

Part II - Rallying Phase

Rally shots, also known as neutralising shots, are played in response to a quality shot of your opponents. It is deep, has good pace and spin and prevents you from taking an aggressive position on court. It may be a good cross court forehand or backhand; a groundstroke or serve directed down the middle at the body. Your aim in this phase of the point is to prevent your opponent from gaining control on the next shot as a result of your short or weak return.

The rallying or neutralising phase of a point is possibly the most common scenario during a match. Players need to understand the context of this shot – too safe and the opponent will be able attack; too risky and many errors will occur. Drills should teach players their ideal rallying speed where they both apply pressure to the opponent while minimising unforced errors.

A good neutralising shot will have the following characteristics:-

- Directed at a large target area, well inside the lines,
- Played with plenty of spin to increase the margin for error,
- Good net clearance, and
- Don't change the direction of the ball.

All these factors contribute to reducing errors.

When rallying or neutralising it is crucial to be patient and play percentage tennis waiting for the opportunity to create or attack. *It should not be confused, however, with safe, hesitant or tentative tennis.* Lleyton Hewitt sometimes falls into this trap of merely waiting for his opponent to become impatient and make an error. His shots frequently drop inside the service box and quality opponents pounce and take control of the point.

During the neutralising phase of a point players need to consider the following issues:-

- Playing personality. Are you an aggressive shot maker; or more a patient, percentage player?
- The flow of the match. Is the opponent dominating the rally situation and could more variety be used?
- Opponent strengths and weakness'. Consider a cross court rally between a left handed player and a right handed player both with big forehands. Don't let your opponent play their strength to your weakness'.

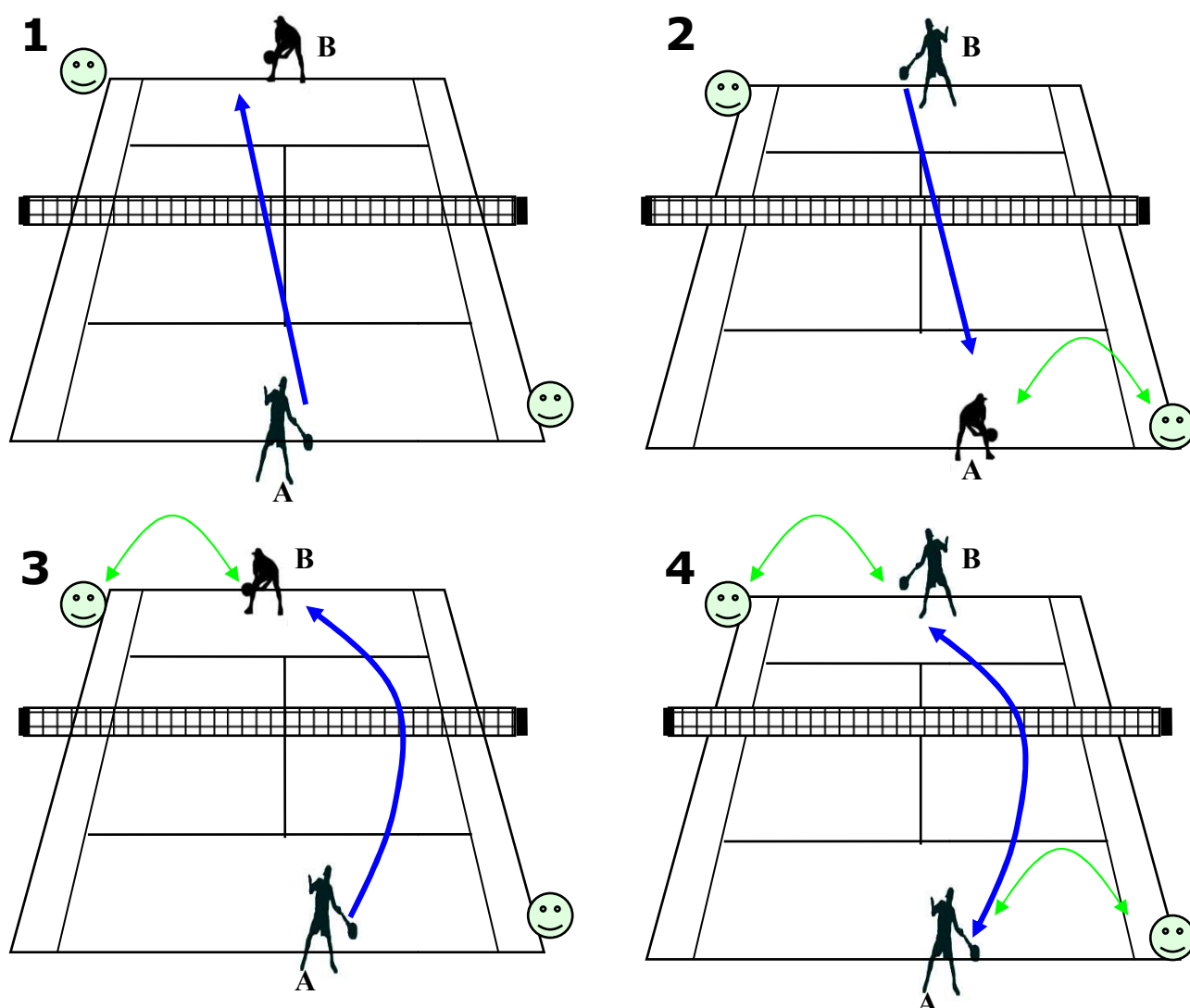
Smart players will play neutralising shots early in the point. Serving a second serve into the body, or returning at the servers feet (net or baseline) are two good examples of neutralising shots early in the point. This will both decrease your chance of error; and make any aggressive or forcing shot from your opponent more risky.

Coaches should strive to increase the quality of their students rallying shots during practice (pace, spin, depth). It is of no use training players to hit 50 – 100 – 200 balls in a row as this will rarely happen in a match and most likely will be at a slow speed. More effective would be to have them rally 10 – 20 balls at a higher speed, more spin and greater depth.

RALLYING DRILLS SECTION

The objective of each of these drills is to train the rallying and neutralising aspects discussed in this chapter. Co-operative drills are the emphasis of this section as they best hone rallying skills. Review the main points of this chapter before implementing these drills.

Rally / Neutralising Drill #1 "Partner Rally and Catch"



Drill Type: Fundamental Motor Skills

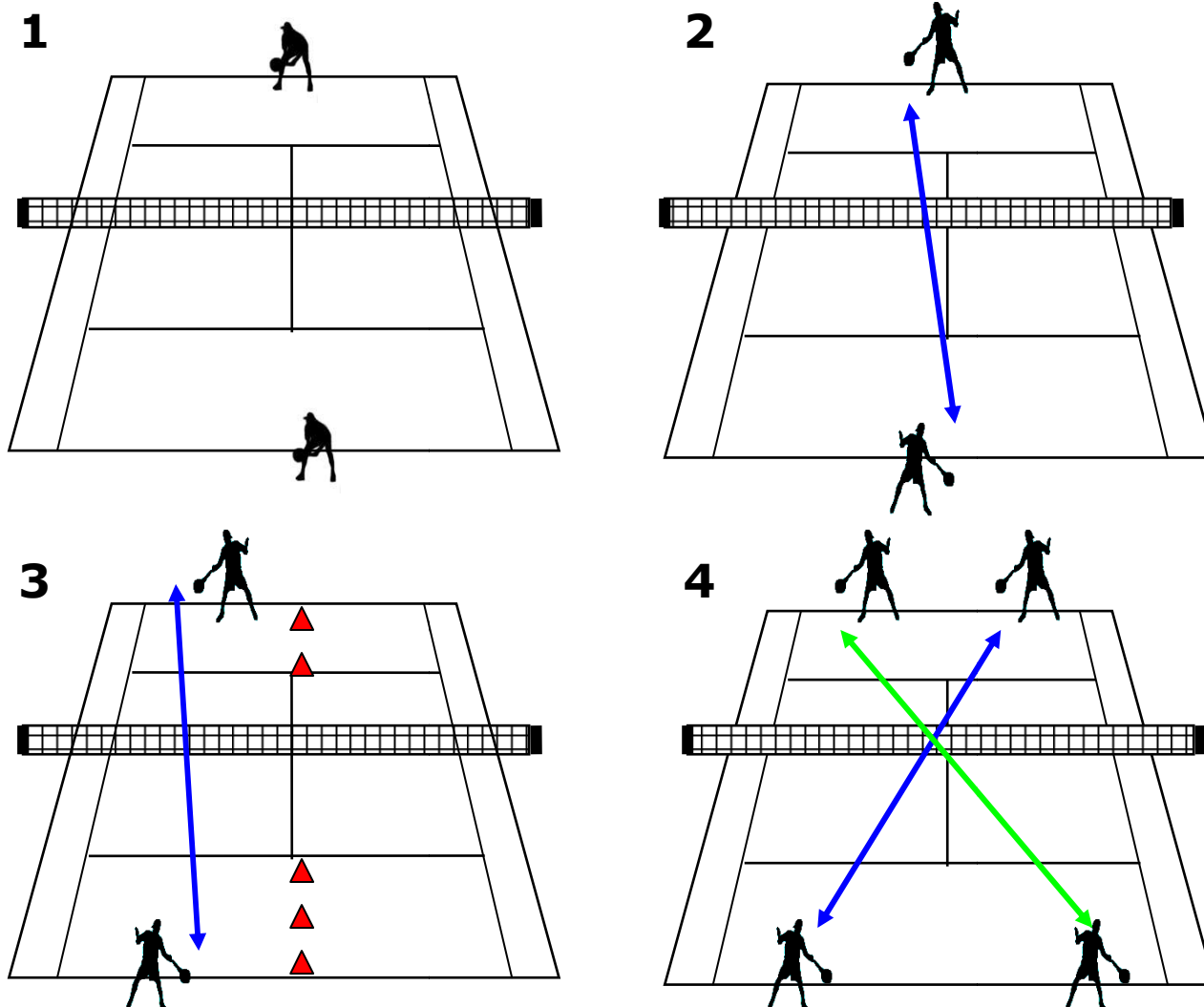
Instruction:

1. Two players start a controlled rally from the baseline. Each player has a partner standing adjacent to them in the sideline – each has a ball and will act as the catch partner.
2. After starting the rally Player A turns to their partner who lobs them a ball which is caught and thrown back while player B returns the ball.
3. B completes the same action as A and the rally continues. The players will need to manipulate the pace of their shots, slowing down where necessary so they can complete the partner catch.
4. The aim is to rally as many balls consecutively as possible by **controlling the speed of the rally**.

Coaching notes:

Rotate positions every minute so rallying and partner catching is balanced. As many as 8 students can conduct this drill on one court by using ½ court boundaries.

Rally / Neutralising Drill #2 "2 Minute Test"



Drill Type:

Rally / Co-operative

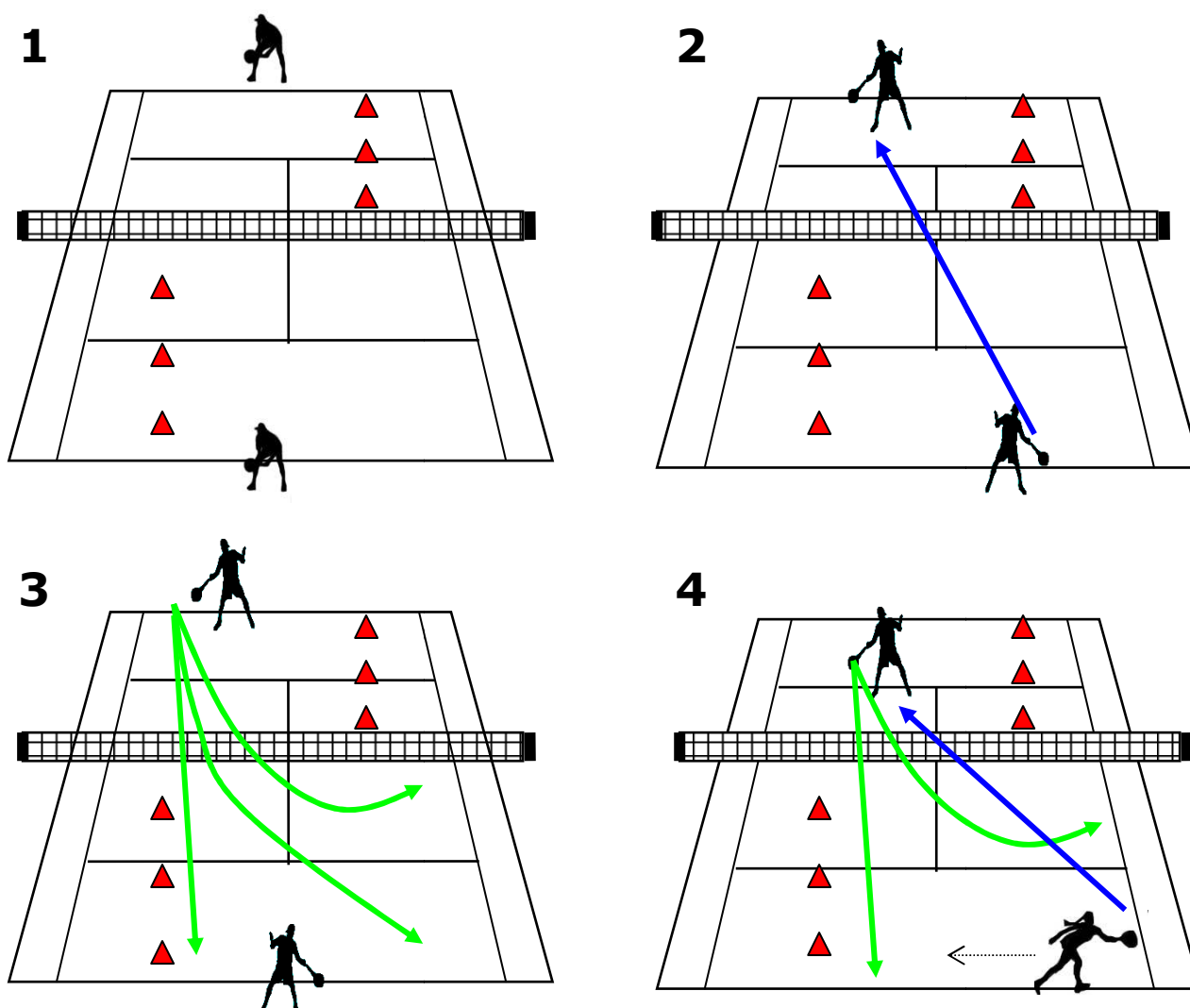
Instruction:

1. Two players set up for a baseline rally.
2. On the coaches signal they will play a high intensity rally, aiming to hit as many balls in a 2 minute time limit as possible. The rally speed must be balanced to hit as many balls as possible; while avoiding errors - which will waste time while the ball is retrieved and the rally started again.
3. Use a half court area to increase the degree of skill needed by the player. Consider only counting shots that land beyond the baseline to monitor quality.
4. Two pairs of players can compete in a cross court challenge aiming to reach the highest score.

Coaching Notes:

A benchmark of around 50 shots (25 each in 2 minutes) would be appropriate for our developing players. Advanced players should aim for 60+ while elite players should reach 70+ for this drill.

Rally / Neutralising Drill #3 "Cross Court Consistency - Forehand Pattern"



Drill Type:

Situational / Decision Making

Instruction:

1. Set up the court as illustrated. The markers should be placed 1.5 metres (approximately 2 racquet lengths) inside the side lines creating a forehand cross court hitting zone.
2. Start the rally with an underhand feed and during the point only forehands are allowed to be played.
3. To win the point, the players have to manipulate the spin, speed, height, angle and depth of their shots. Keeping the opponent off balance and out of position should be the priority with the aim to force errors by hitting shots that the opponent can't handle.
4. In the limited court areas hitting an outright winner will be difficult. By pulling the opponent out of court and then improving your court position you will be able to attack the backhand - or wrong foot your opponent as they scramble back to cover the backhand.

Coaching Notes:

Play sets of 1st to 7 and emphasise patiently taking control of the rally.