# Section 1.06 HOW TO BUILD A PRACTICE BOARD

## Advantages of a Practice Board

The marked improvement in forehand and backhand drives resulting from frequent use of the Practice Board is becoming more generally appreciated by progressive schools and clubs which have installed them. The very obvious advantages of a practice board are that a player can get excellent practice by himself in overcoming the particular weakness which requires attention, and secondly, that the instructor can stand beside the player and watch every detail of the stroke much more closely than if he were stationed 40 or 50 feet on the opposite side of the net. At close range, it is easy to teach the basic essentials- balance, shifting of weight from rear to front foot, swing, timing, position of racquet at time of impact, follow through. Once these fundamentals have been learned, the player has a sound foundation upon which a game can be built in practice on the court and in competition. Even the expert tournament player finds the practice board invaluable in providing ways to overcome his weaknesses.

At the start, the young player should be stationed a short distance from the practice board, five or six feet, and shown by the instructor HOW TO HIT THE BALL RATHER SOFTLY AGAINST THE BOARD AND RETURN IT WITH AN EVEN SWING. The player should be particularly warned against crowding the ball, a habit which nearly all beginners and young players adopt and which must be corrected by careful and patient instruction. He should be taught not to hit the ball too close to the body, which cramps his stroke. Gradually, the distance from the board should be increased, the player instructed to hit the ball harder, and with a low trajectory. At this point, the follow-through, body balance, and the shifting of the weight from the rear foot to the front foot on forehand and backhand drives should be taught, together with frequent advice to focus the eyes on the ball.

The practice Board can be as wide as a singles court, if space permits, with a painted line across the board to represent the height of the net. Three or more discs should be painted 6" to 12" above the net line, at positions where the ball should cross the net on a crosscourt drive and a drive straight down the line. These discs or targets are so placed to teach accuracy in driving since the players try to hit the targets in returning the ball off the board. They are particularly helpful to the more advanced player.

## General Suggestions in Building a Practice Board

The advice of a carpenter or contractor should be obtained before constructing a practice board as local conditions may require some variation of the following:

1. LENGTH - 15 to 60 feet divided into 15 foot units, if desired, so that more than one player can practice at a time.


2. HEIGHT - 12 feet
3. SUPPORTING POSTS - 15 ft. Vertical 4" X 4" posts spaced 5 ft. apart and sunk in 3 ft. of concrete or creosoted and sunk 3 ft. in ground and braced by 2" X 3" supports.
4. HORIZONTAL FURRING - 2" X 2" furring spaced 1 ft. apart from bottom to top of uprights.
5. REBOUND - 2" tongue and groove finished floor boards, 5" or 6" wide,nailed vertically
6. SURFACE - to the cross furring by 4" galvanized nails, countersunk, at least 3 nails to a board.
7. MARKINGS - Practice board to be painted dark green with a white line indicating proper position of top of net 3 ft. above court surface at the centre and raising toward the edges. Also, if desired, a horizontal line 11 ft. high marking a “lob” line.
8. Three or more discs may also be painted 6" to 12" above the net line, at positions where the ball should cross the net on a crosscourt drive and a drive straight down the lines. These discs or targets are so placed to teach accuracy in driving, since the players try to hit the targets in returning the ball off the board. They are particularly helpful to the more advanced player. If, instead of discs, holes are cut in the same positions, interest in practice may be increased.
9. TOP NET - Support pieces nailed to top of uprights, projecting at an upward angle of about 30 degrees and extending outward over the practice board about 5 ft. to be topped with 1" chicken wire or old tennis netting.

## EXAMPLE

The framework is made of four 12 ft. 4" X 4" hemlock posts set 6 ft. apart and 3 ft. into the ground. The actual work on the board was done with the whole thing laid flat on the ground. The four posts were laid on the ground first and on top of these were laid five 2 X 4s flat side down and securely spiked on the posts, which makes them parallel to the ground. Every joint was painted before putting the pieces together so as to make the whole structure as weather and waterproof as possible. On top of these was laid (as it lay on the ground) a floor of ordinary 3" matched fur flooring. Each edge of each board was painted also before it was laid so that when the board was finished, there was no joint that was exposed to the elements.

This makes a board which is 18 ft. long and 9 ft. high with the boards laid vertical. As the boards run this way, there is no piecing of the floor as the longest piece is only 9 ft. long.

The boards were raised into place and secured by using four 2" X 4 planks as braces. These were spiked to the top of the main posts at the top of the braces and then to four 10" X 10" posts set 2 ft. into the ground. As this particular board was set against a low bank, there was no need for full-length braces, but where the ground is level, longer braces would be needed.

On top of this board is a head piece which makes a roof over the width of the board and forms a drip edge on the back side to prevent the water from running down the full height of the boards.

Above all, this is a screen frame of 2 X 4's which slants out over the front of the board at an


angle of about 30 degrees from the perpendicular. The long pieces are 6 ft. long and are extended down the back side to join the main 2 X 4 braces to which they are spiked. The top end is joined by another 2 X 4 spiked to the ends of the long pieces. On this frame was originally fastened common poultry wire, but this did not prove satisfactory as the force of the balls which hit it soon broke through it in a few days. In as much as the width of the board is half the width of the tennis court, we hung in place of the poultry wire an old net cut in half. One part of this was hung along the extreme outer edge of the frame and the other piece about half way down the slant of the frame. As these are not fastened only at top and on the extreme ends, there is enough "give" to it so that there is not the wear and tear on them that there was on the netting which was stretched taut.

On either side there are wings which extend out for 12 ft. and at about 45 degrees. These are of the same construction as the frame on top of the board. Experience has indicated that they should be made solid like the rest of the board itself as netting etc. soon gives way under the constant pounding of the balls.

The whole board is painted a grass green. On this is painted a white line indicating the proper position that the net takes on the court, that is 3 ft. high at the centre and raising towards the edges. The playing surface should, of course, be the same as that on the courts themselves.