

Positioned to Win

More than any other strategy, learning the correct home bases for court positioning significantly improves most players.

Baseline: This position is a few inches behind the back line. Standing inside the baseline is ineffective, because here you must volley balls at your feet and can't accurately determine which balls are going out. Being several feet behind the baseline makes short balls difficult to reach and creates more running for wide shots. Instead, stand right behind the baselines so you can move forward and play groundstrokes at the top of the bounce or on the rise.

Soft Net: There are 21 feet between the net and the service line, and soft net is two-thirds back in the service box or 14 feet from the net. Generally, soft net should be your position after the approach shot. This home base enables you to move forward after initial volleys and greatly improves your ability to hit overheads. Standing on the service line after the approach shot results in playing too many difficult balls at your feet, and being in front of soft net makes you vulnerable to lobs. The ability to hit effective lobs and overheads determines the outcome of many recreational matches. At soft net if you turn and run back, you can be in excellent position to hit overheads.

Offensive Net: This position is half way between the net and the service line or 10.5 feet from the net. When you are at the net you are on the offense and want to finish points successfully. Generally, after you play a shot at soft net and don't anticipate a lob, move forward to offensive net. Playing shots at offensive net reduces your opponents' recovery time, creates more angles for volleys and significantly contributes to winning points. There is a downside to offensive net – if your shot is weak you are vulnerable against an offensive shot or deep lob.

Knowing the correct home bases and implementing them in your game has very favorable results. The important question is, "When should I be at baseline, soft net or offensive net?" Generally, play most points at the position where you are strongest, and remember there are advantages and disadvantages of each station. A good rule for transition is hit your shot and move to the nearest home base. Stand in the right place, and you'll be positioned to win!

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