



BALL MACHINE TIPS

TARGETS

Once any target is placed on the court the player tends to tighten up. Through repetition with a given shot and target area, you will become comfortable hitting a particular shot in practice and especially in match situations.

I like to use dome target cones in areas of four cones. The area size of the target should be based on the shot selected as well as the skill level of the player. For example, a passing shot target for the average club singles player should be a long channel about 3' wide extending from the net to the baseline. A rally target area could start at being a 5' wide x 9' deep target placed about a foot inside the baseline and singles sidelines on both the ad and deuce sides of the court.

You should hit your target area 70% of the time for an effective practice session. If you are hitting your target more frequently than 70%, try shrinking the target first before increasing the difficulty of the incoming shot.

BALL FREQUENCY

If the ball machine frequency is not set correctly, you are just grooving poor footwork habits in practice. Most players set the ball frequency of the ball machine too slow to accommodate how they want to feel while practicing instead of simulating game-play. To properly set the ball frequency of a ball machine, the machine should be throwing another ball as your ball passes the front of the ball machine. This timing simulates a player actually striking another ball. Most players when setting the machine with correct frequency realize they have footwork issues that need to be resolved to allow them to reach the next ball. Setting the frequency too fast will not allow the player to properly see their outgoing shot and allow the player proper motor skill feedback.

POSITION OF THE BALL MACHINE

The position of the ball machine is the most vital tip you can receive with regards to training with a ball machine. Players tend to always place the ball machine in the center of the baseline. It is rare that the ball ever comes from there in a match especially for those who play doubles. You should place the ball machine where the shot you are working on would come from in a match. For example, if you are working on your overhead then set the machine off near the doubles alley on the deuce or ad side of the court to throw a lob. Another example is, if you are working on your up-close doubles volley, move the ball machine to at least the service line to give the appropriate location of the incoming volley. Most doubles players only practice from the side they return serve from however, you must serve from both the deuce and ad sides of the court, so practice from both sides.

SPEED, SPIN, HEIGHT, DEPTH, DIRECTION

Ball machines can really enhance your ball recognition skills. Ball recognition is your ability to judge the ball in flight early enough to play the ball in the appropriate strike-zone for your out-going shot. Most players when training on a ball machine only practice their forehand or backhand rally ball. However, when in a match, you win or lose based on your ability to adapt to different shots. You receive high approaches, low approaches, moonballs, half-volleys, balls with excessive topspin, ball with excessive backspin, etc. Each one of these shots requires different stroke paths, follow-throughs, and decisions regarding target areas. Practicing just your rally ball would be like going to a driving range and never practicing anything but hitting your driver. Remember; change the Speed, Spin, Height, Depth, and Direction of shots while practicing.