

VIJAY'S TENNIS BLOGS

TARGET THE MIDDLE



This article is going in a tactical direction. So yes, I will talk to you about a tactical approach to hitting down the middle. You might want to consider adding this tool in your bag of tricks. I will explain what and why hitting down the middle is good, along with its advantages and disadvantages. Many coaches and players will always talk about going cross-court or down the line, but why not talk about hitting the ball towards the middle of the court? Let's start!

Targeting down the middle or hitting towards the middle of the court. Is a tactical tool that will create a lot of advantages and make it tricky for your opponents to apply angles against you. It also helps to manage your risk and to avoid making easy mistakes. Now that I have explained the what and the why. Let's go through the tactical advantages and disadvantages down below:

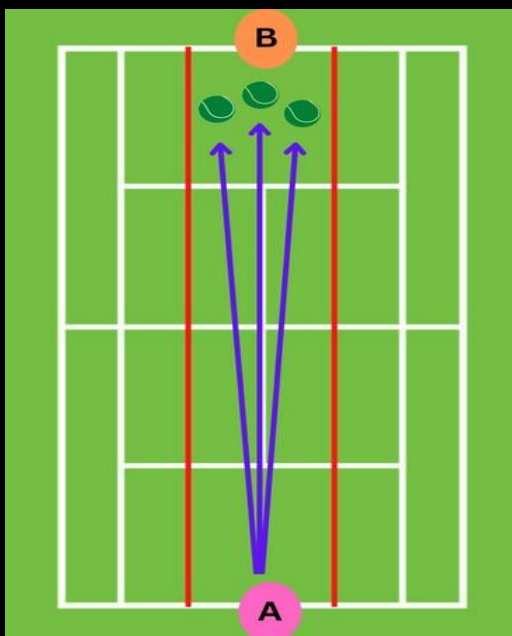


IMAGE ON LEFT: Player A hitting to Player B down the middle. Imagine another singles side line (both red lines) inside the court, to give you an idea of targeting the middle.

ADVANTAGES

1) When hitting down the middle, you create more room for error (margin for error). It allows you to make fewer mistakes, provides more safety and builds consistency. If you are hitting your shots wide or long, hit towards the middle to reduce your errors. It can also allow you to hit the ball heavier to the middle, as there is no singles sideline where you can miss.

2) When hitting the ball deep and middle of the court, it makes it tricky for your opponent to apply pressure against you or create an angle that isn't in existence. You can trap your opponents to force them to hit angles when it is not there and not safe to do so. Refer to images down below:

IMAGE A

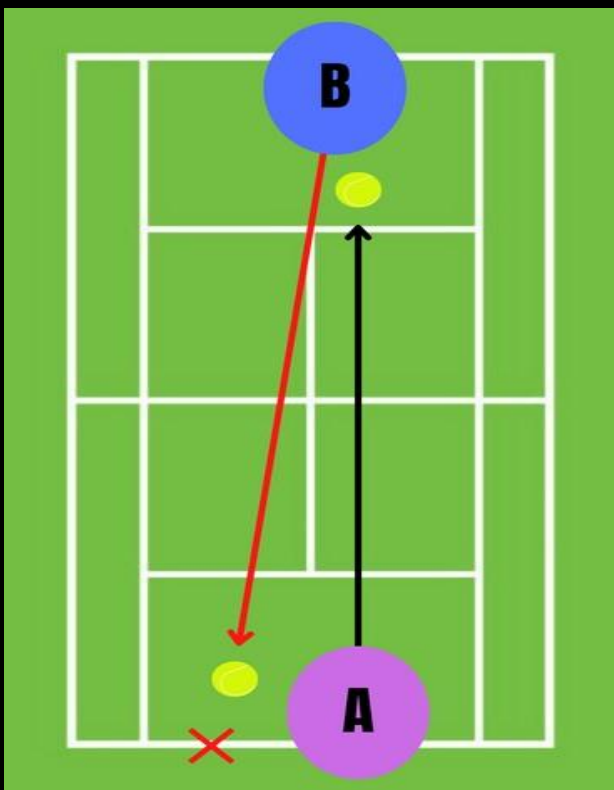


IMAGE B

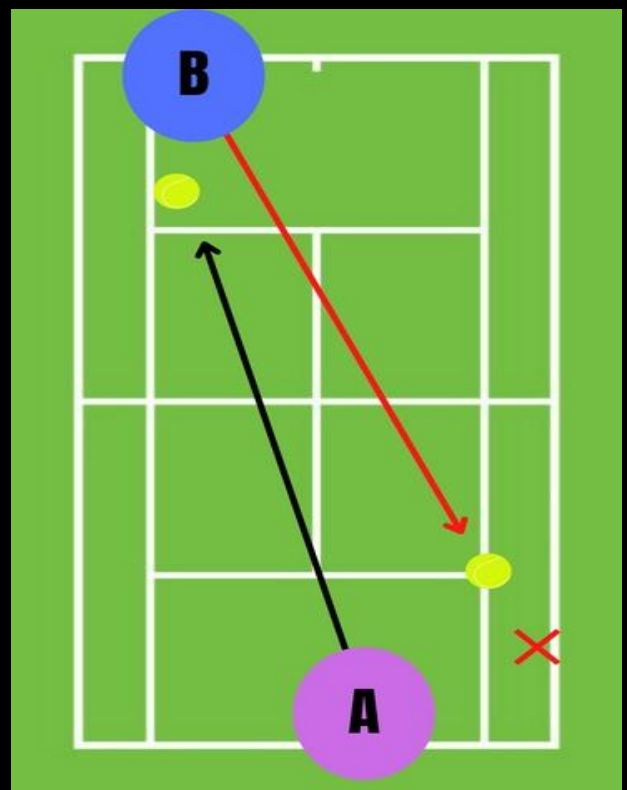


IMAGE A

Player A hitting forehand down the middle to Player B's Backhand, you will notice that Player B can't create much angle. The X mark represents where the ball will land on the second bounce, not pushing the player off the court as much.

IMAGE B

Player A hitting forehand cross-court to Player B's Forehand, you will notice that Player B now can create an angle. The X mark represents where the ball will land on the second bounce. This proves it will push Player A wide off the court.

3) When your opponent forces you outside off the court, you can hit a ball high and loopy, deep to the middle of the court, which doesn't help your opponent to create an angle and provides you more time to recover. It also can help you to stabilize the point against your opponent. Once that happens, it will turn into a neutral rally.

4) Hitting down the middle or cross-court, you'll notice the height of the net is lower and gives you easy access to get the ball over the net. Going down the line is higher and you will need to hit the ball with more height. Refer to images down below:

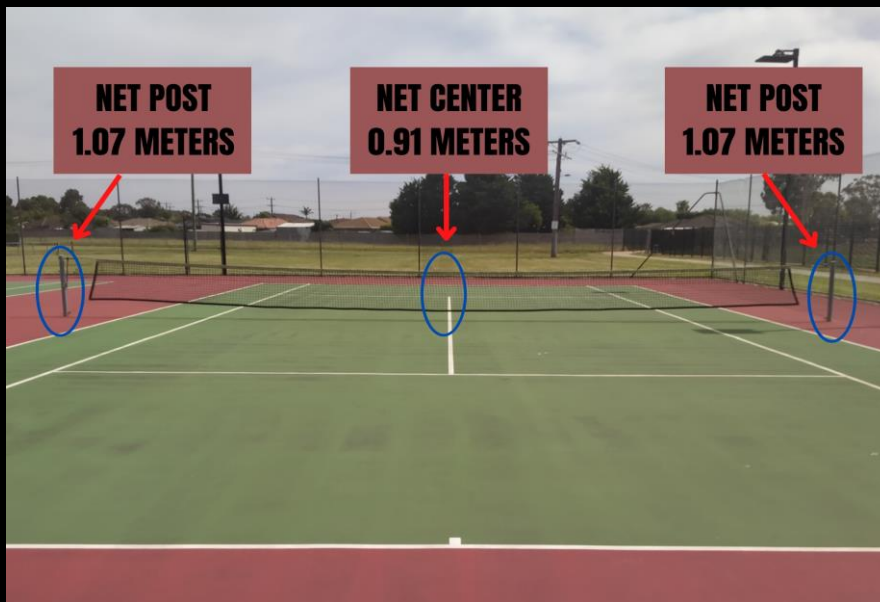


IMAGE ON RIGHT

Notice the net height differences, on both sides of the net post and in the centre.

IMAGE BELOW

Pay attention to the image above and indicators on the bottom left of the image. You will notice the height trajectory on the red line (down-the-line) is higher, while green (middle) and aqua (cross-court) you can hit the ball lower. Hitting the middle is safer, as it provides room for error and makes hitting the ball over the net easier!



5) Hitting deep and middle of the court can be a great option when you are looking to expose a weakness from your opponent. Either because of their technique or to create an opportunity for you to finish the point. Here is an example down below:

Example: If I want to hit the ball deep to my opponent's weak backhand, I will hit the ball to the middle of the backhand and there might be 2 scenarios that may occur:

- 1) The opponent will create a forced error or an unforced error.
- 2) The opponent can hit the backhand, but it might be a weak return and lands short, allowing you the opportunity to finish the point.

DISADVANTAGES

1) If you are trying to hit the ball down the middle but it lands short, it will allow your opponent to dictate and control the point. Off the short ball in the middle of the court, they can create angles, apply pressure or move in for the approach to put pressure on you.

2) This tactic may become predictable to your opponents and they eventually will figure out what to do to play against this type of pattern. Potentially they can hit the ball back to the middle to put pressure on you and try to force an error from you.

3) When your opponent starts getting comfortable with your pattern of play by going down the middle, the opponent will use their strengths to beat you. Example: When the ball lands between the baseline and service line, the opponent has enough time to run around the backhand and hit a forehand to apply pressure.

I hope these ideas of targeting the middle will help you in your matches or practice. I recommend practicing this with your coach or playing partner and working out if it works for you. But trust me, this will work for anyone! When I first sampled it in 2015, it worked like a treat. I won all my Vic Pennant Singles Matches, dropping only one set in 2015.

It will take a few months to comfortably get used to this tactic, so spend a lot of time getting comfortable with this pattern of play. Practice hard on the courts! Remember to TARGET the middle of the tennis court. Thanks for your time to read this article.

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