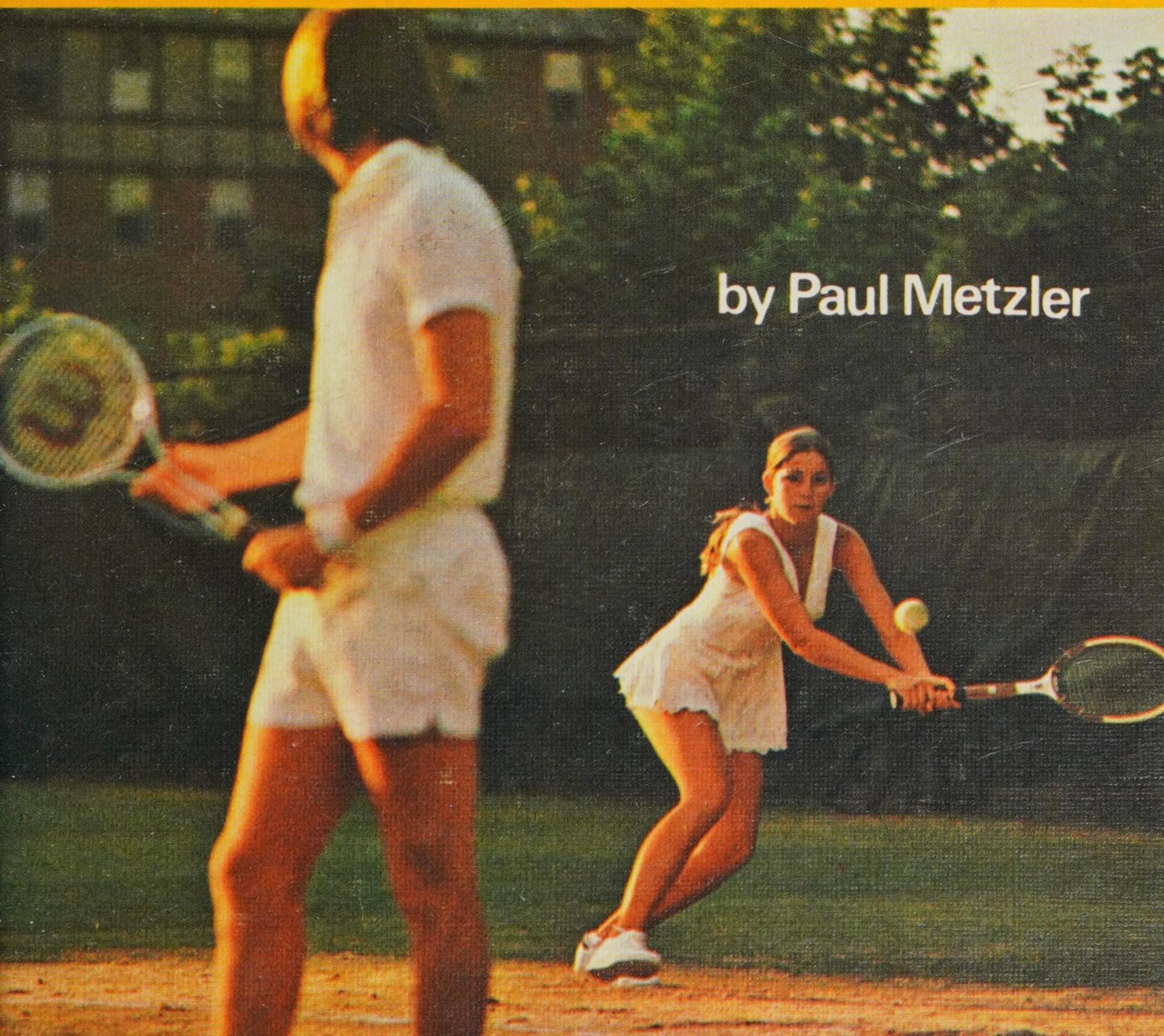


tennis doubles

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TACTICS AND FORMATIONS

by Paul Metzler



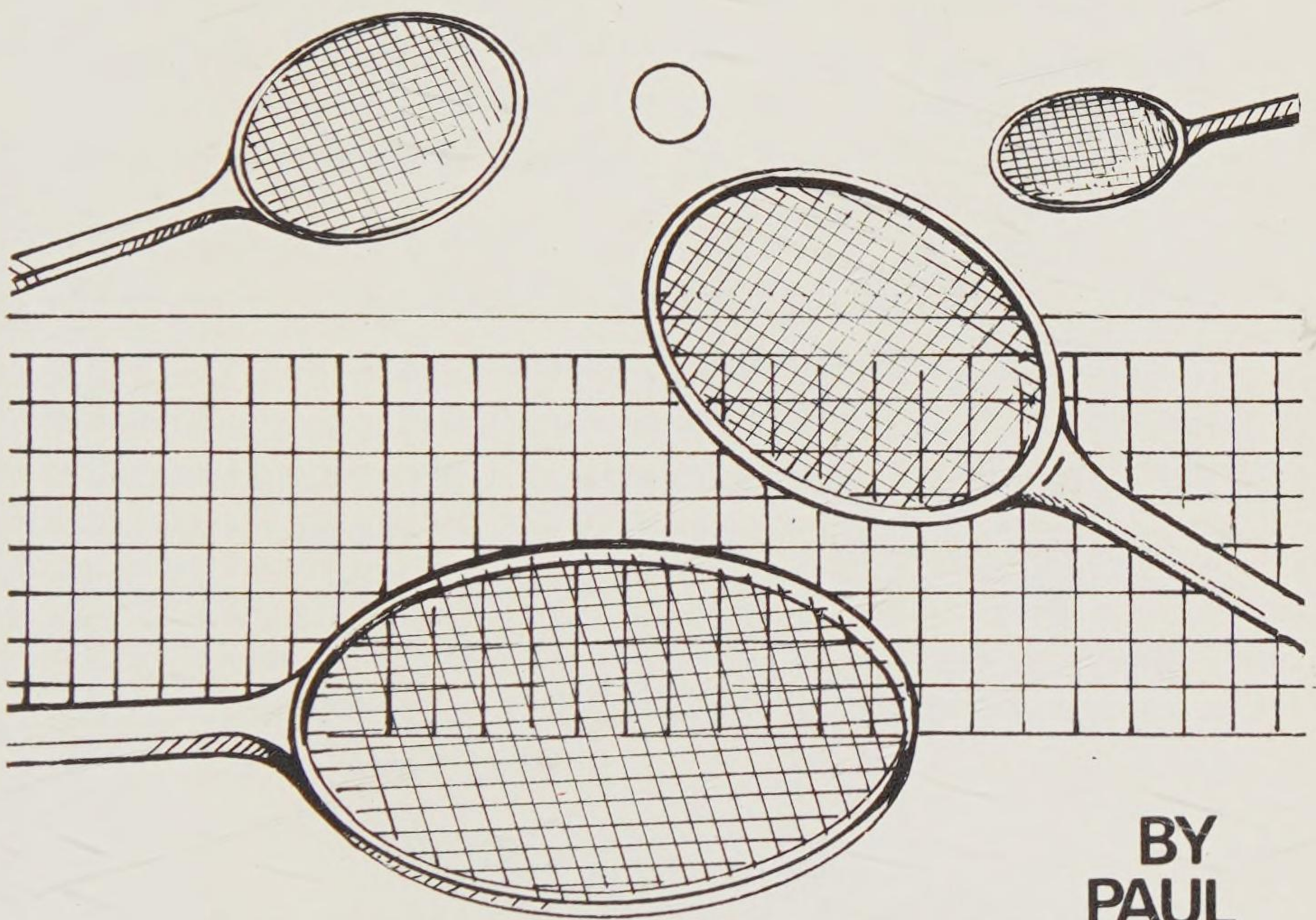


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**TACTICS AND
FORMATIONS**



**BY
PAUL
METZLER**



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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Advanced Tennis
Getting Started in Tennis
Tennis Weaknesses and Remedies

Athletic Institute Series

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INTRODUCTION

PERHAPS you always play doubles One Up One Back and feel things are becoming rather static. You'd like to experiment with tactics—but what are they exactly?

Or, you're young and improving and playing Net Game doubles, but your game is brittle. You never know if you and your partner will do well or be beaten hollow, and you're never certain of beating pairs you know you should be able to beat. You badly want to make your game solid.

Or you're left-handed and have heard you're supposed to have great natural tactical advantages. But you wish you knew what they were.

Or you're a girl.

Perhaps you want to learn from watching good players play doubles, live or on TV, but you don't know exactly what you're seeing, what they're really up to, either with the strokes they use or their positional play.

You want to be a more appreciative spectator.

Perhaps you play Net Game doubles well but you feel incomplete and would like a few fine points argued out.

That's about the range of interests the book covers, but it is mainly directed towards making your game solid. You need strokes and tactics for that, whatever formation you use.

—PAUL METZLER

1. STANDARD FORMATIONS

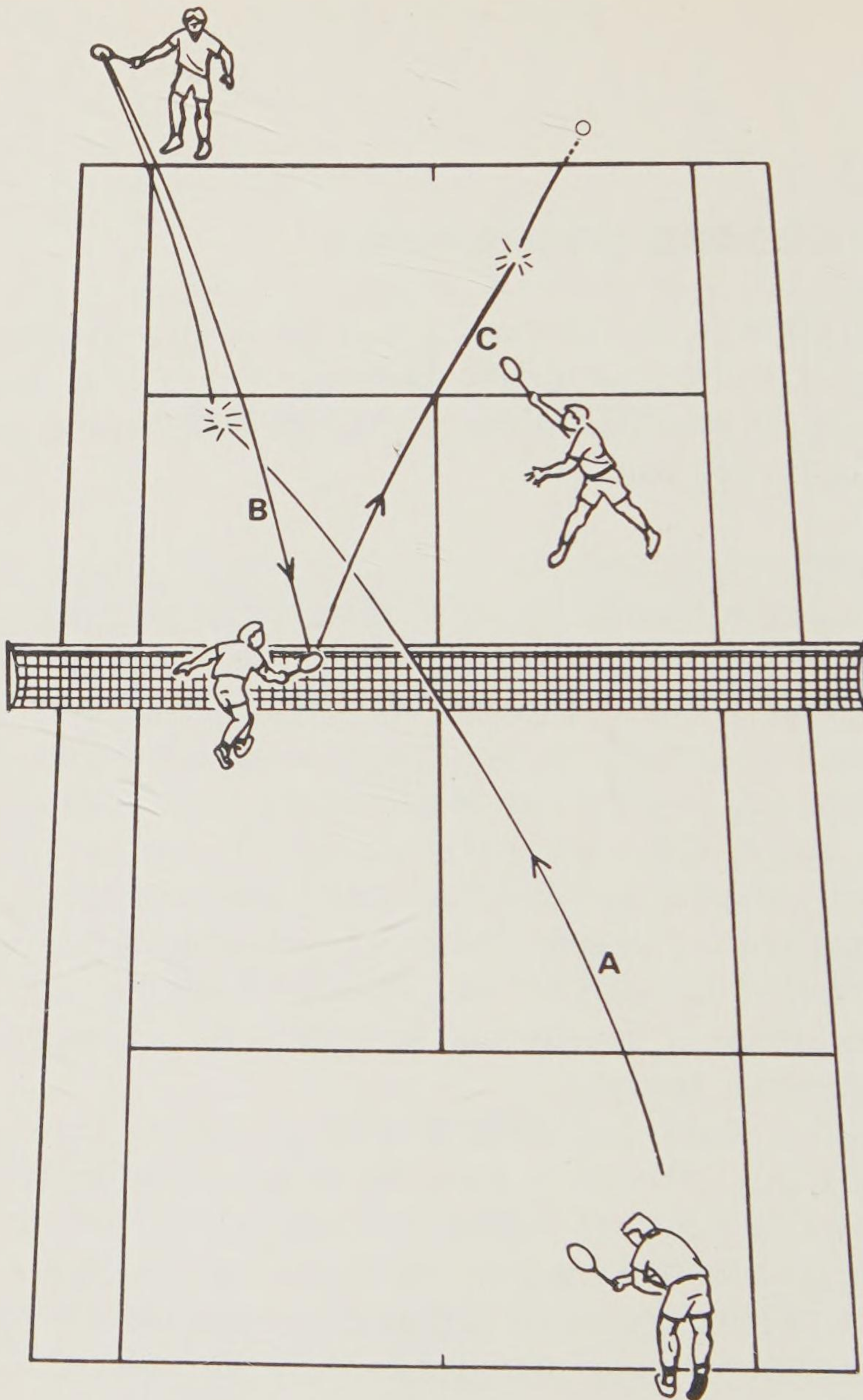
WHEN MORE THAN ONE person is involved in conducting an operation, formations usually come into things. Doubles is no exception. In describing these formations we'll begin each time with the serving pair.

Two Back

This means both server and partner take positions before serving, behind the baseline. (See Illus. 1 for all generally used court terms.) This formation scarcely deserves mentioning, because it is virtually never used. It is negative, since it will not allow you to press any advantage the server's service may gain. About the only occasions you'll see it are with children—where a so-called “net man” would be too small to be of any use and therefore helps his partner more by standing back beside him—and in odd cases of women's and mixed doubles, where a net-shy but resolute lady refuses to stand anywhere near the net.

The Two Back formation is used far more often by the receiving pair, who never have the advantage of striking the first blow, namely, the service. It's still negative for receivers though, because its main purpose is not to allow the opposing net man to intercept a poor service return and make a winning volley between the two receiving partners. (See Illus. 2.)

The Two Back formation is even more negative if used for the reason that neither of the receivers wants to volley and instead merely intends to play the ball carefully back to the server until he misses. Mostly, however, a receiving pair uses



Illus. 2. NET MAN INTERCEPTION. The Two Back receiving formation is defensive. It guards against the situation shown above, where the receiver has not been able to get his return past the net man.

the Two Back formation only while a fast first service is being served, in case it forces a weak return or a short lob. Then, for the second service, the receiver's partner will move in towards the net.

One Up One Back

One Up refers to the net man, positioned somewhere in the forecourt. One Back is the server, who does not intend to follow his service to the net and instead plans to play any ensuing rally from the backcourt or from behind the backline. He's going to drive and his partner, hopefully, will volley.

One Up One Back is the usual formation played. It can be used from beginner stages to a level or standard high enough to win club doubles championships. Beyond that, it cannot withstand the pressures exerted by a receiving pair playing a Net Game against the One Up One Back formation.

In receiving, One Up refers to the receiver's partner, who stands at the net. If the receiver can hit the ball safely beyond the opposing net man's reach, the One Up position places the server under pressure to make a good return—or the receiving One Up or net man will cut it off, in the manner of Illus. 2 but opposite in direction.

The One Back player is the receiver, who, like the server, intends playing the rally from the backcourt or beyond the backline.

Net Game

In this formation the server follows his service to the net, to form a barrier there with his partner. The serving side's aim is to take the advantage of volleying the ball first, before their receiving opponents have an opportunity to do so. The server follows every serve, good or bad, to the net. The reasoning is that if the serve is strong he will take full advantage of it; if it is weak, he cannot afford to stay back and surrender first use of

the net position to his two opponents. His theory in the latter case is that attack is the best form of defense.

In receiving, playing a Net Game formation means that the receiver's partner stands at the net and that the receiver will move in and join him there in a barrier as soon as he can. If the server does not follow his serve to the net and remains back in the One Up One Back formation, the receiver normally moves in after his first stroke, that is, his return of service. It goes almost without saying that the Net Game is doubles' most formidable attacking formation.

Formations Versus Strokes

Formations, as tactical positions, *aid* strokes, but do not replace them. Folklore has it that, "Singles is a game of strokes, doubles is a game of strategy," but that is an exaggeration. A singles player with reasonable strokes but no idea of tactics is a babe in arms against an equivalent strokemaker who *knows* the game. The first player may look the equal of the second in the warm-up, but never after.

Similarly, to order a man to "Tote that barge and lift that bale" would be hopeless if he had no muscle. So what's the use of "Dip that ball, kill that lob," to a doubles player possessing neither topspin drive nor reliable smash?

Strategy can be left mostly to military planners. A doubles player has far more immediate need of tactics and strokes. The Net Game formation demands a third attribute: mobility. To play this formation successfully you need to be able to follow your service to the net quickly and, as net man, to move back quickly enough to cover lobs over your head.

Only about one in a thousand pairs playing One Up One Back do so because of the excellence of their driving. The rest do so because of lack of volleying ability (especially low volleying ability) or lack of mobility in taking the net and covering it against their opponents' angled shots or lobs.

The fact remains that One Up One Back is the formation in greatest use by tennis players en masse. Many have no intention of ever forsaking it. Improving players have to pass through it, because one walks before one runs, and on average girls will remain longer in it than men. All told this formation deserves detailed examination.

2. ONE UP ONE BACK

THE ONE UP ONE BACK FORMATION is not as rigid as its name may suggest. As server you may:

- Go up to the net after a first serve occasionally and unexpectedly—to catch an easy high forehand volley and get a point almost for nothing.

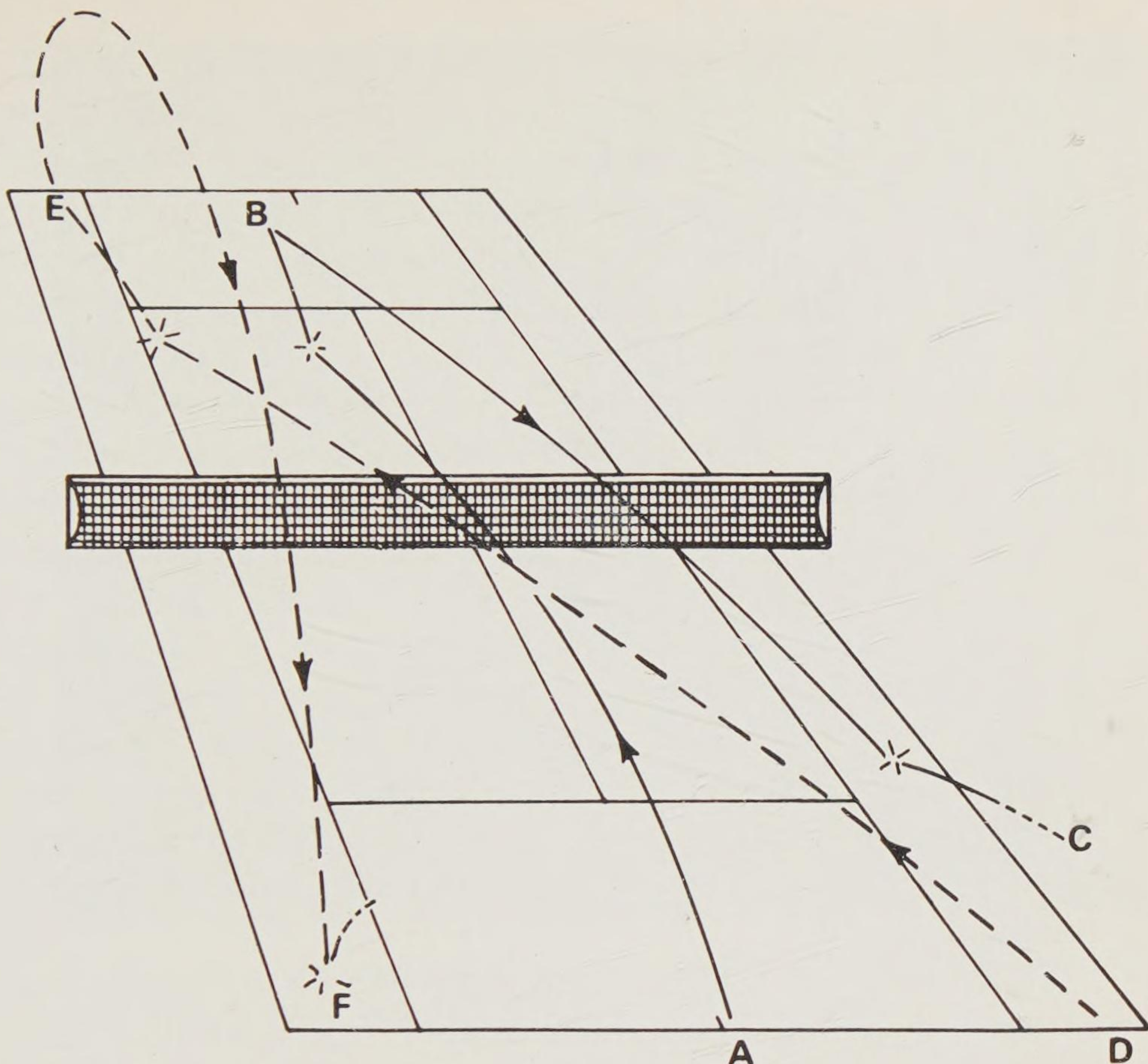
- Prefer to attack with a forehand drive instead of a serve, and then go up.

- Go to the net on all first serves from the left side to the backhand of the receiver in the left court. Using this tactic you reason the backhand return may be weak and, if lobbed over your net partner's head, that it will be on your forehand side and you can cover it.

All these moves are variations of One Up One Back. They do not constitute Net Game play. Net Game play means that the server invariably goes in—on weak second serves and all—and that the net man, not a changing-direction server, covers all lobs over his own head whether he reaches them on the full or goes back and recovers them after the bounce.

SERVING TO THE RIGHT COURT

In singles you serve mostly from near the center mark, to be able to protect both sides of the court. It follows that in doubles you serve mostly from about halfway between the center mark and the sideline to protect both sides of your half of the court. It's true that serving from near the center mark makes it easier for you to find your opponent's backhand and that serving



Illus. 3. SERVING FROM CENTER OR EXTREME SIDELINE. Situation A B C: A short crosscourt shot BC may be an outright winner, or cause you to scramble. Situation D E F: A lob EF gives you a long chase.

from wide out near the sideline increases your chance of serving an ace angled wide of his forehand. However, whenever you choose to use either of these tactics you should be mentally prepared for their possible results if, after all, your serve proves to be easily playable by the receiver's forehand. (See Illus. 3.) If you had thought of doubles as a game where you could comfortably look after only half the court, then serving too often from A or D will soon disillusion you.

If your tennis and that of your opponents is not yet of high quality, there are advantages in aiming your first services fairly wide of the right-court receiver's forehand. First, a diagonal serve, from your right side well across to his forehand, is easier to land into court than one aimed down the center line, so you will feel confident of getting a lot of first services into play. This is always a great advantage, at all levels or standards of doubles play. Second, he is likely to have trouble in keeping his return clear of your net partner, who will receive an easy volley. The wider you serve the more your partner intercepts, and blesses you. It seems you've developed a first-class combination, painlessly.

Beware. A more accomplished receiver will pass your net partner down his exposed sideline. The earlier position is reversed: the wider you serve the more your net partner needs to stay at home. If he is immobilized, you then have to balance the advantage of serving better diagonally against the attendant disadvantage of playing to the receiver's stronger stroke, his forehand.

Fairly soon you realize that the serve down the center is a better proposition, and perhaps at about the same time your net partner realizes that this type of serve allows him to move safely across and cover more court.

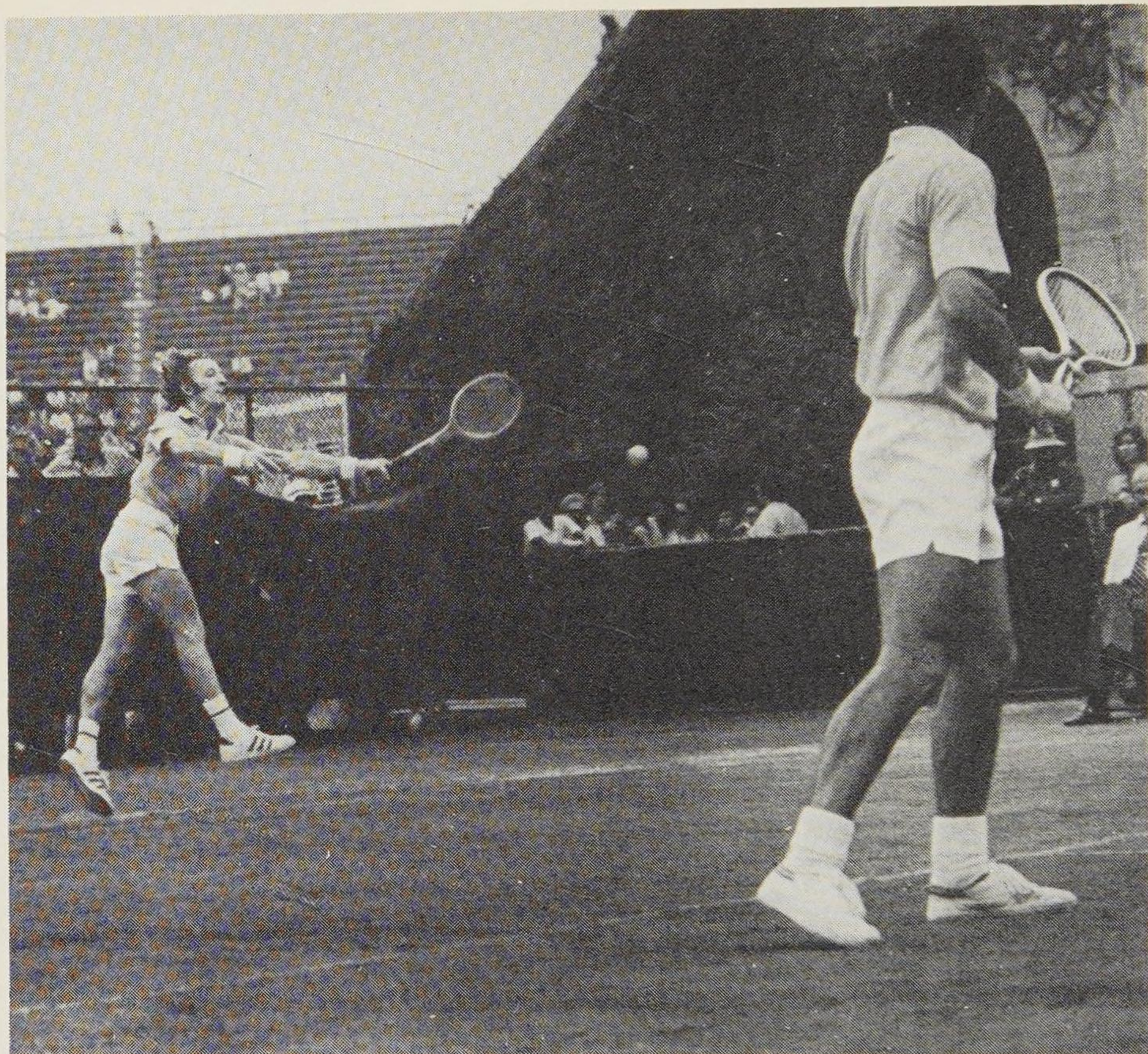
If you can land the ball *down the center* whenever you want to, while at the same time serving from about halfway out to the sideline to protect your half of the court, you can say you have a good doubles service to the right court. Set that as a mark for yourself, a signpost, whatever your level or standard of play.

Depth

The next point is depth. Whether you land the ball on the receiver's backhand or not, if it is short he should not have much



Short or deep, you must cover lobs on your own side of the court, as Virginia Wade is doing here with Margaret Court as partner.



A deep serve to the forehand corner puts even the great Rod Laver off balance. He won't be joining partner Ken Rosewall at the net from this service return.

difficulty in returning it and keeping it clear of your net partner. The deeper you serve, the longer his hit must be before it reaches the net. This gives your net partner more time to intercept. It also gives you more time to play it, if the shot goes to you. In addition, this service return, hit from well back, is likely to land short and therefore will be easier to play.

Be conscious of serving for depth, or you won't make it. Serving for depth also makes you aware of needing a reasonable clearance height between ball and net, and you need this awareness because serves have a built-in downward tendency that causes most faults to be made down into the net.

If you can serve from about halfway out to the sideline and land the ball *down the center and deep* whenever you want to, you have a very good doubles serve to the right court, whatever your standard.

A deep serve to any part of the opposing court is nearly always a good one. If you serve to receiver's backhand, you will find that not many players can make a strong backhand shot to their off side. (Receiver has to play to his off side to avoid your net partner.) If served deep to the forehand corner for a change, notice that the receiver often returns such a ball within reach of your net partner.

Aces

Having served two balls deep to the backhand in the right court and having reached a score of 40-15, you may wish to try for an ace, wide of your opponent's forehand. Most players associate wide aces with great speed, but you will land more of these short and angled serves just in, instead of just out, if you serve them firmly rather than fast. Champions tone their speed down a little for wide serves, but all their serves look so fast that we don't notice it.

This idea of a controlled ace rather than a very fast one starts

you thinking of the second serve. What if you aimed a fast first serve deep to the backhand that missed, and then the receiver moved in a little to his left ready to attack your second serve with his forehand—and instead you aced him with a steady serve curving wide? The answer is that you'd feel wonderful—master of the situation. It's just like, in singles, when you draw him right in with a drop-shot—and then lob over his head almost before he's stopped braking.

The catches in attempting second-serve aces are that you may unnecessarily double-fault, or that you may merely give your opponent a short ball on his forehand. The latter situation is not too bad if you realize he will attempt a sharp angle—if you have served from at least halfway out you can cover this shot. If you've been unaware of the sharp angle return, and have also served from the center mark, then you've served about the worst type of serve there is to the right court.

Nevertheless, a combination of protecting your sideline, serving deep mainly down the center but not always, swerving a wide and controlled ace—all this amounts to having an excellent service to the right court against a receiver of about your own level or standard, whatever that shared level or standard may be.

Speed

You need to be clear about speed. The faster you serve the less time your opponent has to make his shot and you may make him play weakly or even mis-hit the ball, to say nothing of his not being able to reach it and hit it at all. Champions serve fast and so do many other good players. Therefore, the short answer can only be that you should serve as fast as you can.

Your fast speed must include comfort and control. Obviously you shouldn't continually strain yourself and be right out of balance when the ball comes back. As for control, without it you're not really *serving* at all, because “serving” really means

delivering the ball into play to start the point; without control you're putting the ball *out* of play.

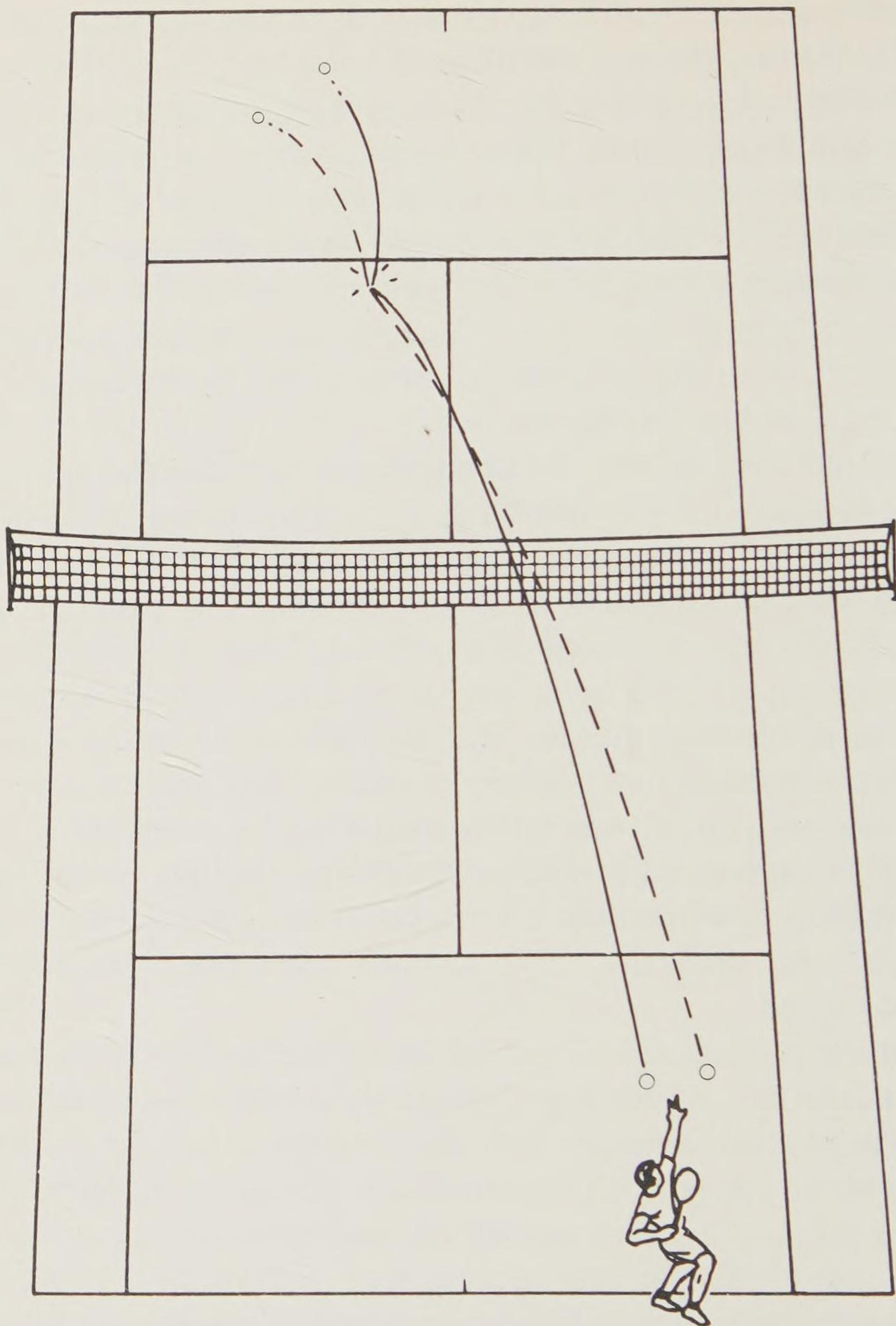
However, in doubles there's more to speed than serving at your controlled fastest. You should always be aware that if this speed does not inconvenience your opponent then it is probably *aiding* him. He gets the ball back faster; you have less time between your service and your next shot. This aspect is particularly important in Net Game doubles, where you follow your service to the net, but you should also be aware of it in playing One Up One Back.

Be conscious of both the condition of the balls and different court surfaces. With new hard balls your faster speed may inconvenience an opponent on concrete, but with used balls and a slow court it may aid him. But these are lesser factors. Mostly it's the opponent that counts. When he can handle whatever speed you have, you should vary your serve more instead of hitting it harder. But the main thing in this case is to keep in balance and position and concentrate more on trying to win from your return rather than from your serve.

Many players realize all this when hitting against a brick wall or other form of practice board, but when playing do not recognize the similarity of a receiver who can handle their service speed.

Hitting harder and harder beyond your stroke capability is technically called Pressing. Continued, it becomes desperation. A form of it often occurs in mixed doubles, where the girl tries to serve far too hard against the man. In this event, he mostly has to play only her second serves, and when a first one lands in he gets it back before she's ready.

In men's or women's doubles or in mixed, you should keep a cool head and instead of serving harder you should *try to win* harder. It may be easier said than done, but it's immeasurably easier if you are aware it is the correct tactic to follow.



Illus. 4. TOPSPIN AND SLICED SERVES DOWN THE RIGHT-COURT CENTER. A topspin serve is easier to land down the center of the right court. A sliced serve carries more out-curve and needs to be aimed well over the wrong half of the net. Even its bounce goes more towards the receiver's forehand.

Changing course, if you have a good strong serve, it will usually be too good for receivers of your own level or standard. You will win most of your service games. Regard it as an asset and use it confidently.

SERVICE MECHANICS

Turn now from tactics to strokes.

The service down the center of the right court is more easily made with a topspin serve than with a sliced serve. For the topspin serve you throw the ball above your head, and bend your elbow sharply and bring the racket up so that the ball rolls across the short strings and thus departs with topspin on it. The important point, for direction, is that the racket swings forward and distinctly from left to right, finishing down by your right foot—and this equates with sending the ball towards the receiver's left, down the *center* to his *backhand*.

You make a sliced serve by throwing the ball above your right shoulder and somewhat ahead of it, and slicing round it—from right to left. The racket travels across your body and finishes down by your left foot. The whole action puts a natural curve on the ball, curving it towards the receiver's right, towards the *sideline* to his *forehand*.

To land a sliced serve down the center into the right court means that it must cross the net on the wrong side of center and curve into play onto the receiver's backhand. This can be a nerve-wracking business where your score is 15-40 or 4-5 and 30—all or something like that. If you waver, and don't apply as much slice as usual, the ball will curve less and land in the wrong court. Also you haven't even got the comfort of serving over the lowest point of the net. For all this, see Illus. 4.

Second Guessing

The easiest way to get your service into court is to serve topspin when aiming for the backhand and sliced when aiming

for the forehand.* By all means try this if your opponent is not sufficiently experienced to notice which serve you are using and hence its probable direction.

To a more experienced player, however, the direction of your throw is immediately tell-tale—particularly late in a match, when he can't help getting used to you.

You will have to do some second guessing. Stand a little wider out towards the sideline than usual and the receiver will also move wider, to cover the wide angle you threaten to serve; in moving wider, he exposes more of his backhand side than usual. You throw the ball to your right side for a sliced serve and he automatically prepares to move to cover your wide out-curve. Instead you serve to his backhand. The ball curves into him and often forces him to play a cramped shot that your net partner can intercept and volley away.

For your next serve to this right-court receiver you can stand in this same wide position and again throw the ball up to your right for a sliced serve. This time he has no idea which side you intend to serve to. You can now serve wide to his forehand, if you want to, with a far better chance of success than before.

Similarly, you could play your first serve of the game as a topspin serve down the center. If you make your next serve a topspin serve deep to your opponent's forehand corner, he may not have time to get sufficiently behind it to aim it properly. Your partner, without recklessly exposing his sideline too early, may again be able to intercept the return.

The above are examples of what is meant by the terms, "using your serve well," or "mixing them up."

Don't go too far with your repertoire of second-guess serves. For instance, for your second serve you may decide to stand

* Of course, if your opponent in the right court happens to be a left-hander you have an easy task in hitting sliced serves diagonally across to his backhand. It may be his *steadier* shot, or he wouldn't be playing there, but it is highly unlikely to be as dangerous as a right-hander's forehand.

close to the center mark and throw the ball above your head for a topspin serve—to lure your opponent into being virtually certain you will serve down the center, when all the time you are planning a slow wide second-service ace. If you do this you are looking for trouble. If you don't ace him, you will have given him a slow short ball that bounces higher than the net (from the topspin it has on it)—and all your forehand court is exposed. From the wide angle you have set up for him and the high bounce of the ball he can play a downward angled slice or a crosscourt topspin drive and leave you standing. See Illus. 5. You may as well have served a double fault.

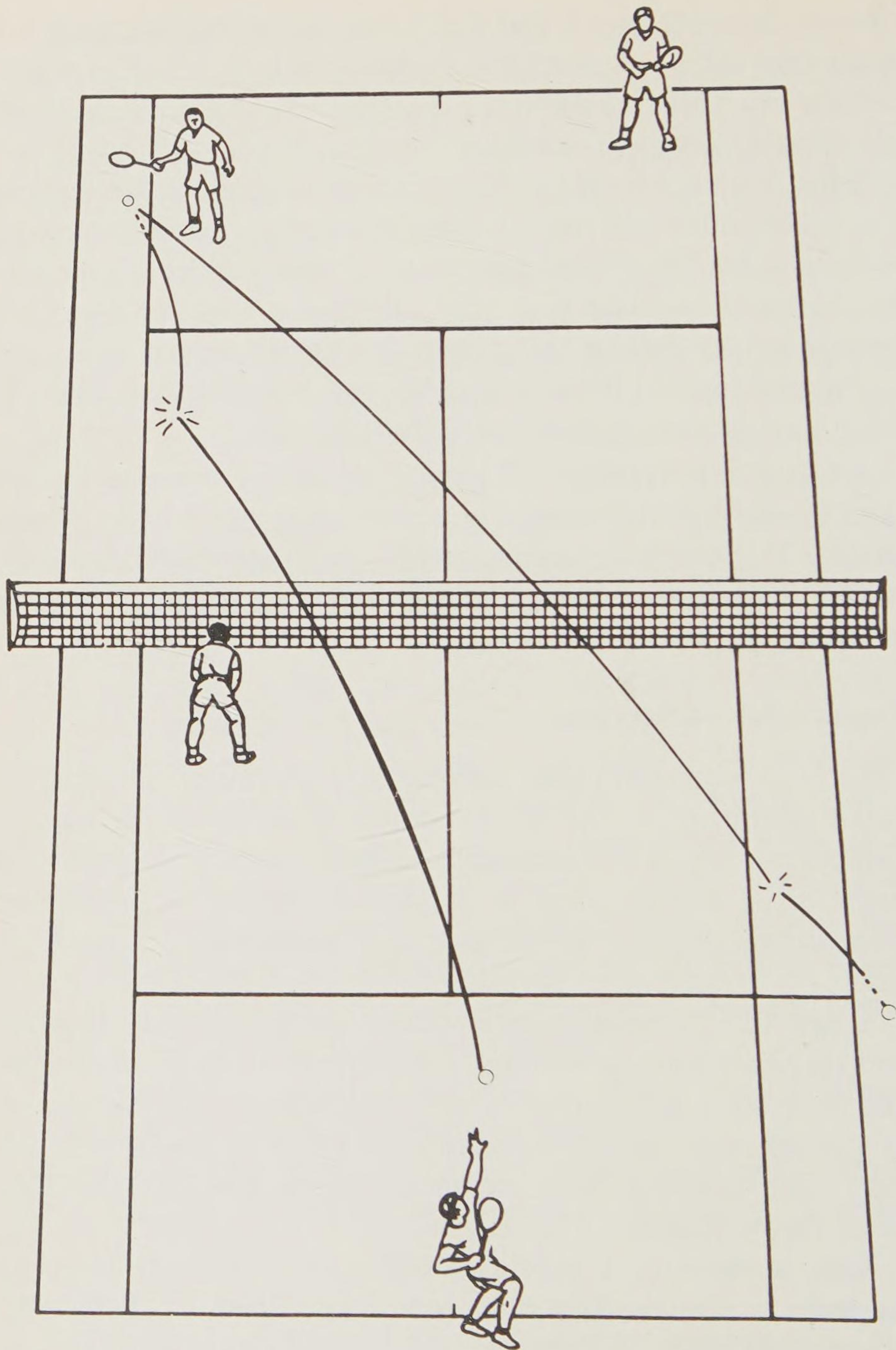
Another disadvantage of too much second guessing is that your strokes, in this case your service, may not be up to your tactics. This can lead to your serving too many faults. Doubles is not *all* tactics. “Mixing them up” calls for a lot of serving practice.

Topspin-Sliced Service

Perhaps you don't like serving in “unnatural” directions, meaning topspin to the forehand and sliced to the backhand, and yet you know you've reached a level where you have to do better than merely serve in natural directions to opponents who anticipate your serves and play them with comparative ease.

You'd like to have a serve somewhere between the topspin and sliced services. It wouldn't have as much safe net clearance and drop as a topspin serve nor as much penetrating swerve as a sliced serve, but its big advantage would be that you could vary your direction from a constant throw and ball position. Your throw would not be tell-tale.

Such a serve is a topspin-sliced service. Players refer to services as Sliced, Topspin, American Twist or Kick (an exaggerated form of Topspin) and Flat or Cannonball and in



earlier days they spoke of Reverse Spin (opposite of Sliced) and Reverse Twist (opposite of American Twist)—yet all the time the stock ball of many players has really been (although unnamed) a topspin-sliced service.

You make a sliced serve by throwing the ball somewhat ahead of your right shoulder and slicing round it. At the moment of contact between ball and strings *you feel your elbow is about fully straightened* and you feel you are hitting down and round the ball—like throwing an out-curve.

You make a topspin serve by throwing the ball above your head and bending your elbow sharply so that you have enough force to strike the ball with the strings of a racket head that is still rising (to put forward roll or topspin on the ball). At the moment of contact between ball and strings *you feel your elbow is still in the process of straightening itself*.

You make a topspin-sliced serve by throwing the ball not as far forward and to the right as for a sliced serve, and by hitting the ball *with a feeling that your elbow is still to some extent uncoiling itself*.

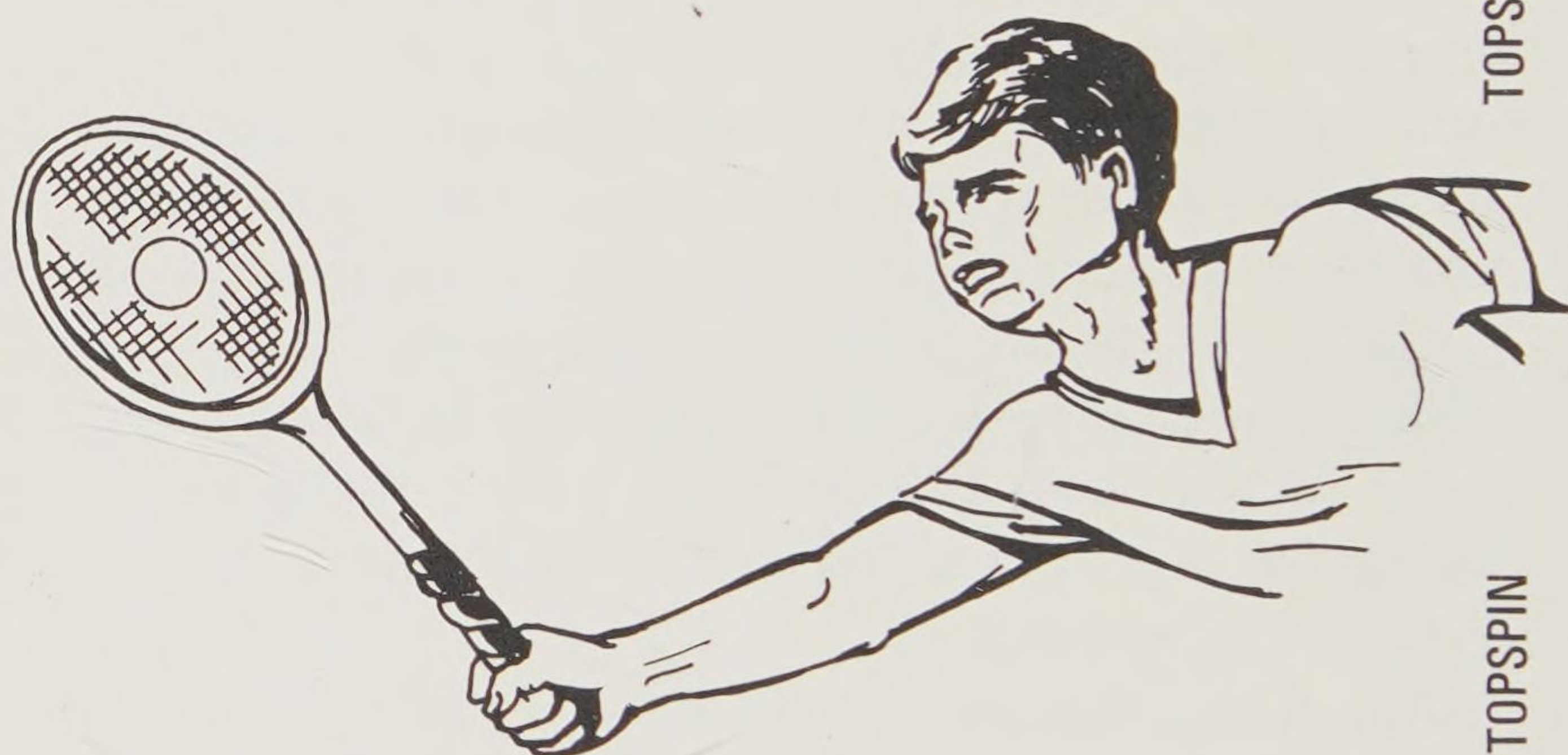
Illus. 6 is a comparative diagram of the three services. Note that in all cases the elbow is shown as being straight at the moment of impact. To illustrate it as bent in the topspin and topspin-sliced drawings would give you a completely wrong impression, making you imagine you should serve with a bent arm. The fact remains that with these two serves, particularly the topspin, you must *feel* that your elbow is still uncoiling,

(opposite page)

Illus. 5. HOIST ON YOUR OWN PETARD. You stand close to the center mark and throw the ball above your head for a topspin second serve. Both actions lead your opponent to expect a center-line service, but you intend to second guess him and serve a wide ace. You're playing a dangerous game. If it doesn't come off, you probably won't even touch his return.



TOPSPIN-SLICED



TOPSPIN



SLICED

that you are “hitting on the up-swing.” Illus. 6 is also a comparative diagram of the mental picture you should have of the position of your racket head at impact.

Clearly, text and diagrams are not enough. Nor, for practical purposes, are strip photographs. You don’t see the picture as a whole, nor the relative speed of parts of the swing. To develop a topspin-slice serve yourself, you must watch someone serving it.

That won’t be hard to do. Formerly you may have thought that dozens of people served sliced serves, some curving and skimming low over the net, and others somehow or other being higher and much safer while being about as fast. These latter serves were actually Topspin-Sliced. You can analyze these now, noting the element of topspin associated with them. Then you will be in a position to experiment for yourself, far more naturally than from following text or illustrations of any sort.

From your present sliced serve perhaps all you may need is to throw the ball a little farther back.

Who knows, perhaps you’ll find you already serve a topspin-sliced serve yourself? Equally unknowingly you may throw the ball a little more to the right when you want to serve

(opposite page)

Illus. 6. SLICED, TOPSPIN AND TOPSPIN-SLICED SERVICES. In all serves your elbow straightens as you hit the ball—you don’t *hit* it with a crooked elbow. But with topspin and topspin-sliced serves you *feel* that your elbow is still uncoiling at impact, that you are hitting the ball on the upswing. That’s what rolls on the topspin.

NOTE: The Continental grip shown (butt of your palm on top surface of racket handle) is not essential. It is preferable, if you are master of it, because the end of the handle is angled clear of your wrist instead of being more or less in line with it. This clearance allows greater wrist snap.

wide and a little nearer to your head when you're aiming down the center. You've never noticed—but you can be sure your wiser opponents have.

Flat or Cannonball Service

A flat serve has less margin for error than any other. Not being sliced or topspun, it does not curve or dip appreciably. Following a more direct line, after crossing the net it has the shortest possible space in which to land in court and therefore can have but little safe net clearance. Its main characteristic is speed, since there is little point in serving flat otherwise, so again it needs to pass low over the net. And in hitting it hard, you may mis-hit.

Cannonball serves are mostly confined to male players who are tall and strong and accurate enough not to waste most of their attempts.

Although a flat serve is a distinct type of service in its own right, it is seldom completely flat. Serving to the deep forehand corner of the right court, you may like to include a trace of slice for a feeling of control. Serving down the center of the right court or towards the backhand side of the left court you may like to feel your flat racket face coming slightly *over* the ball, feeling that you are giving it a trace of over- or forward spin. Forward spin rolls in exactly the same direction as topspin, but when we speak of topspin on a serve we always mean the heavier spin applied with a topspin serve action as described on page 27 and shown in Illus. 6.

You may not like this concept of feeling a trace of slice or a trace of forward spin, and think that it detracts from cannonball speed. In that case, hit the ball hard but with long contact between ball and strings, feeling you are flattening the ball before it leaves your strings.

Or choose some other concept, because every stroke must

have some mental and physical feel to it, even your cannonball. There's no hope for you if you regard it as just a flat bash. See Illus. 7.



Illus. 7. FLAT OR CANNONBALL SERVICE. Feel you are serving at full stretch. Hit the ball hard and go for depth, not angle. However hard you choose to hit, you need some mental concept of control. It's no good having speed alone in mind and letting the ball fly straight off the strings.

DANGER COURT

Returning from the high plane of cannonball serving to an everyday level, the right court is the Danger Court. There are more game points in the left court, but you are more aware of these. If you lose the points when serving to the right court you are always recovering on the following ones, always trying to save 0-30 or 15-40 or game.

You need to be able to protect yourself from a situation where a right-court receiver with a strong forehand takes your service, particularly the second one, by the scruff of the neck and continually puts you a point down. Your basic need is the ability to land your second service deep to the receiver's backhand, while serving from at least halfway out to the sideline.

Do not regard this as a defensive serve away from his forehand or you will fall into the wrong frame of mind. Make your serve a firm attack on his backhand. There's all the difference in the world.

Whatever your intentions, wherever your aim, wherever you throw the ball—watch it. Keep your head up.

SERVING TO THE LEFT COURT

If you can hold the points in the right court you will handle those in the left court well enough. You have the confidence of being a point ahead and also it is much easier to find your opponent's backhand in this court. Your easily made diagonal serve goes to it. You can land your topspin serve into the left court backhand corner with less strain than anywhere else.

However, this assumes that your opponents are about equal in strength. Often they are not, and then the stronger one usually plays in the left court, from where he can control more of the game. You should remember the Danger Court and not let points unnecessarily slip away from you when serving to the weaker right-court partner. A girl serving in mixed doubles

should be aware of this from the first point. She may carelessly lose it and not recover, the score going love-30, 15-30, 15-40, 30-40, game. This sounds male chauvinistic, with the male receiver too good to be true, but it often happens that way.

A left-court receiver's usual return will be to your backhand side, so you should protect this area as much as possible by serving from rather more than halfway out to the doubles sideline. Serving from farther out also gives you a wider angle to the receiver's backhand, making it more difficult for him to step round it and play a forehand. If he lobs over your partner's head, you will have a longer chase than necessary, but this time the ball will be on your forehand side.

If your opponent plays in the left court for the main reason that his forehand is weak (which you should be able to notice during the warm-up or soon after) you can serve to it from nearer the center mark. Otherwise center-mark serving sets up a receiver's forehand attack to your backhand, and that is a poor tactic on your part.

Second guessing? Serving from the center mark but to his backhand? This allows him to play a crosscourt backhand wide of your own backhand. You mean surprising him the first time with a backhand so that your net partner could intercept for a winner, and next time aceing him down the center? Well, the surprise serve to the backhand might work, but the intended ace down the center is not likely to surprise him. When a server stands close to the center mark, the receiver always feels threatened by a center-line ace and instinctively guards against it. If your center-line serve does not inconvenience the receiver, your backhand side is widely exposed and you are in a poor position. As server, you had the choice of a better one.

Watching doubles play from high to low you won't see many players serving from near the center mark, and most will serve from farther out on the left side than they do from the right.

Left-hander in the Left Court

Few left-handers are merely right-handers in reverse. Mostly they have an over-developed forehand and an under-developed backhand. You may have beaten such a player in singles earlier in the afternoon because you could attack his backhand, and now here he is in doubles playing forehand after forehand and getting much the better of your service. You try to aim down the center to his backhand, but he steps round the ball and makes a better forehand than ever.

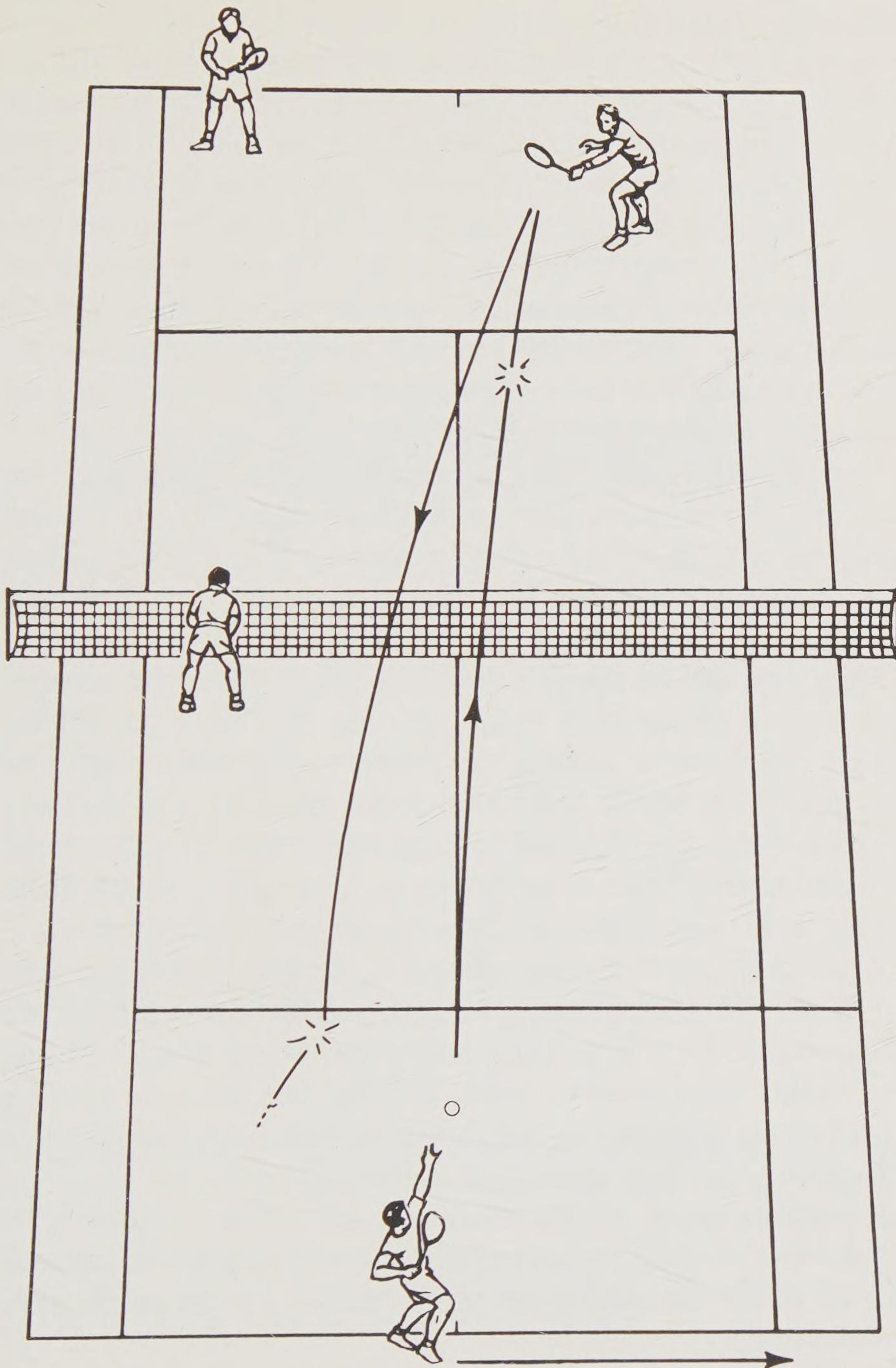
Deciding you must serve to his backhand at all costs, you serve from the center mark and at last you force him to play a backhand. But he does so without trouble; he plays that inside-spin backhand of his, wide of your own backhand. When you'd played him in singles this was about the only backhand shot he could do, and now it seems to be all he needs to do.

You beat him in singles and now he's dominating you in doubles. Wherever you serve he's playing his two best-grooved shots: crosscourt forehand, and backhand to his off side. There *must* be some tactic to cope with such a situation.

There is. Play Tandem. Call it Tandem too, a short descriptive word, and regard it as a normal part of your doubles game to call for and use when needed. To call it the Australian Formation is too remote. In Australia it is regarded as being an American formation, so neither country has a mortgage on it.

(opposite page)

Illus. 8. INCORRECT TANDEM FORMATION. Your net partner's position is wrong. He is standing in the same spot he occupies when you serve to the right court, which even then is too close to both net and sideline to be effective. Tandem emphasizes such inadequate net-man participation. The net man should be nearer the center and farther back.



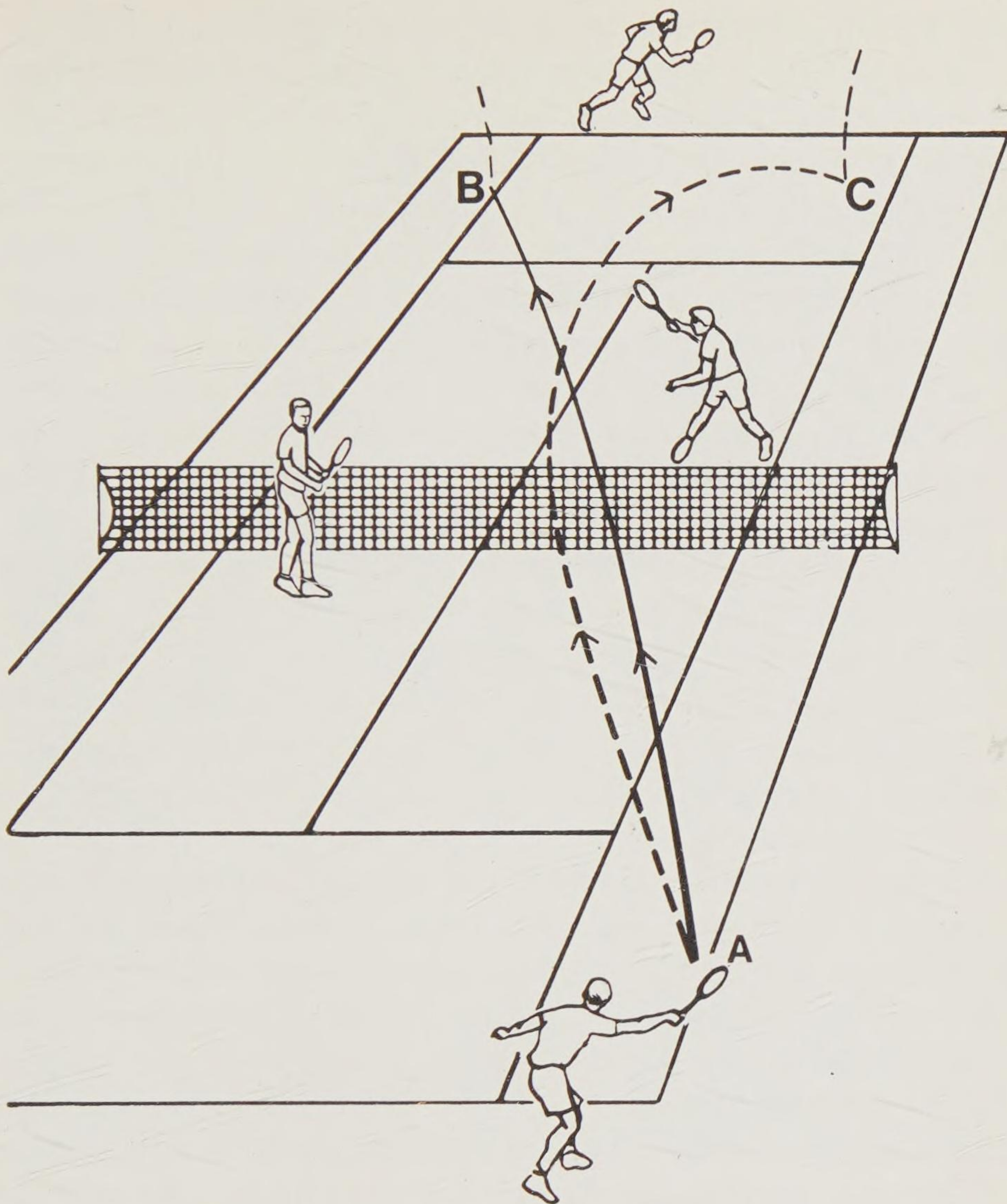
To play Tandem (meaning one behind the other) your net partner stands on the same side of the court as you do. In this position he blocks the left-hander's two natural service returns: crosscourt forehand and off-side backhand. You stand right beside the center mark, intending to swing a sliced serve down the center line to his backhand. After that you will deal with his return, which you can expect to be weaker than it was before. However, as soon as you have served you must move *at once* to cover your totally exposed forehand side. *Serve and move*—just as if you were serving and taking the net in one coordinated movement.

You do this—and the left-hander, from backhand (or forehand, if your serve did not find his backhand) hits the ball down the middle of the court between you and your partner into unguarded territory and scores a clean winner. What's gone wrong this time? It's the net man. See Illus. 8.

Since you will be moving to your right to cover the exposed right side of the court, it is the net man who must protect the center. To have a chance of doing so he must begin by standing much nearer the center than usual, at least halfway between the singles sideline and the center line. He also needs to stand farther back than before, at least halfway back from the net to the service line, to give himself more time to move.

A net man may feel exposed and vulnerable in this position, but Tandem is not a natural and comfortable formation for the server either. All told you may feel you're going to a lot of fuss and bother. On the other hand, it is the best tactic to contain an otherwise dominating left-hander. With plenty of practice beforehand you can apply it at will in a match.

Keep Tandem in mind not only for left-handers but also for any left-court right-hander with an over-developed backhand and an under-developed forehand. Many two-handed players are like that.



Illus. 9. RALLYING AFTER SERVICE. You serve and the receiver returns (neither shot shown) and you play from A. You usually exchange drives with him, such as AB, and if you can force him wide you may then lob over his partner's head. If you feel his driving is better than yours, play such a lob at the first opportunity. Occasionally you can make a passing shot down the receiving net man's sideline, but more often he tries to tempt you to try this.

RALLYING AFTER SERVICE

Though rallies in doubles are seldom as prolonged as they are in singles, a certain amount of baseline rallying does take place. It usually lasts longer from right side to right court, forehand to forehand.

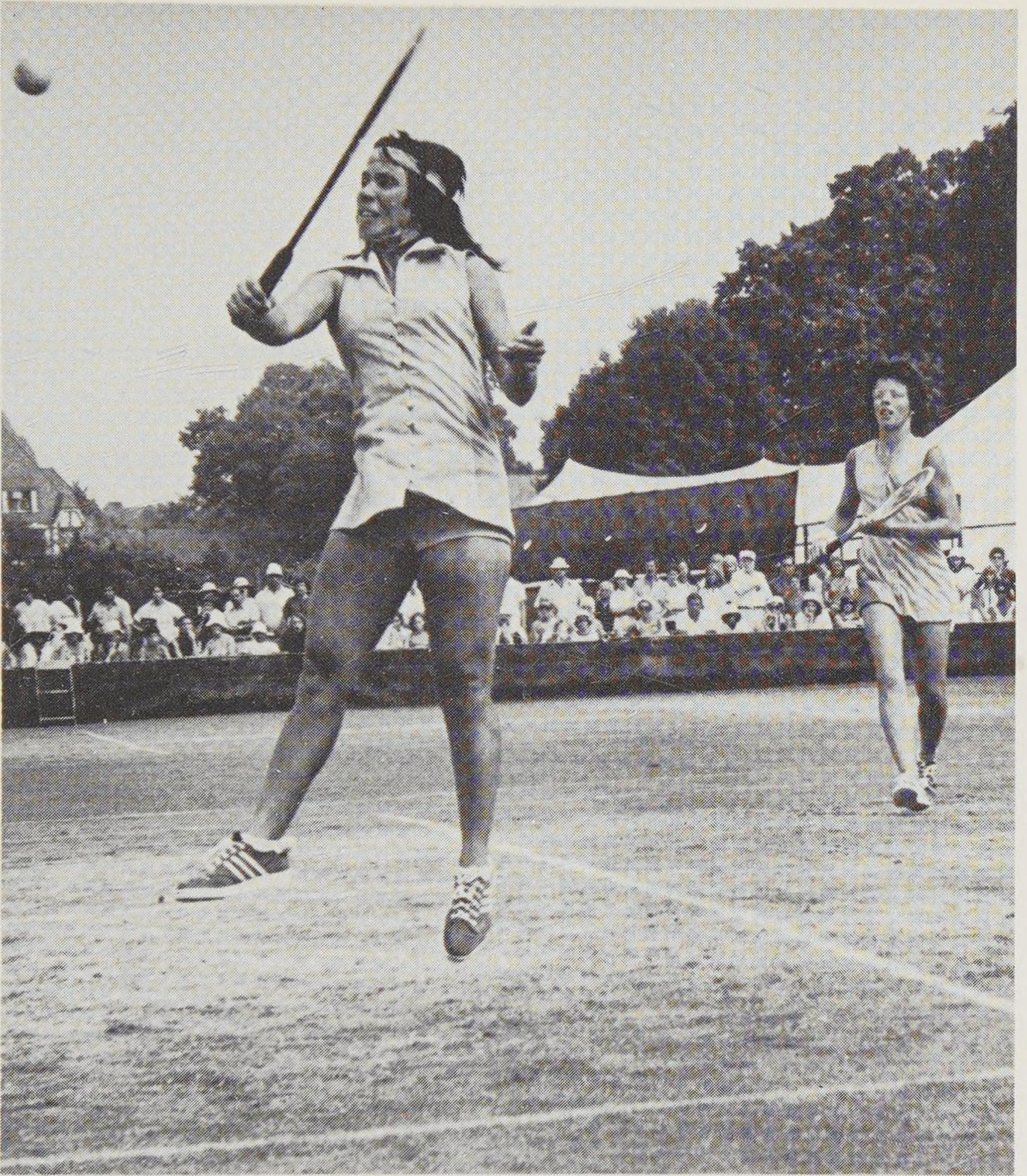
Unless your opponent's return of service has been so short and high that you can knock the ball for a winner past his net partner or almost clean through him, you soon come to realize you would rather this net partner were standing back (Two Back receiving) instead of being positioned at the net (One Up One Back receiving). A receiving Two Back formation allows the server much more scope. From a weak to fair service return, you can attack either opponent's backhand. Against a strong or awkward return you haven't got a threatening opposing net man standing over you.

Rallies against a receiving One Up One Back formation usually take the pattern shown in Illus. 9, with both net men trying to intercept if they can.

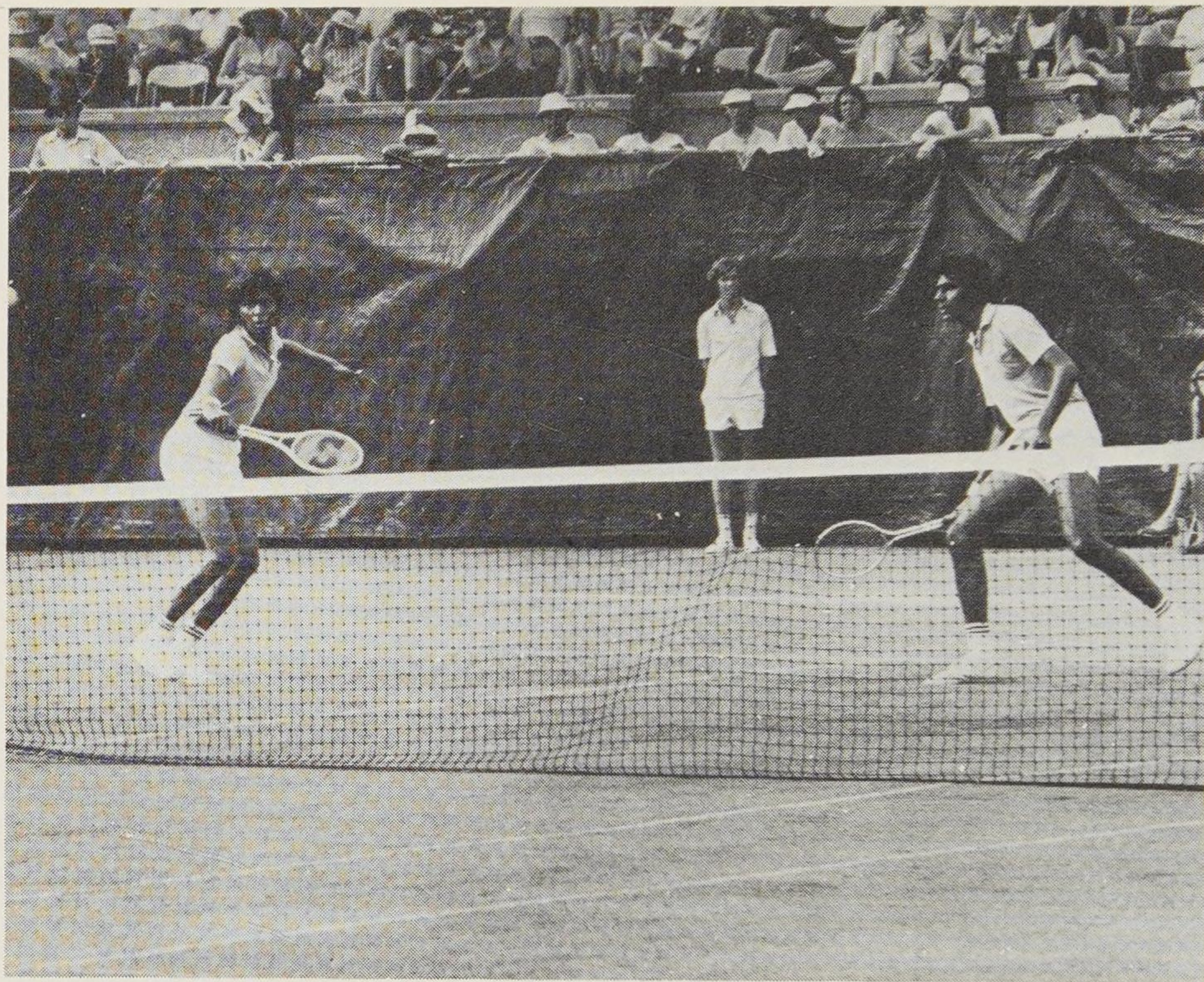
If you have a stronger forehand than your baseline opponent, your tactics are to wear him down. Do not regard this as unimaginative, because getting on top in a forehand driving exchange is never dull. If his forehand is better than yours, your tactics are to break up any driving exchange as soon as possible, before it is too late.

The preferred first shot in this intended break-up is a lob over the opposing net man's head. That's doing more than avoiding the driving exchange, it's attacking. If you aren't on the lookout to play this shot at the first opportunity you may not get a second chance. You are likely to receive the worst of the driving exchange and be forced to lob defensively. The net man then has the initiative, whether he chooses to take one or more bites at the cherry.

If there's no opportunity to get over the net man's head, your



Rosie Casals attacks with a high backhand volley and Billie Jean King prepares to advance. They have the upper hand in this rally.



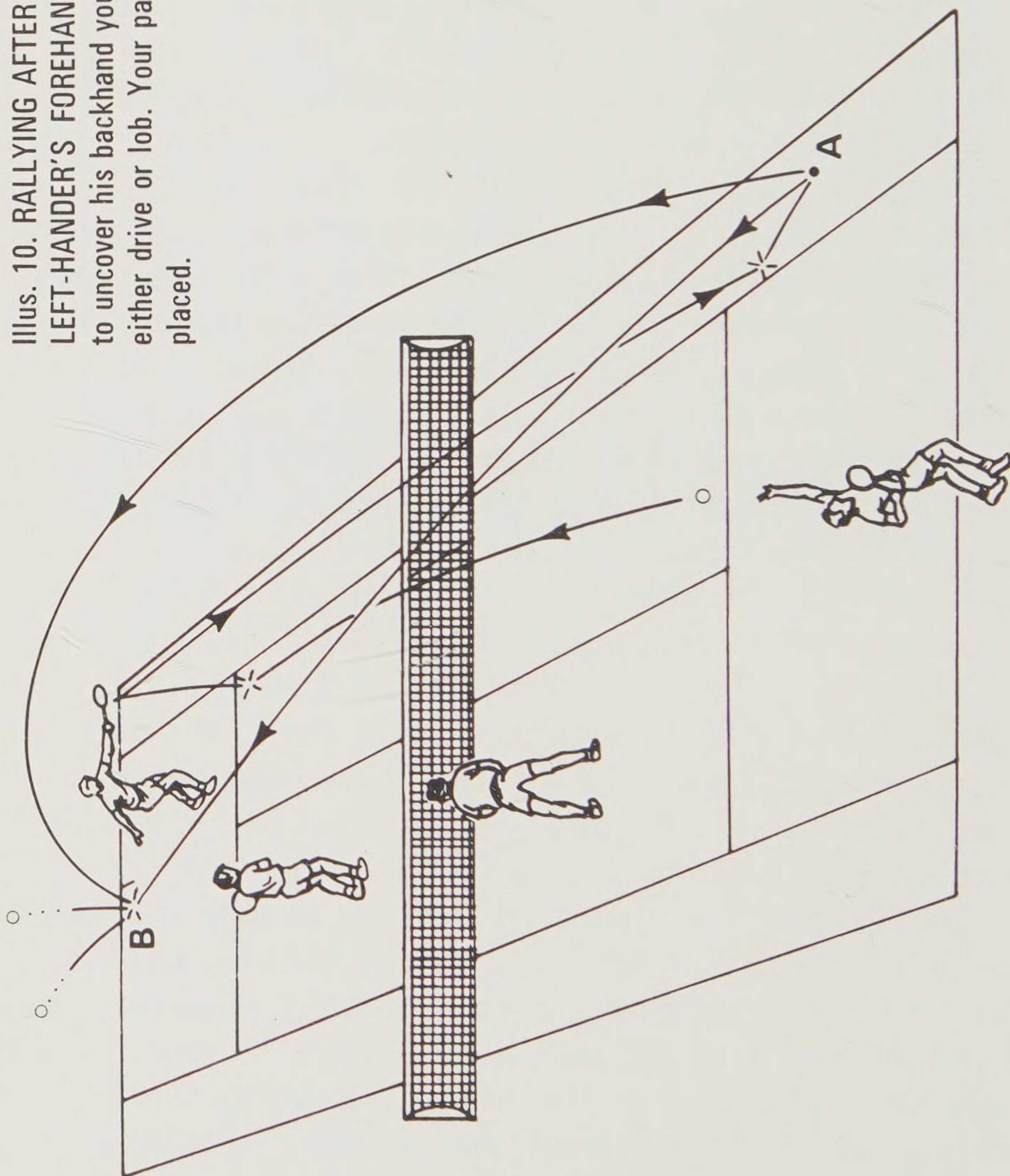
The striker will play this shot and stay at the net. This shows how the Amritraj brothers of India play the net barrier.

next choice of shot for breaking up the exchange is to play the ball back to your baseline opponent high and slow and deep, and await events. This is normally a better tactic than trying a short ball, which may easily be only weak rather than awkwardly short. As for the passing shot down the net man's sideline, if it doesn't come off, it's a near-certain loser for your side. Knowing this, you should be able to avoid falling into that impatient-suicide frame of mind so often seen in One Up One Back rallying. "Play into open court" is your guideline.

In right side to right court rallying in women's doubles, the girls use the lob over the net player's head much more frequently than men think of doing. This is understandable, since the average female player cannot reach as high and is more content merely to cross over and leave things to her baseline partner. In mixed doubles, vulnerability to lobs over the girl's head is the Achilles heel of any pair who lines up with the man playing in the right court and you should always be fully aware of this. Lobbing over the net man in men's doubles is less easy, but from any wide shot it's only his backhand side you have to get over. In short, lobbing over the net man should be a part of your game rather than a random occurrence. Learn from girls.

The reason for right side to right court exchanges often taking place is that both baseline players in these two diagonally opposed corners tend to stay back. Neither risks coming to the net, either against the other's forehand drive or against his forehand lob over the net man's head. From left side to left court, however, you should take the net as soon as you have made a good shot. Your opponent's backhand is less likely to be too good for your volleying ability, and if he makes a backhand lob over your partner's head it will be on your forehand side, where you can probably cover it. It is usually a losing tactic to be pinned on the backhand baseline, with a hovering net man opposite you.

Illus. 10. RALLYING AFTER TANDEM SERVICE TO LEFT-HANDER'S FOREHAND. Having forced him to uncover his backhand you should play AB, with either drive or lob. Your partner is now very well placed.



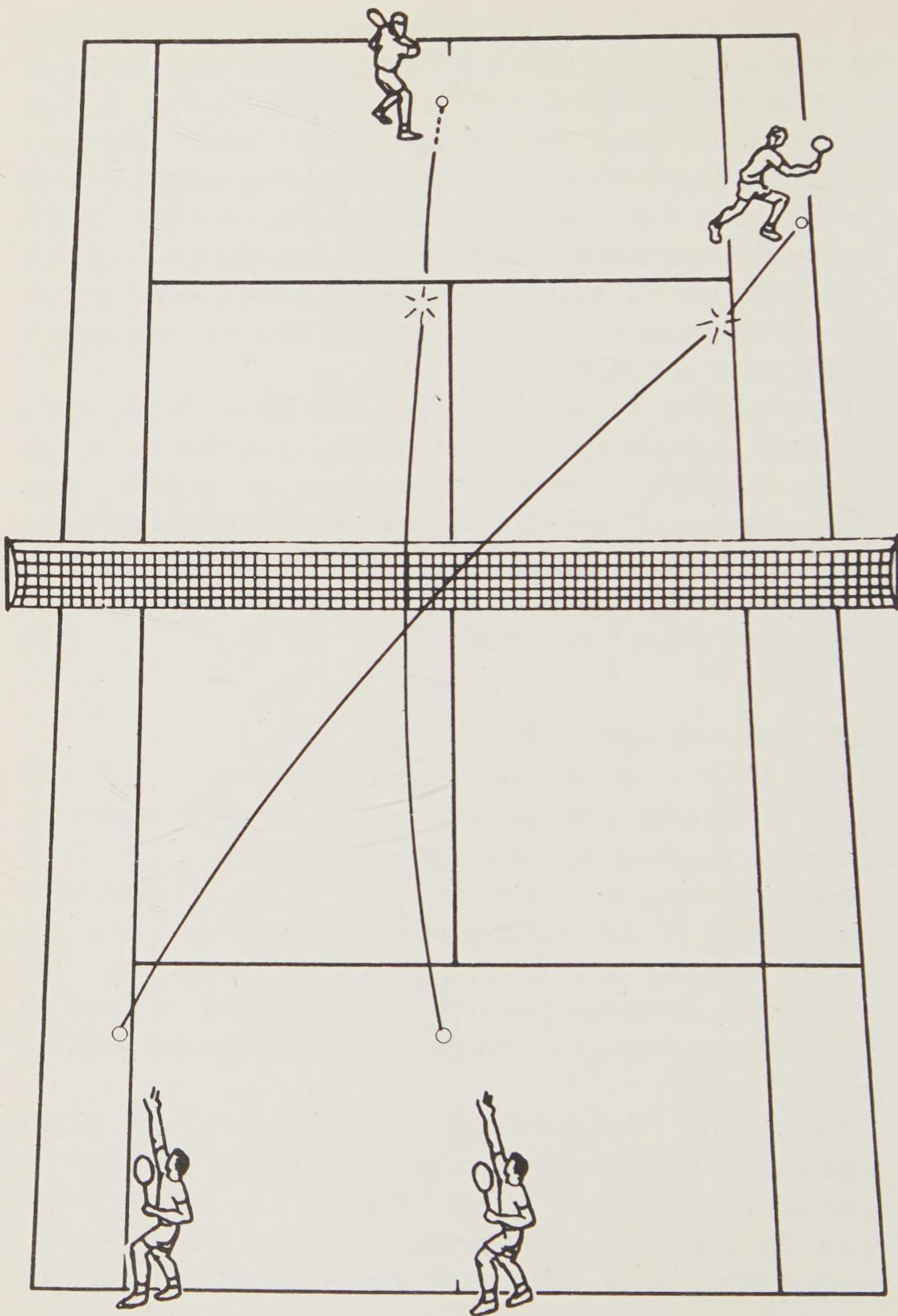
You will find the last statement particularly apt when you serve to a left-hander in the left court who is able to pound forehand after forehand into your backhand corner. If you haven't liked going to the net against your right-court opponent's forehand, it would be like putting your head into the lion's mouth to do so against a left-handed forehand that is usually stronger again. As for lobbing over the net man, it's your backhand lob against his forehand smash, and you can get very uncertain. It is a better tactic, as we have seen, to take the initiative and play Tandem.

When playing Tandem, you can serve to the left-hander's backhand in order to receive a return you should be able to handle with your forehand. Or, you can serve wide to force him to uncover his backhand for your next return. As shown in Illus. 10, this can be either drive or lob. This is positive play—far better than being stuck in the backhand corner, perhaps even feeling you're down in a hole.

LEFT-HANDED SERVING

In a previous section, Serving to the Left Court, you saw that it is normally a bad tactic for a right-hander to expose his backhand to attack by standing just to the left of the center mark and serving down the center line of the left court. The mirror-image of that situation may seem to be you, as a left-hander, standing just to the right of the center mark and serving down the center line of the right court. But this is not an exactly reversed situation and the differences alter the practical result.

First, your left-handed serve goes to your opponent's *backhand*, and few right-court players can hit a backhand to their off side with anything like the penetration of a forehand from the left court. Second, you may have a curving left-handed sliced serve that forces your opponent to play his



backhand almost from his partner's side of the court. See Illus. 11.

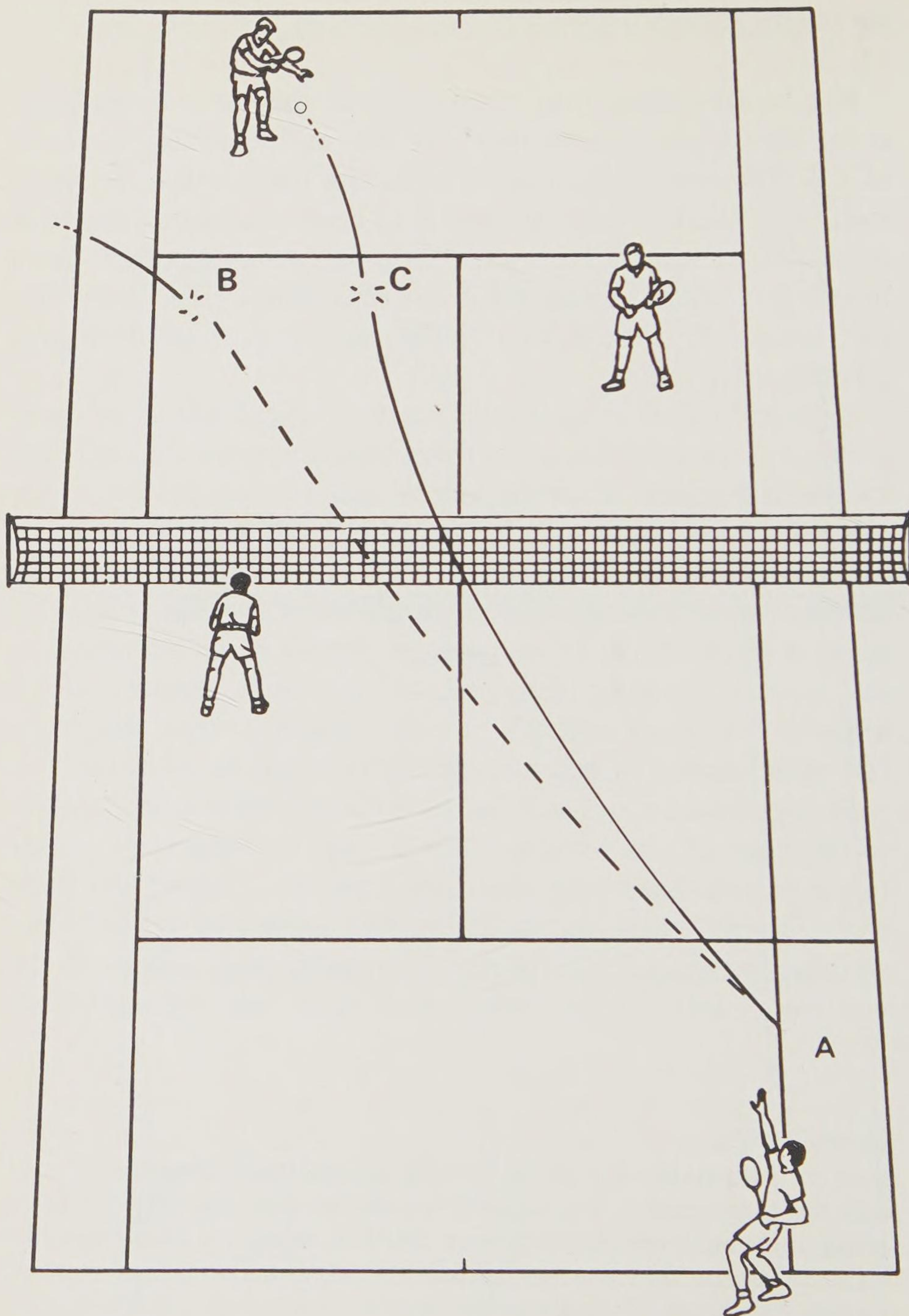
Besides stretching your opponent out, this serve to the right court allows your net partner to move well towards the center of the court with little risk of exposing his sideline. To serve from wider out to protect your backhand would destroy your serve's effectiveness. In brief, if you feel your opponent can't handle your center-mark serve, use it to attack him. Only if he can handle it should you move out to a more defensive position.

Similarly, if you have this curving sliced serve at your command, you should serve from wide out from the left side to the left court. Your opponent will try to lob over your partner's head, wide to your backhand side (mirror-image of Situation DEF in Illus. 3 on page 15) but he won't be very accurate if he is playing most of his attempts from near the side fence. Perhaps Illus. 11 exaggerates a little here, but who's to say a little assisting crosswind never blows? Anyway, it all amounts to a good example of a strong stroke being used to its full value instead of being restricted by tactics or position.

Exaggerated or not, in Illus. 11 a curving sliced service looks to be most natural for a left-hander, but unfortunately not as many players have it as might be expected. Tracing this back to its origins, when you started to play tennis you did not have a strong serve and you did need to protect your backhand. So you stood well out from the center mark—on the right side,

(opposite page)

Illus. 11. LEFT-HANDER'S SLICED SERVICE. Served from either the right side near this center mark or from wide out on the left side, this serve may be so effective that a left-handed server can afford to expose his backhand to the maximum. On the right side you can see it exposed, and on the left it would be open if the receiver lobbed over the net man.



where the game begins—and served, to your off side, your left. This became your more natural way of serving, rather than slicing round the ball.

If you want to develop a sliced serve, work up to it gently. You are far more likely to develop shoulder trouble from the continued strain of a new service action than you are from anything else, such as mis-hitting an odd wild smash or two.

Most left-handers prefer a topspin-action type of service. Using such a serve you can stand wide out on the right side, serve wide to your opponent's forehand, and have your own forehand available for most of the returns. Like the curving sliced service in Illus. 11, the concept here is to make it awkward for your opponent by stretching him out. However, all left-handers should also be well aware of their in-built ability to tie up or cramp their receiving opponent. See Illus. 12.

SERVER'S NET PARTNER

As indicated at Illus. 8 on page 35, speaking of Tandem, the average net man stands too close to both net and sideline to be effective.

He protects his sideline as though it would be a disgrace if ever a winner went down there, yet he unblushingly allows ball

(opposite page)

Illus. 12. LEFT-HANDER CRAMPING A RECEIVER. Stand about halfway out to the doubles sideline and throw the ball above your head and a little to the right. This threatens a wide topspin serve kicking away, AB. Instead, serve about straight at the receiver, AC. The curve bends the ball somewhat to his left, and then the bounce kicks up and breaks in towards his body, making him play a cramped backhand with little or no power. Similarly, from the left side, you can tuck a sliced serve into the receiver's body on his forehand side. It must surely be one of the joys of life to have a really good left-handed serve.

after ball to sail past him down the center for his partner to deal with, almost as though this player didn't have a sideline of his own to cover. When the receiver lobs, the net man lets it arc over his head and merely crosses to the other side, satisfied that he's done his tactical duty by not staying over on the wrong side like a beginner. When his partner loses his serve, he usually considers this solely due to his not having served or rallied well enough.

It's not that the average net man is either complacent or unfeeling. All round, he underrates his own usefulness to the side. In particular, he's too self-conscious about protecting his sideline.

He's also mistaken about his volleying. Knowing he doesn't volley well, he reasons that the closer he stands to the net the more likely he is to get the ball over, even from a mis-hit. The truth is that if he stood only a little farther back from the net he would have more time to see the ball and he would play his volley better. As for mis-hits, they seldom go over, no matter how close you stand to the net.

If you have been a modest net man you will find that standing farther back gives you more time to intercept—to assist your partner by protecting the center to some degree. It also prevents your opponent from getting over your head, at least with a poor lob. As for that sideline you guard so zealously, you have more time to protect it.

Participating

Next time you play, stand well back, almost halfway back to the service line, and see how you fare. You will probably do well against higher balls, but if one of the receivers forces you into errors on low volleys you should then stand a little closer to the net against that particular receiver. One thing is certain: you will feel a greater interest and sense of participation when your part-

ner is serving, instead of being more or less out of the game and waiting for it to end so that you can take part again.

Once you are confident about playing from farther back, you should try standing a little farther away from the sideline. Do not try both steps at once, or your new position may feel radical and uncomfortable.

There is no set net position for all players, so experiment and find your own. Even that will vary against different receivers and you may prefer a slightly different position when playing on the right or left side of the court. In total, you need to feel that your sideline is safe enough, that you can reach a short lob, and that at the same time you're ready and anxious to cover the center to some extent. For an idea of your reasonable coverage, see Illus. 13.

If you are still in doubt about any of this and think it applies only to good volleyers, you should take a lesson from your opponents. When receiving wouldn't you rather find that your opposing net man is a very tame cat? Previously you may also have been reluctant to take up a net position when your partner was receiving, but as a participating net player you will realize the benefit of doing this, at least whenever he is receiving a second serve.

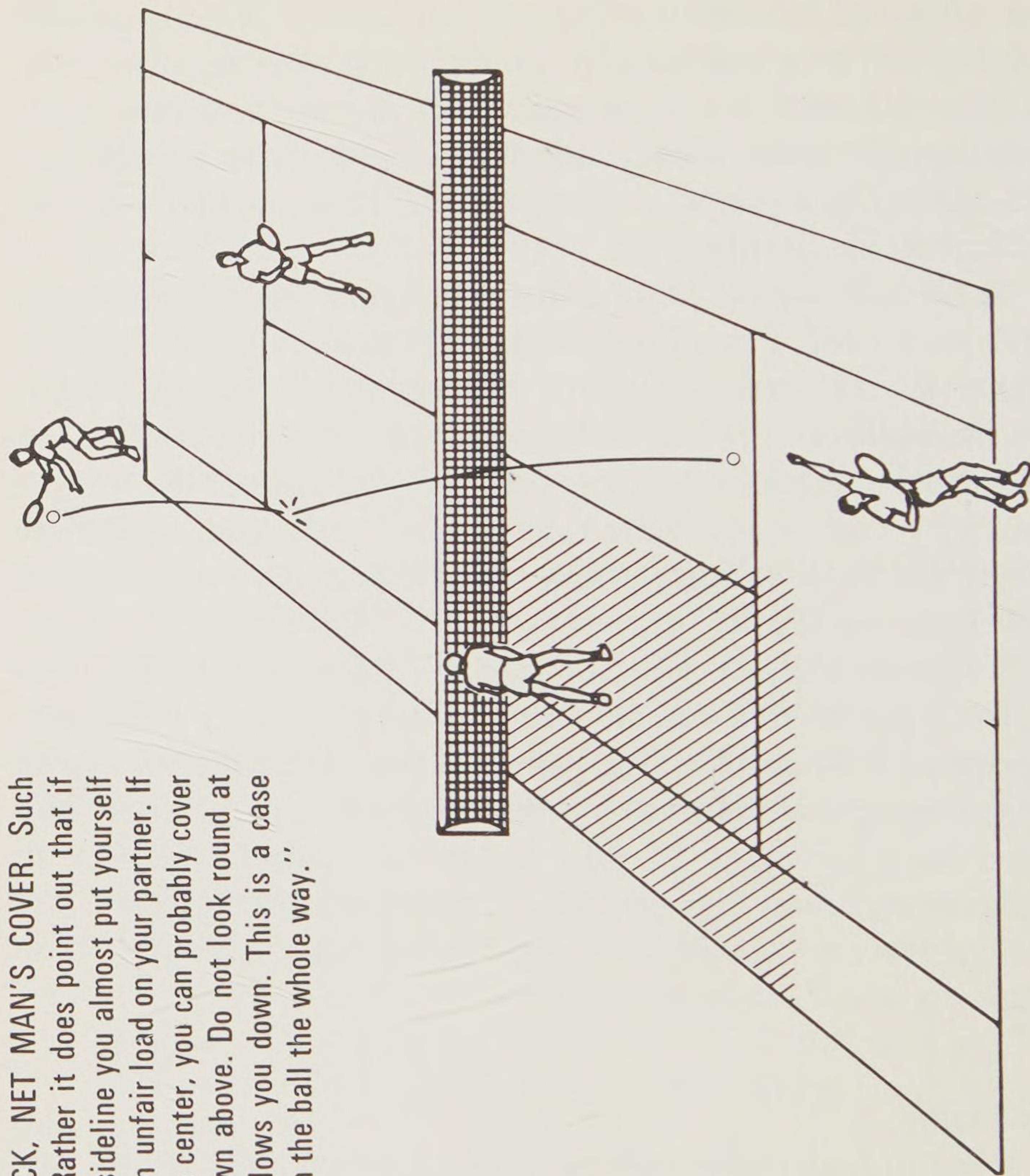
Volleying

Want to make your volleys? You are much quicker that way and far less likely to mis-hit than if you are reluctant. Try to hit the ball instead of feeling it is hitting you. Put a bruise on it.

Hold your racket firmly and keep your wrist firm. Make a short sharp shot. A weak wrist and trailing or drooping racket head look more despondent than any player's face ever can.

If the ball is high and slow to your forehand, slide your left leg well forward. This brings you closer to the net and, at the same time, turns you sideways to it. Both actions prevent your

Illus. 13. ONE UP ONE BACK, NET MAN'S COVER. Such coverage is not ambitious. Rather it does point out that if you stand closer to net and sideline you almost put yourself out of the game and place an unfair load on your partner. If your partner serves down the center, you can probably cover more of the center than shown above. Do not look round at your serving partner, as it slows you down. This is a case where you should *not* "watch the ball the whole way."



slicing the ball wide out of court. If a similar ball is to your backhand, slide your right leg well forward. These are simple hints. Well, volleying is at its easiest when you are stationed at the net in doubles.

Smashing

Regard it as correct doubles tactics that you should always try to reach as many lobs as possible and smash them, in preference to crossing meekly over to the other side and leaving them to your partner. Do not imagine that you always have to smash at full bore, any more than you always serve that way. The downward path of an overhead makes the ball bounce uncomfortably high for your opponents. Therefore, your smashes will usually inconvenience your opponents more than your serving partner's shot would have. Use an action similar to your service, but not identical because you do not need as much swing. To serve, take your racket up behind your body; to smash, take it up in front.

When You're Lobbed Over

For clarity, let's take two extreme cases. First, your partner has served from the left side and the lob that has gone over your head is fairly high and not very deep. It is going to bounce up fairly straight and your partner will have no difficulty in making a half-smash of it, that is, a smash made from a bounced lob. In such a case, you cross to the other side of the court and stay at the net in your attacking One Up One Back position.

Second, your partner has served from the right side and the lob over your head is deep. Your partner will have to scrape it off the back fence with his backhand and his only shot will be a difficult backhand lob. In this case, you retreat diagonally to the baseline position he has vacated and make a Two Back formation, and still live.

Of course it's obvious. But watch other pairs, and time and again you'll see the net man cross straight over and only begin to teeter back when the opponent is about to smash—and he ends by collecting the ball on his shoelaces.

You may be retreating diagonally towards a Two Back formation only to see that your partner is making a fine recovery with his backhand lob. He sends up a long diagonal ball that will land deep in the opponents' backhand corner and put them on the defensive. Check your retreat at once and go up, taking up your attacking One Up One Back formation again.

You'll see players failing to do this too, but all that the correct tactic amounts to is, "One Up One Back for attack. For defense, Two Back."

Go To It

You are not expected to be a champion volleyer and smasher, covering the center completely and dealing with every lob directed to your side of the court. If you were you'd be playing with a partner of similar ability and you'd both be playing a Net Game formation instead of One Up One Back. Just the same, tactics demand that you exert some degree of net coverage—or your opponents would virtually be playing two against one—so go to it.

Similarly, girls will probably agree that in women's doubles the net player is usually tucked close into that corner made by net and sideline, leaving her serving partner to make or break it alone. Her modest reasoning is that she believes her partner's groundstrokes to be safer than her own net-play. Perhaps they are, but are they always more effective? Leave that unsettled, but let's say positively that any girl who volleys confidently should get away from that net-sideline nook and play her valuable part in the game.

The most reluctant net player of all is the girl partner in mixed doubles, almost having a love affair with the net post. If you're one, it's not suggested that you blossom overnight into a dashing center-covering volleyer, but you really should stand farther back to discourage lobs being played against you. If you are constantly lobbed over by the opposing girl in the right court, you're allowing your partner's forehand to be shut out of the game in one stroke—one stroke made by the weaker member of your opposing pair, while at the same time her partner commands the net.

Intercepting

If your last doubt about net play concerns intercepting, here are two basic principles:

- Any ball you can hit for a certain winner in one shot is yours. It does not matter if you cross right over to your backcourt partner's sideline and end by leaning on the side fence. The point is over. You, the player nearer the net, were the right one to have made it.

- In any position where you can make a more penetrating shot with your volley than your backcourt partner could have with a groundstroke *and you can return at once to your original position without loss of balance*, the shot is yours.

That is not poaching (or sharking, especially when it's in mixed). It is intercepting. Apply the opponent test once more; isn't it much simpler to play against a pair whose net man never intercepts?

Played in this way, interception is a sound tactic, without a shadow of a gamble attached. However, now and then you see a good net player do more than that. Having decided that his opponent is committed to playing a drive across court, he dives

over well past the center and brings off a winning volley. Nothing succeeds like success, so it's called a daring interception. But if the opponent second guesses this net man and, at the last second, alters his direction and easily passes him down his widely exposed sideline—then he pays the penalty of non-success and is called a shark.

Daring interceptions can be made consistently only where your opponent is not good enough to second guess you. Where he might do so, and you have to wait that extra fraction to be *certain* he *cannot* change direction, you will be too late for a daring interception. It's disappointing to hear—but that's tennis.

3. ONE UP ONE BACK—RECEIVING

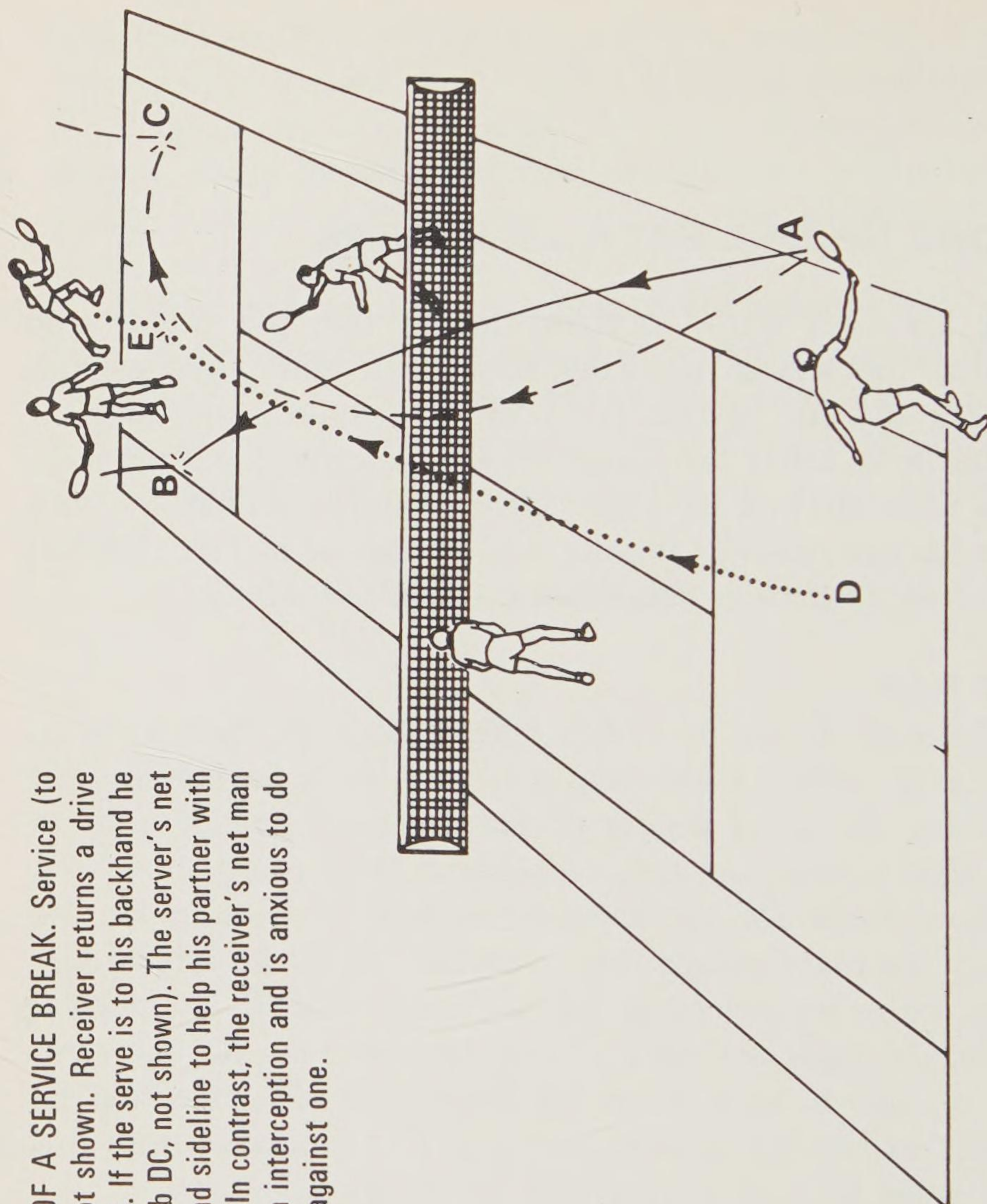
ONE UP ONE BACK receiving means that the player who returns the service normally stays back and plays ground-strokes and his partner takes the net position and cuts off whatever he safely can. Sometimes the receiver's partner stays back while the first service is delivered and sometimes the back man (service receiver) follows in after playing a short ball, but their basic formation is classified as One Up One Back.

NET MAN

Although the net man often takes a faulty position when his partner is serving, this same net man, when he becomes the receiving net man, seldom or never crowds himself away in that tight corner near net and sideline. With changed outlook, he now looks for participation instead of avoiding it. He usually awaits developments from just inside the service line. Then, as his partner plays the ball safely wide of the opposing net man's reach or over his head, he moves in—not too close, but to where he feels he has the best chance of intercepting. He doesn't expose his sideline, but he's less concerned with that than when he is at the net with his partner serving.

It's natural for him to do all this. His partner is going to drive or lob to the back of the court and so the server will be far away and the receiving net man feels keen to participate. In contrast, when his partner serves (and the ball has to drop into the service court and so is short), the server's net man feels that the receiver is almost on top of him. He stays in his corner, determined to guard his sideline or die in the attempt.

Illus. 14. INGREDIENTS OF A SERVICE BREAK. Service (to receiver's forehand) is not shown. Receiver returns a drive AB or an attacking lob AC. If the serve is to his backhand he returns a drive DE (or a lob DC, not shown). The server's net man is too close to net and sideline to help his partner with any of these four returns. In contrast, the receiver's net man is well placed to make an interception and is anxious to do so. It's like playing two against one.



It follows in One Up One Back doubles that often the receiving pair naturally takes up a better position than does the serving pair. This is one reason (purely tactical) why services are broken more often at lower levels of play than at a higher standard. See Illus. 14.

COURT SIDES

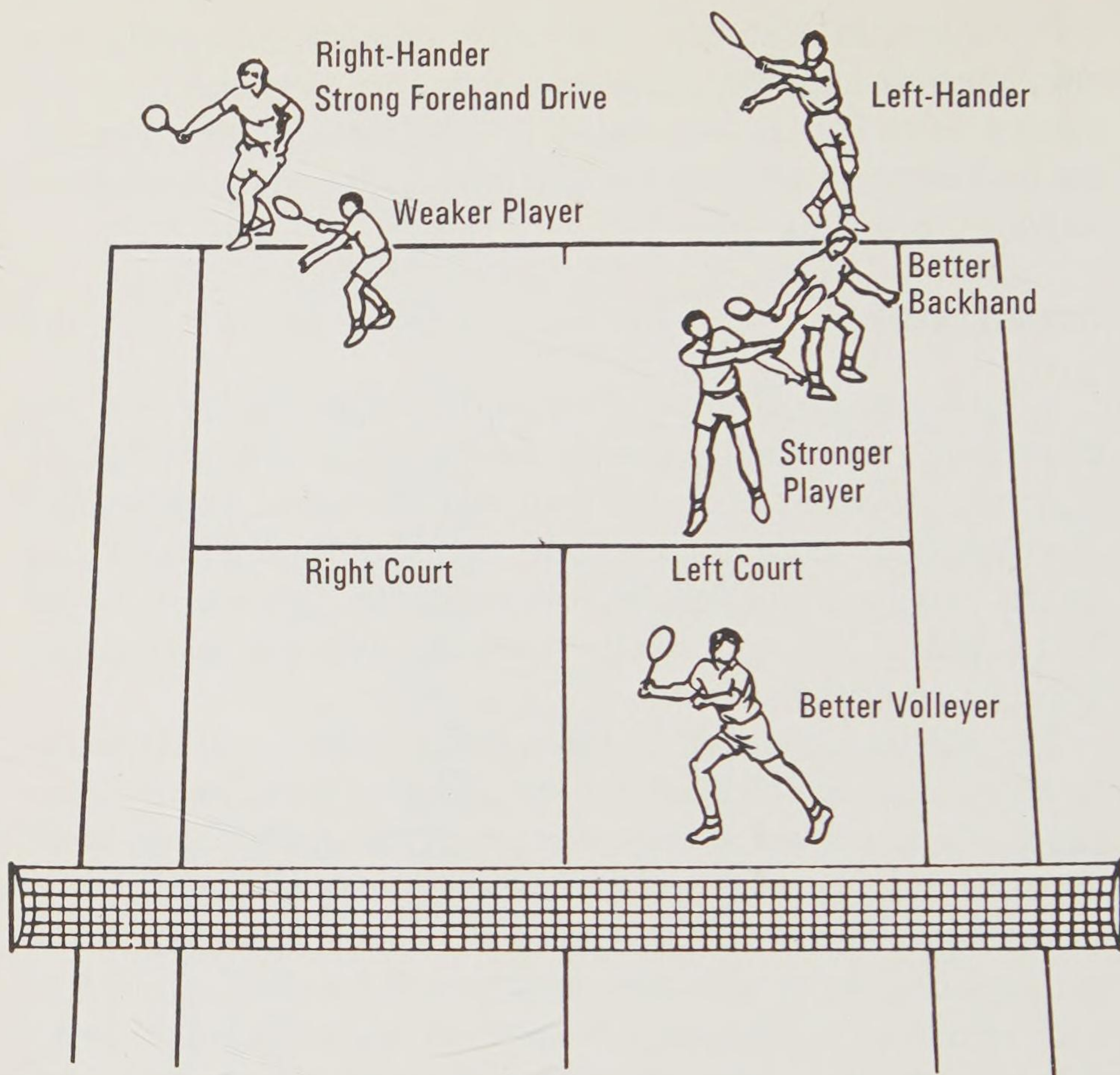
You should be at home receiving in either the right or left court, since this ability allows you to fit in with a range of partners. However, once you team with a regular partner each of you should settle for one court or the other and stay there. In this way, you will develop a better combination than would be possible if you continually changed. Here are some guidelines for choosing courts.

The right court should be taken by the player with the better forehand and the left court by the player with the better backhand. Do not imagine that your strengths should be towards the center for the reason that your opponents may direct most shots there. The governing factor is the service return. Since the opposing server can most easily reach the outside wings of both receivers, to plant your strength in the center would mean that he could get a high proportion of his first serves into court to your weaker sides.

If one player is better on both forehand and backhand than his partner he is usually the stronger player and should take the left court. From this side he can cover more of the court and take more of the play.

Two partners may have reasonable forehands and backhands, but one specializes in driving and the other in volleying. The volleyer should play in the left court, from where he can intercept better, and take more overhead shots.

A left-hander should play in the left court. The point is sometimes made that this results in a double backhand down the



Illus. 15. HORSES FOR COURSES.

center, which is a weakness. True, but this pair will have a much greater weakness if they place their backhands to the outsides, because both receivers would then be presenting their backhands to the opposing server's diagonal serves. This gives him confidence from the start and is almost certain to make him serve better than usual. Further, in rallying after service and service return, as summarized in Illus. 9 on page 37, both receivers would mostly be playing backhands. You could say

that a left-hander playing in the right court and his partner in the left produces a backhanded game.

This will just pass muster if both partners are much steadier on backhand than forehand. At best, that would produce a defensive pair.

A left-hander with a very good forehand should always play in the left court. As we have seen earlier, he may dominate the game.

Illus. 15 is a pictorial summary of all this.

Most exceptions are more apparent than real. For example, two left-handed partners can follow the patterns given for two right-handers. But what if you had a right-hander with powerful forehand, volley and overhead? Should he play right court to make full use of his forehand or left court to exploit his net coverage?

Well, if he has a reasonable backhand, he's probably the stronger player of the two partners, and therefore should take the left court. If his backhand is well below the standard of his forehand he's probably adept at stepping round it and using his forehand nearly all the time, in which case he should stay in the left court. If his backhand is highly vulnerable, he will have to go to the right court. That means his overhead coverage of the center will be lost and volleying efficiency will also be reduced to some extent. They're not as important as his return of service capability.

Women's and Mixed Doubles

The criteria for men's choice of sides applies to women's doubles. Please see Illus. 15 again.

In mixed doubles, the over-riding factor is greater participation by the stronger player and that usually means that the man should play in the left court. Without debating it further, let's accept what has been found to be true over the years,

namely, that a man taking the right court largely puts himself out of the game. As for the girl playing in the left, it's likely to be too much for her backhand. If her backhand happens to be her better shot this will be due to steadiness rather than speed or real strength. It is therefore unlikely to defeat the opposing man's service and against the girl's serve she's still faced with hitting it across a predatory net man. So in mixed doubles, it's nearly always girls to the right and men to the left.

A left-handed girl introduces a complication. If she can play in the right court she should. Not that she'll play better there, but because the greater effectiveness of the man playing in the left court rather than from the right will make them a stronger pair in sum. To be able to play in the right court she needs to be a left-hander with a straight forehand and firm backhand.

If she's the more usual type of left-hander with topspin crosscourt forehand and underspin backhand to the off side she would be so unsuited to the right court that the man's greater effectiveness from the left would not counterbalance it. Her backhand could neither stand up to the opposing man's serve nor keep clear of him when he is on the net. So this time the girl's got to have her accustomed left court and the man takes the one that's left over.

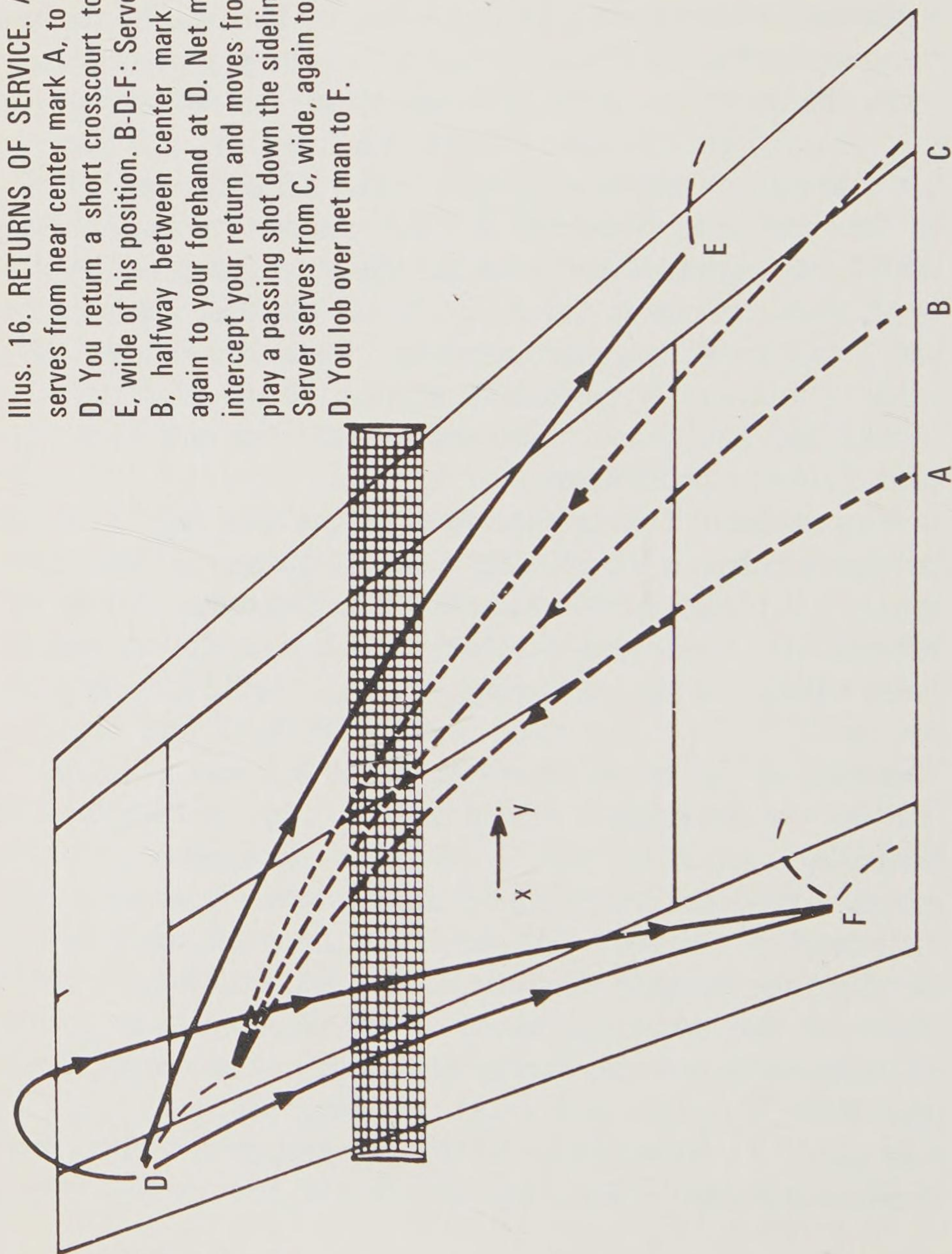
All is by no means lost if they both know how to play this formation. To begin with, both have their forehands to the outside, so the opposing servers' tasks will be more difficult. Let's assume the man returns and follows in, which is fairly standard attacking mixed doubles practice. His girl partner, like her right-handed sisters, can stand at the net or at the back of the court. If at the back, the server's return will be made down the line to her, to avoid the man who has followed in to the net, but it will mostly come to her left-handed forehand which is probably her strongest shot. If she stands at the net and her partner has played a strong wide forehand return, she is

not completely vulnerable to a lob because again it would be to her forehand side, where she can reach higher. To increase her protection here she should stand no closer to the net than about halfway between service line and net. She needs always to be aware that if she's lobbed over, the ball will be on her partner's backhand side where his lob coverage is restricted.

On the debit side, when the man returns and follows in, his shot mostly goes to the server's forehand. This is not as penetrating as when he is playing in the left court and attacks to the backhand. Probably a man's most consistent mixed doubles strength is where he returns a girl's second serve deep to her backhand corner, and closes in and blankets the net, and either volleys or smashes a winner from her return. That strength is taken away from him when he plays with a left-handed girl, but it's some compensation that her returns now go to the server's backhand.

Also on the debit side is the fact that the man cannot use his overhead as freely. He needs to be aware of this, so that whenever a lob is about to be hoisted he should move over to his left and try to bring his forehand smash into play instead of being tied down to merely playing a high backhand volley. Of course, he'd use a backhand smash if he had one, but few players have and none can compare with a forehand smash.

From the foregoing it should be fairly clear that the type of man who is most penalized by playing in the right court is the man who plays left court in men's doubles where he relies mainly on returning quickly to the backhand, and following in for net play, and being the mainstay of his side with his overhead. However, the man who always plays right court in men's doubles and has a strong forehand and would sooner drive than volley anyway—well, he likes to keep his right court and he'd prefer to have a left-handed girl partner whacking her crosscourt forehand from the left court.



Illus. 16. RETURNS OF SERVICE. A-D-E: Server serves from near center mark A, to your forehand D. You return a short crosscourt topspin shot to E, wide of his position. B-D-F: Server serves from B, halfway between center mark and sideline, again to your forehand at D. Net man intends to intercept your return and moves from x to y. You play a passing shot down the sideline to F. C-D-F: Server serves from C, wide, again to your forehand D. You lob over net man to F.

Tennis has its limitations, or we'd all be perfect, but it seems that there's a happy answer to most things.

Two left-handers, both with crosscourt forehands and off-side backhands? Tactically it's a disaster. Plain chivalry should take over and the girl be given her preferred left court.

RETURN OF SERVICE

Mixed doubles has its quirks, but otherwise you should regard the return of service as being the crux of the receiver's game. Being the first stroke, it has to land in play if anything else is to develop. Also, it embraces a range of strokes: drive, slice, lob and sometimes even drop-shot, from forehand and backhand, but the point is that each is *made against a serve*.

Most people do not realize this and as a result do not practice their shots as service returns. They rally with a single opponent practicing their strokes, but never practice their doubles service return as such.

The best way to do this is to play three-handed, Two Against One, with no change of partner until the set is finished. The three players serve *in turn*, starting with one of the doubles partners; the single player serves next, then the other doubles partner, then the first doubles partner serves again. For two thirds of the set the single player is getting practice in his doubles return-of-service. The odds are against his winning more than a game or two, if any at all, so he gets a solid workout.

Illus. 14 showed four types of service return. On this aspect of variety, yet confined only to forehands from the right court, please see Illus. 16.

Strokes in Illus. 16

CROSSCOURT D–E. If the service A–D is soft and slow and bounces high, the easiest shot is a downward slice for D–E. If you prefer a drive it should have heavy topspin, so that the

ball will dip into court in spite of the sharp angle you are playing.

PASSING SHOT D-F. This is simple if the net man moves too early. "Too early" means that you feel you have plenty of time to aim your stroke down the line as distinct from altering it at the last moment. Any type of shot will do—but get it *over* the net and aimed to a spot *inside* the backline, not towards infinity.

It's a different kettle of fish trying to make a passing shot when the net man delays his move until you are almost committed to your return. You see him move (you can't miss seeing this) and you know he's going to cut your shot off. It's no use hoping, which is our natural reaction, your stroke *has* to be altered. Be content if you can do this in any single way at all, because very few people indeed are gifted with reflexes quick enough to alter their stroke in several different ways. Most experienced players rely on one "disaster plan" alone if forced into a last-second change. Here are four suggestions:

- Carry on with your shot, but hit it much harder than you originally intended. The net man may run right into it.

- Try to pull your shot much wider with a lot of topspin. The net man may only hit it on the end of his racket.

- Push your wrist forward, so that the ball will go to your off side, down the net man's sideline for a passing shot. This will result in a winner, but you may find it the hardest thing to do.

- Turn your racket face up at the last moment so that your return becomes some sort of a lob. It may not be a good one, but it has far more chance of evading the net man's interception than your original shot, which had no chance.

LOB D-F. Hold your racket firmly and make a positive lob, never an indefinite perhaps-I'll-try-it. Aim it reasonably deep, because lobs have an unfortunate habit of being shorter than intended and so become cannon fodder for the net man. Never try to pop the ball just over his head, with the thought it will thus be sure to land in court. If there is such a stroke as a pop you can bet it will have an even worse tendency to be short than a lob—cannon fodder almost before you hit it.

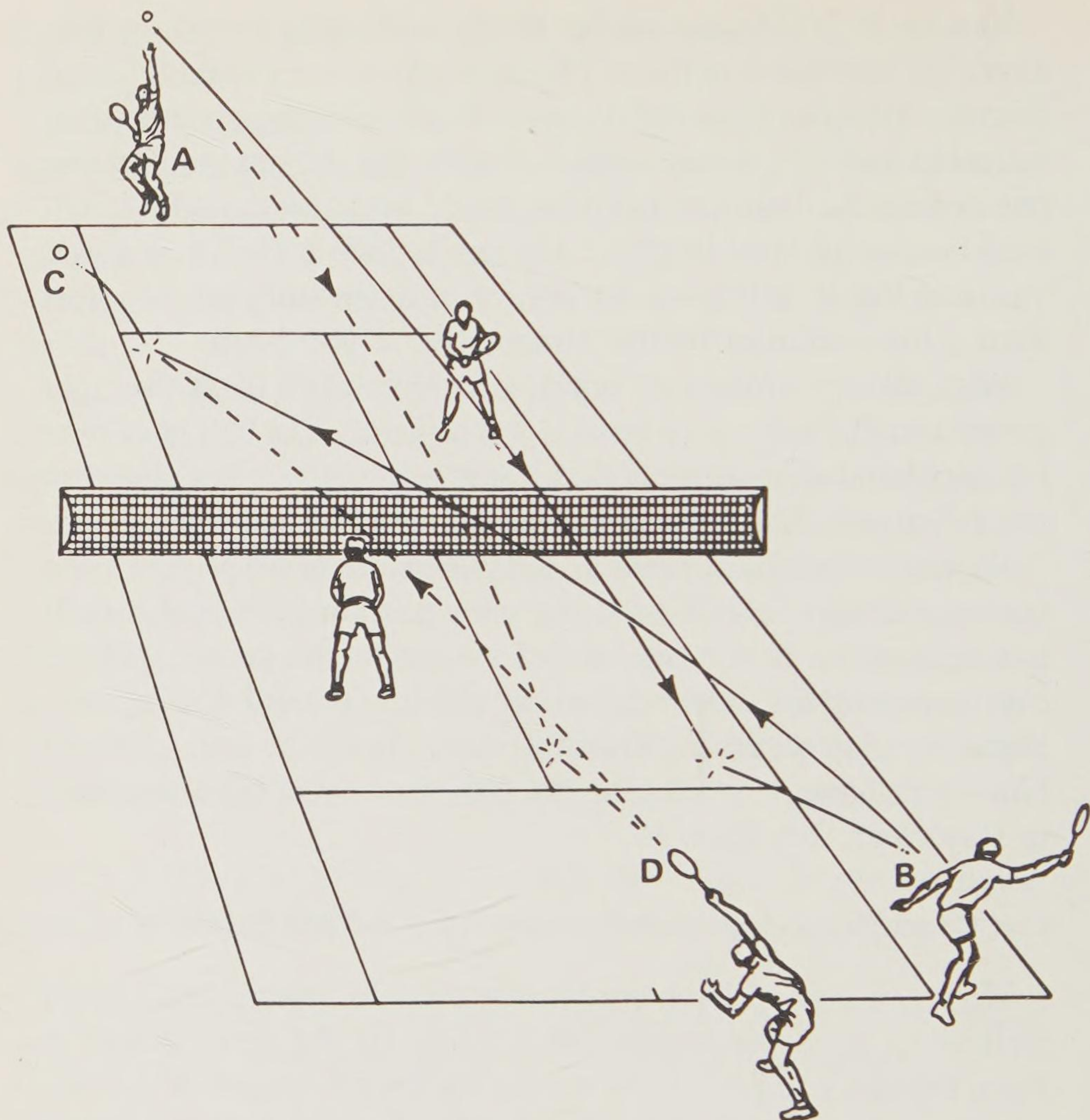
With these warnings in mind, a forehand lob from the right court over the net man's head is not difficult. The ball goes over his backhand side, where he has not much reach. It is a shot you can often use. Regard it as an attacking shot.

So much for the forehand, but when the serve is down the center you may feel that the net man poses a heavier threat. It is true that he can move further across to the center without over-exposing his sideline, but on the other hand you at least begin to play your backhand from a position well clear of him—you haven't got to hit the ball across his body in order to stay clear. See Illus. 17.

Left Court Receiving—Good Backhand and Poor Forehand

If you've a good backhand and a poor forehand, don't stand well away from the singles sideline and let the server know it. Even though you play a few strong backhand returns of service, most servers imagine that your forehand is stronger again and they will keep away from it.

Served from the left side, the ball's direction is across to your backhand, so you can play backhand after backhand more or less unobtrusively. Every now and then the server will attempt a first serve down the center, but this will be with the intention of aceing you or forcing an error rather than of exploring your forehand. Fortunately, these fast and isolated serves seldom go in, because few servers have practiced them. When one does



Illus. 17. LOOKING ON THE BRIGHT SIDE. The serve AB is to your forehand, your stronger side—good, you'll play BC. If the serve is AD—good again, because you can play your backhand return DC without the strain of having to hit right across the opposing net man's body, as you had to in playing BC. This is the sort of attitude you want in receiving.

go in, do *not* reveal your forehand weakness by making either a feeble shot or a wild and unco-ordinated one. Unless you're clearly defending against a very good serve don't lob either, because even this tends to alert the server that your forehand may be suspect. Instead, move to the ball as though you're saying, "At last! Now for a forehand," and play a firm shot. If it goes in, well and good. If not, it's a point well spent if your bluff succeeds and the server returns to his imagined safer pattern of serving to your backhand. The most tell-tale thing you can do is to display weak and hesitant footwork. Do that, and the game's up.

Your forehand would be mercilessly exposed if the server tested it by serving second serves down the center. He would see at once that it was not a strong shot and that your backhand was your preferred service return. However, this may never happen, because servers do not like serving second balls down the center of the left court, for the double reason that they feel they are probably giving the receiver an easy forehand and that they may double fault anyway, because they're not used to serving this ball. So you're lucky.

With all this working to your advantage, what a poor tactician you'd be to show your hand from the start by standing over towards the center to protect a forehand your opposing server had no idea was weak. Once he is certain it is your weaker side he will serve down the center much better, because then his conscience is clear that he is not making experimental and risky serves. Quaint, but nothing improves a shot more than playing it with a clear conscience.

Tactics are all very well, but to help them work you can see that you need at least a respectable forehand. Go back to fundamentals in your practice: watch the ball the whole way to make it seem slower; move with co-ordination instead of awkwardness or recklessness; keep your wrist very firm; hit

the ball solidly and hold it on the strings in long contact for as long as possible. Progress from there.

Left Court—Strong Forehand

Make no secret of it. Hang it out like a battle flag. Stand well over to the sideline. You won't be continually aced. Intended center-line aces are not easy to serve into court, and in any case they are being served from the left side and so cannot curve as widely away from your forehand as do aces to the forehand in the right court. They may curve a fair amount if served from the center mark—but would *you* risk doing this if you were serving to a strong-forehand left-court player?

Make full use of your strong forehand. Besides standing well out to receive service, step round every ball you can and play a “slider” forehand wide of the server's backhand.

Make it difficult for the server to find your backhand with his second serve. When he finally manages this, his serve will have to be wide and short, which you can angle back. If this makes him feel that he finally reached your backhand and it didn't do him much good, then most definitely you're on top.

Left Court—Balanced Strength

Lobbing over the net man's head is not as promising a tactic as it is from the right court. The main difficulties are that the net man has a higher reach on his forehand overhead and much greater inclination to jump for the ball on this side instead of crossing over. If you do get the ball successfully over his head, his partner may have time to make a half-smash of it and put you on the defensive once more.

In ample compensation, your drives are mostly more effective than those of your partner in the right court. Yours attack the server's backhand.

In the early stages of a player's career the left is the more

difficult court to play, for the simple reason that it involves playing more backhands. Once your backhand is formed though, the left court becomes easier to manage, and eventually it becomes the preference of most players. A cross-court backhand is more natural than one that has to be directed to the off side. A straight or down-the-line forehand is preferred by most right-handers—from the practice they get with this shot in continually attacking other right-handers' backhands in singles.

Rising-Ball Drives and Slices

You know it's an advantage to play a rising ball. You get it back quicker, often forcing your opponent to hurry his stroke and sometimes even leaving him stranded. The trouble is that you often hurry yourself into a mistake rather than hurry your opponent.

In One Up One Back doubles the average player should settle for the dropping ball as the basis of his service return. He can play a rising-ball shot as circumstances demand in an ensuing rally, when he's got his eye on it. A rising ball shot comes far more naturally this way.

Here's an example. You are playing a match, in the right court, first game, first point. The server misses his first serve and over comes the second, less than medium pace, on your forehand. You're feeling more than a little shaky, but you watch the ball the whole way, you let the ball drop a little, then you drive it safely over the net with long contact between ball and strings. (There's no hurry. The serving pair are playing One Up One Back, so it's not as though the server were getting right on top of the net while you were taking a little extra time with your return.) The server gets the ball back, and you watch it settle and then drive it back, somewhat harder. You and he repeat this—to his disadvantage, because his last shot is short

and high. You come in and play it on the rise, from near the net, with a short downward stroke between the two players for a winner. You've had a sight and feel of the ball, you've won a point, and probably you've stopped shaking.

Contrast this with a rising-ball-at-all-costs concept. From that same slow second serve you may hit a shot that forces the server to hurry his shot, or even leaves him stranded. However, if you are feeling shaky you are more likely to rush your stroke and hit too early, sending the ball straight into the net or smartly over the server's forehand sideline. Long contact? You didn't have time to think of it. As well as playing a rising ball quickly, you've rushed yourself mentally.

If you are a player who hits rising balls more naturally, more calmly and with more certainty than dropping ones, you will have the best of both worlds. Good luck.

Similarly, you know that slices make the ball travel straight, even hang in the air somewhat, so that they are much easier for your opponent to volley than a drive would have been. But the server hasn't come to the net. He won't be making a volley, easy or otherwise. Therefore, in One Up One Back doubles, by all means slice your return of service, if you're safer with a slice, whenever certainty is the key factor. Remember you are trying to win a doubles match, not practicing your forehand or backhand drives for a coming singles match or something like that.

THE OPPOSING NET MAN

You'll recognize a non-participating net man from his stance being too close to the net. Take full advantage of the scope he allows you, from either right or left court. In addition to your normal returns to the server (deep, wide or non-descript), from the right court you can lob over this type of net man almost at will and you can also lob over him whenever

you are forced on the defensive. From the left court you can't toss over him as easily, but from this court you can sometimes add a drop-shot to your repertoire. It will have to be against a weak serve, of course, but no player who sticks close to the net ever thinks of chasing right across the court with his backhand to rescue his partner.

Be aware that you and your partner are practically playing as two men against one (the server), and you can set out to win all service games that contain a timid net man.

Energetic Net Man

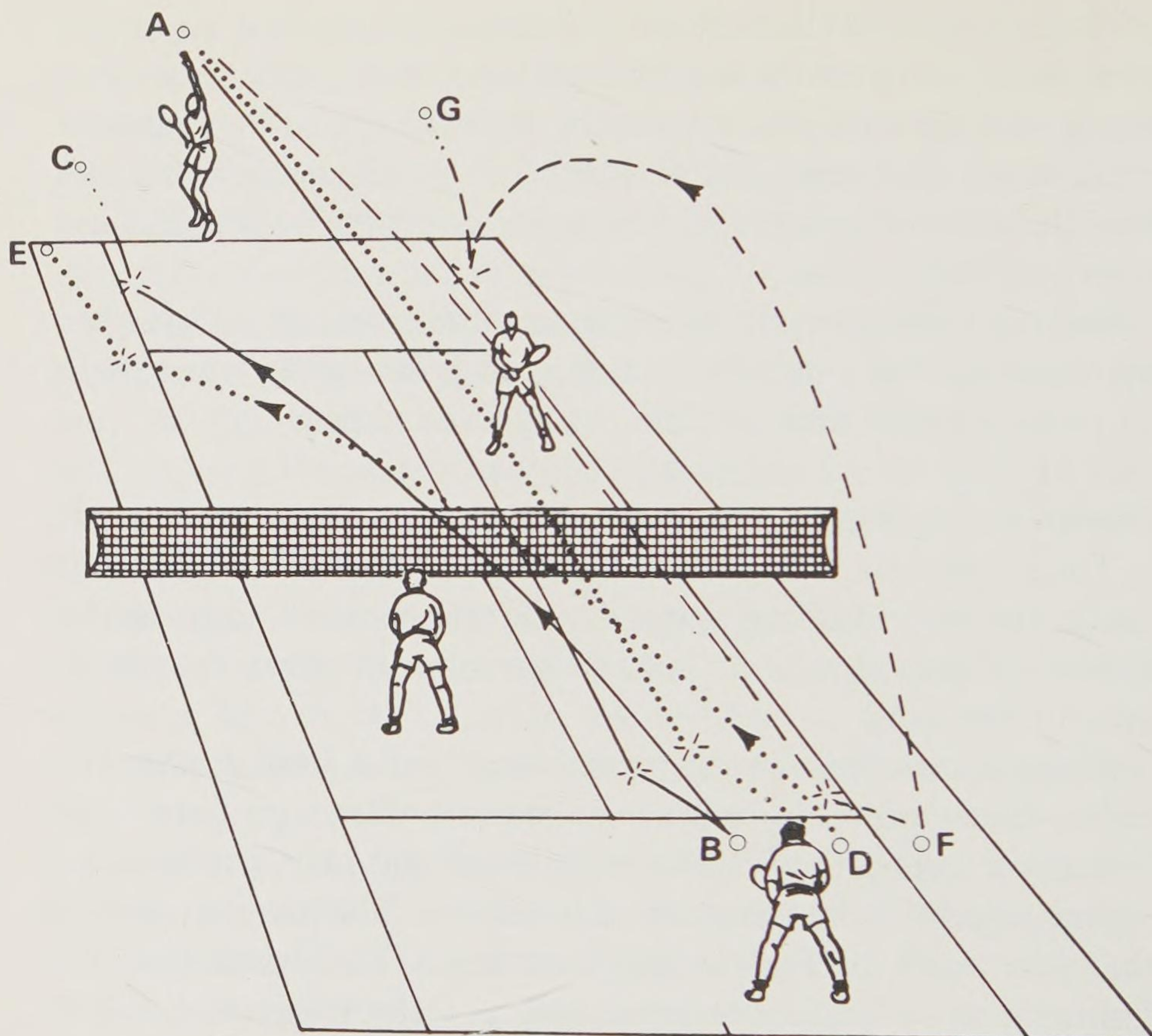
Take him on. Accept his challenge immediately after he's made his first dashing coup at the expense of your service return. If you don't, he'll have his objectionable thumb on you all day long.

Here is a situation—you may remember a similar one with pain—that can easily happen to anyone. Playing in the right court you receive the first serve of the set and play it safely clear of the net and in the direction of the server. The net man guesses that you won't attempt to pass him down the sideline from the first ball, so he leaps across and volleys a sharp winner between you and your One Up net partner. He's one interception up.

The next serve to you is a forehand and you unwisely try to pass him down his sideline. Too obvious; he's waiting for that—and bang goes a backhand volley winner between you and your One Up partner again. You probably lose that game.

Three games later he's facing you again, this time apparently at rest. You begin a crosscourt forehand return and all at once he's on his way across the court. You try to keep the ball away from him—only to hit it outside the server's forehand sideline. This net tiger has "forced you out." He's three up.

You think you may as well try a lob. *Think, may as well, try?* It's weak, inevitably. He doesn't merely smash it, he crashes it.



Illus. 18. KEEPING CLEAR OF AN INTERCEPTING NET MAN. Serve AB is to your backhand, which is clear of the net man. Play BC, deep. Serve AD is to your forehand. The net man is opposite you and can move towards the center. You have to hit across him. Play a crosscourt shot DE. AF is a fast first serve deep in your forehand corner. A lob FG over the net man's backhand is the safest way to avoid him. Be prepared to play this shot. Many players regard a lob as being a last resort only, but here is a situation where it is the preferred shot. This is One Up One Back doubles, remember, where the net man is intent on intercepting drives rather than covering lobs.

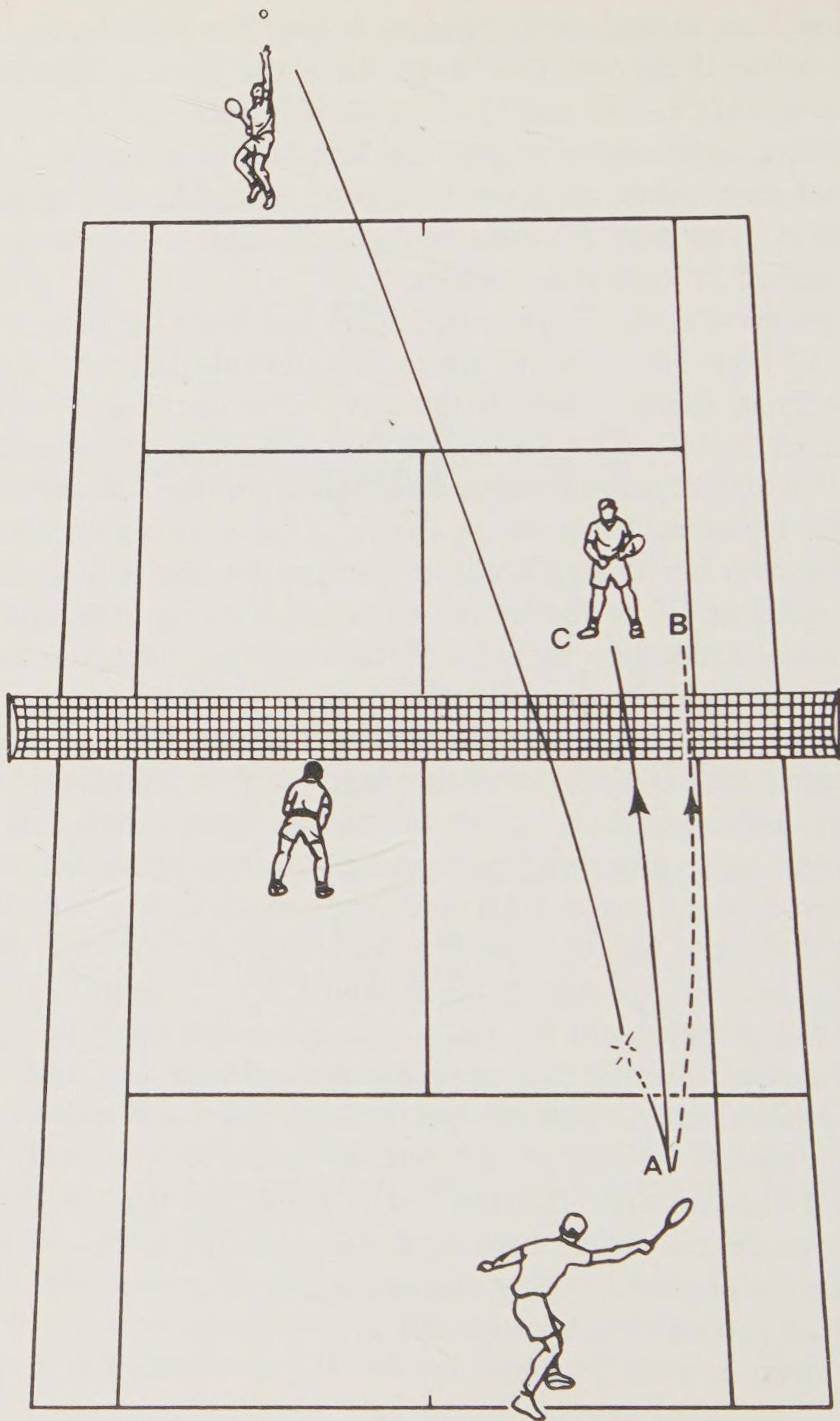
It's insulting enough if he bounces it over the back fence and even worse if he hits you. Let's draw the curtain now and consider what tactics you should follow in future.

Settling down ready to play the first ball of a set, notice if the net man takes up a position from which he can readily intercept. If he does, it's odds on that he intends to. You're now forewarned to keep clear of him.

If the serve comes to your backhand you begin by being well clear of him—see Illus. 17 again. You should have no great difficulty in staying clear. If the serve is to your forehand be prepared to return it crosscourt. It will be out of his reach. He's not 10 feet tall, any more than you are when you're on the net and try to reach a crosscourt drive. If the serve is a wide one, the net man has to stay home or else present you with a wide open sideline. If he makes the mistake of trying to intercept and you sideline him by a comfortable margin, then you, not he, are one up in this confrontation.

The serve from which an alert net man is most likely to make his initial coup is a first serve that lands deep in your forehand corner. First, you have to hit across him from a ball that is deep enough to give him time to make his interception. Second, this serve doesn't expose his sideline as much as a short wide serve does, and, being deep, it gives him more time to return there if he sees you aiming for it. Third, a serve deep in your forehand corner is not always easy to drive crosscourt beyond the net man's reach and keep safely inside the server's sideline.

Therefore, unless you can get well behind a serve deep to your forehand corner, so that you feel you are completely in control and can drive it safely out of reach, the best shot is a lob over the net man's backhand side. Against a threatening net man *be prepared* to play this as a strong deep shot from the first ball you receive, because this first ball may be a fast first serve deep in your forehand corner. If you think of it as an



attacking shot you'll accept it more readily as a full member of your service-return family. See Illus. 18.

Applying these tactics to the original situation at the start of this section you can see how to handle an energetic net man who knocks off your first return and is looking for more. From that next serve to your forehand don't try to pass him, but lob the ball over his head. It's the last thing he will expect. He won't be two up.

With any difficult serve, lob over his head. Well over, giving him no chance to smash. Even if one goes out, he's had nothing to do with winning the point. If the serve is on your backhand, return it well clear of him so that once again he's had nothing to do with it.

You haven't had a chance to assert yourself yet. But the moment the server obliges with a short soft serve on your forehand side, hit it hard and hit it straight at the net man. Do not aim it down his sideline—which he hasn't exposed anyway, because of the soft short serve. He has his racket cradled in his left hand, so that you are likely to "hit his backhand volley." Aim for his right hip, where neither he nor anyone else can play a shot without first having to move his body out of the way. There's nothing savage about this. You won't hit him, he'll mis-hit. See Illus. 19.

(opposite page)

Illus. 19. ASSERTING YOURSELF. Don't play AB. The net man's racket is cradled in his left hand, giving him a half-prepared backhand volley. His fastest reaction would be a backhand volley. Aim AC, hard, at his right hip. No one has a shot from here without first moving his body out of the way. You won't hit the net man. He'll mis-hit, or at best only defend.

What's the position now? Since his initial coup, that would-be aggressive net man hasn't been able to lay a glove on you. You've been over him, wide of him, almost clean through him. He feels that given half a chance you'll be down his sideline next. So he'd better start looking after his own side of the court—perhaps by trying to reach some of those lobs.

Once he starts looking after those lobs he won't be thinking of intercepting. You drive home the final nail in the coffin if you begin to hit the ball down the center, piercing his partner's backhand while *your* net man threatens at the net.

Summing it all up, when you meet an aggressive net player the correct tactics are to take him on. That doesn't mean hitting every ball at him, it means keeping your mind on his side of the court instead of only trying to steer the ball out of his reach crosscourt. Never neglect, even for a moment, your strokes—from the right court you need a good forehand to enforce your tactics.

From the Left Court

An energetic net man is seldom as dashing on this side, because now he has to make backhand interceptions instead of forehand. This is less instinctive and his reach is shorter. However, his lessened capacity is somewhat offset because his net position is now opposite *your* backhand. If he's left-handed, then his forehand interception threatens your backhand service return and in such a situation a dominating net man seems as though he's standing over you.

Get rid of any feeling that you're playing uphill and take him on, whether he's right-handed or left. If you have a strong forehand and you stand well over to the sideline and take as many serves as possible on your forehand, the net man will not get much chance to intercept. You are always threatening a forehand passing shot down his sideline.

If you stand wide near the sideline, a service that does find your backhand allows you to make a sharply angled return beyond the net man's reach. Such an angle is normally easy to make, because most players' backhands go crosscourt naturally. (If yours doesn't, and you prefer sliding your backhand to your off side, it is highly doubtful that you should be playing in the left court.)

If your backhand is your better stroke, then as discussed before, you will be playing most of your service returns with this stroke. They have to cross the net man—and he wants to intercept. If he is right-handed you should be able to play crosscourt beyond the reach of his backhand volley. If he is left-handed, you can lob over his backhand side. Whether he is right-handed or left- but decidedly predatory, you should be prepared to lob if you receive a fast first serve deep in your backhand corner.

It all feels easier when you've got a plan to work to instead of feeling you're on the receiving end of things.

You have now seen how difficult it is to avoid an alert net man. When your partner serves, shouldn't you be one?

FROM SERVICE RETURN TO NET GAME

Many an argument has ensued over the relative merits in doubles of service, volley, smash and service return. Without entering into debate it can be said that the pair having the better service returns usually wins. At least you can be sure of one thing: if the service return becomes your forte, you won't suffer from pre-match nerves—you can leave that to your opponents. So the next time one member of your practice four doesn't turn up, perhaps you can regard it as a blessing in disguise and get into some serious Two Against One sets.

In low-grade doubles, returning service is not difficult. The serve is slow, it lands in a confined area you can easily cover

even if you're slow on your feet, and the server often presents you with a double fault or two. Almost as many service games are lost as won, so a service break doesn't matter much.

From this stage, the server advances over the receiver, winning an increasing percentage of service games as the standard of play improves. Although this puts the server ahead, it also means that increasingly he needs to make certain of holding his service because he can't afford a service break against him. Eventually a One Up One Back pair will develop to a stage where they decide a service break is a really serious matter. Probably at about this time they further decide that it takes two players to make certain of holding a service game, and accordingly the net man participates fully at this stage.

When you reach the stage of striving to hold every single service game against better and better service returns, you decide you'd do better with two net men. So you advance to the Net Game formation—if you have the mobility and strokes to play it.

4. NET GAME

A STRONG PLAYER is going to play a doubles match with a lesser player he hasn't seen before as his partner.

Strong Player: "D'you come in on your serve?"

Lesser Player: "Oh, yes*. All the time."

SP : "Right. Come in as far as you like. I'll cover my lobs."

LP : "Right."

SP : "Right court OK for you?"

LP : "OK."

That's all the talk they need. In most cases they make a reasonable combination from the start.

There's a lot to explain, but it all falls into an easily understood pattern. Once you understand it, you never need to have it all analyzed again and you may not need any more conversation with a new partner than did the laconic players above.

NET MAN'S COVER

Look at Illus. 20, to see what you're in for.

* Girls, smaller on average than men and less strong in their wrists and hands, will take longer to develop the strokes and court coverage necessary to play Net Game doubles successfully. Court dimensions are the same for a game of women's doubles as they are for men's, so women need to stretch wider for volleys and reach higher for lobs. Nevertheless if women can play men's type tennis these Net Game chapters apply. Please read girl for man and hers for his, and all the rest of it.

If you've had a shock, it's as well to get it over early. Let's reason it out.

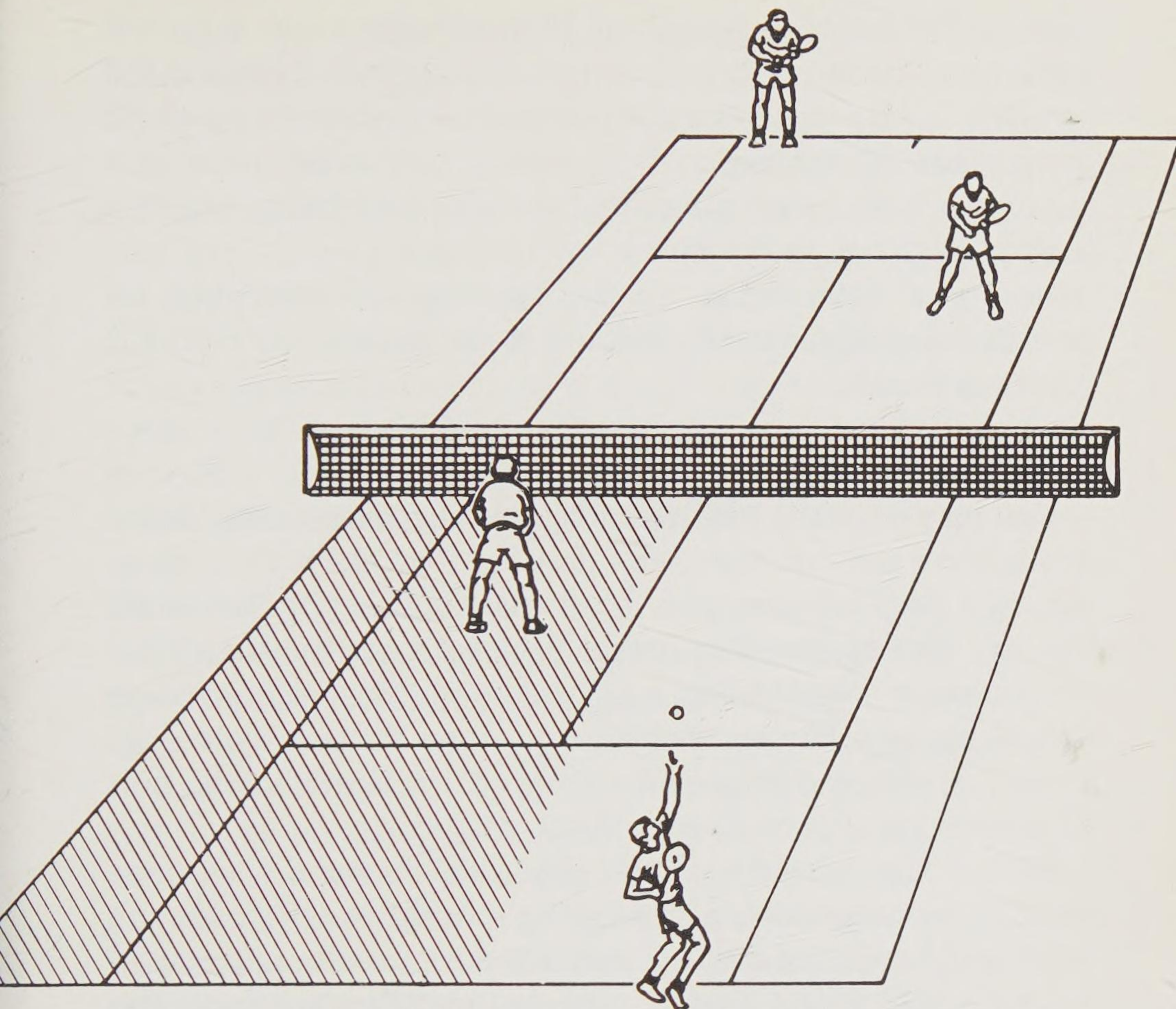
The object of a pair playing the Net Game is to form an impenetrable barrier at the net, winning points with volleys and smashes. To form this barrier, the server must follow his serve to the net—well in, so that he can make his first volley from inside the service line. Otherwise he would inevitably be low volleying and half-volleying—always hitting *up*, and that is scarcely forming part of an impenetrable barrier. Clearly, he needs to come in fast. If he has to think of turning to retrieve a lob over his net partner's head he will never achieve his barrier position. It follows that you (as net man) must take all lobbs on your side of the court, and therefore the shaded area of Illus. 20 goes all the way from the net to baseline.

Don't Be Lobbed Over

If a lob takes you by surprise and goes out of reach over your head, *you* and not your partner must turn round and chase it. You, standing more or less still, are in a better position to do this than he is; he is moving forward, fast. So you run back and get the lob on the bounce and lob it high to give your partner time to get back beside you, and you both hope for the best. Gone, however, is your intended net barrier position. You've been lobbed over; you've let the side down on that point.

Against a deep lob you have to move back quickly, still facing forward, jump high, and smash the lob on the full at full stretch. Then you move forward again beside your partner. Your net barrier remains intact.

You must not be lobbed over. To achieve this cover, you can stand about halfway back from the net to the service line, as shown in Illus. 20. Move back quickly, rather than stand too far back and allow the receiver to direct his service returns at your feet. If you're tall, if you have quick reflexes in moving



Illus. 20. IT'S NOT CALLED THE NET GAME FOR NOTHING. The shaded area is the net man's share of the court until the server has safely made his first volley and moved closer in to form a net barrier. Even then, with his forehand volley and overhead towards the center, the net man's cover will continue to be about the same while the server is serving to the right court.

back while facing forward, or if your opponents show no inclination to use a lob, you can stand somewhat closer to the net. Where you stand is your own affair—provided you don't get consistently lobbed over, or lobbed over every time your opponents need a vital point, and in either way manage to lose your partner's serve for him.

Now you know what the Strong Player meant when he assured his partner-to-be: "Come in as far as you like. I'll cover my lobs."

Objections Please

You may object to this reasoning and say your partner has a strong serve that receivers can't do what they like with, such as putting a deep lob over your head whenever they feel inclined. You say that by standing farther back from the net than need be, you are over-protecting against deep lobs that seldom come and taking up a less aggressive net position for your volleying. Instead of doing that, you'd sooner stand closer to the net, where you have more chance of volleying *down*.

Well, it has already been said that you can stand where you like. If your partner has a dominating serve he hardly needs you at all, and for that matter he may not even need to advance to the net behind it. But if he has to fight to hold his service games against receivers who can handle his serves and make good service returns, including lobs, it is essential that as a pair you have a roof to your house. A net barrier has to be high as well as wide.

Center Cover

Mention of width brings us to the second point about the shaded area of Illus. 20. As well as guarding against lobs, you should cover about as much as the center if you can. The reason is that it is easier for you to volley from the net, where the ball

is higher, than it is for your incoming partner. For his first volley he will not yet have arrived at a position as close to the net as you are; he will not be beside you, forming a barrier more or less parallel to the net. He will have a lower and hence more difficult volley, or perhaps a half-volley, to make.

It seems a long way over for you to cover, but it is far less, once you are aware of it and convinced it is the right thing to do. You can't start from a net position near the sideline and leap across, because this commits you and makes you vulnerable to either a sideline passing shot or a toss over your head. Give yourself a chance and stand near the middle, a little less than halfway between sideline and center line.

Sideline Cover

What about your sideline? You are far more likely to over-protect your sideline than you are to over-protect against lobs. Unless a receiver is openly gunning for you, he seldom attacks your sideline. Against a strong serve, he tries to keep clear of you. From a weak one, he doesn't want to waste a good opportunity; he is better off driving into the feet of your incoming partner with every chance of success than risking a "perhapser" that may go down your sideline, but equally may be straight into your backhand volley, played from higher than the net. When your partner serves wide, you must protect your sideline. That is not in dispute.

You've a lot to do as net man. Your overhead and your volleying need to be solid. To cover a good half of the court from a net position you need to move well, but foreknowledge of what you should do allows you to move a lot faster than a player who has swift reflexes in his body but doubt in his mind. Mind beats muscle by a mile.

Can You Play a Net Game With Less Cover?

You may object that you want to play Net Game doubles, but you don't feel you have to cover all that shaded area when you're the net man before daring to attempt to play this high and mighty formation. You've seen plenty of servers following their serves in and lobs going over the net man and the server getting them somehow or other. Also, returns go down the middle and the server plays most of the game without the net man and he wins nearly all his serves too. Or you may say that you and all your partners play this way—satisfactorily, thanks.

Here are some agreeable answers:

- Don't hold back. Play the Net Game as soon as you want to.

- If you feel you can't cover all of that shaded area, at least adapt your coverage to the play of your opponents. If they mostly drive, try to cover the center rather than concentrate on guarding against lobs.

- Be conscious, though, that practice sets are not match sets. When only practicing, your friends usually want to hit hard drives or attempt short angles or play a variety of interesting shots—so they seldom bother with lobs. It's different in a match. When a receiver sees your partner follow in his serve to block off the net, he often decides that his best course is to toss. The very pair you practiced against are just as likely to do this as any other pair, if later you should meet them in a match.

- Against a pair who lob at every opportunity, if you don't cover those directed over your side of the court your position as a pair will be continually upset. Your serving partner will then decide he can't risk coming in and will stay back instead. In other words, you'll be playing One Up One Back again—and

that's not progress. Illus. 20 and its explanatory pages are meant to stop this sort of thing happening to you.

■ Don't doubt your ability to cover lobs. No one can lob over an able-bodied man's head who's expecting to be lobbed and refuses to be lobbed over. Test this in reverse in a practice set: when you're receiving, tell your opposing net man you're going to give him some smashing practice by trying to lob over his head. You'll soon find that the only lobs he won't be able to move back to and cover with a smash will be those that go out of court. You've prepared him, of course, and similarly in a match you should be prepared.

The play of the net man is the key to the Net Game formation. Have another look at the short conversation between our friends at the start of the chapter. The only other thing settled was court sides, where the Strong Player tactfully suggested, without saying it, that he ought to have the left one. The SP, as a strong doubles player, would cover the whole of the shaded area when he was net man. The LP would too, because his first answer showed he was no stranger to the Net Game doubles, and also he would be backed by his partner's strong serving.

A strong-serving partner allows you to cover your responsibilities well. A weak-serving one practically demands that you do. So in either case have no doubts—cover your half of the court fully, and perhaps a little more than half.

NET MAN'S STROKES

Your strokes as net man—volleys and smashes—have already been discussed in Chapter 2 page 49, and the following remarks are supplementary.

If you mis-hit a volley, make sure that next time you watch the ball the whole distance of its travel. If you hit weakly, punch the next one. If you volley a fast ball out, block the next one. If none of your volleys have that comfortable feeling you're



Illus. 21. COVERING DEEP LOBS. As you move back, while still facing forward, put your left arm up to steady yourself and cock your racket near your right shoulder. You do *not* need as full a swing as for your service.

used to, use a little follow-through. Few players connect follow-through with a volley, but it's amazing how it smoothes you out.

Smashing

Your smash needs to be solid rather than speedy, because at the usual fairly high standard of Net Game doubles you will receive more good lobs than poor ones. To smash a deep lob, you have to move backwards while facing forwards. Put your left arm up to steady yourself as you move back and cock your racket somewhere near your right shoulder. See Illus. 21.

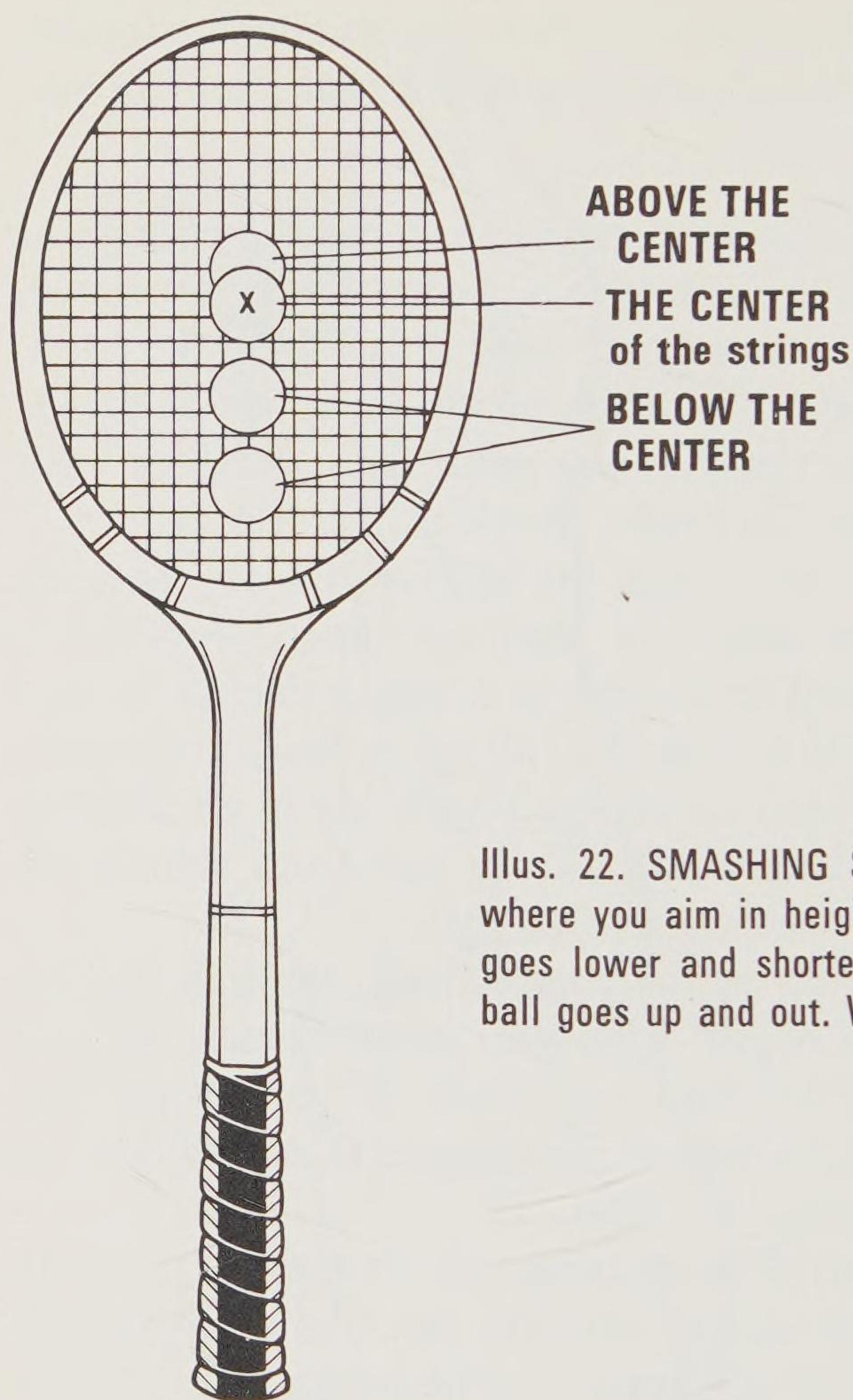
At the last moment rise to meet the ball (so you won't have a shaky feeling that it is falling on you) and hit it *forward*, not down. You are well back in court and a smash carries its own downward tendency. Do *not* use the full swing you use for your service, in which you wind up behind your body in an effort to propel an almost stationary ball all the way from behind the baseline. Aim the ball well clear of the net.

If you hit with the center of your strings, the ball will go where you aimed it in depth. If you hit above center, the ball will go lower and shorter than you aimed. If you hit the ball below center, down in the bow of your racket face, it will go up and out over the baseline. See Illus. 22.

The below-center part of your strings has no magical property of sending a tennis ball up and out—it's just that when you hit the ball here your racket is always sloping backwards towards the back fence behind you, so up goes the ball.

Anyway, watch a number of other players smashing deep lobs. You will probably find that most swing too deeply and hit almost as many balls into the net as over, and that if they send one over the backline they have hit it from below the center of the strings.

Practice the technique outlined and your overhead will become as safe against deep lobs as against shorter ones. *That's* having a solid overhead.



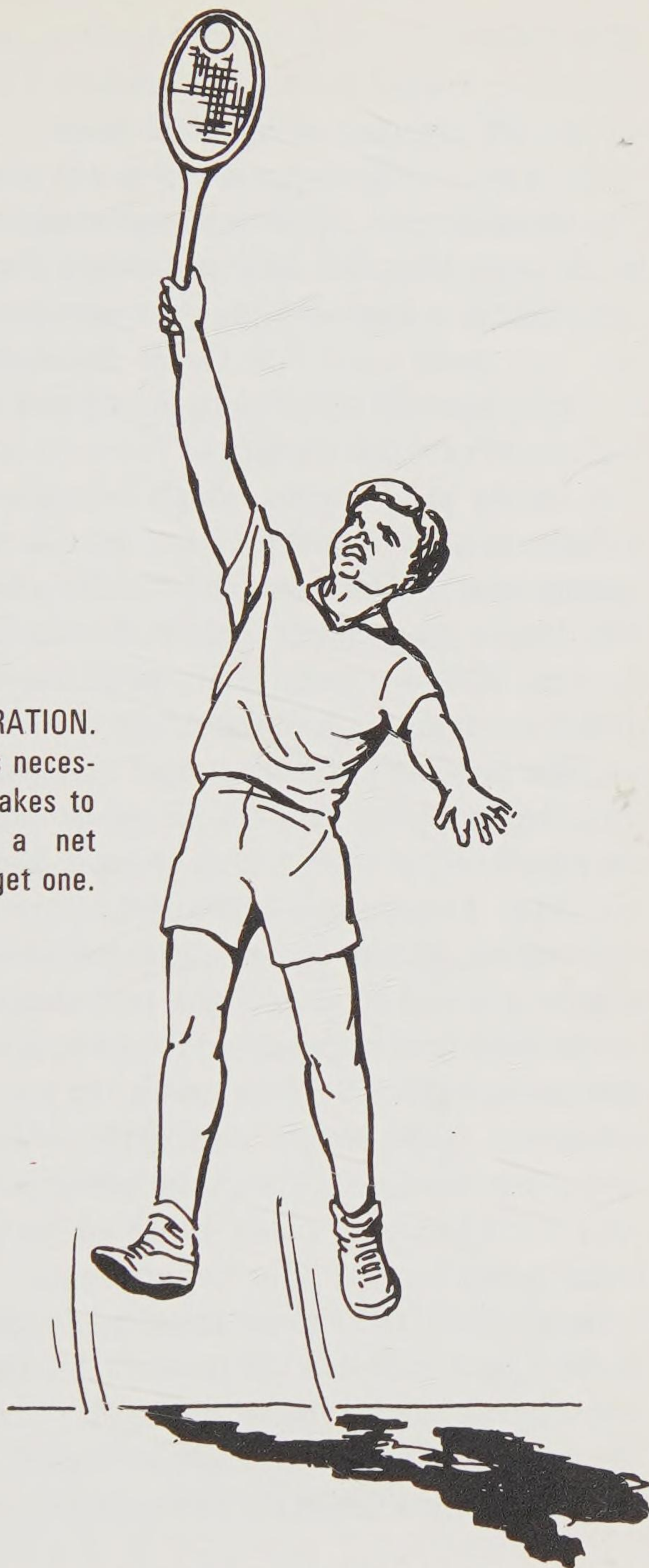
Illus. 22. SMASHING SPOTS. Center—ball goes where you aim in height and depth. Above—ball goes lower and shorter than your aim. Below—ball goes up and out. Why? See page 87.

Patience Please

Keep calm and patient against deep lobs. You don't have to win with one smash. Smash firmly and move in again. Be desperate only when trying to reach to the last inch, in hitting a nearly-out-of-reach lob on the full, instead of having to let it bounce and go after it—and lose your net position. Illus. 23.

You began with a net position. Hold onto it.

Illus. 23. ALLOWABLE DESPERATION.
It's more than allowable, it's necessary. What a difference it makes to the position—you'll keep a net barrier or the receivers will get one.



SERVING

Serving has been covered in some detail for both tactics and mechanics. In discussing Net Game doubles serving, we will again assume that your serve is not so dominant that it continually aces your opponents or causes them to mis-hit or play weak shots, in which case you could win by your strokes alone. All situations assume that your service needs tactical backing, that you need your Net Game formation to win, either with certainty against lesser pairs or by yet another last inch when you are evenly matched.

As your stock serve, don't blast the ball. Unless it is a winner or near-winner in itself it comes back too quickly and catches you too far from the net for a comfortable volley. You will "force your opponent into brilliance." Serve instead with the idea of being well placed to make your First Volley, a key shot that deserves a name of its own. Serve with rhythm and balance so that your serve and follow-through end with your right leg stepping into the court as the first step of your net approach. Flat, sliced and topspin-sliced services all equate with this. The topspin-serve action sends your right leg somewhat sideways, the extreme topspin (or American Twist) sends it definitely out to your right, and these distortions slow down the start of your approach. However, it is well known that these two serves have a higher arc over the net than others and so take longer to arrive at the receiver's racket. Thus they give the server the maximum time to get into position. It also improves your confidence in other types of serves to know that their smoothness can aid your net approach.

Don't foot-fault. Your keenness to get to the net makes you do this practically all the time if you are not aware of it. Then one day at some tense moment someone suddenly shouts, "Foot-fault!" It's as though he called, "Foul!" or even, to a sensitive soul, "Cheat!" You're a very experienced competitor

if it doesn't upset you, or at least make you feel self-conscious, which interferes with your concentration and your watching the ball on your next serve. Instead, stand clear of the line—well clear if you know you always move your front foot a little, miles clear if you know you move it a lot. Don't have any self-pity that you're *penalizing* yourself, for heaven's sake. Then serve, follow through, swing your right leg over and step into court and move to the net.

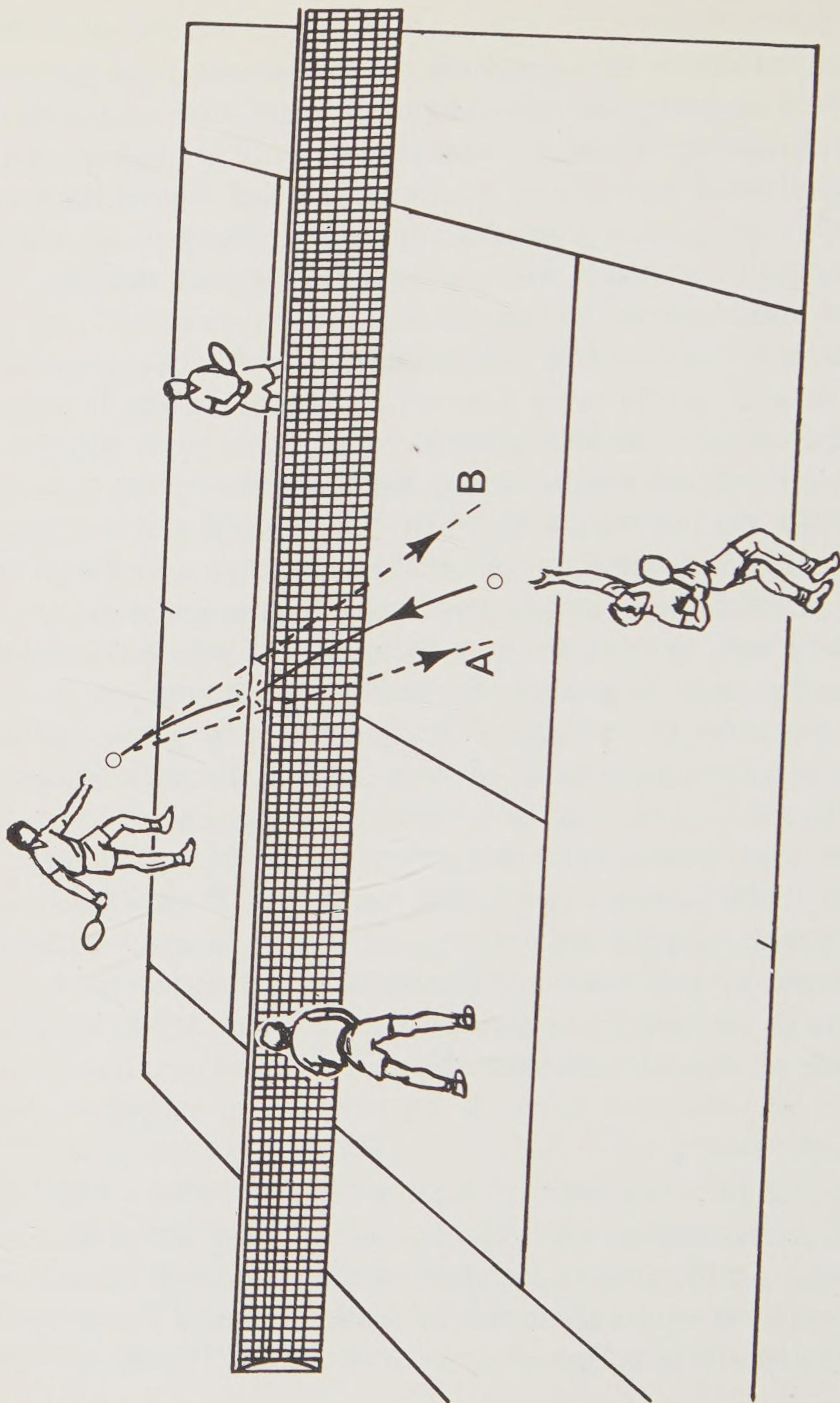
Move to the net swiftly or strongly, accordingly to your build and movement. Never see yourself as rushing the net. The patter of excited little feet belongs to a children's party, or perhaps to a Two Back pair's more daring member, who makes a sudden burst for the net at match point. They don't belong to a player following every serve to the net. Sometimes you do things best in a hurry, but it's no way to play Net Game doubles.

The longer the time between the impact of your serve and the impact of your first volley, the farther into the net you will be, and the easier this volley will be. Therefore, be aware that you need to serve deep, instead of more or less leaving this to chance and trying to make up the time by "rushing" in.

On most points, your first volley, rather than your serve, is the key shot. Mostly you can play it well and, if you do, the odds rise steeply of your winning that point, at once or eventually. Therefore, if you receive a comfortable first volley never miss it—that's careless squandering. If it's difficult, try to scramble it back at all costs and keep the point alive.

Smooth Sailing

Go for an ace whenever you want to, but many servers find such concentration on one shot alone interferes with their balance in following in for the first volley, should the receiver make a good return after all. The stock method of many experienced players is to regard their serve and first volley as a pair



of shots rather than as two separate shots. They swing their serve over the net, seem to curl it downward into a service court almost waiting to receive it with open arms, move in as part of a service-action-continued, pause or slow down a little as the receiver is hitting the ball, take a comfortable first volley, and move in farther to parallel the net man and form a net barrier with him.

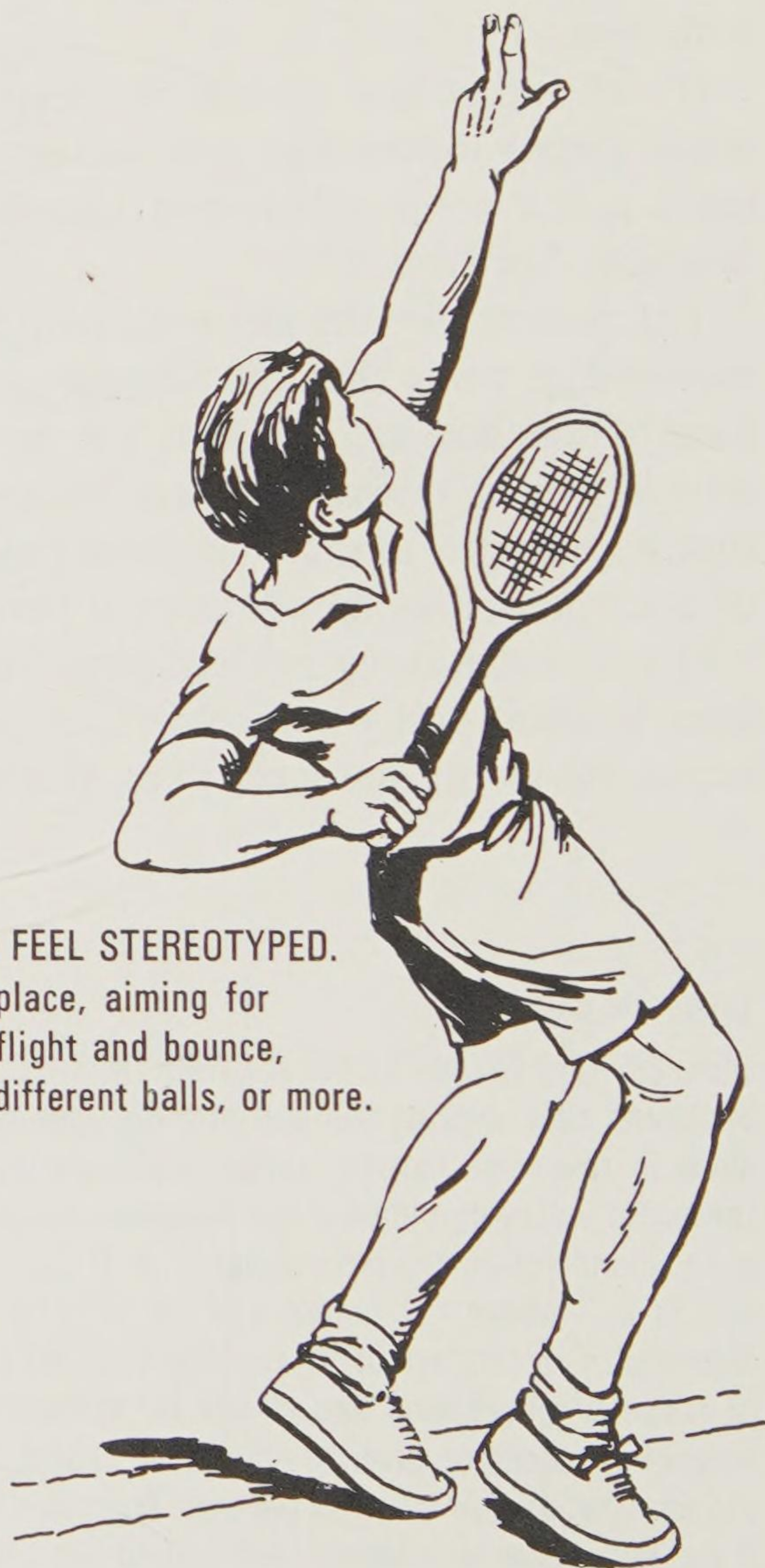
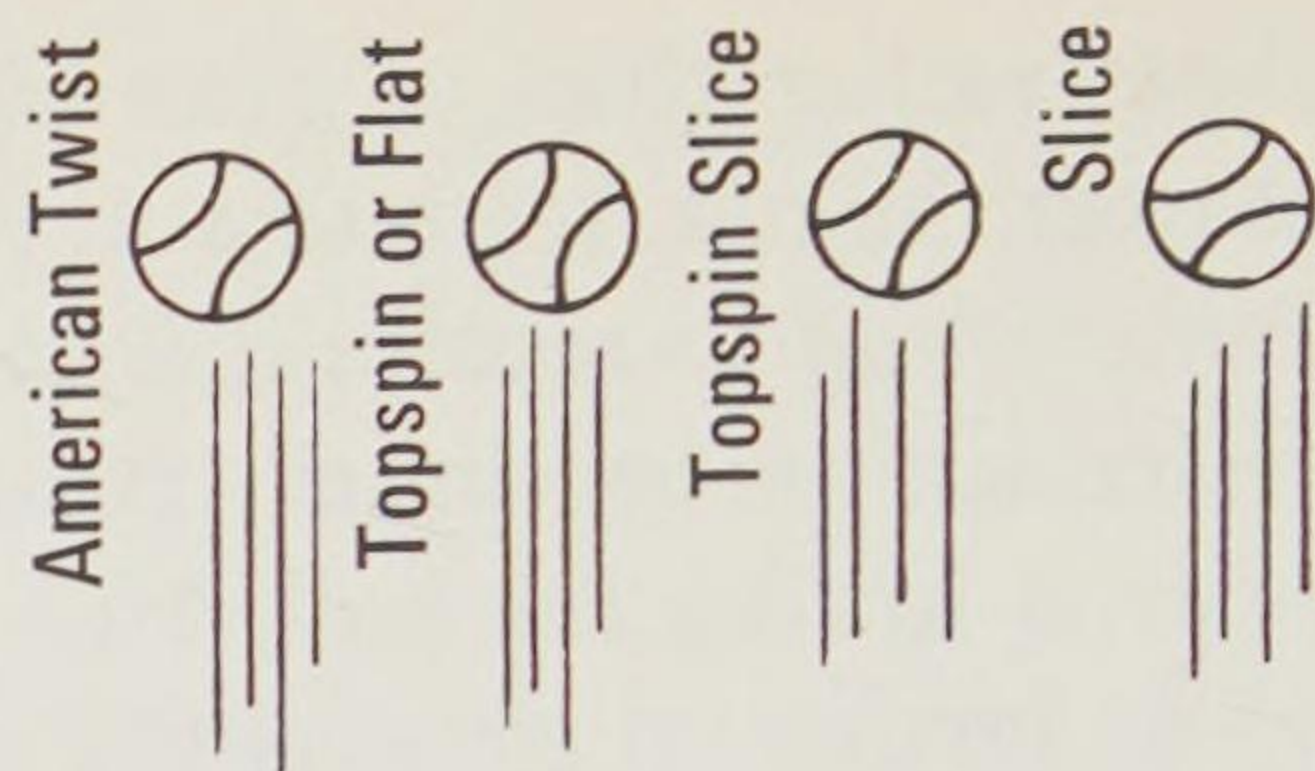
It's all rather like a game of chess, when the player with the white pieces moves first and, taking no risk and not looking for a quick coup either, sets himself up in a sound opening position. See Illus. 24.

The reason why the server usually holds service in an evenly-matched game is that the serving pair has the first chance to form a net barrier, not that the serve is far superior to the return. This is one of the clearest, and certainly the most consistent, examples of tactics dominating play, although the strokes of both pairs may be about on a par.

If you watch doubles champions on TV, you will notice that their brilliant and varied play looks spontaneous, even opportunist. No doubt parts of it are, but their stock serving basis is

(opposite page)

Illus. 24. IT'S RATHER LIKE A GAME OF CHESS . . . Server serves to receiver's backhand side, curving the ball into his body so that he cannot make a forceful shot. In the same motion, server advances inside the service line and pauses there, for volleying balance and maximum reach to right or left. Receiver makes a backhand return towards either A or B. He has avoided the net man but the ball is still above net height and not a difficult shot for the incoming server. Server plays a comfortable first volley from his backhand (A) or forehand (B) deep to receiver's backhand and closes in. Without having taken the slightest risk, server has forced receiver to play his next shot from behind the baseline and has set up a net barrier with his partner. From this perfect position you'll agree that if the latter now lets himself get lobbed over, he should be taken out and shot.



Illus. 25. . . . BUT NO NEED TO FEEL STEREOTYPED.
Same man, serving from same place, aiming for
same spot—but from different flight and bounce,
receiver feels he receives four different balls, or more.

as shown in Illus. 24. It is recognizable. (Don't watch the ball for awhile and keep your eye on the server instead.)

It's satisfying to have a basis to work from and it does not mean you are stereotyped. Taking one shot alone, service, you can serve from the same position and land the ball in the same spot in the receiver's court and yet make it feel a different ball to him. See Illus. 25.

Make your first volley from inside the service line whenever possible. It's laziness if you don't. If you're sure you're not lazy, then you need to practice a smoother and therefore quicker combined service-and-approach action. If you can't do that either, you will have to serve with more arc. Give yourself a fair chance throughout by remembering to land the ball as deeply as possible and not to serve at top speed to a receiver who can handle your speed. The penalty for not getting well into the net is that your would-be comfortable first volleys will be replaced by a string of very low volleys or half-volleys, and probably as well by a few of those cross-breed shots somewhere between half-volley and rising ball.

When the receiver occasionally returns a very slow ball high above the net, you can run all the way in and hit it for a winner or near winner. At all other times, however, you will have to pause somewhat in your approach as the receiver strikes the ball—for two reasons. One is that you can't change direction to cover wide returns properly while you are running forward, and the other is that you can't volley with control while you are on a dead run. This pause isn't a complete stop, but it has to occur even if you scarcely notice you've made it. An analogy is in the swing of your forehand drive: whether you stop at the end of your backswing or merely slow down, some pause occurs there; you never swing back and forward in one looped motion at the same speed.

Once you are aware of the feelings of satisfaction and safety

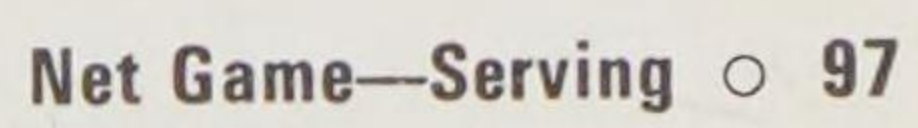
that come from setting up a comfortable first volley for yourself, you cannot help noticing that this happy state of affairs follows far more often after first serves than second. Formerly, you may have recoiled from advice to get at least 70 per cent of your first serves in. It seemed to take away your dash. However, with a manageable first volley as the prize, you will want to get them all in. When one does miss you will want to have a second serve that still allows you to claim your prize. You'd rather have two good serves than one. That is what coaches and advisers have been saying for years, but you have to discover your own interpretation of it for yourself before it's convincing.

Rough Going

The most dangerous chink you can have in your armour is a lack of confidence in your ability to land a vital second serve on your right-court opponent's backhand. Vital points are not so much match points as those where it's on the razor's edge whether you will win or lose. Being down 1-5 and 15-40 doesn't compare for tension with 4-all, first service a fault, and the right-court receiver eager to hammer a topspin forehand down into the dirt at your feet. If he succeeds and he and his partner go on to win 6-4, *that* would have been the real match point, and well you realize it at this vital moment in question. Of what use to you now is your past service concept, if it has been one where you serve fast first serves and get a reasonable number in, and your second ball is—well, shall we say “about reasonable?”

(opposite page)

Illus. 26. TANDEM DOES NOT COMPENSATE for having a poor second serve to the right court. Your serve AB finds the receiver's backhand, your partner is positioned to give you maximum protection, and you set sail for C. You've done all you can tactically, but a poor serve leaves BD as an easy shot for the receiver and a highly awkward one for you.



There's still a chance for you to hold this vital point if you clearly realize that a weak serve calls for a strong recovering first volley, with no hesitancy about it. You serve your relatively poor serve and follow in hard. He easily makes a forehand of your serve and bangs back a fast topspinner that is only about two inches above the ground as it reaches you. If you hesitated, your volley would be weak or perhaps in the net. But you volley hard, bending your knees deeply and digging the lower frame of your racket into the ground for rigidity and support. If the ball is lower again, forcing you to half-volley, you play the ball the instant it touches the ground and follow through with strong covering topspin. Possibly you'll be able to get out of it, with no thanks to your serve.

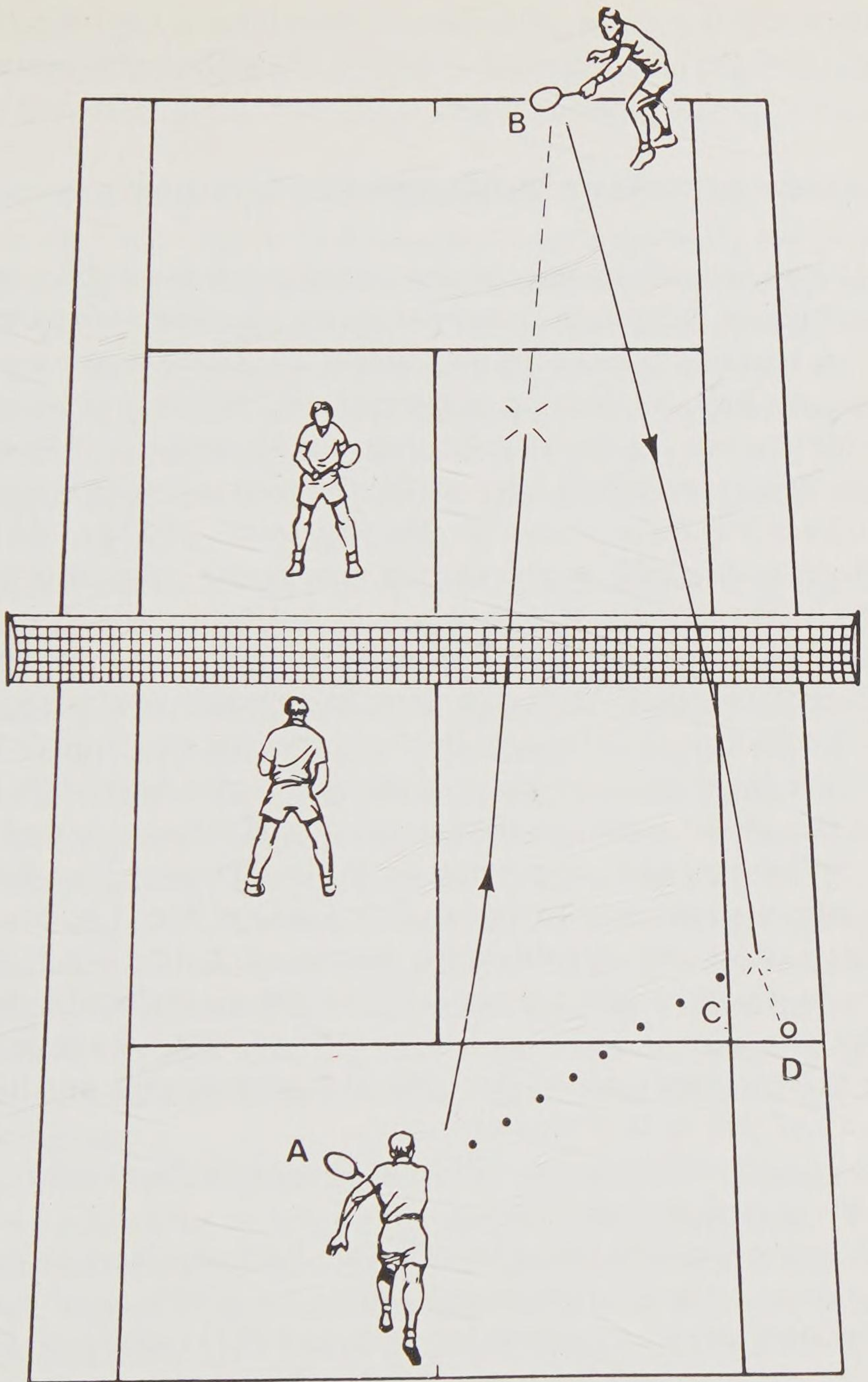
Prevention is better than cure. The best answer to a strong forehand in the right court is to be able to avoid it with a decent serve made from about halfway out to the sideline. Merely playing Tandem is not likely to make up for a weak serve. See Illus. 26.

You seldom see right-court Tandem played. Possibly three circumstances combined would justify using it: server otherwise unable to place the ball on the receiver's backhand; receiver showing devastating form with his crosscourt forehand drive; server having a much better backhand volley than forehand.

Tandem to the left court is a different proposition altogether, when you back it with a good serve and play it to shut out a good left-hander's crosscourt topspin forehand that has been

(opposite page)

Illus. 27. TANDEM AGAINST A LEFT-HANDER. In comparison with Illus. 26, the receiver's shot BD is now much harder for him to make. The serve is a good one, deep, and either sliced and going away from the receiver's backhand or topspun and breaking into his body. The receiver shown has positioned himself well, but many left-handers prefer to play an inside-spin backhand to their off side and have difficulty in making BD an effective shot.



dominating the game. This was discussed for a One Up One Back formation in Chapter 2. For its Net Game application see Illus. 27.

AGAINST DIFFERENT RECEIVING FORMATIONS

As you prepare to serve in the opening game against a pair whose play is unknown to you, you see that the receiver's partner is also standing back. This may mean that they are not a net-conscious pair, or that the receiver is not confident of playing a strong return against your first service. However, it may also mean that he intends to lob over the net man or to sideline him—to keep him in his place from the very start—and has told his partner to stay back in case the net man covers either shot and plays it into the unguarded space between them.

As it is never a good idea to underestimate your opponents in doubles (in singles it's easier to make amends), your net partner should forgo any thought he may have had of opening with a demoralizing interception, and instead should look after his own side of the court. As server, you should take advantage of the chance you have of playing against a defensive Two Back formation (which may change to One Up One Back for second serve) and so you should make certain of getting your first serve in while the going is good. If you get a comfortable first volley you have all the court to aim at. If you receive a difficult one, at least there is no net man standing opposite you, or sitting on top of you as it often seems.

In opening this way you will come to no trouble, like driving a car well and without risk.

If your opponents prove to be a Two Back receiving pair all the time, you and your partner should be able to hold your serves comfortably. Continue to play your Net Game system and tap up the points like a typewriter tapping out print. Do not

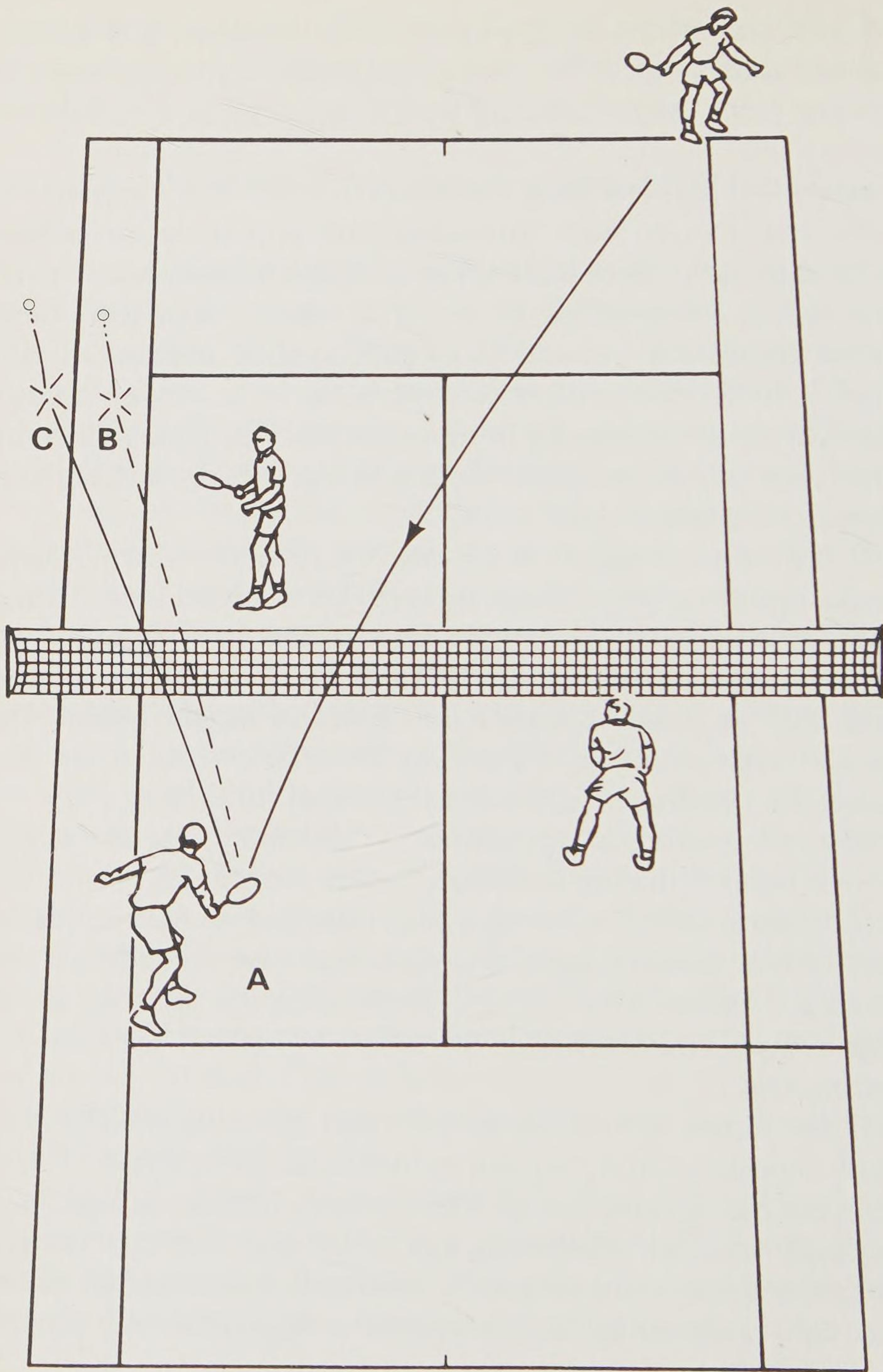
become lazy about following well in for your first volley, because that is where the rot sets in. Equally, you can make it the key point for maintaining your concentration.

Against One Up One Back Receivers

In One Up One Back formation your opponents are potentially aggressive, since their net man threatens to intercept your first volley and perhaps hit it for a winner. However, their actual aggression and net man participation depend on the quality of the receiver's service return. So we'll analyze various types of return, assuming in all cases that the receiver has hit them clear of your net man's cover and that you, as the incoming server, are going to play them.

If the return is high over the net, the receivers' One Up One Back formation leaves them in a weaker position than if they had played Two Back, where they would have been better placed to return your first volley. In a One Up One Back formation their net man changes from threat to target. Depending on how near or far he is from the net, you can either fire the ball at his vulnerable right hip (as shown at Illus. 19 on page 74, where you were asserting yourself) or down into the dirt at his feet. Whenever the return is high, you're the one who's in command—no matter how strong a player the receiver may normally be, nor how threateningly his partner may have taken up his net position. Against One Up One Back receivers, look for these high returns and serve with the object or at least the hope of getting one.

If the return is medium to slow and about net height it is fairly innocuous and you can easily avoid the net man. If it's from the right court you can afford to play it closer to him than normally and hit a penetrating first volley deep down the center, or in any event to the receiver's backhand. From the left court you can easily volley to the receiver's backhand and almost



invariably you should. In playing a forehand first volley from a left-court return, unless you are on a stone cold certainty, it is sucker play to hit across the ball in an attempt to sideline the net man. See Illus. 28.

When the return is fairly good—either from speed, dip, angle, lowness or any form of awkwardness for you—you can be sure the net man is also aware of this. He is now a hazard to be avoided, so from the right court don't count on playing your first volley to the receiver's backhand. It is likely to be intercepted. Be content to play it deep and to move in and await developments. Serving to the left court, your normal crosscourt backhand volley avoids the net man and at the same time goes to the receiver's backhand.

When a return is really good, the opposing net man increases in stature from a probable hazard to a certain threat. Your tactics are to avoid him at all costs and play the ball back to the receiver and move in. You still have the advantage of position, because he still faces the task of beating your net barrier with a groundstroke.

(opposite page)

Illus. 28. SUCKER SHOT. You serve to the left-court receiver's backhand (not shown) and come in. His return is a little higher and slower than usual. You could easily volley it to his backhand, once more, and move in. Instead you have the shot AB past the net man fixed in your mind, a winner in one. You edge across to make a forehand volley of it. The net man edges to his right. You alter your aim a fraction to pass him—but in hitting across the line of flight of the ball that fraction is too much, and your would-be AB goes over the sideline as AC. It's been done through the ages, but apparently each of us always has to find out for himself. It's a perfect way of reaching deuce after leading 40-30.

Against Net Game Receivers

A new stage is reached when the receiver tries to follow his return to the net and volley your first volley. This is Net Game receiving.

To keep the upper hand you have to prevent him from doing this if you can, or your opponents will have formed a net barrier of their own. In this case, your serving advantage will go and it will be a matter of which side volleys better. You have to try to retain your initial advantage by serving well enough to keep the receiver off balance as he plays his return (so that he cannot play it and move in, all in one motion) and by moving in so fast that if any volleying exchange does occur it will be your volleys that are hit downwards and not the receivers'.

All this goes double, as you'd expect, when Net Game receivers play rising-ball returns.

In any rapid-fire volleying exchange, both you and your partner should be wanting to volley balls going down the center instead of standing off. It is better for two rackets to try to hit a ball than none.* However, you can do better than that. A rule that works well, because it is instinctive, is that the player who hits the last ball hits the next one, as though he were playing singles. Always guard your own center well and mostly attack your opponents' center. Angled volleys are not the basis of this two-barrier situation and attempting them is often no more than sucker play.

Against Freak Returns of Service

It's not uncommon to meet a player with an outstanding serve, or forehand, or agility at the net, or whatever it is. Very occasionally you'll find someone with practically all his strength in his service return—and not in a variety of returns, but in one single shot.

* The two rackets may clash, but only one hits the ball (into play). This is not a Double Hit, which is a foul, where a player's racket hits the ball twice.

Here is such a situation. You stand 15-love and serve to this so-far-unrecognized freak, who is standing well over to his left. Obviously he's got a good forehand, so you aim for his backhand side and come in. You hear a rapid swishing of feet on the court surface and in a flash he's round your serve and has hit a forehand topspinner away from his body that goes wide of your intended backhand volley for a clean winner.

You get 30-15 and are going to do better this time. You serve fast and wide so that he can't avoid a backhand, but it's a fault. He moves wider out again for the second serve. You're not going to be hustled into a double fault looking for that backhand line, you've been around too long for that sort of thing, so you serve towards his backhand side safely in court, but with a high arc that will give you plenty of time to get right in and blank off the angle wide of your backhand volley.

The high arc bounces high—and needless to say he's got it on the forehand, because it would take a left-hander with a sliced serve and standing wide out to find *this* fellow's backhand. He topspin-crashes it from above shoulder height. You feel that if the ball had bounced any higher he would have made it into a shot like a reverse topspin serve. You made a bad mistake in giving him a high bounce. The extra time you had in getting to the net wasn't worth it. You half-volley uppishly and his partner bounces it unplayably down the center.

You reach 40-30 and slice your serve to keep its bounce low, and in you come for a more playable volley. But this chap can hit a topspin forehand from anywhere and land it short, so this time he forces you to play a low backhand volley on the wood. Deuce.

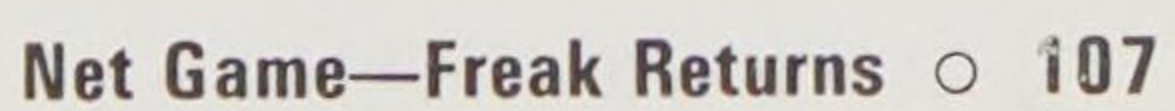
No matter who's ad it is after the next point, this man has to be stopped, and by now you've recognized him. He's a one-shot specialist who can make net players half-volley and mis-hit wherever they go. It's too risky to try Tandem because he can

probably pull the ball down your forehand line too, and it's more exposed. Putting your pride firmly in your hip pocket you stand about halfway out, slice your first serve more or less down the center—for low bounce and no risk of missing it, and also to bring him towards the center—and you *stay back*. He hammers yet another short topspinner to where your backhand half-volley would have been if you'd gone up. Instead, it bounces up, you walk in and play a curving backhand slice to his sideline and move in. It's all over. You're up there with a net barrier and he's on the side fence trying to play a backhand he hasn't got. Illus. 29 is a graphic and less dramatic description of all this.

It's been a bitter pill for you, as an accomplished Net Game player, to have hung back when you know champions go up on every serve, invariably. However, they don't encounter one-shot freaks. They can't. If one-shot freaks were good enough to become champions, they'd become part of the game, and neither they nor their pet shots would be freakish any more, would they?

(opposite page)

Illus. 29. POCKETING YOUR PRIDE. Occasionally you should do this and *stay back* after you have served. An example is against a one-shot player who specializes in a severe topspin forehand service return that lands short. Against serves like AB he slithers round his backhand and hits BC, landing the ball in an awkward spot wherever you go. Your answer is to serve a first serve AD, bouncing low and drawing him towards the center, and stay back. He crashes yet another of his topspinners, DC, for where your shoelaces or the wood of your backhand volley would have been if you had come in as expected. You step in to this short and high-bouncing ball and play a downward backhand slice CE, and move in. You have your net barrier formed and he has an unwelcome backhand to play. It should be all over but the shouting.



5. NET GAME—RECEIVING

AS WITH SERVING, your Net Game as a receiving pair is based on forming an impenetrable net barrier. Again, all situations discussed assume that your service returns need the tactical backing of your Net Game formation to win with certainty against lesser pairs or to hold your own when evenly matched. The last chapter showed that the serving pair can play their cards strongly. Another similarity with serving is that you begin with one player stationed at the net, the other intending to join him at the first opportunity.

AGAINST ONE UP ONE BACK PAIRS

Against One Up One Back pairs you look for your net approach opportunity from the first stroke you play, your service return. If your opponent's serve allows you to make a comfortable return you follow this in and form your barrier. If the serve is good enough to unbalance you, you will normally not be able to recover your balance in time to advance to a good net position, and therefore you should stay back and await a better opportunity. It will not be long in coming, probably from the next shot.

On this combined matter of balance and net approach, you will have more chance of making an approach shot of your service return if you get behind the serve than if you take it on the rise but are in any way unbalanced in doing so. From a combination of slightly dropping ball plus balance plus a slightly longer approach distance to the net, it takes you less time to take up a good net position than it does from a combina-

tion of rising ball, loss of balance, recovery of balance, and shorter approach distance. It is recovery of balance that takes the time. You are in balance whenever you are behind the ball and can play it and move in in one motion. That is one aspect of what coaches mean when they say that after reaching a certain standard of play you should think more of your feet than of your racket.

Anyway, the server is staying back. Why take the rising-ball risks of being caught off balance and of mis-hitting for the advantage of gaining an extra second's time? That's not the way to win with certainty against a lesser pair.

It is essential to avoid the net man—elementary, but essential. You can't form a net barrier if he intercepts. Instead you're right back to square one, or rather to Illus. 2 on page 10. Or look at it this way: the immediate purpose of your Net Game is to volley before opponents do; since the server does not come in, only the net man can prevent this—so *avoid* him.* Until such time as he may show that he is merely a passive net man, it is safer to assume that he may intercept.

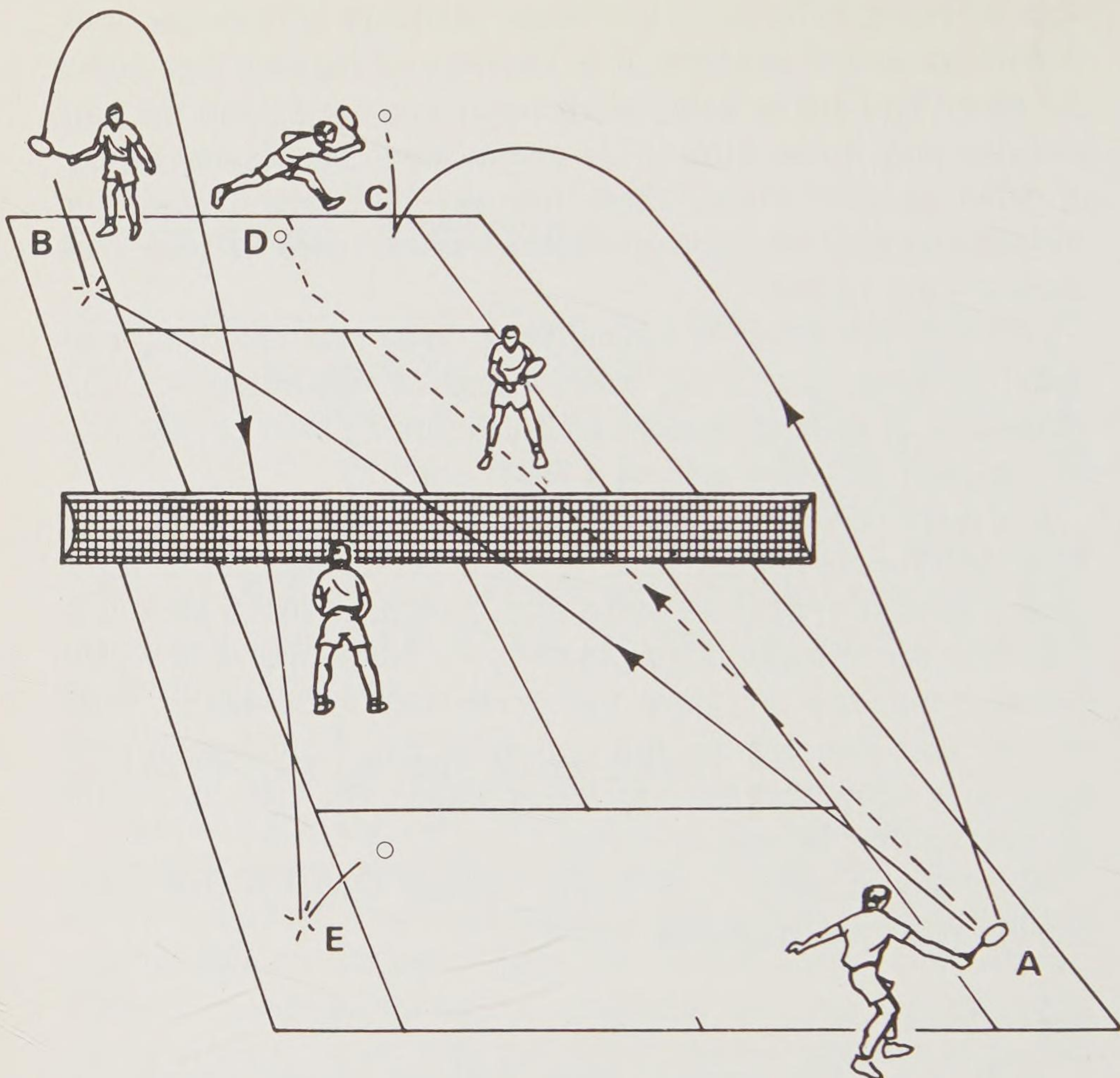
With this in mind your tactics against One Up One Back serving pairs are suggested below:

Right Court

■ It is a better tactic to form your net barrier against the server's forehand than to try to attack his backhand and run any risk of your return being intercepted by the net man. Naturally, the deeper your return the better.

■ If the server shows he has an exceptional forehand drive often capable of defeating your net barrier, you must find his backhand. Your first preference should be a lob over the net

* If you want to refresh your memory about avoiding energetic net men, the discussion is on pages 71–77, possibly aided by Illus. 18.



Illus. 30. NET GAME RECEIVING against One Up One Back—Right Court. Unless the server serves particularly well it is really the net man who threatens to prevent your forming a net barrier. Not to avoid him with your service return is a Net Game crime. Therefore, form your net barrier by returning towards the server's sideline, AB, and moving in, or by lobbing well over the net man's head, AC, and moving in. Do not risk a center shot, AD, to attack the server's backhand until you are sure the net man is a passive type rather than a participating one. Whenever you play AB your net partner must guard against a toss like BE.

man's head. As part of a One Up One Back pair he will be more concerned with intercepting than with covering lobs. As he sees it, his partner looks after lobs.

- If the server is left-handed, you avoid the net man and play to the server's backhand at the same time. Whether the server is right-handed or left, when you drive to him your net partner must be prepared for an attempted lob over his backhand side.

See Illus. 30.

Left Court

- It is usually simpler here. The net man has less inclination to intercept on his backhand side and your normal returns avoid him and go to the server's backhand at the same time. His backhand will need to be more than merely a good steady shot before it will trouble your net barrier.

- If the server is left-handed and has a strong forehand, again it is better to lob than risk the net man's intercepting your intended center return to the server's backhand. Do not lob down the sideline, giving the net man a chance to smash. Lob down the middle, between both players' backhands.

See Illus. 31.

Summary—Against One Up One Back

- Regard receiving not as defense against service, but as counter-attack. *You* are going to be the first pair to form the first net barrier. *You* are going to be the first to volley.

- The opposing net man *must* be avoided. Not to do so is a Net Game tennis crime, like serving a double fault to the

opponent with the weaker return of service. In trying to attack down the center, make sure the net man cannot intercept.

- Crosscourt drives or slices and lobs are your basic returns. These drives and slices should be as deep as possible, consistent with avoiding the net man. The lob should be clearly in your mind, rather than being a tentative standby.

- Get behind the ball with purpose and swift footwork, so that you can play service returns as approach shots, whenever possible.

- Depth gives you more time to take up a good net position, and also reduces the effectiveness of the server's reply.

Playing in this way should enable you to be certain of defeating lesser pairs. In most cases, a pair playing One Up One Back against Net Game receivers is a lesser pair. It may possibly consist of two players who can each defeat you and your partner in singles by extreme baseline steadiness with forehand and backhand slices. In doubles, these slices will not penetrate a net barrier, and if you and your partner can also cover your lobs you will be likely winners. People will call it an upset, but really it won't be.

AGAINST NET GAME SERVERS

Take heart. Not all Net Game serving pairs know the tactics detailed in the preceding chapter. If they don't, there are certain to be holes in their game. Let's start by opposing a pair whose sole idea of Net Game doubles is that the server runs in and volleys.

In the first place, the net man is almost certainly unaware of his key role in protecting against lobs. Most receivers drive the ball back, he's found, and so far he hasn't had much trouble

against anyone who's tried to lob an odd ball over him. A few have got over his head, but his partner crossed over and covered them—hit winners sometimes, in fact.

You may wonder how this can be, but explanations are simple. Most people do drive the ball back. Net men don't experience much trouble with lobs because *most lobs are feeble*. A receiver *tries* one, sees it get mortifyingly bounced and says to himself, "No more of that," and determines to hit his drives harder instead. It's human nature. Anyone would sooner play strongly, going down fighting if necessary. As for the lobs that our net man's partner crossed over to and smashed, these would have come from the left court. Against a good serve to his backhand, a left-court receiver is sometimes forced into a hasty lob that clears the net man's backhand side, but is easily playable by the server, who needs only to move over a little to be able to play a forehand smash. Contrast such a lob with that shown in Illus. 31, deliberately played down the center between two backhands. In short, our net man and his partner, if they are two of a kind, have not yet encountered calculated and forceful lobbing, particularly from the right court and well over the net man's backhand side.

And the net man shows you all this before the first ball is served by the position he takes up at the net. He stands too close, showing you that you can get over his head. He doesn't crowd over into the corner between the net and singles sideline like a totally unaware One Up One Back net man and some of the modest female players. He stands well towards the center, either for aggressive interception or at least to protect as much of the court as possible for his incoming partner. For you, that makes it all the easier to lob over his backhand side.

The warm-up is over and you're ready to receive the first ball of the set. The server is bouncing the ball, settling himself for a fast serve and swift advance. The net man is on the balls of his

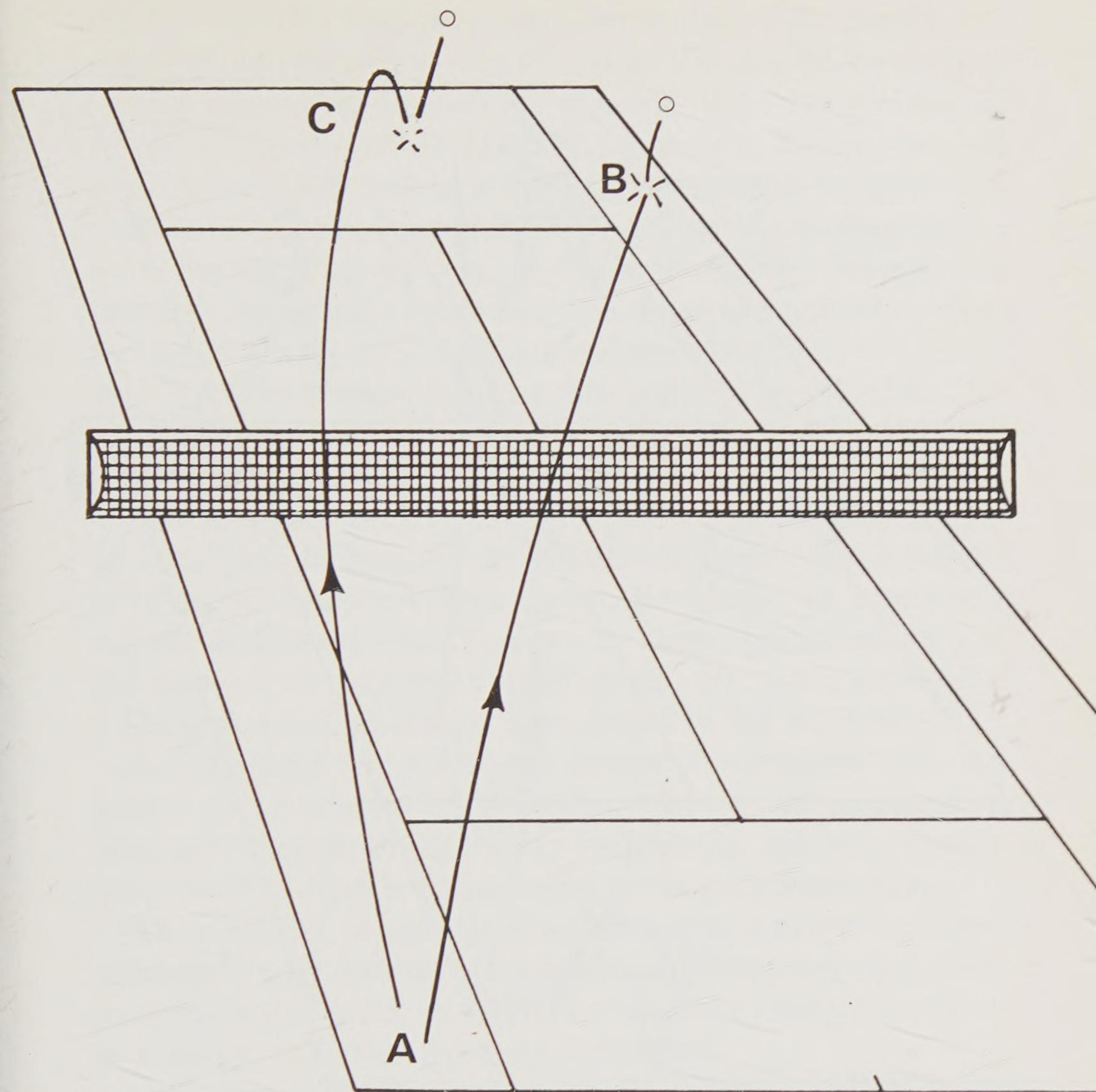
feet, flexing his knees a little. They're ready to attack you. Over comes a fastish serve, but not very deep nor placed down the center; it's the usual sort of ball served early in a match. The server comes in, and the net man is poised, and they're all set to volley strongly. But you play a forceful forehand lob over the net man's backhand. See Illus. 32.

At once their Net Game formation comes unstuck. The net man was tending to cover a little more of the center just before you hit the ball, and he is now off balance and can't recover in time to chase a shot already past him. The server, farther back, has to do it. He won't reach it on the full either and will have to go all the way back and recover a bounced lob on his backhand side. You move in and you and your partner have the net barrier your serving opponents intended to have.

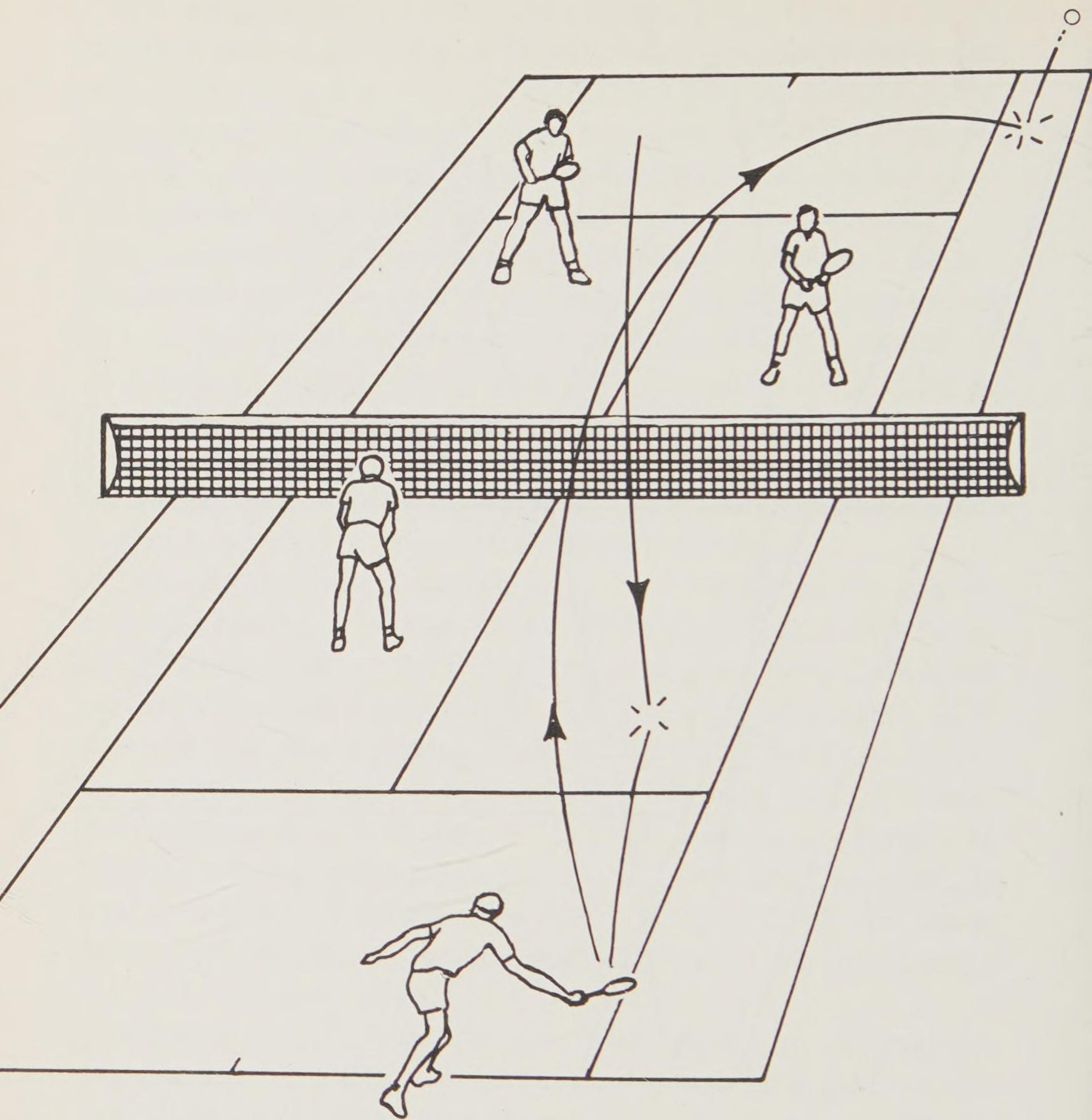
Carrying this rally a shot further, the retrieving server can do little else but lob. Unlucky fellow, *he* won't find anyone's backhand. From that angle if his lob goes over your left-court partner's backhand side it will also go over the sideline. If it goes towards your backhand side, it becomes a forehand smash for your partner. You may not win the rally with the first smash, but the score should become 0-15. What a difference there was between your attacking lob and the server's defensive one. It was a tactical difference. Yet many players think the great difference between an attacking and a defensive lob is that one's low and the other's high.

Suppose now that our happy warriors say to themselves, "That's the end of the blasted lob and now let's get into the game," so the net man stands up close again—and you do the same thing.

Suppose, instead, that the net man tells his partner he'll cover the next lob, but he stands up close again—so you play your lob once more. He'll chase it this time instead of his partner, but with no effective difference. Covering a lob means covering it on



Illus. 31. RECEIVING FROM THE LEFT COURT. Form your barrier by returning to the service backhand, AB. If server is left-handed and has a very strong forehand, the safest way to find his backhand is to lob, AC, between both players' backhands.



Illus. 32. THEY'RE ALL SET TO VOLLEY STRONGLY. Net man is poised, server is well inside service line—but you play a forceful lob over the net man's backhand.

the full and retaining your side's net barrier. Few players can stand close to the net and cover a backhand-side lob on the full.

After two experiences, the net man will have to be determined to prevent your lobbing past him, or lose by default. He will stand farther back and he won't be concentrating on the center. The server adds his contribution to holding the fort by avoiding those forehand serves that aid you in lobbing towards his partner's backhand, and so he serves down the center this time. But by now he's got lobs on his mind and so he doesn't follow in with his former gusto. Look at their position now, in Illus. 33.

A Little More About Lobbing

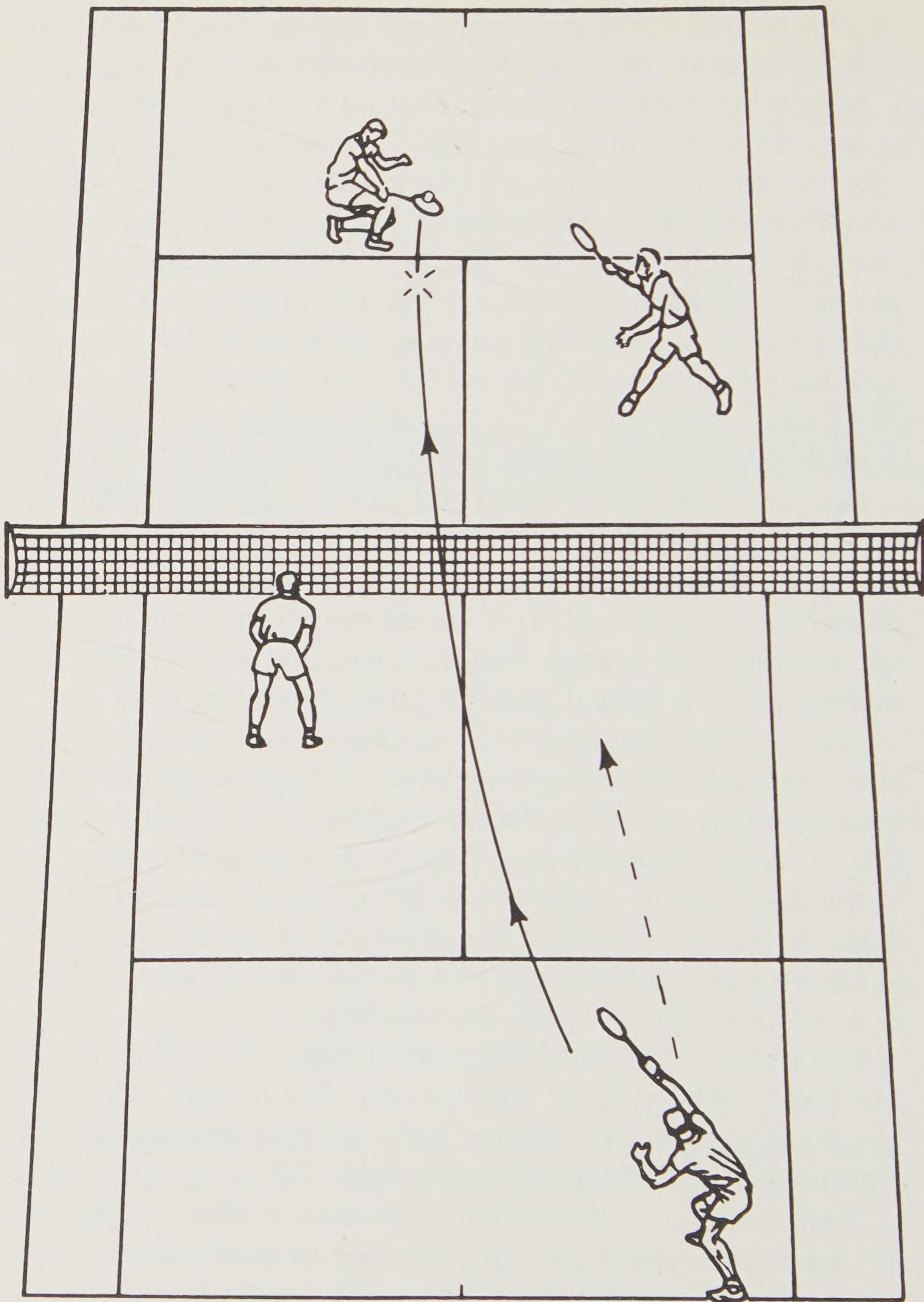
Now and then you've heard of a pair having been broken up by consistent lobbing, or having shown their vulnerability to lobs, and perhaps you took that to mean that the losing pair missed all their smashes. You can see now, from the example of the vigorous but untried couple above, that tactical offensive lobbing and not missed smashes probably did the trick.

Just the same you have your doubts. It all sounds fine, but your own experience has been that lobs are dangerous shots because if they go wrong they're slaughtered, and you, for one, don't want to have anything more to do with weak play.

All right, but to prevent your becoming a player who lobs defensively only and has no tactical or attacking lob whatsoever as an extra shot in his locker, let's discuss only the forehand lob as a return of service from the right court.

Don't regard it as a touch shot any longer ("So-and-so was in fine touch with his lobs," you've read), but instead look on it as a forceful shot, over the net man and past him, and one of your range of attacking service returns.

Then, you won't immediately abandon it after one failure any more than you'd give up your drive or sliced return when you'd missed one. Turning from a stroke comparison to a



tactical one, you wouldn't abandon your net position and stop coming to the net because you missed a volley or two, so you should not forsake your forceful shot over and past the net man if one or two come to grief.

You're still doubtful. A short lob, smashed for a resounding winner on an important point, looks terrible. You'd rather "hit yourself out of trouble."

Well, many good players "hit themselves out of trouble." They refuse to be forced into a weak lob for the opposition to smash and would rather chance their arm by lashing hard at a difficult ball. They don't, of course, do this wildly with little hope of success; they hit over and round the ball with a sort of covering topspin for whatever control is possible. There's little time for aim beyond general direction, but wherever that shot goes it won't be soft.

Good stuff, but that doesn't mean these aggressively minded men never play *attacking* lobs. They choose easier balls to play them from.

Keeping to the point of not abandoning your right-court forehand lob because of a failure on an important point, take this disaster-into-triumph scenario: Deciding set, 4-all, 30-all. You go for your shot over the net man, but you don't watch the ball properly, perhaps because he began to move. You don't hit the center of your strings, the lob goes short, he crashes it, teammates groan, partner looks tight-lipped. Partner brings it

(opposite page)

Illus. 33. LOOK AT THEIR POSITION NOW. The net man is intent on guarding his overhead backhand side and the server has not reached as far as the service line. Instead of having a net barrier against you, the center is as open as a barn door. In this situation it's a pity you're not one of those left-handers with a strong topspin forehand, fiercely unleashing it into the hesitant server's backhand half-volley mis-hit. Anyway, play your backhand into this area and move in.

back to deuce. Server misses first ball, and second is on your forehand and rather poor. He charges in fast to blanket the net to make up for it and net man edges over a fraction to be ready to guard the center.

You should watch the ball closely and play a forceful service return over the net man's backhand side, past him. Brave? Not really, you weren't nerve-wrackingly "touching" the ball. Competent? Most.

LEFT-COURT RECEIVING

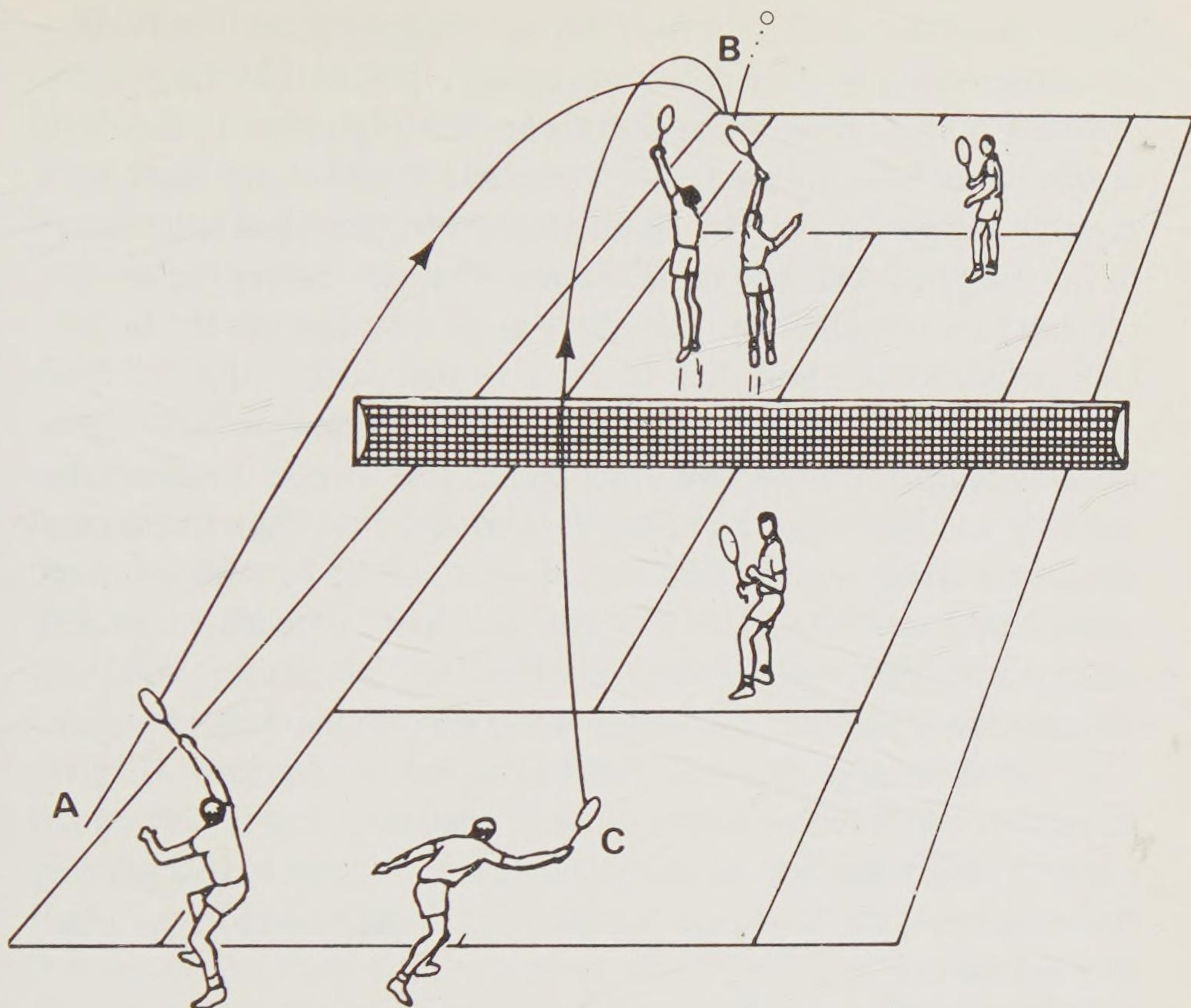
From the left court you haven't got the same beautiful target for a lob over the net man's backhand side. If you get clear of his backhand smash, your shot can usually be covered without much difficulty by the server, who has the ball on his forehand side. He has to change direction somewhat, but a lob gives him time to do so. This means that your lobs from the left court will have to clear the net man's forehand smash, and this is so much more risky that attacking left-court lobbing is not a basic tactic.

Nevertheless, lob over the net man if you can. It gets the ball behind both players, destroys their net barrier, and allows you and your partner to form yours. The net man may be left-handed, allowing you a good target for your backhand lob. Or, you may be a player who can safely roll a topspin lob from a center-line serve over a right-handed net man's backhand, out of reach of the incoming server, and going all the way to net man's sideline and baseline corner. Or, you may be a good lobber anyhow. See Illus. 34.

Direct Service Returns

From tossing lobs about in all directions, turn now to more direct forms of service return.

From the left court, your main targets are the incoming server's feet and wide of him. You won't reach either target by



Illus. 34. LEFT-COURT LOBS. Left-court lobbing is not as attractive a tactic as it is from the right court (forehand lob over net man's backhand side). However, when the net man is a left-hander you can play an equivalent backhand lob, AB. Or, from a center-line serve, you may be able to pull a topspin lob, CB, across a right-handed net man's backhand side and travelling out of reach of the server. Or, you may just be very good at lobbing.

plain speed alone. The strong flat or slightly rolled drive that penetrates deeply in singles, or against a One Up One Back doubles pair, is only a comfortable waist-high first volley to a server who has followed in. Your most attacking shot is a dipping topspin drive, the faster the better, provided it has time to have dipped well below net height when it reaches the server, forcing him to volley *up*. The more angle you can get the better, too, provided the ball dips in time to stay within the sideline.

Unfortunately, a topspin drive often applies only to your forehand. By the time you are playing Net Game doubles, the serves you receive are often too fast to give you time to make a backhand drive, and so you may have to settle for the quicker-made backhand slice. However, the backhand slice allows you to skim the ball low over the net, and from the left court its natural direction is crosscourt and wide of the server's backhand volley.

By all means, play a topspin backhand if you can. To give themselves a fraction more time to do this, many left-court players await service holding a backhand grip. Most don't, however, so do whatever is more natural and therefore quicker in your own case.

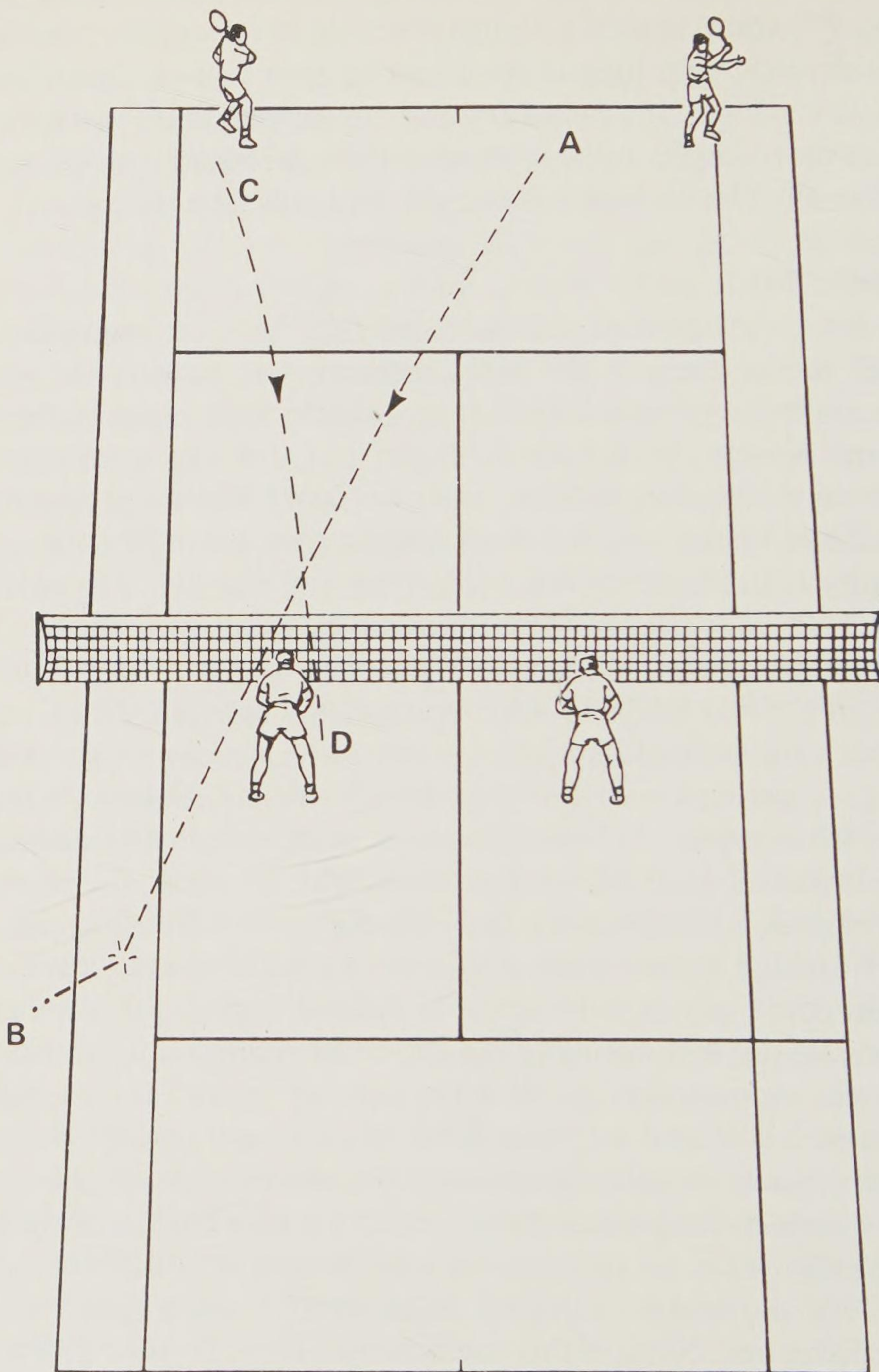
Neither is your forehand return restricted to a topspin drive. For example, there is the Slider forehand. You step round your backhand and slide the ball across to your off side, keeping it very low (or it would be easy to volley) and aiming it wide of the server. Or you may play a slow low shot to the server's feet. These are sometimes called Dink Shots. Whatever you call them, you hope that the incoming server will think yours is faster and longer than it really is, will think he can make a volley of it, then find he can't, and will end by getting it well and truly entangled in his shoelaces. His right shoelace for preference—because a half-volley near one's feet is more accessibly played with a backhand than a forehand, as then your elbow is free of your ribs.

Most players play these low slow forehands more easily from the left court than the right. From the left, you can use that inside-underspin long-contact sort of shot you can push away to your off side. Instead of arguing this in detail, have you noticed that most singles opponents play their forehand drop-shots to their off side, to your backhand? Probably you do too.

Rising Ball

Another aspect of left-court play is that you can take the ball earlier than in the right, because you haven't the same necessity to get well behind it in order to keep clear of the net man. Always get behind it if you can, for better control of direction and also to be in better balance to follow your return in if it is a good one, but the left court gives you a better opportunity to combine all this with rising-ball play. Hitting outside the ball, your backhand goes across the net man naturally. As for the forehand, whereas a right-court player who is late in playing it hits the ball within reach of the net man (Net Game-Receiving Tennis Crime), the later you are with yours the wider it goes, perhaps even over the server's sideline. Therefore, from the left court you can stand in closer to receive service, and play a rising-ball type of service return with less risk of net-man interception than you can from the right court. See Illus. 35.

Watching various pairs play, you can notice that except for a right-court player who crowds second serves for forehand devastation, it is normally the left-court receiver who stands in closer. Admittedly he doesn't have to guard as carefully against a fast and swinging forehand ace, and perhaps he's in there merely because he's usually the stronger player. Perhaps he stands closer because the left-court player's backhand slice is probably the most consistently used service return of any, and for this particular shot he'd rather have a rising ball than a dropping one. None of this conflicts with Illus. 35. It amplifies it.



Our discussion also explains the rather odd player you meet who seems to want one court one day and the other the next. His true position, though he may never have explained it to you, is that he prefers the right court when the court surface is slow, but on a fast surface he can't keep the ball away from the net man properly and finds that, in these conditions, he does much better from the left. He'd be hard to combine with, but we can't very well dispute his reasoning.

At all events, this recognition of the value of a rising ball should please you. Anyone playing attacking Net Game-Receiving wants to play rising-ball tennis, and you may have felt somewhat hostile to earlier suggestions to get right behind the ball rather than take it on the rise. You need rising-ball service returns to the full against strong pairs, and you don't want to feel unsound in taking the ball reasonably early against pairs you know you should beat.

Center and Sideline

Not many left-court backhands will fit into the center. Even if you take the net man momentarily by surprise, he is likely to make a swift recovery and possibly volley a winner. Unless he happens to be one of those players who await the ball with their rackets held straight out in front of themselves, he will be holding his racket more comfortably cradled across his body, from where his backhand volley is the fastest reflex-action he

(opposite page)

Illus. 35. YOU CAN TAKE THE BALL EARLIER IN THE LEFT COURT. Both your forehand and backhand returns avoid the net man more naturally when made from the left court, because most people tend to hit straight forehands and crosscourt backhands. Further: for your backhand you don't have to find the time to turn as far round, as shown here. If you're late with your forehand it goes wide of the net man, AB, rather than towards him, CD.

has. Many a player has thought he has made a winning shot, even from a hard smash, only to find he has hit it fair and square into his opponent's almost automatic backhand volley.

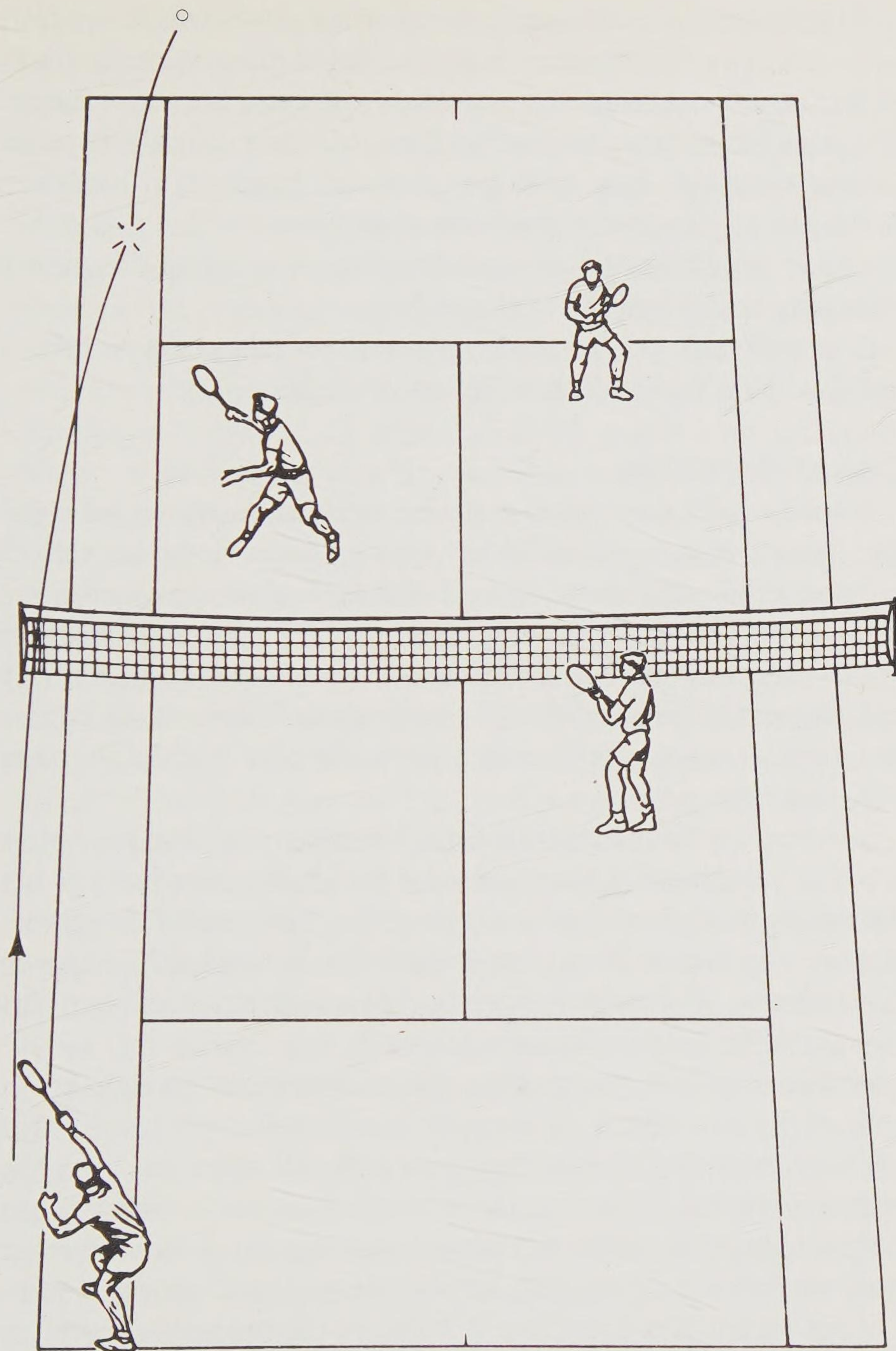
A center forehand is most safely made by pulling a topspin forehand across from a center-line service. See shot CB in Illus. 34 again, imagining it to be a drive.

Your attempts to sideline the net man should be restricted to cases where he moves well over and you have time to pass him, or where you receive such a wide serve to your backhand that you can hit the ball outside the sideline as it crosses the net. See Illus. 36.

Beware of making a half-hearted attempt to sideline the net man with a backhand slice. You want to hit low, as you've been doing crosscourt, because a high slice is very easy to volley, but now you're aiming where the net is 6 inches higher. That doesn't sound like much, and no one ever appreciates it until he sits down beside the court with his eye on a level with the net and watches how many center balls slip past in the bow of the net's sag. It shows more clearly than any amount of talking that a low center clearance would mean the ball would be well into the net at the sideline. Likewise unless you've turned fully round, your sideline aim is more to your off side than before, and that's weaker even though you don't notice it. All told your shot is likely to find the net. You may feel it's served some useful purpose by warning the net man to stay at home and not interfere with your next point, but you should then be playing wide of him anyway, and meanwhile you've lost the point.

(opposite page)

Illus. 36. SIDELINING THE NET MAN. From a wide serve (not shown) you hit outside the ball, as for a crosscourt shot, and the ball can then pass beyond the net man's reach, and either curve or at least "tend" inside the sideline. Against both net man and sideline, you've given yourself good odds.



If the score had been game point against you it was a complete waste, because four games later the net man is scarcely likely to feel restricted from any warning you gave him four games ago; also the set may be over by then. If it had been game point to you, your side may have lost a service break. If it had been 30-15, or 15-30, as the score so often seems to be, you either left your side facing a double game-point or you lost the chance of having that position for yourselves.

It seems that you're never allowed to relax, never take a holiday. That's part of your left-court role.

The Left-Court Role

Doubles pairs don't have captains, except sometimes jokingly. The nearest equivalent is the left-court player. Here you should be the anchor, the man to hold the fort when your side is a point down and the one to gain a double-point advantage or clinch the game when it is ahead. Accepting this responsibility and always being conscious of it makes your side a much harder pair to beat, and greatly aids your ability to beat lesser pairs with certainty.

In accepting your responsibility, it is clear you have the better court to implement it from: natural backhand direction, no net man in front of your forehand, your forehand volley to protect most of the center or to attack with, your forehand smash to cover almost all center overheads. No wonder the left court is usually taken by the stronger player.

If your partner is the stronger player, but takes the right court because he specializes in it, you should still play responsible left-court tennis. For example, you will still have to cover the center overhead. However, the normal situation is that you are the stronger player in the left court and that your most important shot, even though it may not be your best, is your service return.

Your return is a good one if it forces the incoming server to

volley from below net level, while you have remained in good balance and can follow into the net. At first thought, that may not seem to be setting a high enough standard for yourself, but after reflection you will probably agree, as left-court anchor, that it is your basis for defeating lesser pairs with certainty.

While you're returning low and following in and the server is volleying up, you should be winning. Therefore it is *not* your role to take unnecessary risks by hitting your hardest, or under-spinning to your extreme lowest, or touching to your finest, or taking the ball on the extreme rise, or slicing your backhand across at its widest possible angle onto the sideline itself, or letting fly with a long backswing topspin backhand drive that you didn't have time to make properly.

If you get these shots in, it can't be called sucker play, but it is a sucker attitude. It makes you and your partner a brittle pair, open to an upset.

If you accept your senior left-court role, your guiding principle is that Enough is Enough. That does *not* mean you're not attacking. You are, if you're making returns good enough to be followed in; you can't do that tentatively, or leaning back. If the opponents lift their game, so do you.

A last responsibility of left-court tennis is to carry it through to the end. Let's say you have borne the brunt of the game, but your opponents are serving for the match; however, your side manages to gain a break point, and you force a weak volley from the server, but then your partner absolutely dumps it; receiving at deuce, he loses his nerve and hits wildly at a second serve that he could have returned into play and given you a chance. It is now match point against you. *Don't*, do *not*, slash at the next serve and run up to the net to shake hands in angry defeat—all your partner's fault. Set yourself a high standard here. It's not enough to be a middle-distance runner. You've got to be a stayer.

AN EYE FOR THE GAME

A match between a tall hard-hitting pair and a well known tall hard-hitting pair was programmed and an inexperienced friend went along to watch it and learn something. He sat opposite the middle of the court so that he could see both ends equally well, and he sat at court level to be as close to the players as possible because he was going to study their strokes.

To his eyes, all four players seemed to have terrific serves and they'd have served ace after ace if only a number of them hadn't just missed. There were fast returns, close volleys, a few lobs that left the opponents standing and some towering smashes. Fairly soon the well known pair had won the match 6-2, 6-2, a margin of twelve games to only four, but our friend still has no idea how. The two pairs looked alike. He didn't see any difference between any one of the four players, if it came to that. In physique and in strokes too, which all hit hard, they all looked alike.

As yet he has no eye for the game and it's certain he plays like that too.

You should watch a match from one end of the court and above it, to get a view of the ball similar to the view the players have. A doubles court does not look overcrowded that way. If you had watched the breathtaking near-aces of the match just described, you would have seen them to be harmlessly wide and mostly served by the lesser pair. To you, the ball would have looked slower and more manageable, as it does to the players. The fast returns our inexperienced friend saw, in fact, came mostly from the forehand of the right-court player of the better pair, because the lesser pair allowed him to use it instead of attacking his backhand with center-line serves. He probably made the lobs too—over the backhand side of the net man standing too close to the net. The left-court player of the better pair was far more solid on return of service than his opposite

number. The lesser pair followed their serves in all right, but the better pair often got to the net on service return as well as from their serves. Mostly the lesser pair were volleying up and the better pair down. And so on and so on.

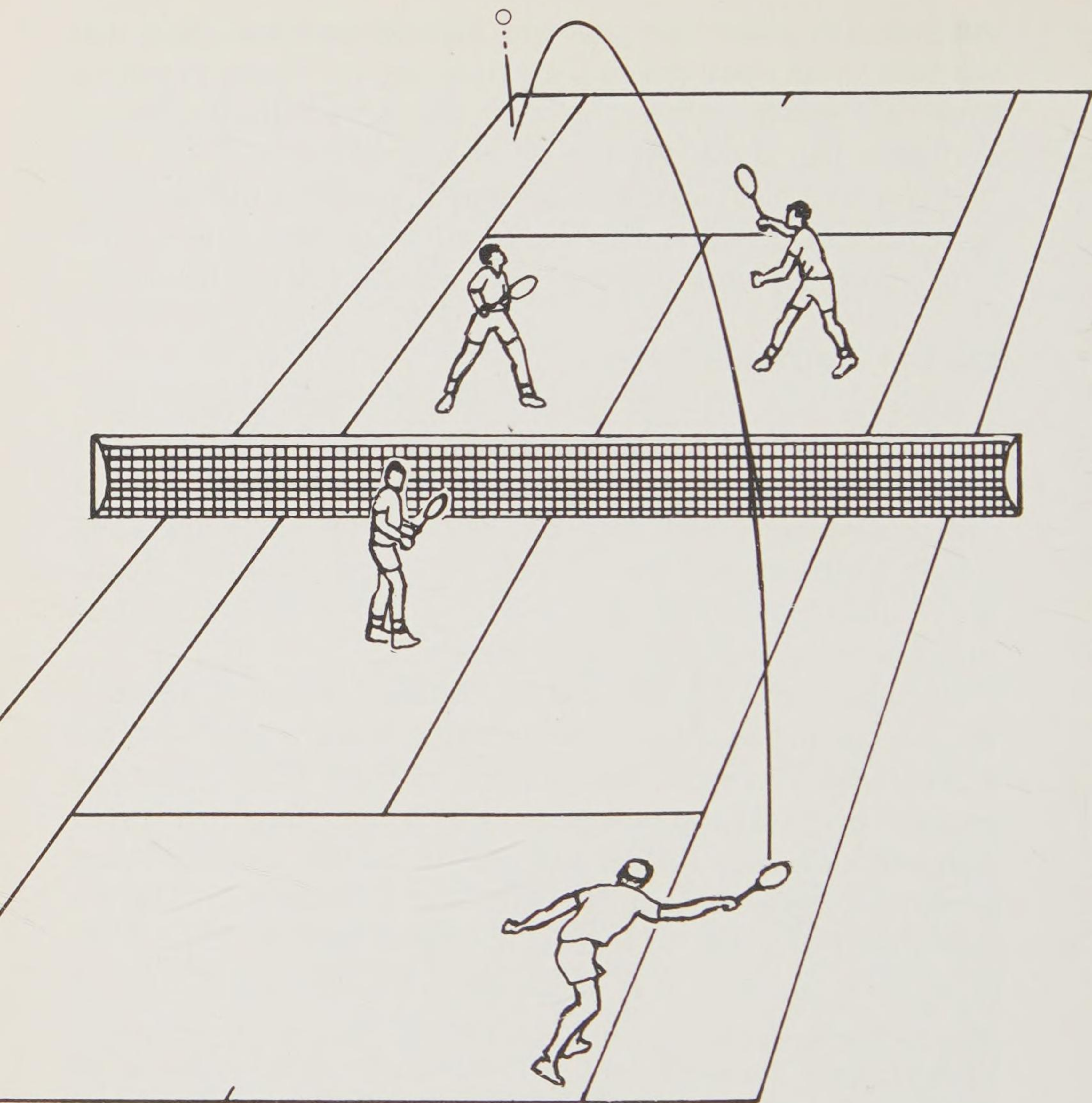
If you, as a Net Game doubles player, can see doubles in that light you can play that way too. It will be unlikely that a hard-hitting pair can take you by surprise and hit you off the court.

ENTER: ANOTHER FREAK

After all this orthodox positioning and enterprising right-court play and solid left-court play and hard-hitting play and left-handed play and all the rest of it—after all this a freak with a slow serve and stabbing volley comes along and completely frustrates you. He wins all his service games with ease. Why? Because he's always volleying down. How? Because somehow he's always on top of the net.

Perhaps you've met him before. Perhaps, for good measure, the one you met was an old-timer with a Western grip* who did a lot of his forehand volleys from in front of his face and prodded his backhand volleys away with equal force. He served high and slow over the net and landed the ball deep, and then he was on top of the net in a flash and volleyed down. He's a man who'd give you no trouble in singles, because he couldn't reach wide, but here he is in doubles, all tactics and no strokes except those prodding volleys, holding his serves and, who knows, likely to upset you. His admiring teammates on the sidelines chuckle a bit at your discomfiture and as you change ends they impart his legend to you: "Old Jim, you know—each season his serve gets higher and slower and he gets into the net faster. One of these days he'll be in there and his serve will come along and hit him in the back of the head."

* Racket held like a frying pan or a carpet beater. Backhand: racket head turned over the top and same side of the strings used as for forehand.



Finding you can't get past Jim, because he's in so close he's blocked off any possible crosscourt angle, you try lobbing. No good; he's got his net partner well briefed for this ploy; alive and alert this net partner skips back and despatches your lobs; he never misses either, because that's the only sort of net partner old Jim will play with.

Of course there's a solution, or Jim's method would be standard practice all round the world. In case you don't already know it, see Illus. 37. Lob forcefully over Jim's head.

(opposite page)

Illus. 37. IN CASE YOU DIDN'T KNOW. When a server comes in so far that he blocks off all possible crosscourt angles, it is always too far. Lob forcefully over *his* head, not the net man's, towards the far corner. In singles, you'd lob over a too-close net position without thinking. In doubles, however, you associate tossing a service return with going over the net man's head. In trying to pass the server, or get at his feet, you try to take his serve more and more on the rise—to beat him to the punch. In suddenly changing to a lob over the net man you would hurry—and anyway he's waiting for you. Recognize this quickly and save yourself pain.

6. NET GAME—SERIOUS BUSINESS

IN PROGRESSING now to an advanced standard of Net Game doubles, where the strokes and tactics of both opposing pairs are sound, we must first catch up with Tandem. Many players of high standard are not familiar with Tandem and, as a result, play it reluctantly, to please their partner, and in a most unsound manner. In examining and developing Tandem, let's do it from the viewpoint of a left-hander playing against it. The serving opponents are Net Game players.

LEFT-HANDER AGAINST TANDEM

You're assumed to be the type of left-hander who makes a normally orthodox pair of right-handers resort to playing Tandem. You have a strong topspin crosscourt forehand drive that badly embarrasses an incoming server. Your backhand is difficult to find, unless the server has to take the risk of serving from close to the center mark. Your backhand is a small inside-spin stroke that you prefer to hit to your off side. You've been playing well, giving the incoming server a dose of backhand half-volleys to play and now they're taking the plunge and are going to try a Tandem formation against you.

Tandem suddenly played in a match without plenty of practice beforehand is usually a failure. When this happens it loses points and, as well, it sets the serving pair back and sets you up.

You can tell in a flash if one of the players isn't sure of what he's supposed to do; his partner always has to give him some

words of instruction. It is usually the server who wants Tandem, so it's usually the net man who doesn't know exactly where he should stand and what he's about. Sometimes it's the other way round, where the net man is the stronger player and is trying to help his weaker partner to hold his serve. Whichever is the uncertain one, go for his side of the court with your next service return.

If it's the net man, he may not stand near enough to the center to guard it—and you can hit through the center. See Illus. 8 on page 35, imagining that the server has followed in.

If he is placed near the center and told to guard it, he is likely to concentrate on this and present you with an excellent chance of lobbing over his head, his backhand side too. Next time he stands a little farther back, guarding both center and overhead; but, in moving back, he opens the court on his left side and you can slide a short low shot into it. For this shot and your lob see Illus. 38.

If the server is the uncertain one, he is almost sure to be slow in getting across to his “wrong” side of the court—Play BE in Illus. 38.

A pair who have had to talk about their Tandem formation first and then make adjustments and still lose points will give it up. Often they give it up after the first point.

When They Know Their Business

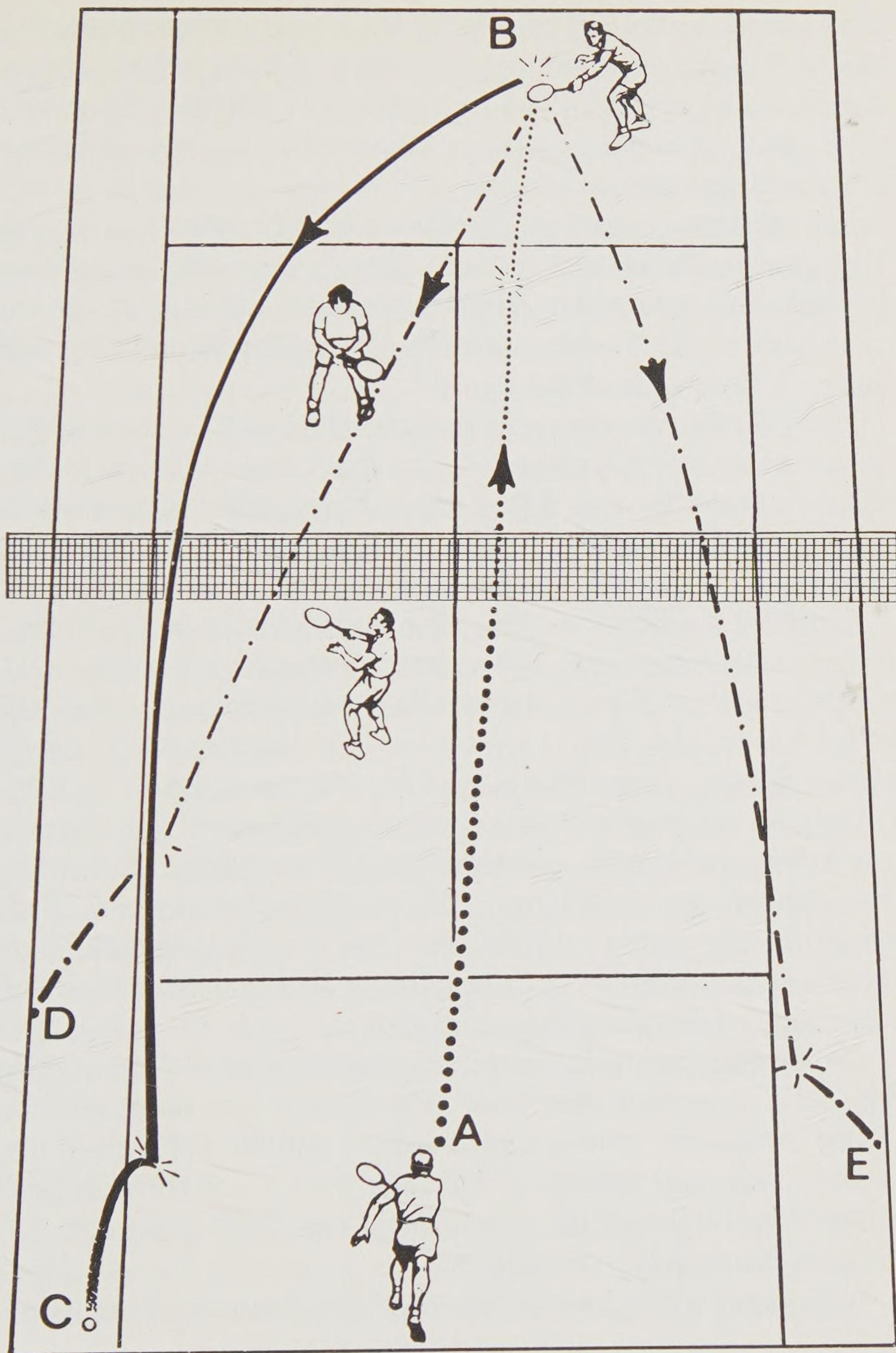
Still assume that you are a left-hander playing against Net Game serving opponents, but that this time they know their business and at once settle into their proper Tandem positions. The server goes straight to the center mark, to attack your backhand and to be as close as possible to the “wrong” side of the court that he will have to cover. The net man, in comparison with his former position in orthodox formation, stands nearer the center and farther back. These positions

are similar to those shown in Illus. 38. However, taking the case of the net man, there's all the difference in the world between a man poised to cover center, overhead and sideline, and one who has to be coached to stand where his *partner* decides is just the right spot. They are now ready to serve.

It is usually a bad tactic for you to attack a well-positioned net man already set to volley or smash, so your attack should be directed against the incoming server. You should think of it as an attack, because a Tandem server's position is by no means impregnable. In fact, it's rather uncomfortable. An incoming Tandem server has to approach the net on a somewhat diagonal path, instead of naturally following the line of flight of his serve more closely. Also he is comparatively open. His net partner is on the other side of the court, instead of being opposite you. Against an orthodox formation you had to avoid the net man, but now there's open court in front of you—that is, until such time as the diagonally incoming server fills it in, but even then he can't cover the net as strongly as an orthodox net man does. For that matter he can't get as close to the net as he can from his line-of-flight approach from an orthodox serve. As for your own net partner, against Tandem he can threaten a Tandem server more than an orthodox one, because he can afford to stand nearer the center without exposing his sideline—because

(opposite page)

Illus. 38. LEFT-HANDER UPSETTING TANDEM *against an uncertain net man*. If the net man stands near the center to guard it, play the lob BC. If next time he stands farther back to guard both center and overhead, play BD. The serve has gone to your weaker (backhand) side, but in both cases you are playing it in your accustomed and preferred direction, namely, to your off side. As a further bonus, your lob BC goes over the net man's backhand side. *Against an uncertain server*: Play a shot like BE. You have to hit in your non-preferred direction, so play it safely rather than go for too much and risk an error.



the Tandem server will be playing from diagonally opposite him and no longer straight opposite him. Your partner should stand about opposite the Tandem server's net man, but closer to the net, for more aggression, because he hasn't got the same lobbing threat against him.

So, when an expert pair settle efficiently into their proper Tandem positions against you, there's no need for unease. Instead, both you and your partner should be ready to attack, conscious of the Tandem server's potential difficulties in that open "wrong" side of his.

Now, to your service returns as a left-handed receiver. The server serves down the center. You don't *have* to attempt that effective shot shown at BD in Illus. 27 on page 99. It is in the wrong direction for your inside-spin backhand. If a shot like that, from you, always seems to float the ball up for a volley within easy reach or else floats it over the sidelines, don't play it. Instead, as the server moves over to cover his "wrong" side of the court you should aim for where his backhand low volley or his feet will be. This is a more natural direction for you and allows you to have better control. Play your shot steadily (there's no net man in front of you to interfere and you haven't got to win the point in one shot) and, if you happen to keep it low enough, you may have the satisfaction of giving that server yet one more backhand half-volley to contend with. And if he's hesitant with it, your partner is well placed to take advantage of anything high and weak.

On the next point, the server may decide to serve wide to your forehand, reasoning that your best forehand is made with a pulled crosscourt action and therefore will be well within his reach; from your return he will then play a comfortable first volley deep to your exposed backhand and close in to form his barrier. That's what *he* reasons.

Well, don't try to hit the ball out of his reach by sliding your

forehand away to your off side if it's not natural and safe. You will probably either hit it too high or waft it over the sideline, or both. Instead, carry on and play your special pulled, outside-the-ball, topspin, fast, *crosscourt type* forehand. *But* in hitting it from outside the doubles sideline, hit it over the net area outside this sideline to be wide of the server, and let your outside-the-ball contact act as a safety measure in curving the ball into court. See Illus. 36 on page 127, showing a right-hander doing this with his backhand.

This is a natural shot for you and hence is safer and faster than pushing at the ball and trying to steer it wide of the server.

If the server serves straight at you, make a forehand of it and try to hit yourself out of trouble rather than play a defensive backhand. Aim, with a lot of topspin, for his low backhand side.

In short, always try to turn Tandem Against Left-hander into Left-hander Against Tandem. If you're a good left-handed doubles player you can't let an artificial formation like Tandem cut you down to size.

The last aspect is that a really good pair will not play Tandem against you consistently, letting you settle into a happy situation of having no net man opposite your service returns. Their changing from one formation to another and back again would be bound to unsettle you if you had to play natural strokes one minute and unnatural ones the next. The returns suggested above allow you to play naturally at all times, namely, with your crosscourt forehand and your underspin backhand to the off side.

Tandem Scissors

A Doubting Thomas may tell you that all the above discussion comes unstuck if the Tandem pair scissors. But why should he limit such an accusation to Tandem? It would apply

equally to service returns against a pair who served from the orthodox formation and then scissored.

Scissoring succeeds when it is a surprise move and when the service return is poor. For general play against the normal standard of returns encountered in Net Game tennis, the serving pair's volleying is hampered if they're trying to play it in the midst of scissoring all over the place. It must be so, or scissoring would continually be used by the champions. Anyway, try it out for yourself.

OVERALL PICTURE OF NET GAME DOUBLES

The basis of your Net Game tactics is to form a net barrier. This pits your volleys and smashes against your opposition's groundstrokes and lobs. Results have shown that the volleys and smashes mostly win. It thus becomes merely a matter of *how* you form your net barrier.

Serving

When serving you place one man at the net, intended to cover his sideline and overhead and give adequate protection to the center. The server completes the net barrier in two stages, steadying himself before making his first volley from inside the service line if he can, and then following in closer after it.

At a low standard of Net Game play, the net man usually protects his sideline and neglects his other two responsibilities. Overhead, he smashes lobs within reach, and his center play mainly consists of making interceptions now and then. Standing close to the net, he cashes in when his partner serves well, but gives little support when he does not.

The server usually has a good fast serve, or he wouldn't be playing the Net Game without much idea of its tactics. He tends to "rush" the net and, like his partner, does well on those points where he has served well. When the receiver has control of the ball for his return, the serving pair is vulnerable.

At a higher standard, the net man recognizes his key role of covering sideline, overhead and center, and he takes up a suitable net position to help himself fulfil it. The server combines his service action with his net approach, and mainly serves with the intention of setting up a comfortable first volley. He gets a lot of first serves into play. The two players win their serving games as a pair. They're a brick wall against lesser pairs and a very tough nut against better ones. Their net barrier is seldom broken; from the first point of a rally to the last each player covers his own overheads and is rarely lobbed over.

These are the basic tactics for Net Game serving, though if you play regularly with the same partner you will make your own additions. In doing so, watch that side-effects don't interfere with the basic structure. For example, when one of you is unexpectedly lobbed over, it may be easier for the other partner to half turn and chase the ball diagonally, rather than for the guilty partner to make a complete turn-round and run straight back after it. You should do this as a last-ditch cover on occasion, but if you make it your normal method the practical side-effect will be that both of you will be lobbed over more often, and that would be a net loss.

Another example is signals. These may seem to be the last word for a sophisticated combination, but in practice their value is doubtful. The idea is that the net man signals where to serve or how to serve so that he can make a surprise interception. But why bother with this pantomime when you can just as easily mutter to your serving partner, "Straight at him and I'll go across," or whatever it is? Last-minute signals to a server who can't answer are a dangerous device. You might signal for one type of serve just when your serving partner felt like serving something else. Anyway pre-arrangement means pre-committal, and if things don't fall exactly into place your formation becomes a shambles. No one can afford that.

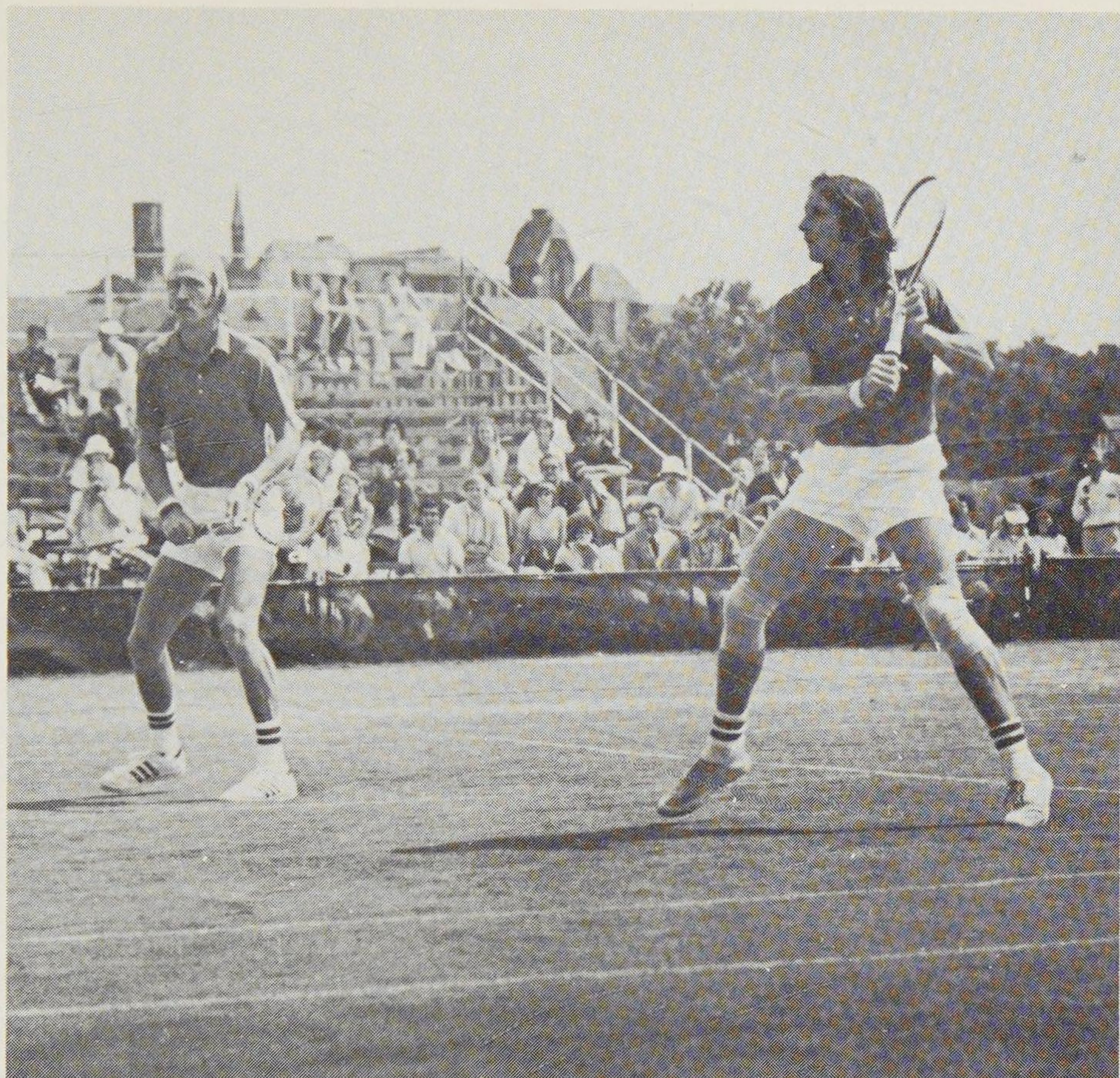
Confirmation from the Top

Settling the matter of signals first, world champion pairs don't play committed tennis. On the other hand, they don't play haphazard tennis and rely solely on the devastating strokes we see them produce. Basically they play the chess-like tactics shown in Illus. 24 on page 92, from which they branch out into brilliant play.

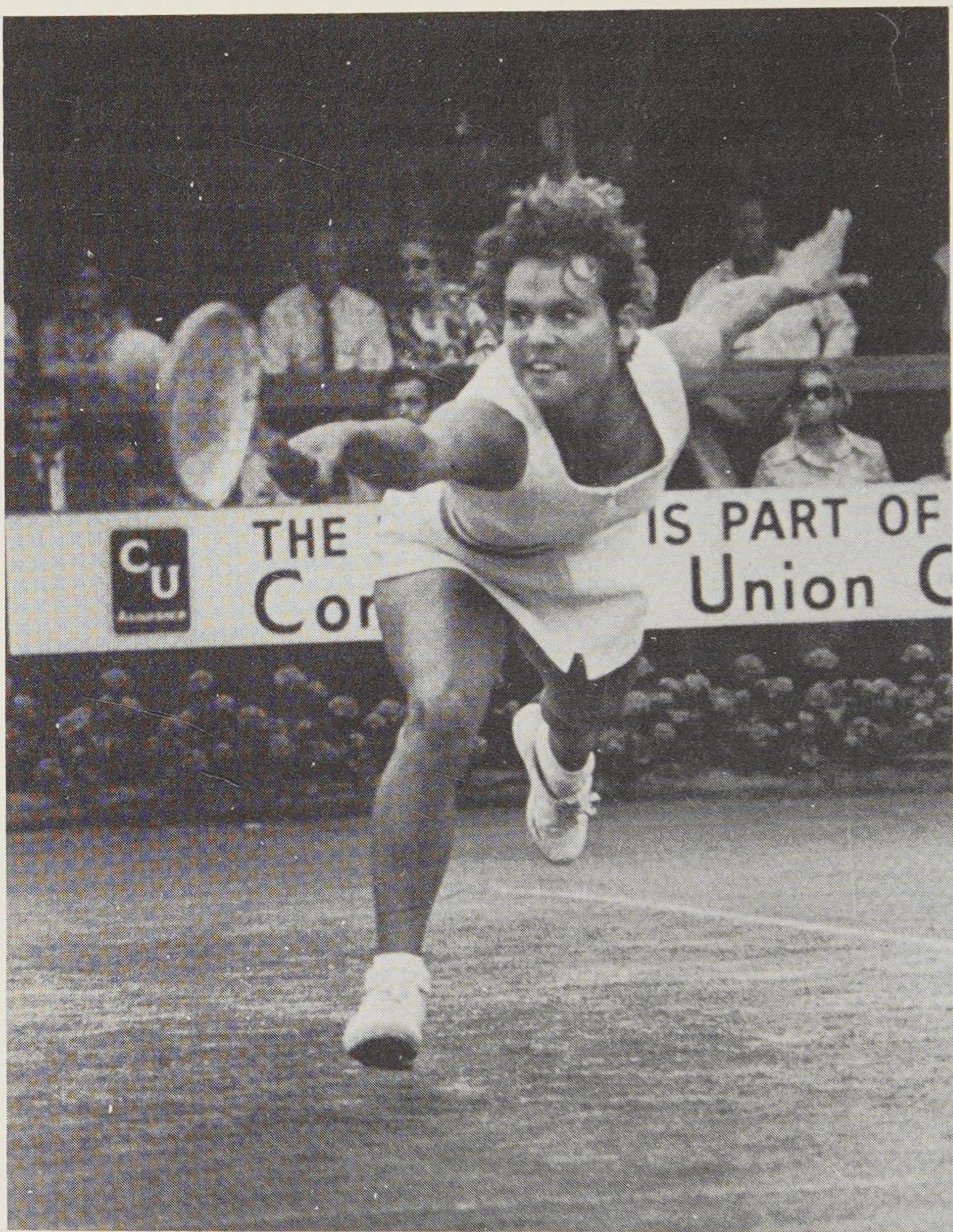
With your tactics fully developed, it follows that your next advance will be made through your strokes. Better strokes lift your doubles play in themselves, as everyone knows, but at the same time they aid you in playing your tactics. Taking champions' serves as an example, these so greatly threaten aces swinging wide of the forehand that the receiver has to guard against this by exposing his backhand more than he would like to. Thus you will notice serve after serve finding the backhand, and the server playing almost all his first volleys against backhand returns. They may be the receiver's better shot but for one hit are less dangerous than his forehand. The champion prides himself on playing percentage tennis, so he prefers to play a certain first volley and to control the game from there. Those are *your* tactics. He implements them better, through a better serve.

We've mainly referred to the champions' first serve, the impressive big gun, but you may already have reached your limit with this shot. It's cheering news to know that many a sound judge of tennis has said that the greatest difference in stroke effectiveness between player and champion lies in the second serve. It must be within your power to improve your own second serve.

Of course, it's not only the serve. The champion's net approach is swift and co-ordinated, and he makes almost all his first volleys look comfortable, even those turning out to be half-volleys. It is easier to see how they do it if you can watch



Servers' net barrier. Bob Lutz has followed well in and now almost parallels his net partner, Stan Smith.



Evonne Goolagong has been forced wide for her first volley. Her partner will have to get back in the picture to protect their exposed center against the next shot.

them live, and you can observe it on TV if you're looking closely for this part of their play. If you can *see* tennis, you can play in a similar way.

Turning from champions' strokes to their position and reflexes, you may notice that in world class doubles the net man usually stands well wide of the sideline, to cover the center, but he stands closer to the net than we have been advocating. He volleys more aggressively from there, fast reflexes making up for the shorter time available to play his shot. His "too close" position makes him appear vulnerable to a well played lob, but again his fast reflexes compensate. Net men of all standards of Net Game doubles must cover their own lobs; they can stand where they like; but they must cover them.

Make no mistake about that last part. If a champion net man gets lobbed over, he has let the side down with as big a thump as anyone else. He'll be back in a flash and he'll hoist the ball to the skies with a defensive lob to gain the most time possible, or he'll make a marvelous drive on the turn—but he's up against a couple of the world's best net players and the odds are low that he'll get out of his elementary mistake. Of such stuff are service breaks made, and the class of the company matters not.

Regarding the net man's very wide position, in addition to quick reflexes there are two inter-connected reasons for this. First, top class receivers play percentage tennis with their service returns and this means they virtually ignore the already positioned net man and, instead, consistently attack the more vulnerable incoming server. Second, and complementary, since the receivers allow the net man to stand wide he certainly does so—to protect the center fully and thus assist his serving partner in withstanding the receiver's attacks.

A lesser mortal can adopt the champions' closer and very wide net position if he knows what he's about. If he copies it

blindly, just because he's seen a champion use it, he's likely to be both sidelined and lobbed over.

Watching champions critically, you may also notice that they seem to miss more first serves than you'd expect. Perhaps we expect too much. You also know it's an error that doesn't directly cost a point, and that their Big Gun is probably worth a risk now and then, and that they have very good second serves behind them in reserve—but just the same you're surprised to see they miss more first balls than a server playing tight “high-standard” Net Game doubles could afford.

Does this mean that at last we've found an instance where the champions depart from the best tactics for high-standard players? No, it doesn't. In the final game of a close match you will see the serving pair buckle down to their task and close things off by hitting first serves safely into play, so they can't be attacked, and setting up safe first volleys.

Does this mean the receiving pair can count on this and stand in closer to attack better? Perhaps, but then again they may get aced for their pains. Champions will be champions.

Receiving

Our topic is still how you form your net barrier.

Receiving against a One Up One Back pair you can form a net barrier almost at will. Get right behind the ball to ensure avoiding the net man, rather than take it on the rise, and follow your return in to join your partner at the net. Only serves difficult enough to unbalance you can prevent you from gaining this position directly from your service return.

If you regard your return as an approach shot you will play it more effectively. You should go a step further and regard this approach shot and your first volley after it as a pair of shots rather than two separate shots, because this will make you move into position better. Odds are good that there will be a

first volley for you to play, because the returning server will practically always choose to attack you, as the incoming receiver, rather than your partner already stationed at the net. When you play this pair of shots time and again, meaning your opponents can't prevent you from doing this, you're winning.

Against Net Game servers with little experience, it is not overly difficult to gain a net position in opposition to theirs. Whenever you have handled a serve well enough to force the incoming server to volley up, and have remained in balance yourself, you can follow in. Again it is more important to get well behind the ball for certainty than to take it on the rise. Sometimes you can even supplant their net barrier by lobbing over an unwary net man's head.

Against high standard Net Game servers you can't expect to use the lob over the net man's head as a service return any more, because he's closed that loophole. Similarly the server's net approach and volleying ability become too good for a dropping ball service return to provide a net approach any longer. Standing back against fast serves and then hitting a dropping ball takes too much time, no matter how hard you hit. By then your opponents are too well positioned and, after the first volley, their net barrier looks impregnable.

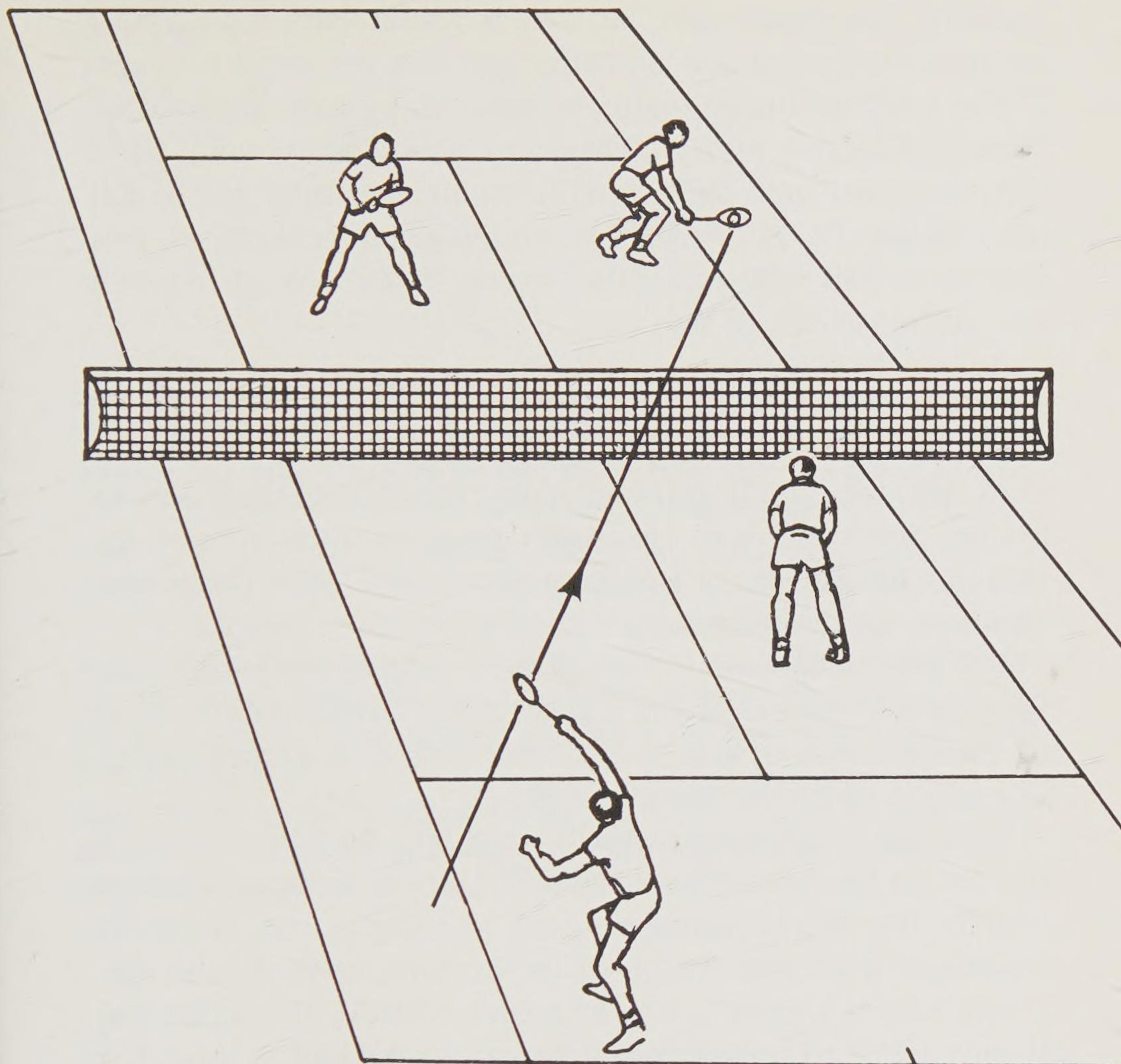
If you're to form your net barrier it's now essential to take the ball on the rise. A duel exists between you and the server over the formation of your net barrier, both of you having tactical limitations. Before making his first volley he needs to steady himself in his approach, because on the run he can't cover the court as widely nor volley as effectively, and he cannot come *right* in without being too close and allowing you room to lob over his head. Your limitations are that in trying to take the ball on the rise earlier and earlier to beat him to the punch, you will either enter the mis-hitting stage or you will be

standing in so close that you allow him room to ace you. See Illus. 39.

You also need to keep your return low, but must beware of reverting to the beginner's mistake of hitting balls into the net without being forced to. Topspin gives you your best chance here, and you have time to use it with your forehand. If you have never been confident with your rising-ball contact because the ball flies up and away out of control, the concepts shown at Illus. 40 may help.

So far so good, but by this stage along the way the server is cutting your forehand return out of the game and serving to your backhand, where you may have time only to make a slice. The main feature of a slice is its safety, but even that virtue may disappear in your ever-sharpening duel with the opposing server. As he has little trouble in volleying your slice, you try to play it lower and lower or finer and finer in touch, until you make mistakes with it. If a slice is all you feel you have time for with a rising ball, particularly from the right court, you will have to continue with it. However, many good players play topspin rising-ball backhand service returns from either left or right court and if you wish to be among their number the following points may help.

First, it is not necessarily easier to play a rising ball with a slice than with a topspin stroke. You may normally play a long backhand baseline drive with topspin and a rising-ball service with a shorter backhand slice, but for a very early ball, such as a backhand half-volley, you often use roll and never under-spin. You may object here that no backswing is involved with a half-volley, which provides its own momentum, but your objection leads directly to the second point: that you need only a very short backswing to make a rising-ball backhand return of service. For the same (short) backswing, your backhand has more pace than your forehand. Your forehand is



Illus. 39. DUEL OVER RECEIVERS' NET BARRIER. You can't stop the server from coming in to begin to form his net barrier, so the duel is always over forming yours. You both have stroke weapons (his service and your rising-ball return) and tactical weapons (both playing with the intention of following in to a more aggressive position). Neglecting any faulty stroke, you both have tactical limitations. He can't come right in before making his first volley and you can't take the ball extremely early.

normally your faster shot, but that is because you use a longer swing. A backhand *action* is stronger; you get more leverage. If you think of making your topspin, rising-ball, short-swing backhand service return like a strong edition of your basic early-ball backhand shot in table tennis, you may not find it too difficult after all. Perhaps you'd imagined these table tennis shots to be half-volleys, but they're not. If you look again you'll see they're rising-ball shots.

What's On Top?

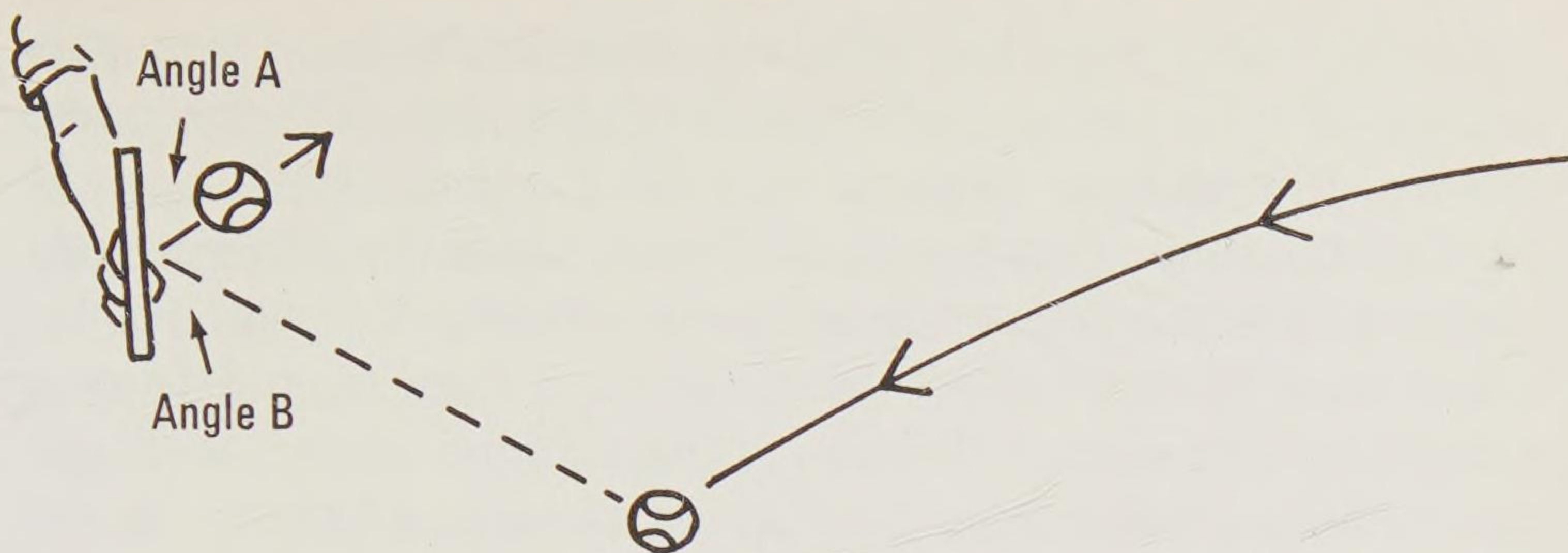
At the top you'll still see many sliced backhand service returns, but you'll note that apart from exceptional cases the topspin shot is a more attacking return. We leave this aspect now to your own preference.

One's first impression of a top class doubles match in which the receivers' returns are very good is that the advantage seems to change from one side to the other with each superb stroke. The server whips the serve into play.

"No one could handle that!" we think. But the receiver is fast on his feet, gets behind the ball, takes it on the rise, keeps clear of the widely-placed net man and attacks the incoming server with a fast low return—all before you can wink your eye.

"He's hit a winner"—but he hasn't, because the server has already followed in swiftly and he volleys the ball as though it had been just what he was waiting for. A battle of giants has been joined, but fairly soon, after a few games and level scores, we realize that the winning giant is not either pair by name but the serving pair. The server makes the first stroke and so has the first chance, which he invariably takes, to volley and move in to form a net barrier.

We also see that the server mostly wins that server/receiver duel, with the receiver trying to form a second net barrier.



Illus. 40. RISING-BALL CONTACT. When you play a rising ball, consciously close your racket face, that is, turn it downwards. The drawing shows by simple geometry the result of leaving the face square to the net. This is only for a flat ball. A topspin ball climbs up the strings and rebounds higher, a sliced one lower.

Topspin: When you drive a dropping ball from beyond the baseline your concept is to hit the lower half of the ball, perhaps just below an imaginary halfway line, and lift on forward spin (topspin). When you play a rising-ball service return, the concept is to hit the upper half of the ball, perhaps just above the halfway line, and roll on topspin. The higher the ball bounces and the closer it is to the net, the higher above the halfway line (or the farther forward on the ball, if you like) should you hit.

Note: Anyone already confidently playing rising balls, using his own special concept (such as getting your weight forward earlier than usual) should ignore this illustration and its text. There's more than one road to Rome.

Mostly he is not allowed to, and must play his next shot as a groundstroke.

Our friend, from back on page 130, who couldn't tell one tall hard-hitting player's game from another, sees a top-class game and then goes home and tells his wife that the volleying was so fast he could hardly see the ball, and that all four players were on top of the net playing marvelous volleying exchanges all the time.

It was more than the ball that he couldn't see. There were some of these sharp exchanges, and they brought the house down, but all four players, two net barriers, weren't at the net all the time. That would have meant that the receiving side was always on top, each receiver consistently winning his duel with the server by being able to follow in and form a receivers' net barrier. When next our friend plays, no doubt he'll try to emulate what he thought he saw and charge to the net on every return, be it high, weak or generally poor. Let's hope he's not up against two tall hard-hitting players.

Your High-Standard Game

Our last tactical discussion covers your backcourt play after the server's first volley.

You're the receiver in a high-standard game where both net men know their business, where the server serves well, where you play rising-ball returns with the object of following in and setting up a receivers' net barrier, and where the server plays his first volleys well and mostly wins the duel and scotches your objective.

So: You're in the right court; he's served to your backhand and you've returned without being able to follow in; he's volleyed back to you in the backcourt. What to do next?

We'll assume your return was severe enough to prevent the server from volleying deep down the center past your net partner. Instead, his volley bounces to about net height and you can advance on it with your forehand. You should play a hard dipping forehand down the middle—towards the server's backhand, clear of the net man's forehand volley—and if it will reach the server below net height, you follow in. He's volleyed short. It's the best opportunity you'll get. Go for your shot without hesitation. If you happen to miss it, go for it next time with no diverting doubts that perhaps you should play

safer. It's also the instinctive thing to do, after having played a severe service return that wasn't quite good enough to follow in, but was good enough to have forced the server to volley short to your forehand.

Now take the other extreme, where your service return was somewhat high and your net partner has been unable to prevent the server from volleying fast and very deep to your backhand. Here is a case where you're in such a bad position that you should try to hit yourself out of trouble. Let fly with a driven backhand half-volley with tons of covering topspin. Done purposefully and without doubts that perhaps you should have lobbed, this is far from being wild desperation.

If the server's volley is wider of your backhand and so deep that it lands behind you, you've little chance of hitting yourself out of trouble because you can't develop enough power to embarrass their net barrier. Perhaps you can manage to play a low backhand slice that the server will have to volley from below net height, and this would keep your chances alive. Mostly, though, you'll have to lob. If you can, aim it over the server's backhand side, never towards that net man's waiting smash. If you've no other choice, hoist a very high and deep lob and await events.

From the very high and deep lob your opponents will probably not try to win with one smash (because they have a winning position and need take no risk) and you *may* get a better chance to attack than the server's penetrating first volley gave you. In defense you must look for attack. If the player shaping up for your lob shows any sign of faltering or losing his balance, or if he shirks the issue and runs back and lets your lob land deep in court, then in either case you and your partner should take the net at once. You've been given your chance of a net barrier. You should be able to cope with a faltering smash. Against the bounced lob, the opposing player will hit his half-

smash like a rocket now that he sees you have the net, but what of it? No one's ever promised you soft stuff at the net all the time.

Your net partner will be in tune with all this. As the server's deep first volley goes past him he begins to move back. If he sees your backhand slice is going to be low over the net, he moves up with it, but if he sees you're going to lob he stays back. If he sees there is going to be either a faltering smash or a half-smash from deep in court he must move up as quickly as you do. If he hesitates and gets only halfway in, he'll probably have to half-volley, if he can. If he stays back, the smashing opponent can play his overhead shot safely towards him as an approach shot and follow in behind it. The net barrier will be theirs instead of yours.

We have discussed first volleys that are short and easy to attack, those that pitch near your feet from which you should make a virtue of necessity and half-volley hard, and those deep ones that land wider and somewhat behind you. In all three instances, your best tactical replies are more or less instinctive to you as an advanced doubles player, and this instinct applies to your play against all other types of first volleys that come your way. Mostly you play the ball back once more, trying to make the server volley from below net level, using either a dipping topspin drive or a very low slice. If the net man shows signs of intercepting, hit one of your forceful lobs over his backhand side. If the server closes in too far after his first volley, lob over him.

You may see an opening for a sharply angled forehand across the server's body. It's better for you if it's one you can go for with a strong dipping drive, rather than one needing a touch shot, because woe betide your partner if your touch shot goes high. Angles are often traps for young players and the center yields most success.

Your general objective after the first volley and any succeeding shot is to keep the game alive until you can make an approach shot and follow in. By all means, hit a groundstroke for a winner if you can, but it is a bad tactic to hit very hard and miss if you could have played at strong medium pace and followed in.

Mostly the serving side copes with it all, as you would if you were serving. Most services continue to be held. Not all though, and when they're not held they're broken through by the receivers, not lost by errors from the serving side. "Get the ball back, let *them* make the mistakes," is thin advice to a receiver in high-class doubles—with service returns, for example, he'd only be giving the server a succession of comfortable first volleys.

You'll make your service breaks by returning strongly, getting the net position and forming and holding your barrier—by winning that duel, from your service return or eventually. And you'll only do your best with these tactics when you're satisfied they're right. Meantime, while you're convincing yourself with observation and experience, no one's going to present you with missed volleys and smashes, let alone serve you double faults.

HIGH TACTICS TO SAFE MECHANICS

Rapidly changing sides, you've got to avoid double faults yourself. If you suddenly lose confidence in your serve, the trouble is almost certain to be a temporary loss of co-ordination, co-ordination in the serve itself and your combining it with your net approach. You know you're rushing, doing everything all at once, but when you try to slow down, everything becomes isolated and you feel out of balance. You fall at the ball and your second serve is more likely to go into the net than over it.

You can remedy all this by one expedient, namely by temporarily reducing the number of co-ordinated movements you've been using. Separate your hands, so you don't need to co-ordinate them, by holding your left hand with the balls in it near your waist, and by dropping your racket head down near your right foot. Throw the ball straight up, so you haven't got to co-ordinate your leaning forward into it and swinging your right leg into court. Be satisfied to hit the ball firmly over the net and then to follow in, forgoing your flying start.

As a normally good server, your confidence quickly returns, and you can build up your speed and rhythm once more. You can be over your trouble within the space of one service game, certainly within a set. There is no need to lack service confidence throughout a match or to carry it like a lead weight from one match to the next.

Perhaps you'll play with me one day. Come in as far as you like. I'll cover my lobs.

Left court OK for you?

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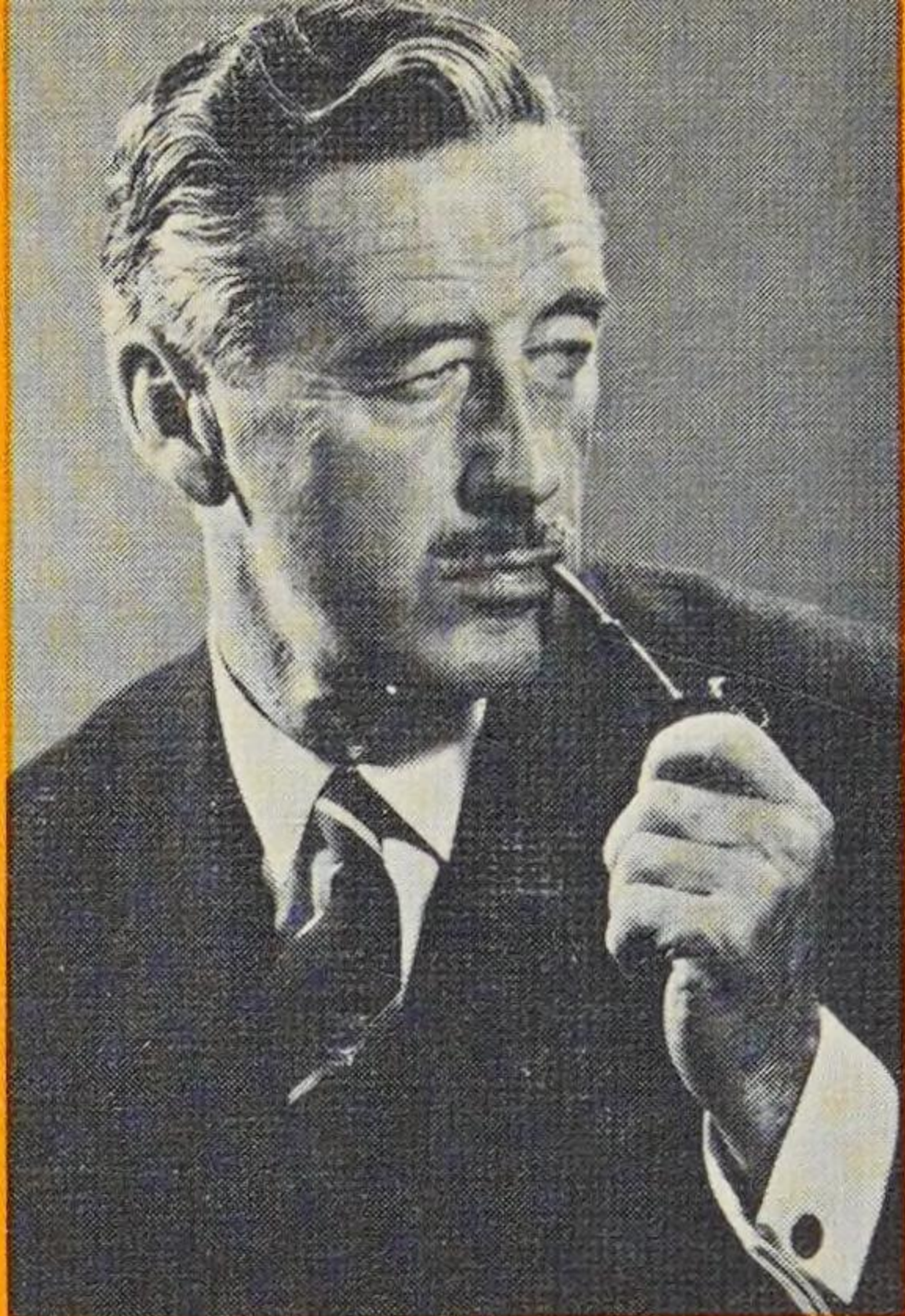
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Front cover photograph of Chris Evert and Jimmy Connors by Leon Serchuk, courtesy of the U.S.L.T.A.

tennis doubles

Do you think doubles play is just singles with a partner? Do you know Net Game doubles? Can you switch to a Tandem formation without disrupting *your own* game? Do you know when and how to smash and lob? Do you and your partner consistently lose to players whom you can always beat in singles play?

In this book, the well known tennis analyst and writer Paul Metzler maps out the court like a chessboard and shows you exactly where to position yourself for any situation. He breaks down the game of Doubles Tennis, from the basic strokes and formations to general tactics for both the serving and receiving sides. You learn how to hit a Topspin-Sliced Service, and when to go to the net, volley, smash, lob, or hit the ball with topspin or underspin.

Metzler deals extensively with both the One Up One Back and Net Game formations, and with the aid of 40 drawings points out their strengths and weaknesses, using cautionary tales to illustrate pitfalls or vulnerabilities. He even shows you how best to attack when the same formations are used against you!

Metzler is specific in showing you how to deal with a left-handed nemesis, how to play with a weaker partner, how to pass a troublesome net man, how to lob aggressively, how to force your opponents to retreat from the net, and how to set up your own "net barrier" so that you make the most of your advantage.

Whether you are just beginning to play doubles or if you are a seasoned pro, this book will be equally valuable to you.



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