

Ask the Coach



“Lob the Wong Way”

Usually the lob is not associated with the imposing or spectacular shots that are delivered with power and authority such as a serve, overhead or ground stroke. Even the word “Lob” sounds like sob, slob, snob, and blob, which isn’t very appealing. The lob is a finesse shot and not a power shot. Although the lob is not an exciting shot, it can be an effective weapon when used properly (just ask Gilbert’s opponents). When the lob is too short or low and/or not executed properly, it can be disastrous (just ask Gilbert’s double partners, if any are left). In my younger days I never lobbed, because I thought lobbing was for sissies. What changed my mind was watching the 50 and 55 Men’s National Hardcourt Champions Tournament at my tennis club (Lindborg Racquet Club) and saw the championship doubles team lobbing frequently.

Usually, the lob is used as a defensive shot. For example, when your opponent hits a shot deep and/or at sharp angle that forces you out of position, you’re unable to hit an effective offensive groundstroke. Since you can’t call time out, you have no choice but to play defensively.

If you’re able to reach your opponent’s shot, a good defensive return is

to try and hit a high and deep lob. Doing so will allow you to keep the point alive and provide you additional time to recover for the next shot. In addition, for the average weekend warrior’s ability, the deep and high lobs are more difficult to put away because there is less angle to work with and the distance the ball needs to travel is farther. In other words, the deeper the lob, the more effective it is.

When possible, try to lob to your opponent’s backhand side. Why? Because if your lob is short, one of the hardest shots to put away is a high backhand. This will also force your opponent to move more quickly into position for an overhead. If the flight of the lob is too low, you will need to open the face of your tennis racquet more than usual. If the flight of the lob is too short, you need to hit the ball harder. If the flight of your lob is consistently low or short, your doubles partner will need protective gear or you need to learn to play singles!

The lob can also be used as an offensive weapon, such as a volley lob or a top spin lob. The volley lob can be very effective, because it usually doesn’t allow your opponent(s) enough time to react to the lob and counter back with a put away overhead. The top spin lob

can even be more effective, because it can be easier to disguise and the ball can be hit higher and harder. With the top spin, it will stay in play because the top spin forces the ball to drop faster. In addition, the top spin will cause the ball to bounce away from the opponent when being pursued by the opponent. When hitting the top spin lob, it’s very important to get underneath the ball and hit the ball in an upward direction with follow through, so that the projection of the ball is elevated over your opponent(s) with top spin. Because of the angle face of the racquet and swinging motion, it’s generally easier to hit a top spin lob with a “Western” grip versus a “Continental/Eastern” grip.

A difficult lob to execute is the half-volley lob, especially when the ball is hit hard at you. The half-volley lob is easier to disguise, because it so difficult that the opponent won’t expect you to lob!

The lob is just one of an arsenal of weapons that hopefully, you are developing. Another point to keep in mind is making use of the time before the match.

When warming up prior to a match, remember that it’s also an opportunity to evaluate your opponent’s strengths and weaknesses, plus judge the playing conditions. For example, examine your opponent’s overhead and footwork and keep an eye out for the position of the sun and direction of the wind.

—Gilbert