

Lesson Theme: Starting Strong

Objectives: Using the Serve and Return to Gain an Advantage

Skill Level: 3.0 / 3.5

Duration: 90 minutes

Equipment Needed: Balls



Mins	Activity	Details	Teaching Points	Comments
5	Meet & Greet	Welcome, names, housekeeping		
7	Technical Warm Up	Select activities from the WARM-UP MENU.		Warm-up should include volleys, groundstrokes, serve and return.
10	Play & Observe	Real Game without restrictions.		Circulate and encourage, but no teaching yet.
3	Collect Balls & H2O			Make it quick!
2	Debrief / Observations	<p>Praise effort and focus.</p> <p>Explain that your particular interest was the depth of the return of serve: did it force the serving team to hit 3rds from <i>behind</i> baseline, <i>on</i> baseline or <i>inside</i> baseline?</p> <p>Note that you saw many returns that were so short the serving team could move inside the baseline.</p>	<p>Deep returns of serve put the serving team in a position where they cannot do much damage since they have to hit from a long way away.</p> <p>Deep returns don't stop a team from coming to the net, but make the journey longer.</p>	<p>Collecting stats (without telling players what you are looking at) is powerful: for example, of 50 returns of serve, 38 were either short or medium depth, and only 12/50 pushed the opponents behind baseline.</p> <p>Note: deep returns do not give more time to get to the net (that's what height does).</p>
5	Direct Instruction	What controls depth?	<p>The depth of the return is controlled by 3 factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - height of shot - speed of shot - spin of shot 	It is important that players understand what controls where a ball ends up, otherwise they can't do anything about it.
5	Group Activity: Send Deep Returns	<p>Set up a cone at ¾ court in the middle of each service box.</p> <p>Working in pairs, down the line and on half court, Player A serves the ball and Player B tries to return between the cone and baseline. Can experiment with different heights and speeds. Switch after 3 attempts.</p>	Concentrate on controlling height and speed of the ball on both FH and BH sides.	

4	Direct Instruction	High-Quality Set Up	<p>How well we set up for the ball influences how well we can control it. A balanced set-up with a forward impact point is preferred.</p> <p>It is easier to set up well if we have more time to prepare. Standing well behind the baseline (~5 ft) to return serve will give us more time than standing closer to it.</p>	<p>This will often make a very big difference for players.</p> <p>Some will be worried about the short serve. Tell them that we must be prepared to run, but it generally won't be an issue.</p>
5	Group Activity: Send Deep Returns (continued)	Continue activity but with emphasis on set up.	<p>Reinforce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - starting behind baseline - being on balance - forward impact point 	Adjust challenge by moving the cone deeper.
2	Debrief & H2O			
7	Group Activity: Real Points with Deep Returns	Play Real Points but award a bonus point if the returner hits the return beyond $\frac{3}{4}$ court.	<p>Reinforce:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - starting behind baseline - being on balance - forward impact point 	Use flat markers or tape/chalk. For a tougher challenge, call a short serve "out".
2	Direct Instruction	Return Direction	<p>It is important to consider the direction of the return. If we don't (or if we hit down the middle) the other team can gain an advantage by choosing who hits the third shot.</p> <p>We should target a player.</p>	Many players think returning down the middle is smart. But it gives opponents all the power.
2	Direct Instruction	Controlling Direction	Shot direction is directly controlled by horizontal paddle angle at contact.	
5	Group Activity: Crosscourt Returns	Cones set up at $\frac{3}{4}$ court in each service box. Player A serves crosscourt and Player B returns crosscourt, passing the ball between cone and sideline. Switch roles after three attempts.	<p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - balanced set up - paddle angle 	This is useful when targeting the server.

5	Group Activity: Hammer the Serve	Cones set up at $\frac{3}{4}$ court in each service box. Player A serves crosscourt and Player B returns crosscourt. This is a chance for the server to make their serve tougher by hitting it hard .	<p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - swinging freely - relaxed muscles - body rotation 	Players will need to be encouraged to "go for it".
4	Play Points with Restrictions	Play Real Points, but: return of serve must pass between a cone and sideline (not down the middle). If down the middle, the ball is considered out.	<p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - balanced set up - paddle angle - picking a target 	Encourage servers to go for it with their serve since they get a free point if the return isn't in the target.
2	Debrief & H2O			

10	Play Real Points	Encourage players to be thoughtful about their first shot (serve and return)	Reinforce: - Return depth - Serve direction - Return direction	
5	Wrap Up	Summarize key points	How we start the point influences how the rest of it unfolds. Be thoughtful about where you are hitting the serve/return.	Use this wrap up to identify improvement, encourage practice, and promote future lessons or events.

Instructor Notes: