

## Know the Game

*I have literally been through two tennis lives. The first was a totally instinctive, spontaneous approach to the game. The one I'm living now, at thirty-two, is a much more intellectual and professional one, and it's definitely more satisfying. I've learned that it is not enough to do something well. You have to know how you did it to fully appreciate the accomplishment. Especially if you have any hope of ever re-creating it.*

Virginia Wade on winning Wimbledon

A good player is like a craftsman; a great player is like an artist. Common to both is that they are masters of their craft and they control what they do. Artists are special people – they usually have that something extra, something unique, which makes them stand out. You may not become an artist but you can certainly become a craftsman at the game of badminton. But to achieve this you must know and understand all the various aspects of your craft.

In some respects playing badminton is similar to playing chess. Both games involve trying to defeat your opponent(s) by playing tactical moves. For example, whenever you hit the shuttle over the net you are making a tactical move in the game. It is tactical because it obtains a certain response from your opponent(s). For instance, your opponent will respond differently if you clear from your rearcourt than if you play a dropshot. If you clear he will be forced to travel backwards to his rearcourt. Alternatively he would respond differently to a straight dropshot than to a cross-court dropshot. As the game is a contest the purpose of your tactical moves is to win the rallies and ultimately the game. To play in this way is to play in accordance with the **principle of attack**.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF ATTACK

There are two ways of applying this principle – a positive one and a negative one.

The positive one is:

- At all times try to create a situation to increase your chances of eventually winning the rally.

If you cannot do this then apply the negative one, which is:

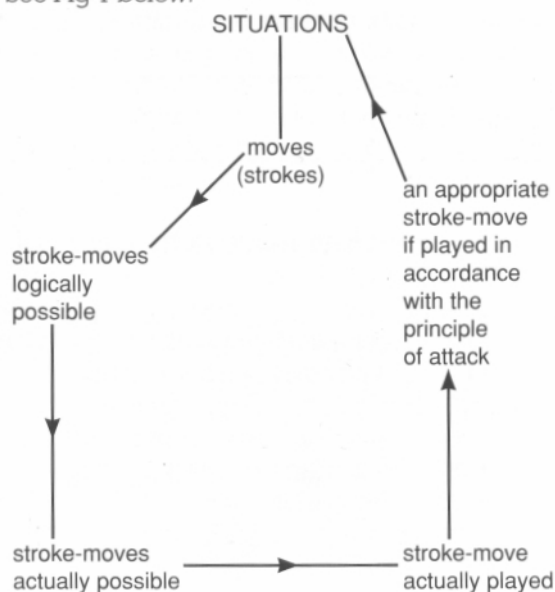
- Whenever necessary try to create a situation to reduce your opponent's chances of winning the rally.

As your strokes are the means by which you make your tactical moves then if you apply the **principle of attack** in your play, your strokes cease to be just actions and become **stroke-moves**. Your strokes and tactics, therefore, should be inseparable.

It is these features which provide the logical structure of the game, i.e. the game is a contest, in which the strokes are used as tactical moves in accordance with the principle of attack.

### The Logical Structure of the Game

See Fig 1 below.



In any game you will find yourself in different situations – as shown at the top of Fig 1. In each situation there will be a number of tactical moves which are **logically possible**. These will be the total of **stroke-moves** that can possibly be played from any situation in the court. Although there will be a number of logically possible moves in any given situation it might be the case that you do not know how to play them all. What stroke-moves are **actually possible** therefore will depend on what you can do. If you cannot play all the stroke-moves you will have fewer options available. This will, of course, be an advantage to an opponent who has studied your game and knows what you can and cannot do in certain situations.

You can, however, only play one stroke-move at a time, although you should always be able to play at least two tactical moves from any situation. In this instance let's assume that you can perform several stroke-moves, which makes it difficult for your opponent to anticipate which one you will choose.

You play your stroke-move, but is the stroke-move you **actually played** a good tactical move and was it appropriate in the circumstances? This is where we can refer to the principle of attack for guidance. If the move helped to create a situation which improved your chances and reduced your

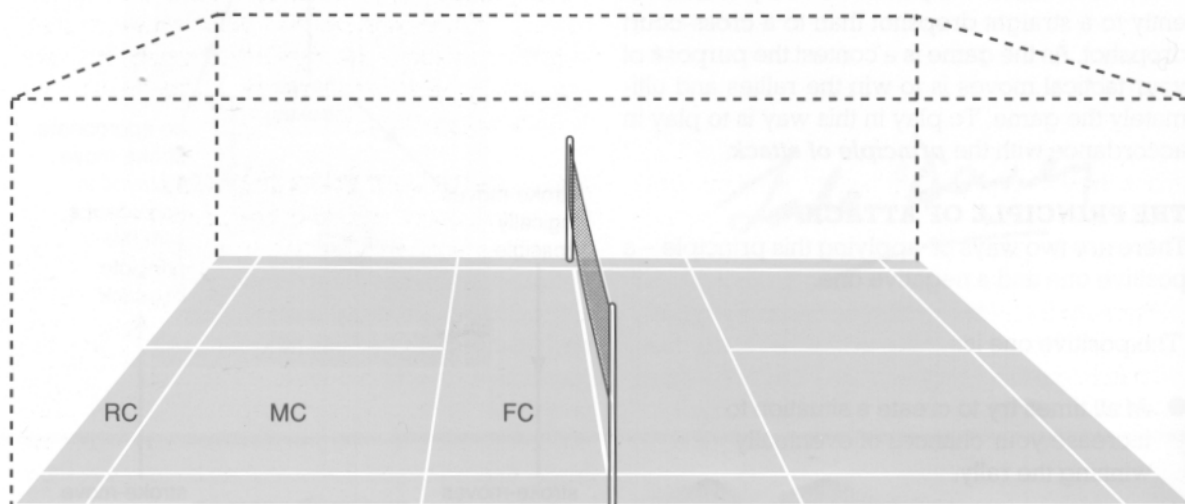
opponent's chances of winning the rally then it was an appropriate tactical move. We could even describe it as a good move – intelligent, clever, shrewd, etc. – all implying that it was played in accordance with the principle of attack.

The logical structure of the game is quite easy to understand. Its value is that it gives purpose to all your actions providing that you apply the principle of attack as you play. You can use it to judge whether your stroke-moves are effective or not in helping to win the game. The structure should also draw your attention to the various situations you will encounter in the game and should help you to consider all the stroke-moves that can be played in each situation. Above all it helps to focus attention on your opponent, in that everything you do is aimed at defeating your opponent.

#### THE SITUATIONS IN THE GAME

There are three major situations in the game. These are the rearcourt (RC), midcourt (MC), and forecourt (FC). See Fig 2. The stroke-moves are played from high or low positions in each situation: high, if above net height; low, if below net height. It is a simple exercise to work out all the stroke-moves logically possible in a situation, e.g. high in the forehand rearcourt. See Fig 3.

Fig 2  
Shows the court and the situations.



## THE BASIC TACTICAL MOVES

Although there are many stroke-moves which are logically possible within the various situations in singles, level and mixed doubles, they can all be reduced to four basic tactical moves.

- 1 There are stroke-moves used to send the opponent to the rearcourt. These are: the overhead clear, the lob, the drive, the high serve and the flick serve.

The reasons for playing this move are:

- a) To draw the opponent out of position away from the centre of the court and as far away from the net as possible.
- b) To reduce the effectiveness of the opponent. He cannot do much damage from the back of the court.
- c) To create space.

- 2 There are stroke-moves used to send the opponent into the forecourt. These are: the overhead dropshot, the block to the smash, the net reply (of which there are several) and the low serve.

The reasons for playing this move are:

- a) To draw the opponent out of position away from the centre.
- b) To create space.
- c) To force the opponent to hit the shuttle upwards (a lift).

- 3 There are stroke-moves used to send the opponent to the sides of the court, i.e. rearcourt, midcourt or forecourt. All the strokes can be used to create this type of situation.

The reasons for playing this move are:

- a) To draw the opponent out of position away from the centre.
- b) To create space.

- 4 There are the stroke-moves used to exploit the opponent in the midcourt. These are: the smash, the long dropshot, the drive, the push and the kill from the net.

The reasons for playing this move are:

- a) To attempt a winning shot.

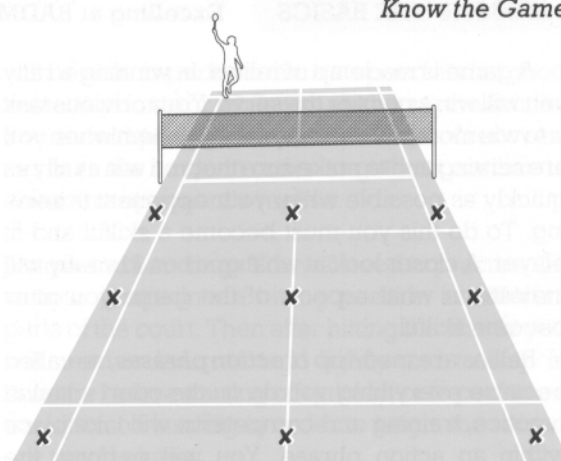


Fig 3

Shows the range of stroke-moves logically possible from the forehand rearcourt.

- b) To create space.
- c) To force an upward hit (a lift).
- d) To force a weak reply.
- e) To force an error.

What is common to these basic moves is that several strokes can be used to play them. They are all used to create situations to increase your chances of winning the rallies and eventually the game. The first, second and third basic moves are slightly different in purpose to the fourth, the intention behind the first three being to use the strokes mainly as **building shots**, while the intention behind the fourth is to use some of the stronger strokes as **attempted winning shots** as well as building shots, e.g. the smash. Obviously all the strokes used to play the basic moves may be used as building shots or attempted winning shots; some are just more effective as one or the other in a particular situation.

## RALLIES AND ACTION PHRASES

The fact that you and your opponent(s) use your strokes as tactical moves to try to create situations, which will eventually lead to a winning shot, causes a great deal of activity on the court. The building shots and attempted winning shots that you both play will cause you both to travel to and fro between the rearcourt, midcourt and forecourt. You will play short or long rallies depending on how many shots you will have to play before the rally ends.

A game is made up of rallies. In winning a rally you will win a point or the serve. Your obvious task is to win more rallies than your opponent when you are serving and to make sure that you win a rally as quickly as possible when your opponent is serving. To do this you must become a skilful and fit player. A closer look at what goes on in a rally will indicate in what aspects of the game you must become skilful.

Rallies are made up of **action phrases**, so called because everything you do on the court when in practice, training and competition will take place within an action phrase. You will perform the strokes, body movements and tactical moves within an action phrase. To inspect a complete action phrase take a look at Fig 7 on page 19. To make it easier to understand I will explain how it is built up.

#### THE PARTS OF AN ACTION PHRASE

See Fig 4 below

**Court Starting Position** This is the start of the action phrase. Here you are in position in a rearcourt, midcourt or forecourt situation ready to cover your opponent's most probable tactical moves.

**Approach Travel Phase** Once your opponent hits the shuttle he will create a new situation so that you must now travel into position to hit the shuttle and play your tactical move – unless of course the

shuttle is hit straight towards you and there is no need to travel anywhere except for a slight adjustment to your stance as you get into a hitting position.

**Hitting Position** Having travelled towards the shuttle you get into position to hit it effectively. This is the position on the court from which you perform the stroke-move.

**Recovery Travel Phase** Having hit the shuttle and played your tactical move you will need to travel into position to cover your opponent's most probable replies in the new situation that you have created.

#### THE BODY MOVEMENTS USED IN AN ACTION PHRASE

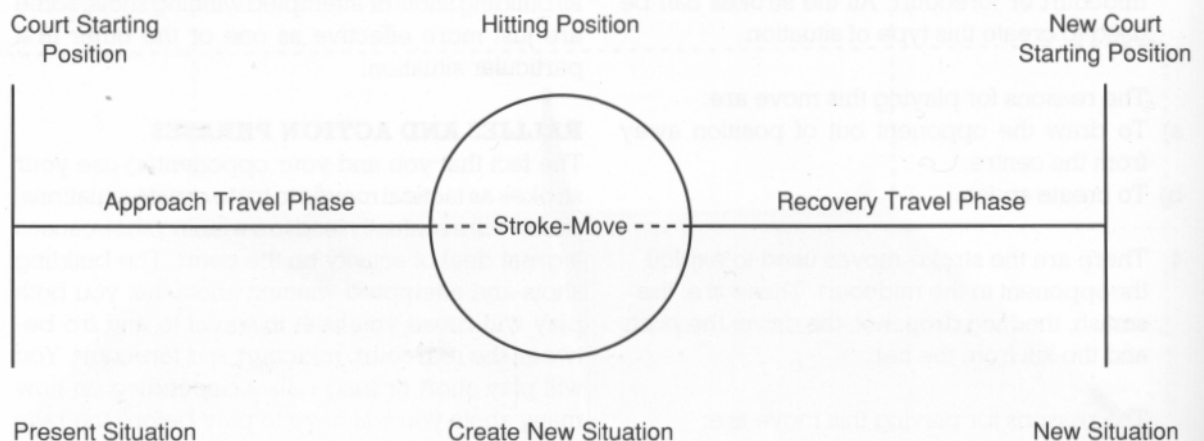
See Fig 5 on page 17

Good posture and balance should be maintained throughout.

**Posture and Balance** It helps to have a good posture and balance at all times during an action phrase since this contributes to good body movement and control when hitting the shuttle.

**Start** From the court starting position you will need to accelerate very quickly from the spot you are standing in – an explosive start. The quickness of the first few steps is very important in travelling towards and away from the shuttle. There is a

Fig 4



special technique for this which is described on pages 51–2.

**Step Patterns** There are several ways of travelling to and from the hitting position. These include walking, running, and chasséing forwards, backwards and sideways. You should use the most effective method for you in a given situation. Whatever method you do use it is most important that you travel lightly and quietly over the floor. We usually describe this as travelling with '*soft feet*'.

**Stop** Just as you should be able to start quickly so should you be able to stop quickly and in balance when the occasion demands it. This is usually prior to or just after hitting the shuttle and when you arrive into position to cover the opponent's probable replies.

**Transitions** These refer to the 'changes of direction' you will perform in the action phrase. You will usually perform these during the travel phases, for instance when your opponent plays a tactical move before you have completed your recovery travel phase; or immediately after hitting the shuttle, e.g. on landing after a jump smash in the rearcourt.

**Lunge and Recovery** Though these usually take place in the forecourt you will also perform them in the midcourt and rearcourt. You will need to practise the various approaches to the half lunge and full lunge in the different parts of the court so you

will be able to perform them at speed and in good balance prior to or while you are hitting the shuttle. You should practise the various ways of recovering from the lunge in order to get into position to cover the opponent's replies.

**Jumps and Landings** You will need to practise the various jumps into a hitting position in different parts of the court. Then after hitting the shuttle you will need to learn to land lightly and to stop in balance before starting off quickly, or to perform a transition on landing in order to begin the recovery travel phase.

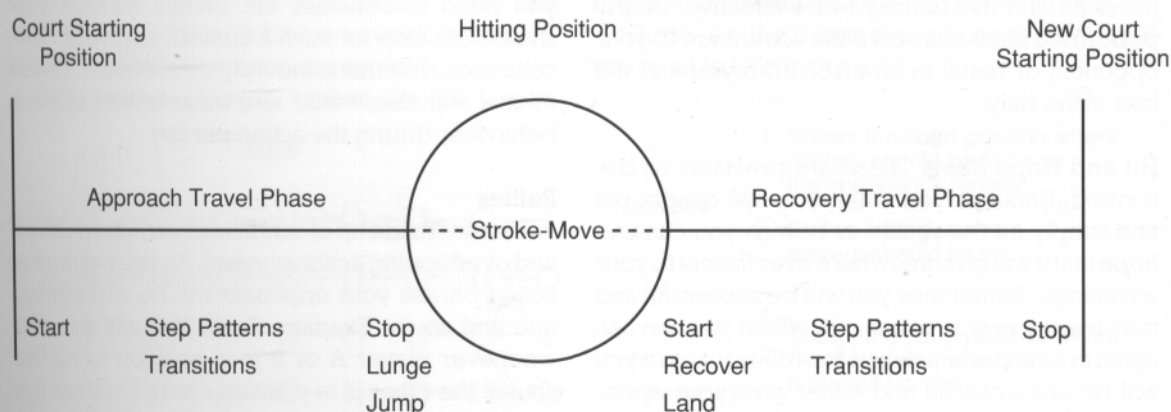
#### THE STROKE-MOVES USED IN AN ACTION PHRASE

See Fig 6

**The stroke-moves** include all the strokes logically possible in the game, played from the rearcourt, midcourt and forecourt. Most players use their stroke-moves in three ways in order to create a situation which will increase their chances of winning the rally (the principle of attack). These are: building shots, attempted winning shots and 'hit and hope' shots.

**Building Shots** You could play a number of tactical moves as building shots to create a situation from which you can attempt a winning shot. They can be well or poorly performed. Well-performed building shots should be consistently accurate, and

Fig 5



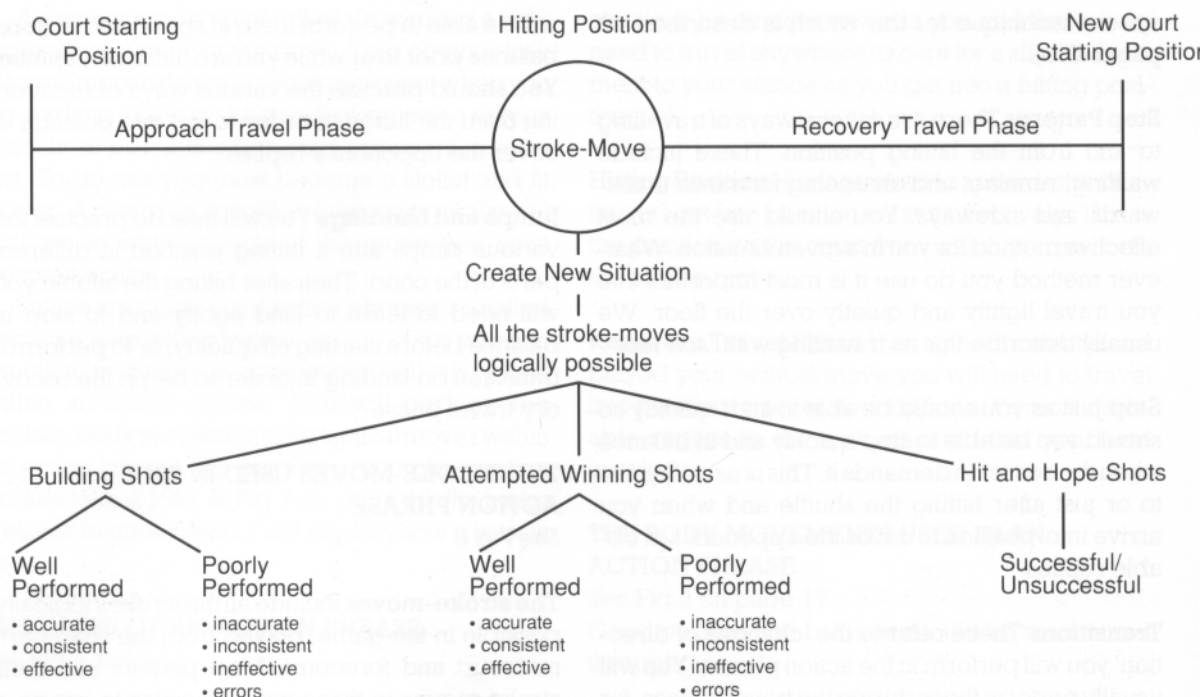


Fig 6

achieve the desired effect on your opponent. Poorly performed shots will be quite the opposite and most probably give the advantage to your opponent.

**Attempted Winning Shots** You should always consider these shots as *attempts* to hit a winner. If you do this you will always be ready for a reply if the shot is returned. If it does succeed then all the better. Well-performed shots will be consistently accurate and more likely to be effective. Poorly performed shots may give the advantage to your opponent or result in an error from you and the loss of the rally.

**Hit and Hope Shots** These are precisely as described. Shots played when you are caught out and simply *hit* the shuttle as best as you can and *hope* that it will go somewhere over the net to your advantage. Sometimes you will be successful and may learn a new stroke-move which you can use again in a similar situation. More often than not you will be unsuccessful and either give your opponent the advantage or make an error and lose the rally.

### THE COMPLETE ACTION PHRASE

Fig 7 illustrates the action phrase with all its parts included. This will give you some indication of the total sum of things you must be able to do to be a good player of badminton. What it does not show is how fit you must become to perform many action phrases in one rally and to play many rallies in a game. In a singles or doubles match of three games, which could last up to an hour or longer, you may have to play many long rallies. In addition you need to consider the mental attitude you should develop for such a contest, e.g. your concentration, determination and perseverance. These mental attitudes would also be reflected in your behaviour during the action phrase.

### Rallies

Rallies are made up of continuous complementary and overlapping action phrases. As you begin one action phrase your opponent will be completing one and so on. Examine Fig 8. You will see that whenever player A or B is in position to hit the shuttle the other is in position ready to cover the probable shots. As long as one player keeps synchronised with the opponent in this way the rally

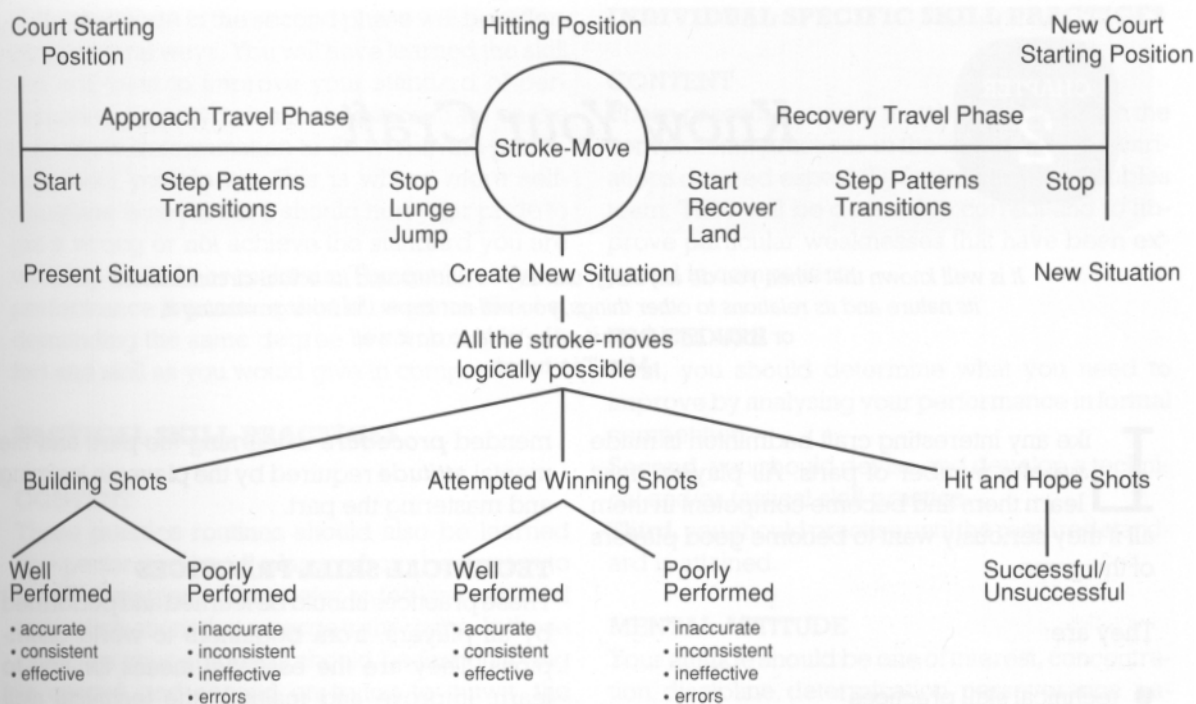


Fig 7

will continue. It is almost like a dance with perfect harmony being maintained between the two players except that to win the rally one player must try to create disharmony and put the other player out of synchronisation.

This is shown in Fig 8. Look closely at B's third action phrase and you will see a dotted vertical line to indicate where B actually is when A hit the shuttle. B has not recovered into position to cover A's probable shots and therefore will be out of synchronisation and at a disadvantage. He will have allowed A more space to hit the shuttle into and consequently he will have to work extremely hard to establish the harmony again.

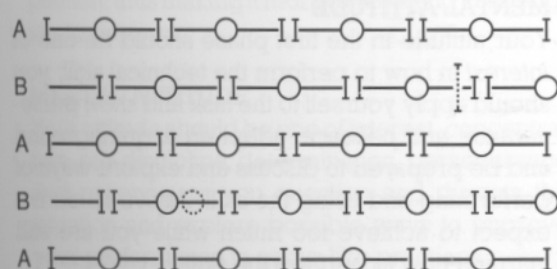
For another example look at B's fifth action

phrase and you will see a dotted circle. This shows B has not arrived into position to hit the shuttle and could be late playing his shot, if he can actually do so before the shuttle hits the ground.

A rally may contain as few as two action phrases, e.g. A serves, B hits a winning shot; or as many as 100. When Morten Frost defeated Sugiarto, the Indonesian player, in the 1987 All England Men's Singles final there were several long rallies of upwards of ninety shots, e.g. ninety-eight action phrases. To perform rallies as long as these requires much fitness, skill and concentration.

These are the things that you must develop if you want to learn your craft.

Fig 8



- I Shows the court position where players should be to cover the opponent's replies.
- Shows hitting position players should be in.
- ⋮ Shows the court position where B actually was when A played his shot.
- Shows the actual hitting position from which B played his shot.