

Repetition Racquetball



by Marcia Richards

The Stepping Stones To A Solid Game

Why?

The Will to Win Means Nothing Without The Will To Practice

I saw this quote printed on a t-shirt at the National Singles Championships in Houston Texas years ago, and I felt it appropriate to use many times since in my career as a coach and as a teacher. Too many times I have heard players say, “I just do not seem to be improving”, or “I practice all the time, but I still do not get better.” or “I keep making the same mistakes”. Something is wrong with the way players' practice or with the lack of practice. Is your practice sessions boring? Are you practicing the right skills? How can I tell if I am practicing the skills incorrectly? There is a saying that goes something like this: *Practice makes perfect*. To take the saying a step further, the saying could go “*perfect practice makes perfect*”. How about even going further to say, “***perfect practice makes permanence***”. Making a skill become a habit in game situations is the goal. Having the skill become an automatic choice in the heat of competition will make a difference in your game.

If a player works on the skills using correct form, it will become a permanent part of their game. If the player practices skills, but uses incorrect form, the end result is a bad habit that needs to be broken. In order to correct the bad habit, the player must practice the skill 100 times the RIGHT way for every time they performed the skill incorrectly. Breaking bad habits are hard to do. Learning the skills correctly the first time around is easier and less work in the long run.

Let's use a passing shot for an example. A good passing shot should bounce twice before it hits the back wall. A player practices by hitting 100 forehand shots but does not hit the ball with their knees bent or their elbow is slightly bent each time they practice their 100 shots. The ball continuously goes too high and comes off the back wall. So each time they go to hit a forehand shot in a game, the ball keeps coming off the back wall for an easy set up. Their opponent keeps putting the ball away to end the rally. The player begins to get frustrated and does not find success, because they have practiced the skill incorrectly to begin with. Knowing what to practice and how to practice is a very important component to skill development.

You may be disappointed if you fail, but you are doomed if you do not try. (Beverly Sills)
If you think you can , you can. And if you think you can't you're right. (Mary Kay Ash)

What Kind Of Player Are You?

If you constantly compare yourself with others, you may become either unhappy or boastfully proud, for their will always be people greater or lesser than you are. by McElroy

To bring your game to the next level you need to improve on what you already have and need to add new skills. The following is a list of criteria put out by the USRA and AmPro to show the skills necessary to play at a certain skill level. This criterion is used to rate players for skill divisions. Ratings reflect skill levels, and is different from rankings and seedings used in tournaments.

Basic Ratings

Level & Experience	Technique/Ability	Competition
PRO - highest level of play	Can retain amateur status in all prize money is deposited w/ the USRA & applied against expenses.	Plays Pro Tour, Pro/AM, & tournaments that offer prize money.
Open -highest level of amateur play	Rated higher than an A player & probably coaches or gives lessons.	Plays in most tournaments, local, state, regional & national. Has completed clinics attended the Elite Camp.
“A” - plays regularly & is a top player in the club.	Trains regularly, backhand & forehand strokes are near equal. Has good depth, high shot percentage, no apparent weaknesses...has perfected the rollout & re-kills opponents offensive shots.	Competes in sanctioned tournaments & may seek to attend Elite Camp. Has a coach or is seeking a coach.
“B” -plays regularly & find time to practice on their own to perfect shots	Has the knowledge, court strategy, & positioning in offense & defense situations. Selects proper shots most of the time & is inconsistent, but improving. Is developing patience & is able to take tips from better players.	Shows interest in lessons and attends clinics. Plays in most tournaments, club leagues, shuttles, and round robins.
“C” -played over 6 months, plays frequently developing strength in the basics	Can execute most shots with some precision. Knowledge of game is rising. Can safely attempt ceiling, pinches, passing & occasionally kill shots.	Has taken lessons, attended clinics & has begun to play small tournaments. Has a second racquet.
“D” -just beginning to receive instruction, but lacks the experience.	Is learning the safety rules, the forehand backhand strokes. Experiments with the Z serve, backwall, angles, & passing shots.	Is ready to start playing in club leagues and friendly competition.

I have seen players who play a certain division, but lack some of the skills that the USRA sets as their standards. An example of this is a “C” player who never uses pinches. This is just an example of a skill that this particular "C" player would need to elevate their game.

You must have direction, a plan of action, a set of goals, or a prescription on how to practice and how to raise your game to the next level. I will present a series of drills and a step-by-step method of how to drill and what errors to look for in making corrections in your game. I look forward to giving back to the racquetball community in an instructional manner.

First Drill: THE MIRROR DRILL

At most clubs there is a space with large mirrors. It can be the aerobics room or cycling room or even a glass court. Position yourself so you can practice your swing without a ball and watch yourself in the mirror. If you are unfamiliar with the correct swing pattern then look at someone else's and make mental notes to yourself (The racquet prep, the swing, the contact point, and the follow-through). You can also look at Racquetball Magazine and take mental notes. When positioning yourself start by facing the mirror and you end up with one side facing the mirror on the follow-through. When using the glass back wall of a court you can see your image in the glass using the sidewall as the front wall. Be sure to practice both the forehand and backhand. Also stop your stroke at each key point to check your body position. Check points: (1) the back swing or racquet prep position is with the elbow high and even with the shoulder. You can use Sudy's check point of the belly button pointing into the back corner, (2) the swing should be level as if you are swinging your racquet along a bench or coffee table, (3) the contact point is off the front foot with the elbow straight and the racquet in line with your wrist and elbow, and (4) the follow-through both legs are in a 90 degree bend with the shoulders facing the front wall. You are balanced and the racquet travels through the stroke at the level of the swing. Do this drill in slow motion and in fast motion. This will develop muscle memory so you can establish what it feels like and what it looks like.

John Wooden said, "what your mind can conceive and believe...it can achieve". Get the PICTURE?