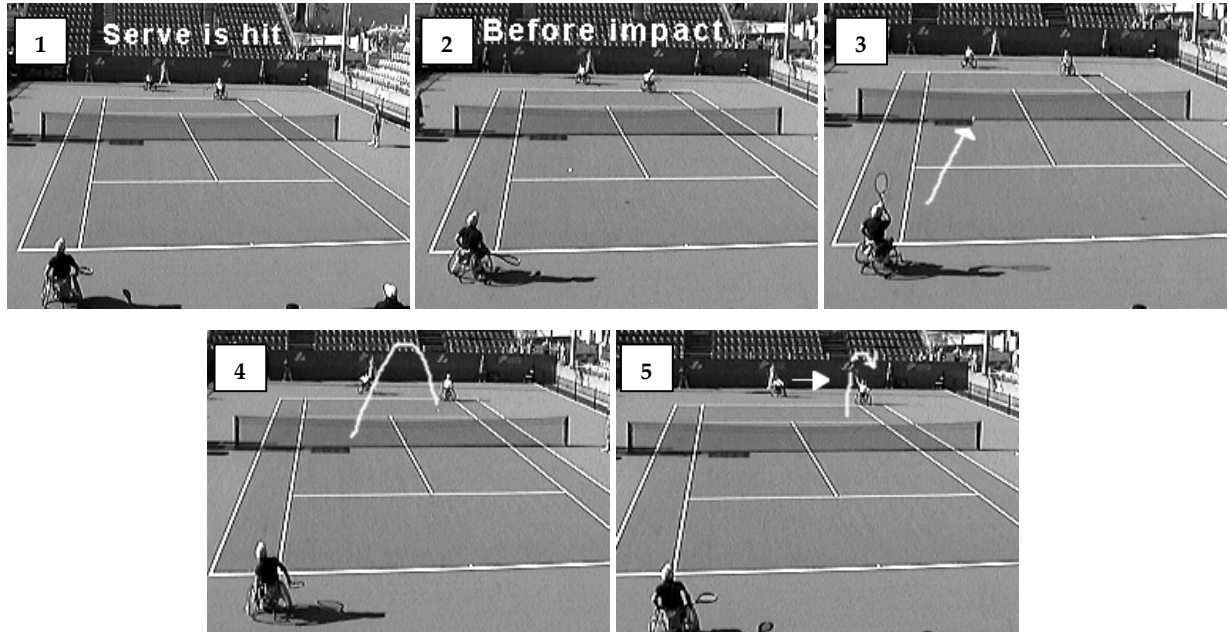
Sequence 5.4 – Hitting a moonball from the return of serve.

</div>

In the sequence above (5.4), the moonball becomes a winning shot instead of a set-up shot.

<u>Movement</u>:

The recovery should be **as in figure 5.6** on page 40 (slightly more to one side).
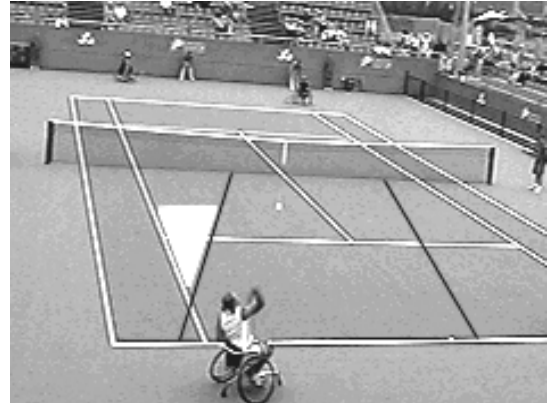
b) When countering or defending

Hitting effective moonballs when in trouble is very useful. It not only **buys you time**, but it **might completely reverse the trend of the point** if your opponents misjudge or miscommunicate about who is taking it.
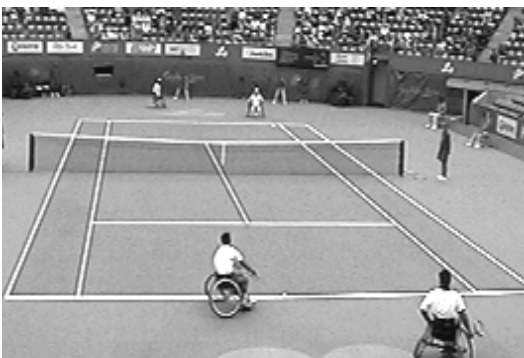
2.4 Leaving part of the court open

a) When serving

Initial positioning:

The server may purposely adopt a lateral position to increase the odds of hitting the next ball with a specific shot. When the server positions herself closer to the singles line on the ad side, it impacts the next shot (Picture 5.1). She could move after her serve so that anything returned at an average pace between the two black lines would be an opportunity

Picture 5.1 – Favoring the forehand after the serve.

to hit a dominating forehand. If she reacts early enough, she could also use her forehand on a soft, short ball hit in the white triangle area.

In picture (5.2), **the server** favours his <u>backhand</u> by initially adopting a position close to the middle. This position invites a return in that direction. His distance from the center will also depend on his speed and the opponents' abilities. The best return from the opponent is down the middle where the weaknesses are located.

Picture 5.2 – Favoring the backhand after the serve.
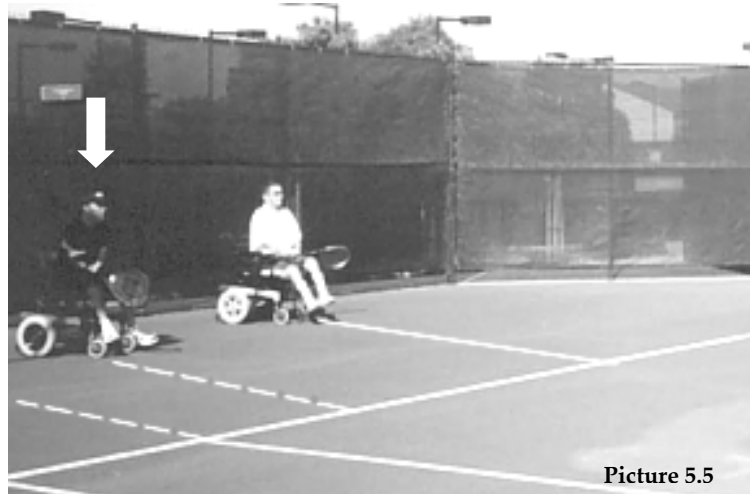

Picture 5.3

Picture 5.4

The server's partner can adopt a position that will increase the chances of hitting her strongest shot after the return (Pictures 5.3 and 5.4). These two pictures show a left-handed player positioned leaving more space on her forehand side.

b) When returning

<u>Initial positioning</u>:

**The player getting ready to return** the serve can shift his position to one side away from

Picture 5.5

the "normal" coverage area (dotted lines). He can then hit from his stronger side on the next shot (unless the serve is very accurate and hard). He also has to be able to cover the other serve possibilities. Much depends on the abilities of the server, and one's own abilities. The receiver in this picture is less effective with the shot on his left side and clearly needs to favour the shot on his right side. Note that this shift in position could also be done toward the doubles' alley.

The receiver's partner can modify his initial position to favour a strength or weapon. The receiver's partner in pictures 5.5 and 5.6 prefers to use the shot on his left side. Therefore they sit on the same sides from the beginning of the point. As a result, they have better chances of hitting their stronger shot is returned on their side.
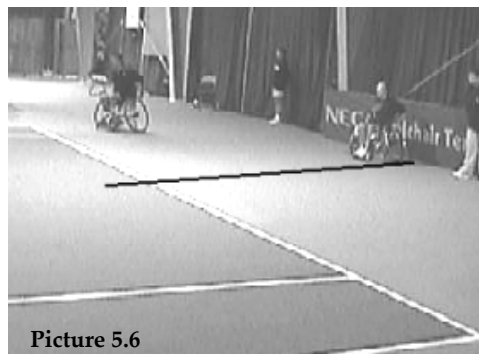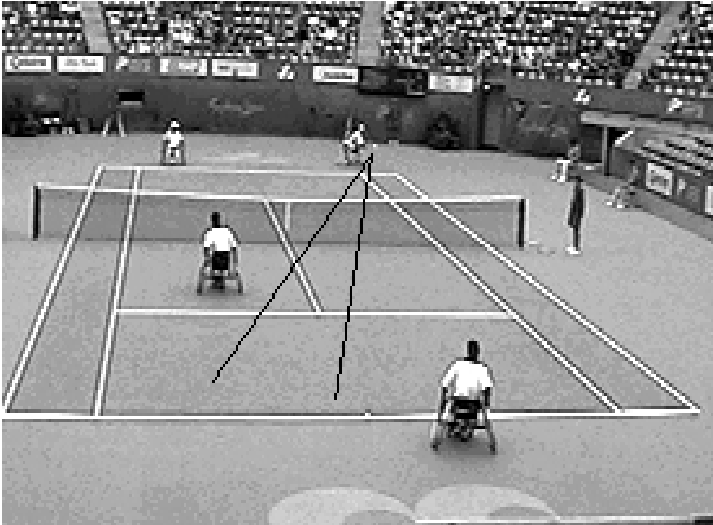

Picture 5.6

c) From the backcourt

<u>Movement</u>:

If a player wishes to hit his strong shot more often during a point, he may **recover while "hiding" his weakness, and opening up his strong side**. More balls will be bouncing in this larger area, or will directly influence your opponent's choice of target, and produce the same result. The latter is called **baiting**. It is a useful tactic because it "lures the ball to a desired position" (Moore & Snow, p.112).

d) When approaching

Movement:

Picture 5.7 – Leaving the center open.

Baiting is a way for the net player to use variations from the regular angle coverage. For example, in picture 5.7, the net player leaves the center "open" prior to impact, and invites his opponent to aim there. Then, he can either hit a dominating volley, or let his partner play his strongest shot. It requires excellent judgment from the net player so that the team does not end up in a defensive situation following that decision.
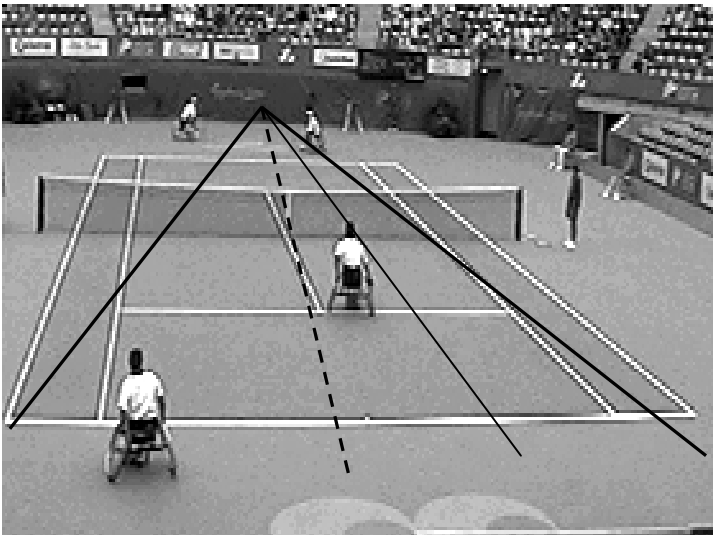
Picture 5.8 – Shifting the net position toward the center.

If a player is at the net by choice, he becomes a weapon. When the opponents are in trouble, it is worth **shifting the net position closer to the center of the court** (or dead center) to maximise the chances of volleying. It leaves part of the alley open, but is outweighed by the benefit of maximising a strength.

In picture 5.8, the opponents are both rushing toward the middle to play a difficult shot while the net player in the near court stays close to the center.

Picture 5.9 shows the next shot. This is another way a player might leave part of the court open to dominate with a strength or a volley in this case.

When the opponents are in trouble, it is useful to adopt a **volleying position closer to the net** to maximise the chance of the ball away. It leaves part of the backcourt open (compared with regular lob coverage), but for the benefit of maximising a strength. Even if the ball is lobbed over his head, the net player knows it will not be an offensive lob, and can count on his partner to cover that part of the court.

Picture 5.9 – Coming closer to the net.

e) When countering or defending

Movement:
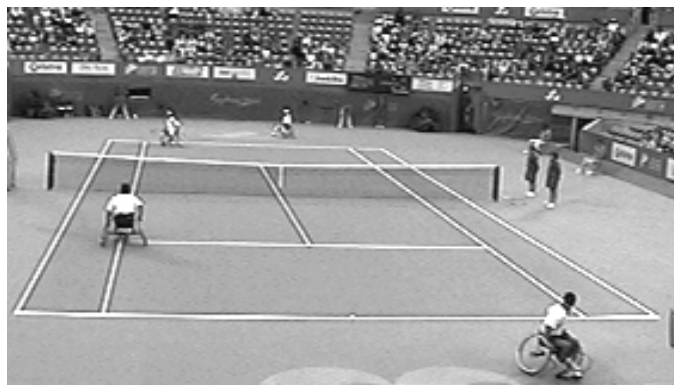
Picture 5.10 – Leaving the center open when defending.

Picture 5.10 shows the net player holding a very conservative lateral position because of his opponent's attacking position inside the court. Notice how close the net player is to the side line (compared to regular angle coverage). He leaves part of the center of the court open because his partner has speed and will also be able to cover a middle ball. The net player in this sequence could also be **faking**. "Faking is used when the player is in trouble. If the player's partner hits a short ball when the player is at the net, then the player can fake to lure an opponent into hitting the ball in a desired direction or into a specific area" (Moore & Snow, p. 112).

Finally, **baiting** can be used to tempt the opponent to attack a certain part of the court. The difference with faking is that the same player would retrieve the ball from the area he left open. The trick is to time the moment to start covering the area left open. It cannot be done as quickly as in stand-up tennis. You have to start earlier, or leave a smaller portion of the court open to maximise the use of a strength or weapon.

2.5 Forcing the opponent to hit to your partner's strength

a) When serving

Movement:

Picture 5.11
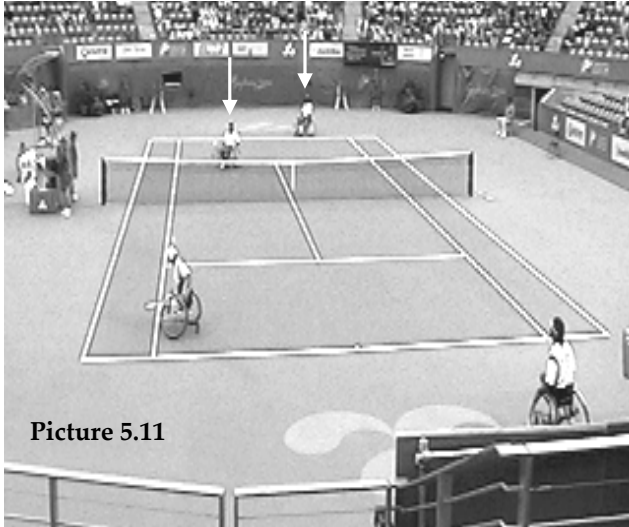
Regardless of its style, a team can force the opponents to play to their strength **right after the serve**. If the strongest player is serving from an initial positioning that is favoring his strength, and a player is sent to the net to block the rest of the court[2], then the next shot after the return will be one of the team's strengths. In picture 5.11, the server and his partner (white arrows) are expecting a cross-court return toward the server's stronger side.

b) When returning, or when approaching

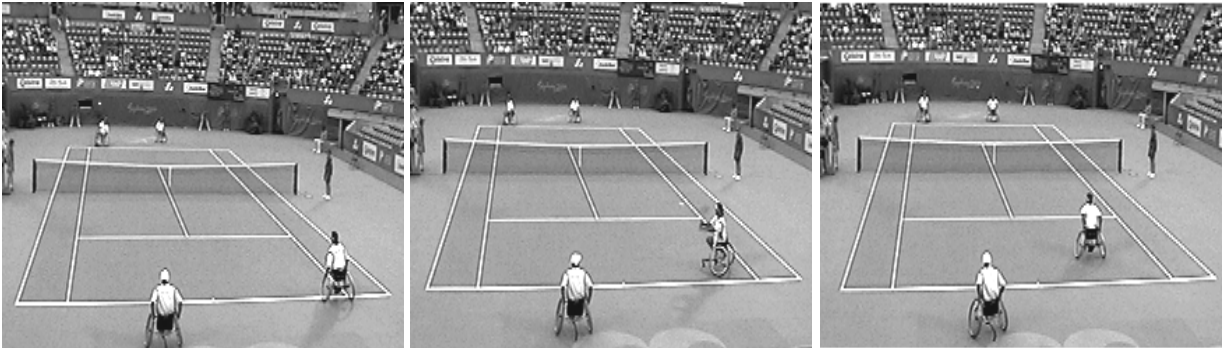Initial positioning:

The receiver's partner can influence the use of a strength/weapon by initially

Picture 5.12

positioning himself at the net. The next ball will be played his partner who has positioned himself to open up his best shot. The opponents' serving level and the partner's (white arrow in picture 5.12) return effectiveness will influence this tactical decision. Once again, the goal is block a part of the court so that the next ball is played to the stronger player's strength/weapon.

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[2] Note that the player could already by inside the court or move in as the server prepares to deliver the serve. His position on the court when the receiver makes contact is what counts.

Movement:

The receiver can influence the use of a strength on the next shot by following the return to the net. The next ball will likely be played to the partner who is the strongest player or who has opened up his strength or weapon. It is a successful tactic if the return and

Sequence 5.5 – The receiver returns and follows the shot to the net.

the court coverage are effective enough to force the opponent to play the ball to the partner.

2.6 Making use of switches

a)   When serving

Initial positioning and movement:

In the example on the next page (figures 5.7 and 5.8) a "Net Player" team can find itself combining their MEP with starting the point with a strength by using a **most-effective-position switch**[3] right after the serve. The server and the net player start on the same side, with the server very close to the center to cover the court more easily afterward. This initial positioning can force the opponents to play to the team's strength or the strongest player **right after the serve**, regardless of the team's style.

A BackCourt Team or an All-Court Team could do the same thing by positioning the server and his partner on the same side in the backcourt.

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[3] See Appendix 2 for a summary of the different switches as they relate to the phases of play.
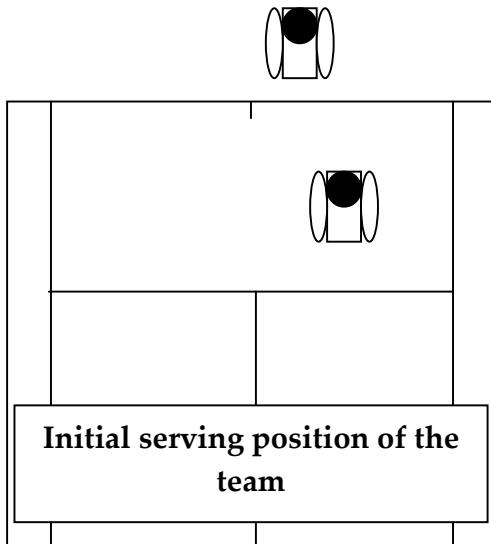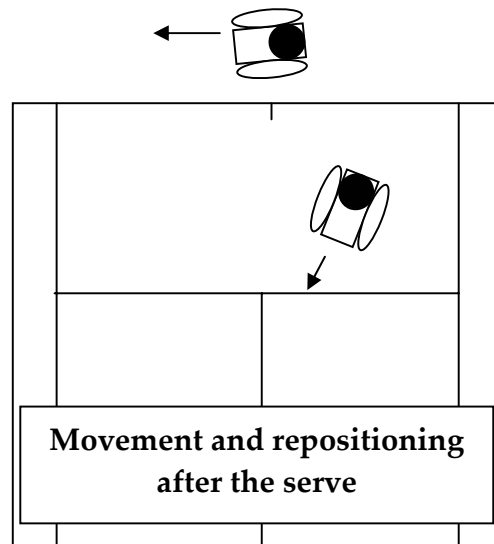
Figure 5.7

Figure 5.8

b) From the backcourt

Movement:

- A **strength/weapon switch** is done with the intent of using one of the partners' best shots to win the point or set the team up on the next hit. It can be done on the first or second bounce. The goal is to let the player with the best shot/weapon hit the ball. Therefore, even if the player toward whom the ball is coming could play the ball, he will leave it for his partner, and switch sides. Naturally, this is best executed on a slow, easy ball so that the player has time to set up and hit an effective shot (see figures 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11).
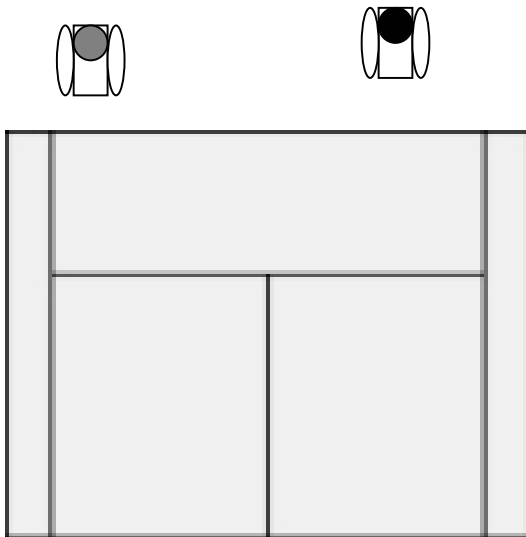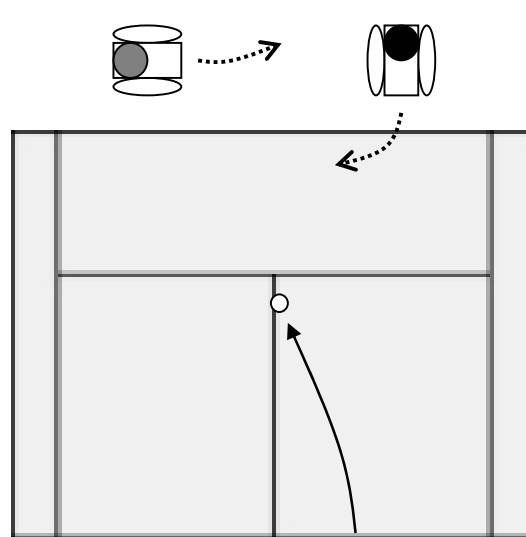
Figure 5.9 - Opponents make contact.

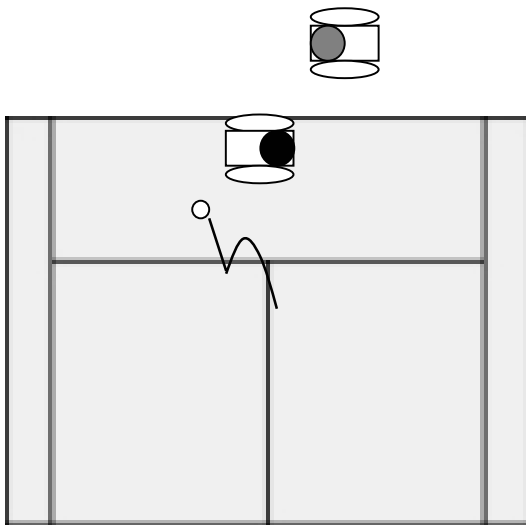**Figure 5.10** - Partners start switching as the ball comes.

Figure 5.11 - Player positions to hit the ball with his stronger shot or weapon.

A team should maximise its strengths in any way possible. A player should not feel cheated if he leaves the ball knowing his partner is more effective in the situation. That is the spirit of teamwork linked to tactical decisions.

This type of switch could be trained within a pattern (i.e. following a deep diagonal).

- A **target switch** is done when both players are back. This switch has partners changing sides before the opponents hit the ball. It helps trap them into hitting to the strongest player. It must be done during a sequence when the team has time to make the switch without getting into trouble (i.e., on a moonball), and so that the movement is not too obvious. The difference between this and the other switches is that it is done <u>before</u> opponents make contact.

- The style of a team is part of its strength. A switch that helps maintain a team style is called **pistoning**[4]. For example, a Net Player team can use it to reintegrate its most effective positioning with one specific player at the net. **Pistoning by decision** is when one partner wheels intentionally behind the baseline to allow the partner to move in (sequence 5.6).
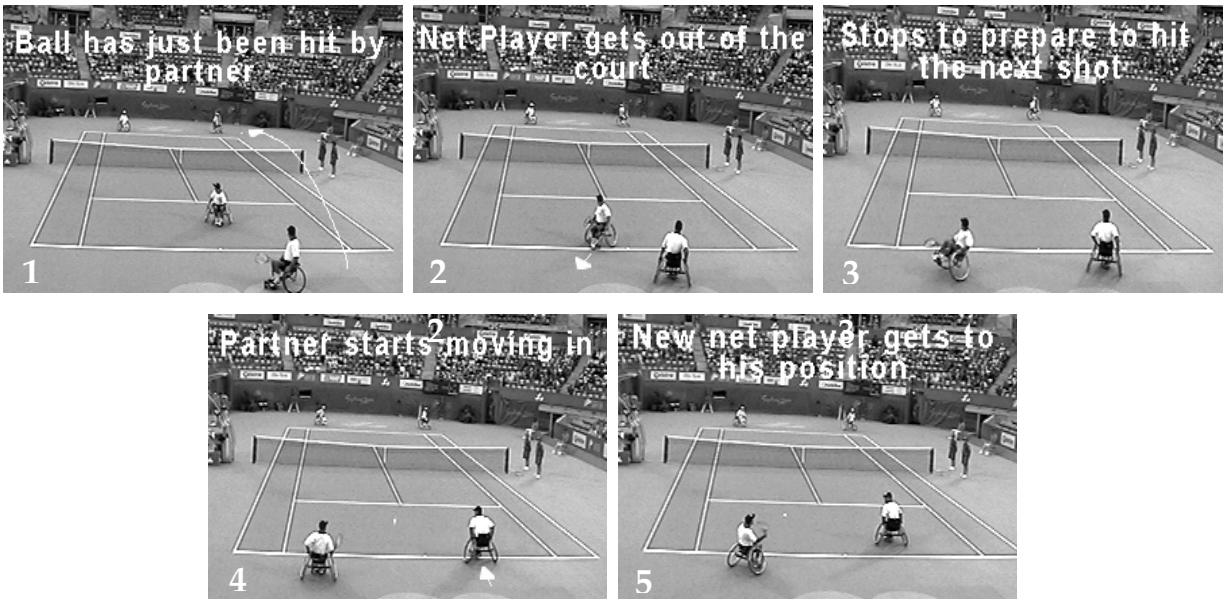
Sequence 5.6 – Pistoning by decision.

c) When approaching

Movement:

Given that the net player is a strength, a **target switch** could be used while one of the players is moving forward while switching sides following a moonball.
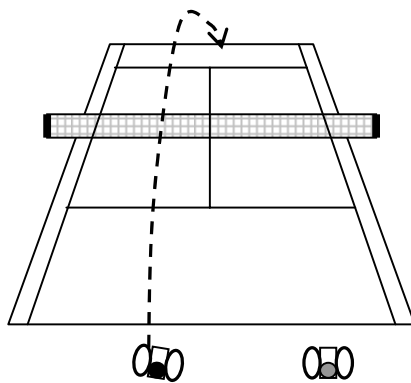
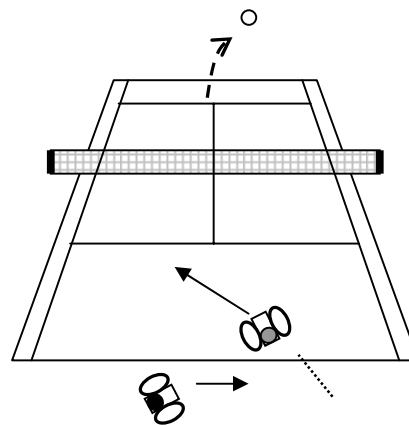

| **Figure 5.12** - The moonball is executed. | **Figure 5.13** - Partners start changing sides as the ball bounces. |

[4] Term created by Tennis Canada Touring Coach, Wayne Elderton in 1999.

If the moonball is effective it will forces the opponent to defend. The player going to the net should slow down just behind the "T" and be ready to intercept on both sides (as mentioned in section 2.4 – d, on page 45).

d) When countering or defending

<u>Movement</u>:

The **speed** of one of the players could be the **strength** of a team. Instead of only being responsible for their own side, both partners should be ready to cover ANY part of the court, and use their speed to keep the rally going when they are countering or defending.

There are two types of switches that will improve court coverage. The first is called a **momentum switch**. This type of switch occurs while getting to a ball hit in the middle of the court. When both players are coming toward the middle, it will be easier for them to keep on going after the ball is hit instead of slowing down and turning back. Either player could play the ball as contact will be in the middle. The momentum toward the other side is the important variable in this switch. If you see your partner coming fast toward the middle to get to the ball, push toward the middle as well to cross to the other side to make the switch. Do this as soon as you detect that she will not be able to slow down.
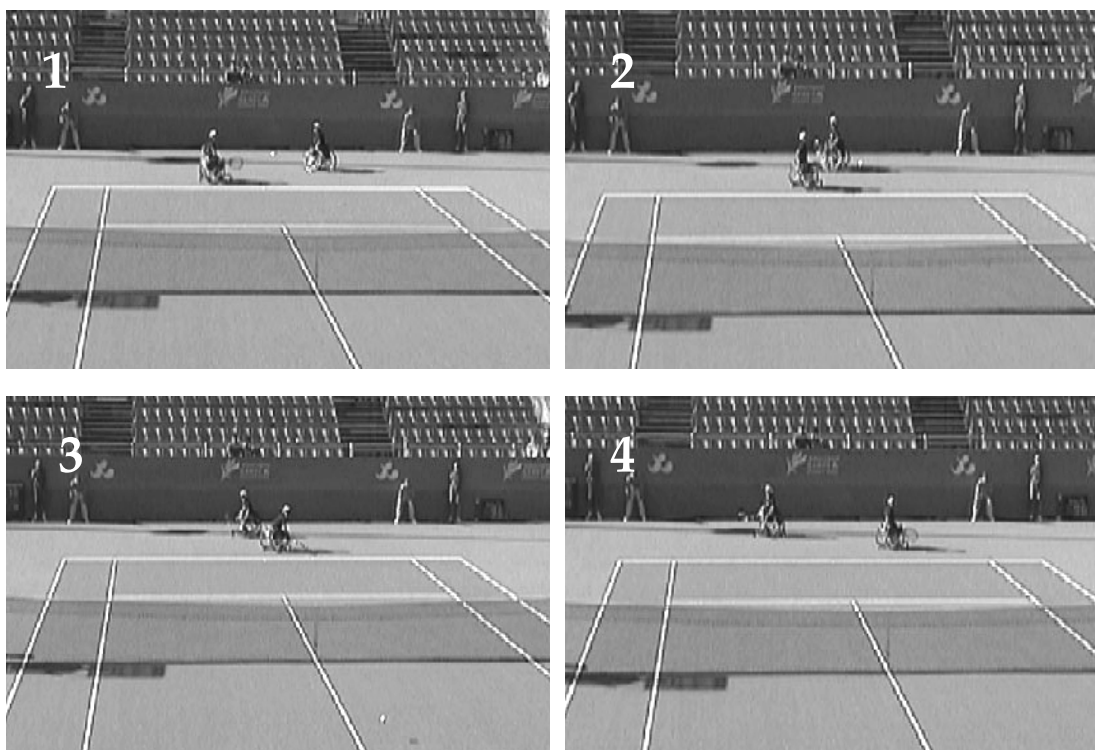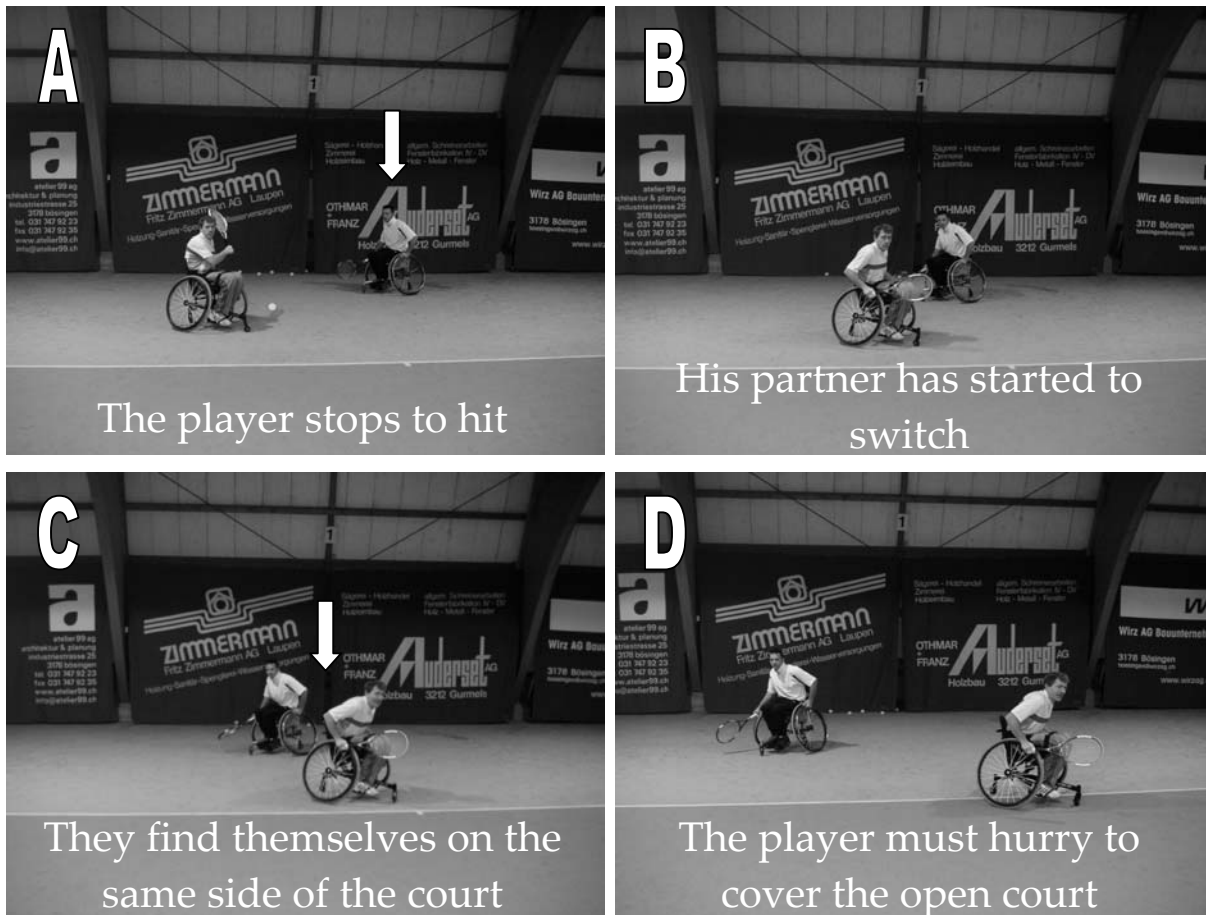

Sequence 5.7 – A momentum switch.

If the goal is to maximise the use of the speed, then switching becomes complementary , and therefore a basic requirement for the team.

In frames 1 and 2 of sequence 5.7 (previous page), the player close to the baseline is coming toward the middle with good momentum to play the ball. Note that her partner has started pushing toward the middle as well. She is still moving at impact, and so is her partner. Frames 3 and 4 show the continuous movement once the ball has been hit, and the ideal court coverage that follows.

To illustrate the relevance of this team movement, the next sequence (5.8) shows two players making a bad decision about switching on a ball close to the middle. The player closest to the tarp decides to move to the other side, but his partner has to stop to hit the ball and lose momentum **before** he crosses the middle. It leaves a large part of the court open as the opponent is about to hit the next ball (frame C). A momentum switch exists only through momentum.

The white arrow in frame A shows the player behind already pushing toward his partner's side. The arrow in frame C shows that the two partners end up on the same side of the court, and become vulnerable.

Sequence 5.8 – A wrong decision to switch.

The same thing might happen with a player at the net. In this next sequence, the last frame (**F**) shows that there should have been a momentum switch, but instead the partners end up on the same side. The net player should have switched in frame **C**.
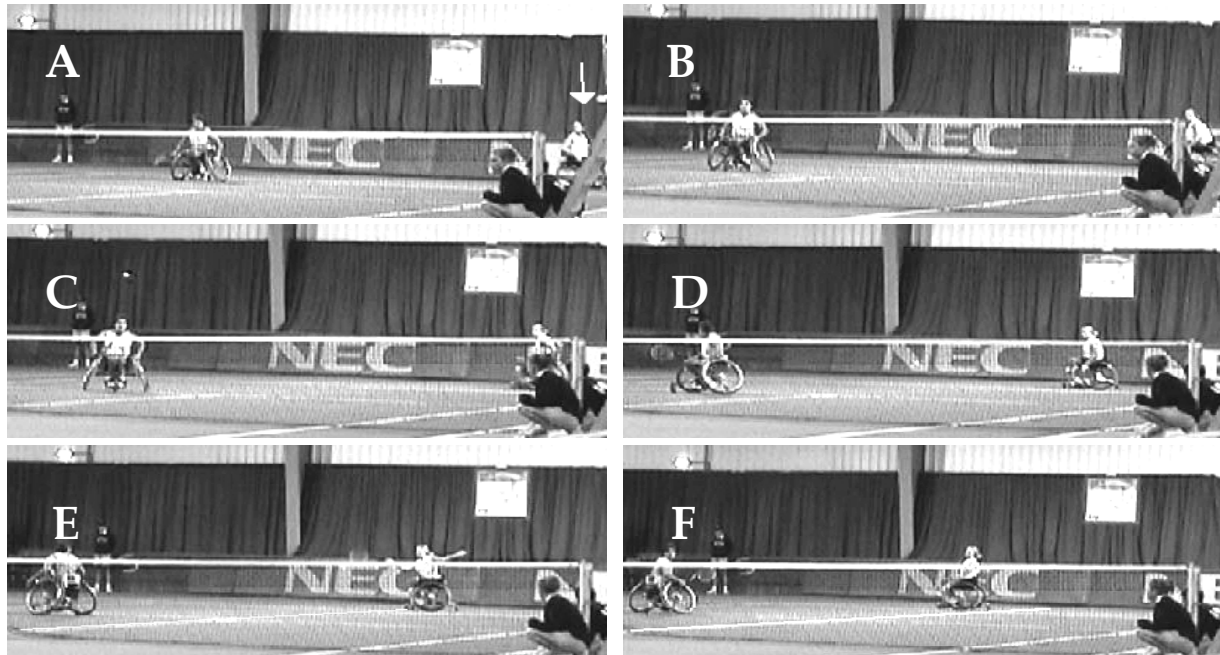

Sequence 5.9 – A missed momentum switch. It is more difficult for the net player to assess if she should switch or not since her partner is behind her, and her position and speed are uncertain.

Note that **a momentum switch could be used intentionally** to reintegrate the most effective positioning of the team.

Movement:

The second type of switch that will help improve court coverage is a **retrieving switch**. The difference with it and the momentum switch is that the player chasing the ball clearly crosses the middle. The retrieving switch occurs when a ball hit on one of the partner's sides has to be chased down by the partner coming from the other side (behind or in front of the partner).
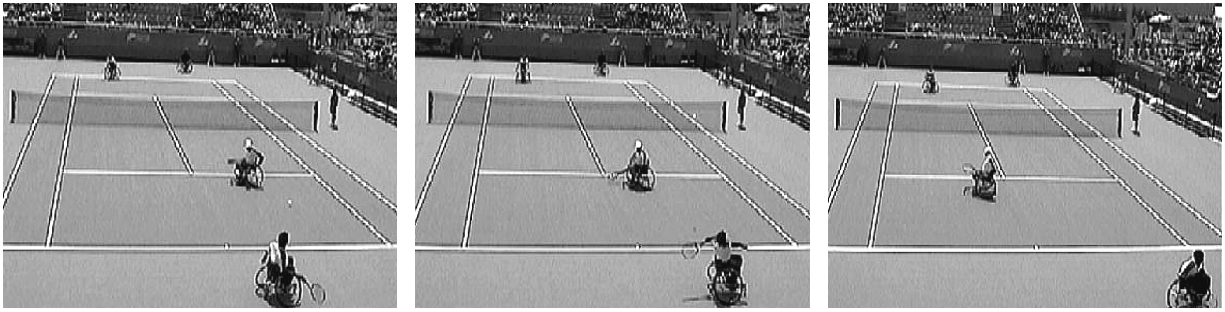
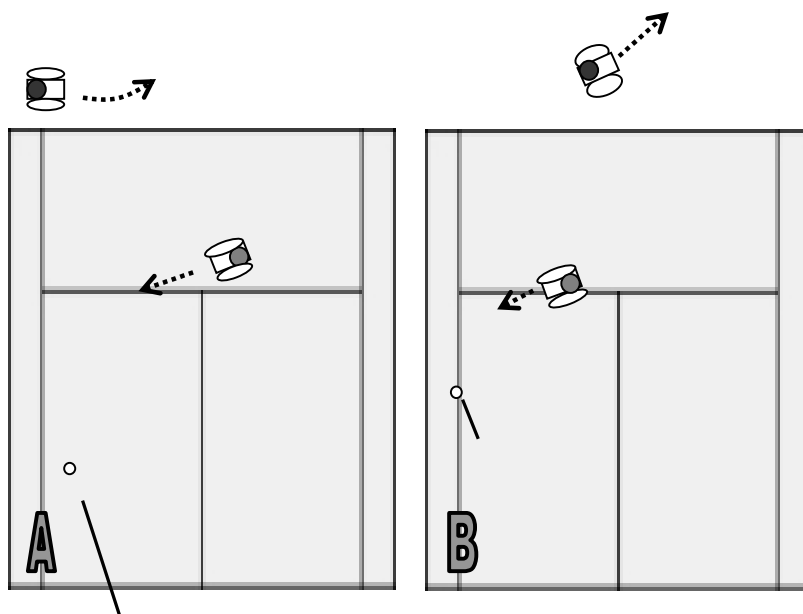**Sequence 5.10** – A retrieving switch behind the partner.

Figure 5.14 – A retrieving switch in front of the partner.

<u>Notes:</u>

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