

Squash Deception Part II – ‘Before the forward swing’

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For this article, I will explain several ways to use deception before your forward swing is initiated.

As a review, deception is when your opponent thinks your shot is going to one part of the court and then it goes the opposite way. Or it can be that your opponent believes that you will play a certain kind of shot and you play something else instead. How do we achieve deception before the forward swing begins?

Remember, deception is best attempted when your good basic fundamental shots (e.g. straight drive or good deep crosscourt) have won you an open ball, a good positional advantage, or if you sense your opponent may be off balance. Trying to use deception when you are off balance or in a defensive position is not usually a good idea. You should also be early onto the ball. The most common types of deception before the forward swing is initiated are: a) the hold, b) shielding the ball, c) looking the other way from your intended shot, d) altering your stance, e) changing the starting point/position of your racket, & f) hitting the ball at a different contact point in reference to your body. Any of the above can be used in combination with one another to greater effect. Deception may or may not win you the point, but over the course of a match it can serve to tire out your opponent, forcing him/her to initially start out in one direction and then having to push off to change direction abruptly.

Explanation of the types of deception:

- a) The Hold – Upon arriving early to the ball, have your racket up and prepared and freeze for a moment before striking the ball at a later point than normal. This will upset your opponent's rhythm and timing and may cause him/her to second guess where your ball is going. If you vary the time when you strike the ball from time to time, you will keep your opponent unbalanced.
- b) Shielding the ball – If you are able to put your body between your opponent and his/her view of the ball while preparing to hit the ball you may be able to delay your opponent's first step a half second or so as he/she will not be able to see the actual striking of the ball. This is usually best achieved from in front of the T.
- c) Looking the other way while hitting – This is most effective in the front of the court while retrieving a loose drop shot near one of the corners. For example, looking left while intending to hit the ball right and turning the body that way before the strike can fake out an opponent if executed correctly.
- d) Altering your stance – This can be used from anywhere in the court, but is best utilized once a fairly long rally has been in progress. Let's say that a rally includes several long exchanges of straight drives and cross courts, and suddenly you close off your stance as if indicating a boast, but then hit another straight drive. This could cause your opponent to take a step towards the front of the court expecting the boast and then have to backtrack for the straight drive which would now be in the back corner. Also, try this in the front of the court, faking a roll corner and hitting a drop or short drive.
- e) Changing the starting point/position of your racket – One example: Let's say on approaching a rather high drop at the front of the court that you keep your racket

- low to the ground instead of prepared where you normally would have it. This would look like your intention is to re-drop the ball while your intention is to flick the ball deep. Another effective method is to aim your racket in one direction while lining up for your shot and then execute your shot in the opposite direction.
- f) Hitting the ball at a different contact point in reference to your body – This is a bit more advanced, but you could take the ball more in front, or behind, or left or right of your body for different effects. It is best to combine this with altering your stance. You can even approach the ball in a zigzag pattern to the front, slightly mesmerizing your opponent.

Here are some of the above tips pertinent to the various skill levels:

2.5 & under: Shielding the ball, as long as you do clear out after you hit the ball, may be the best one to start experimenting with.

3.5 & under: Trying to develop a convincing hold will help to tire out your opponent or keep him/her starting out in the wrong direction. Altering your stance at various points of a rally and not always playing the same shots when you do alter your stance can be very effective.

4.0: When early to the front use the set up position of your racket and your body to mislead your opponent. Twist your head, shoulders and hips to the left & then hit the ball to the right. If you can continually fake out your opponent, you might be up for an Oscar.

4.5 & higher: At this level seek to not only utilize one of these types of deception but also to combine them and integrate them into your normal game. Experiment with various combinations until you find one that is the most effective and then personalize it and make it your own.

The next time you play your regular opponent use him/her as a guinea pig to test out what works and what doesn't work. Keep things fresh by constantly changing and not choosing the same shot in the same situation. Always keep them guessing!

For my follow up article, I will write about the most difficult type of deception to execute - where deception occurs during the actual strike and the racket is in motion.

Happy deceiving!

About the author:

Cliff Wenn has been a squash teaching professional at both private clubs and at university programs for over 30 years in the greater Boston area. Over the years, Cliff has coached and mentored many top ranked players, including several number 1's and national champions both junior and senior. A Malaysian/American, Cliff learned the game while growing up in India, Singapore, and Malaysia from the region's top coaches and players. Cliff holds an B.A. in Economics from Tufts University and an M.S. in Sports Management from Northeastern University. Currently, Cliff is the Director of Squash at the Maugus Club in Wellesley and is the founder and co-director of the LearnSquash Company. Website: www.learnsquash.com.