

## Improve Your Defence

**W**hen you defend you should still play in accordance with the **principle of attack**, i.e. *whenever you hit the shuttle try to create a situation that will increase your chances of eventually winning or reduce your opponent's chances of winning the rally*. You should also make sure that in using your strokes as tactical moves they are used as building shots or attempted winning shots. It is usual to talk specifically about defence when your opponent is smashing in an attempt to hit a winning shot.

### PASSIVE AND ACTIVE DEFENCE

There are two forms of defence, *passive* and *active*. (See Fig 78.)

#### Passive Defence

You will use passive defence when you 'sit back' in a catcher's position and let the shuttle come closer to your body as you absorb the force. It is similar to catching a ball kicked or thrown hard at you in a competitive game; for example a wicket keeper in cricket, a catcher in baseball or a goalkeeper in football. Many top players use passive defence, e.g. Li Yongbo the brilliant Chinese doubles player who excels at this. The use of passive defence makes nonsense of the recommendation that you should always take the shuttle early. If you follow this outdated rule, preached by so many traditionalists, you will hinder your ability to defend well and play good building shots. In passive defence the rule is '*Take the shuttle later rather than earlier.*'

#### Active Defence

You use active defence when you step forwards to take the shuttle early and so reduce your oppo-

nent's recovery time as you counter-hit his smash at speed.

It is important to understand the difference between these two forms of defence so you can practise them more effectively and defend to your advantage. There are times when it is better to take the shuttle late just as there are times when it is better to take the shuttle early. You will defend better and make fewer errors if you know when to use one or the other.

### HOW SHALL I LEARN PASSIVE AND ACTIVE DEFENCE?

You probably already use both more frequently than you may be aware of. What you need to do is to distinguish between them and for this there are two things that you must do.

**FIRST:** you should accept that there are two ways of defending, i.e. passive and active defence.

**SECOND:** you should adopt a particular attitude of mind for each type of defence. For passive defence you should adopt a 'taking in', receptive attitude as you allow the shuttle to come towards you and prepare to hit it. For active defence you should adopt a 'going at' attitude to the shuttle as you move towards it to hit it.

A brief explanation will make this clearer. Imagine that you are positioned in the middle of a large sphere. You 'sit back' on your thighs in balance, alert like a 'catcher', with your racket held in front of you, facing your opponent and watching him very closely. If you stretch out your arm with your racket you will just touch the surface of the sphere (see Fig 78). That is how big it is. All the space included within it is your hitting zone, the space within which you hit the shuttle. Your sphere is situated in the centre of your court. On the other



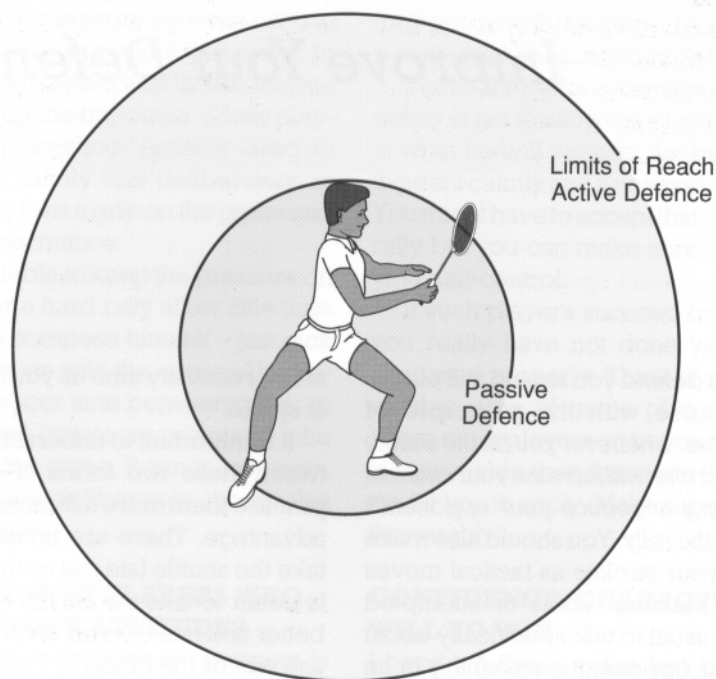


Fig 78  
Hitting Zones for Active and Passive Defence

side of the court is your opponent who smashes the shuttle to you. You allow it to pass through the surface of your sphere and travel into your hitting zone, closer towards you. As it gets nearer you simply lob it up to his rearcourt, block it to his forecourt or push it to his midcourt. Your opponent is given more time to recover to cover your replies just as you have more time to play them.

Now imagine the same scenario. This time you do not allow the shuttle to travel very far into your hitting zone. As it travels towards your sphere you prepare to hit it. As the shuttle touches the surface of your sphere you extend your arm forwards to hit it from just inside your hitting zone. You block to the forecourt, lob it to the rearcourt or push or drive it to the midcourt. Your opponent should have less time to cover your replies just as you will have less time to play them.

If you think about this for a moment you will hopefully agree that there are many occasions in the game when you want more time to play your shots and it suits your purpose to allow your oppo-

nents time to recover.

For example you want them to travel into the midcourt so that you can lob it back over their heads to the rearcourt. Or you want to deceive them into thinking that you will play a lob when you intend to play a net reply. You want them to commit themselves to responding to a certain shot before you play it. This you can only do when you have time to 'pretend' to play a particular shot and your opponents are given time to be deceived. Taking the shuttle late will give you this time.

On other occasions it will suit your purpose to give your opponents less time to recover. You must therefore take the shuttle early, which will also give you less time to play your shot. The benefits will be that your opponents may not be in position to cover your shot and will have less time to react to the shot that you play.

If you want to improve your defence you should use both passive and active defence to outwit and exploit your opponents.

## HOW SHALL I PRACTISE MY PASSIVE AND ACTIVE DEFENCE?

All you require is a partner with a good smash. Refer to chapter 5 (pages 32–4) for advice on practice stages. Position yourself in the midcourt, serve a high doubles serve and ask your partner to smash the shuttle towards you so that you can practise forehand defence and backhand defence.

### Passive Defence

First, practise just getting the feeling of the action and allow the shuttle to come close to your body while you sit back in balance on your thighs. Sit back further as you hit the shuttle. On no account should you allow your body weight to move forwards as you hit the shuttle. Try different stroke-moves, e.g. block, push and lob. Do this for forehand and backhand shots.

When you can do this practise accuracy and consistency in continuous rally practices.

### Active Defence

First, practise stepping forwards with your racket foot to block the shuttle. Do not try to hit the shuttle anywhere but simply place your racket face in line with the shuttle to meet it. The most important action is to step forwards on your racket foot.

When you feel comfortable stepping forwards then do so and play a particular stroke-move. Block, drive or lob the shuttle.

## HOW CAN I DEVELOP THIS TO MAKE IT MORE GAME-LIKE?

There are two further practice stages you should do now. You should add a travel phase to the practice so that you have to travel away from the centre to hit the shuttle; you should add some uncertainty so that you do not know where your partner will hit the smash.

**Use passive defence with a travel phase:** Ask your partner to smash the shuttle wide to your forehand side. Now simply travel to the forehand side, in which case you would move your imagi-

nary 'sphere' with you and defend from a new position. You may have to defend from a half or full lunge position within your hitting zone. See plate 29, page 103. Repeat this on the backhand side although now you may use your non-racket foot to step sideways in a half or full lunge.

**Use active defence with a travel phase:** Repeat as for passive defence. The exception is that if the shuttle is in front of you on your backhand side you will usually step across and forwards to the court side on your racket foot.

### Now add some uncertainty to the practice

Ask your smasher to smash to anywhere while you practise both types of defence. Agree how the practice will be done if you block the shuttle. Will your smasher travel forwards and play a net reply for you to lob high for him to smash again or will you start again with a high serve?

### Practise your defence in conditioned games and informal competition:

#### Conditioned games

- Play a game and restrict yourself to using passive defence only in reply to a smash.
- Play a game and restrict yourself to using active defence only in reply to a smash.
- Play a game and use forehand passive defence and backhand active defence in reply to a smash.
- Play a game and use backhand passive defence and forehand active defence in reply to a smash.

#### Informal Competition

Use passive defence for the first game regardless of whether or not you win and use active defence for the second game. If you play a third game use both types of defence to play your building shots and attempted winning shots as you decide will be effective in the situation.

