

Tennis Tip from the Pro
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Searching for Goldilocks

Imagine you're the net player in a doubles match and your opponent sets you up with a nice, juicy, shoulder high forehand volley to poach and put away. You see the open court up the middle and your eyes light up as you imagine the amazing put-away you're about to hit, and you proceed to wind up and slap the volley 4 feet long over the baseline. What the heck just happened???

Well, to put it simply, you over hit the shot. You had an easy volley at a comfortable height and a wide-open court. Did you need to hit the volley 80 mph to put the ball away? Probably not, but you certainly didn't want to play it too safe and push the shot carefully into play and give your opponents a good chance to run the ball down and lob it over your head. What you really needed was to stay calm and hit a solid volley to the opening with enough pace and depth to get the job done and nothing more. That's what I refer to as the Goldilocks shot. Not too hard, not too soft, but just right. And, that's one of the biggest challenges in the game...to consistently find the balance between too much and to little. Whether it's pace, spin, direction, height, depth or any other variable of your shot, it's difficult to consistently determine and produce the right type of shot without taking too much risk or playing it too safe.

There are a couple of things you can do to improve the your decision making and shot production and help you find that Goldilocks shot more consistently. The first is to practice hitting shots at varying speeds, heights, directions, etc. to refine your control over the ball. I highly recommend using the ball machine for this type of practice. Take a crosscourt forehand, for example, and start with a half speed stroke and gradually increase the pace of subsequent strokes about 10 percent till you're hitting the fastest ball you can without losing control. Once you feel that you've gone beyond your control level, start another sequence with the half speed shot and ramp it up slowly again. Not only will you eventually increase you're your top speed, but you'll gain much better control over all the variations between your half speed, cautious shot and your most aggressive ball. The same can be done with any other stroke or variable in the game including that put-away volley that you sailed long.

Practicing this way will lead you directly to the second thing you can do to improve your decision making and shot production in a match: staying calm. The most common response I hear from players after over hitting an easy put-away is..."I just got so excited when I saw that ball just sitting there." We've all been there and know that feeling, but the more you practice all the variations of your strokes the more confident you'll become and the better control over the ball and your emotions you'll have. Before you know it you'll be finding that Goldilocks shot more often and your matches will likely have a fairy tale ending.

See you on the courts!!!
Paul

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