

# Drills for Teaching the Serve and Return











Presented by Jorge Capestany, USPTA & PTR Master Professional.








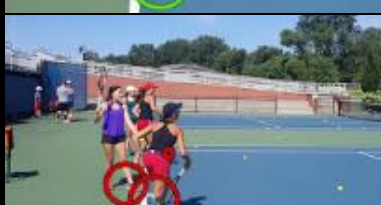
## Quick Facts...

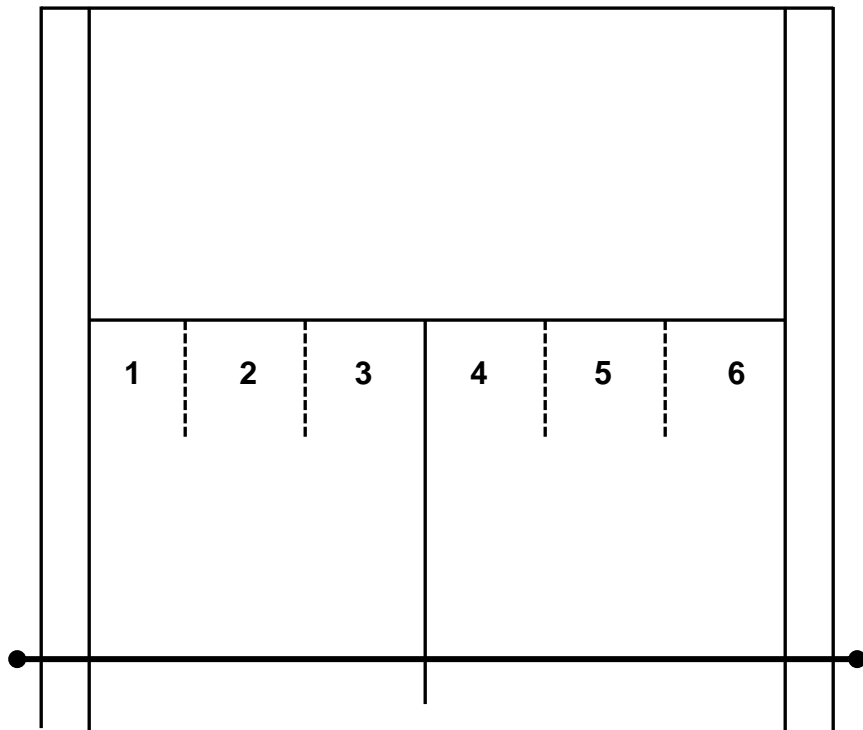
- Average rally length of Pro players = 4.1 shots (In HS it's about the same)
- This means that the Serve and Return = about 50% of ALL shots in a match
- But practice time does not reflect this

	Drills	Area
1	The 9 checkpoints	Technical
2	Serve Number (ground targets)	Strategy
3	Exit Targets	Strategy
4	Strike Zone Serving	Strategy
5	Dice Serving	Drill
6	Dice Returning	Drill
7	Serve squeeze	Drill
8	Serve plus One	Strategy
9	Line of Shame	Drill

# 1) The NINE Serve checkpoints

Novak	You	Checkpoints	Grade
		<b>1) Ritual:</b> Player should have their weight on the front foot and racket should be inside the baseline. Feet should be at least shoulder width apart.	Pass
		<b>2) Weight Transfer:</b> Players should transfer their weight to the back foot, but the racket should remain <u>in front</u> of the baseline.	Pass
		<b>3) Ball Release:</b> Players arms should be staggered with palm down. Toss release should be about eye high. The weight begins to transfer back to the front foot.	Palm on right hand should be facing down
		<b>4) Loading:</b> Player's left hip and/or knees should extend inside the baseline. Arms staggered. <b>Racket head up towards sky.</b> (no waiters tray)	Pass
		<b>5) Launch:</b> Players launch up and forward into the court. Pull with lead elbow. Strings should be visible from the side. Hips are still facing to the side.	Pass

Novak	You	Checkpoints	Grade
		<p><b>6) Point of Contact:</b> The left arm collapses <u>in</u> towards the chest/ribs. The hitting arm should be fully extended with no “pike” in the hips. Eyes should be up at the ball.</p>	<p>Check your body starting to bend too much</p>
		<p><b>7) Arm Rotation:</b> The hitting side of the strings should be facing the camera now. Inverted elbow and thumb is pointed down revealing the fingers.</p>	<p>Pass</p>
		<p><b>8) Landing:</b> the player should land <u>inside</u> the baseline and on his left foot. The follow through begins to occur on the left side of the player’s body.</p>	<p>Pass</p>
		<p><b>9) Counter Balance:</b> Player should be bent at the waist with his non-landing leg extended backwards. Novak has only a minor counter-balance.</p>	<p>Right leg and hip too far forward</p>



## 2) Serve Number: (ground targets)

This is another game that emphasizes accuracy as the most important aspect of an effective serve.

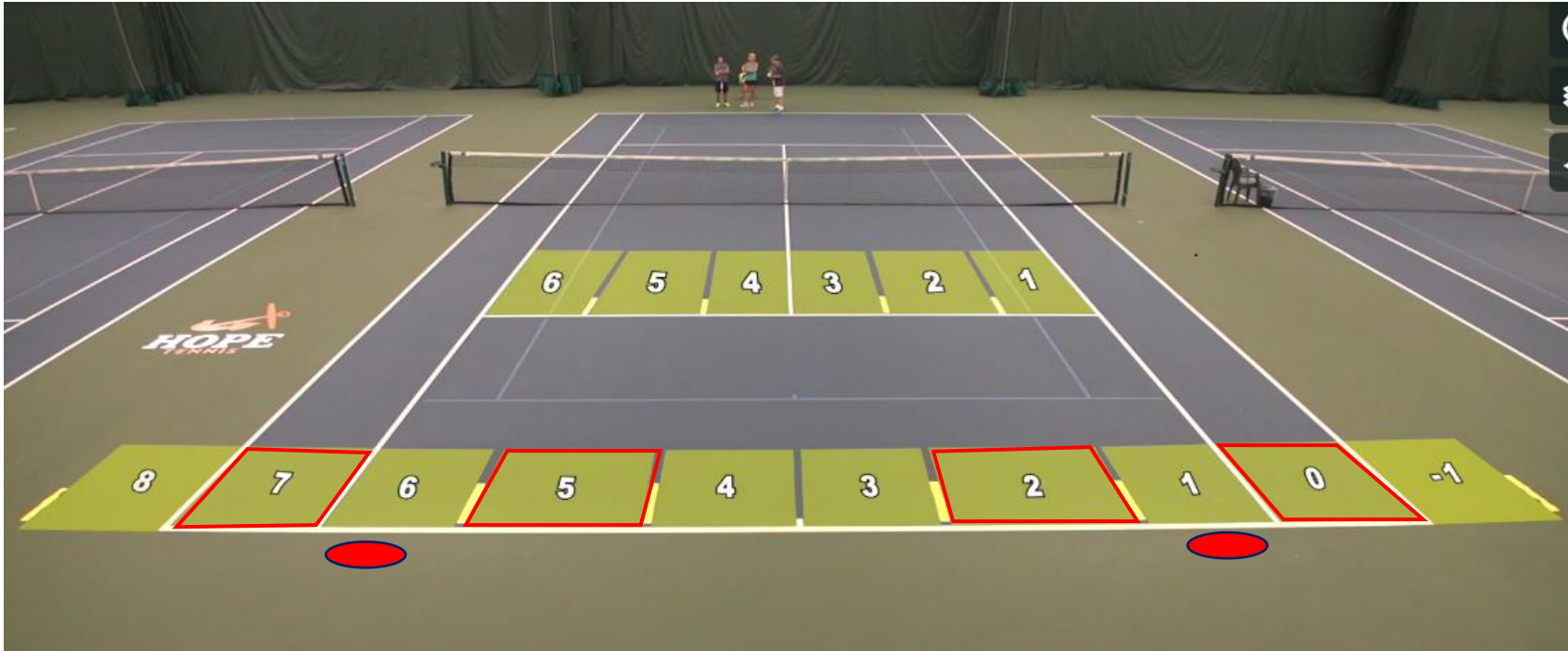
The goal of the **Serve Number** game is to get players to have a tangible number that they can know as their own. This will make it easy to compare where players stand in relation to other players or against themselves as they improve over time.

To determine a player's serve number, the player must start in area 1 and keep hitting serves until they hit that area, after they hit area 1 they may proceed through the rest of the areas. **Your serve number is the total number of serves it takes you to hit all six target areas.**

The goal is to use the **fewest balls** to accomplish hitting all 6 areas. The perfect game would be 6.

Coach should put a **power rule** on each serve, for example the 2<sup>nd</sup> bounce, must go past the baseline in order to count. This will remove any temptation to hit the patty cake serve.

V: For strong players make the power rule be that the 2<sup>nd</sup> bounce must be up against the back fence or curtain in order to count.

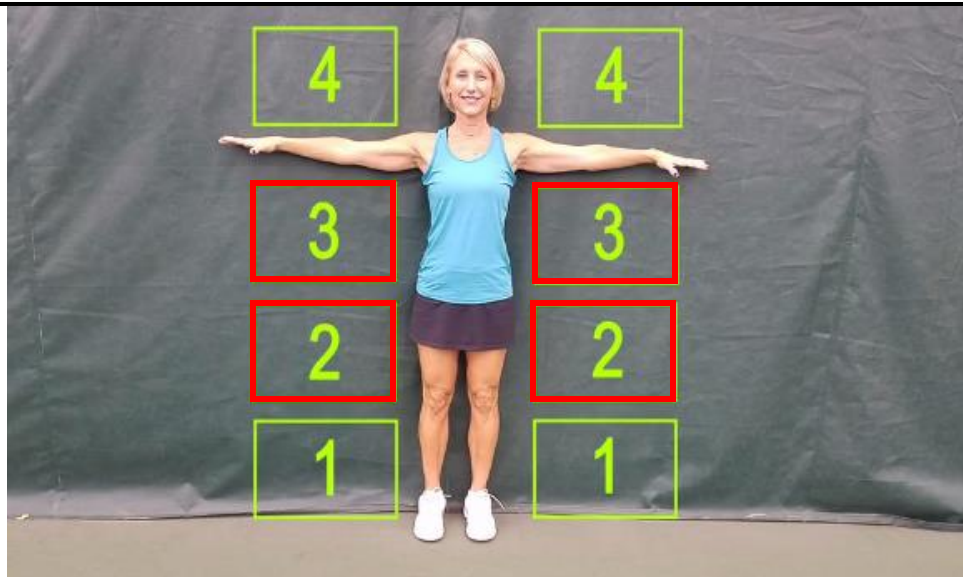


**3) The 10 Exit Targets** A more advanced targeting system is the **Exit Targets**. Exit targets get their name because it is where the ball exits the court on the far baseline. This is important because this is where the returner will be hitting the ball.

While ground targets are helpful in determining your basic accuracy skills, exit targets have more relevance to what happens in a match. The server needs to be able to dictate what shot the returner will hit not the other way around.

**HOW TO PRACTICE:** start by serving and calling (out loud) the ground targets and then the exit targets. This helps you understand that a ground target may not end up being a smart exit target after the ball spins and moves.

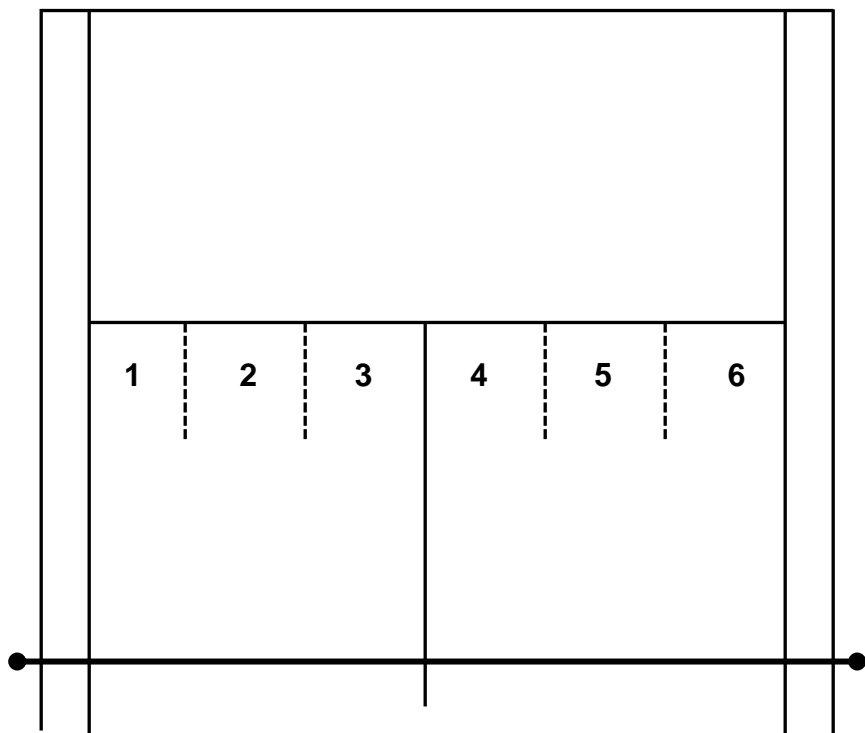
Do this for at least 10-15 minutes and it will help you focus on the returner and using smarter targets rather than just hitting hard into what may be the returner's favorite shot.



**4) Strike Zone Serving:** Too many servers pay very little attention to where their ball ends up as far as their opponent's **strike zone**. But the best servers not only move the ball left to right, fast and slow, but they can also deliver the ball high and low. We already know that strikes zones 2-3 are the danger zones and what most returners would prefer, so being able to avoid those strikes zones is very important.

**HOW TO PRACTICE:** spend 3-5 minutes simply serving to your opponent and calling out the returner's strike zone right when they hit. Most players will be surprised to learn that 90% of their serves are going **exactly** into the opponent's preferred strike zones.

Then spend the next 10 minutes calling out various strike zones of then returner and trying to serve so they end up hitting in that strike zone. Be careful to avoid strike zones 2-3 as much as possible.



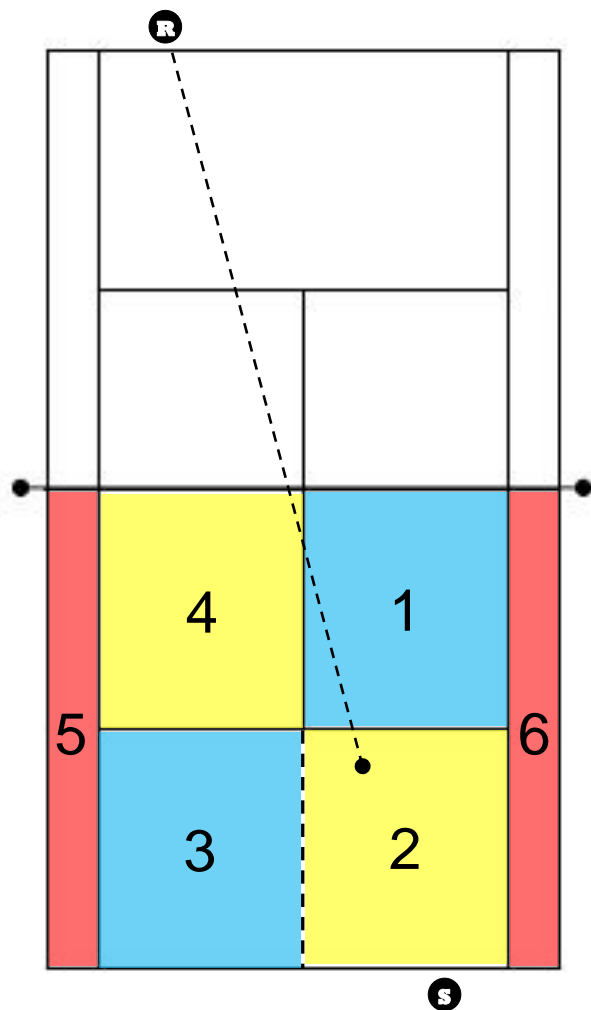
### 5) Dice Serving:

Fun serving game for 1 or 2 players.

**One player version:** The player plays an entire set. They start by rolling the dice and whatever ground target come ups (1-6), that is where they must hot their next serve, if the succeed, they win the point, if they miss, they lose the point. Score is kept with regular scoring for the entire set. The coach can decide whether the player will get 1 or 2 serves in this game.

**Multiple player version:** Players that are playing against each other still use the dice, but then they play a game of HORSE here they must match the other server's results.

We love this game because it makes serving fun when it's typically boring.



## 6) Dice Returning:

Great way to practice returns to different areas of the court.

The court is divided into six target areas as shown on the diagram.

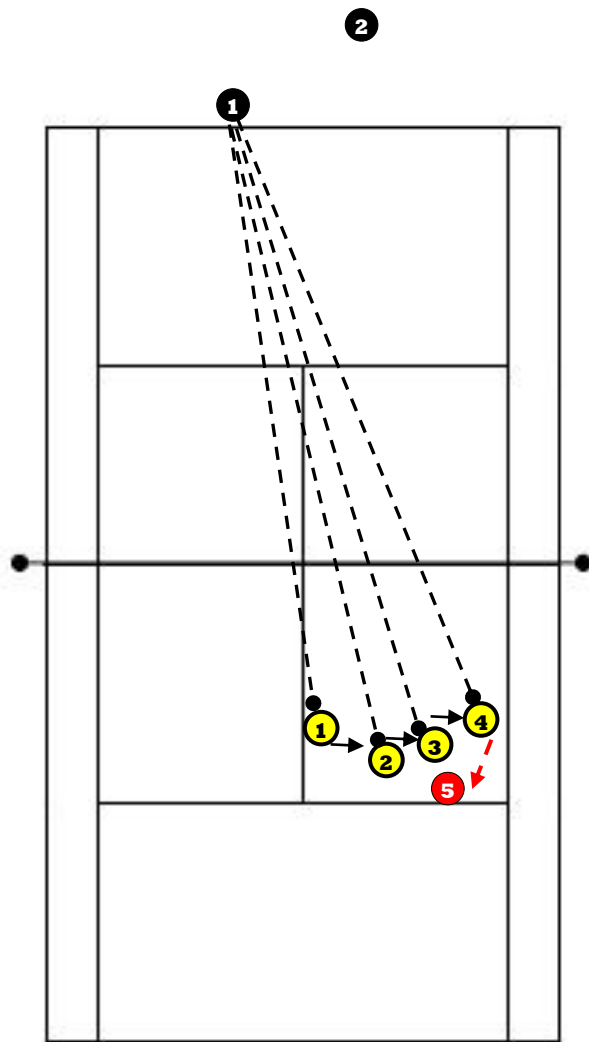
The player returning serves, rolls a dice and whatever number comes up, they must hit their return into that same corresponding area on the other side of the court.

Scoring is simple... if the returner puts his return in the correct area, he wants the point, if not, the server was the point.

The points themselves are not played out.

This can be done for an entire set and helps our players a lot.





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### 7) Serve Squeeze:

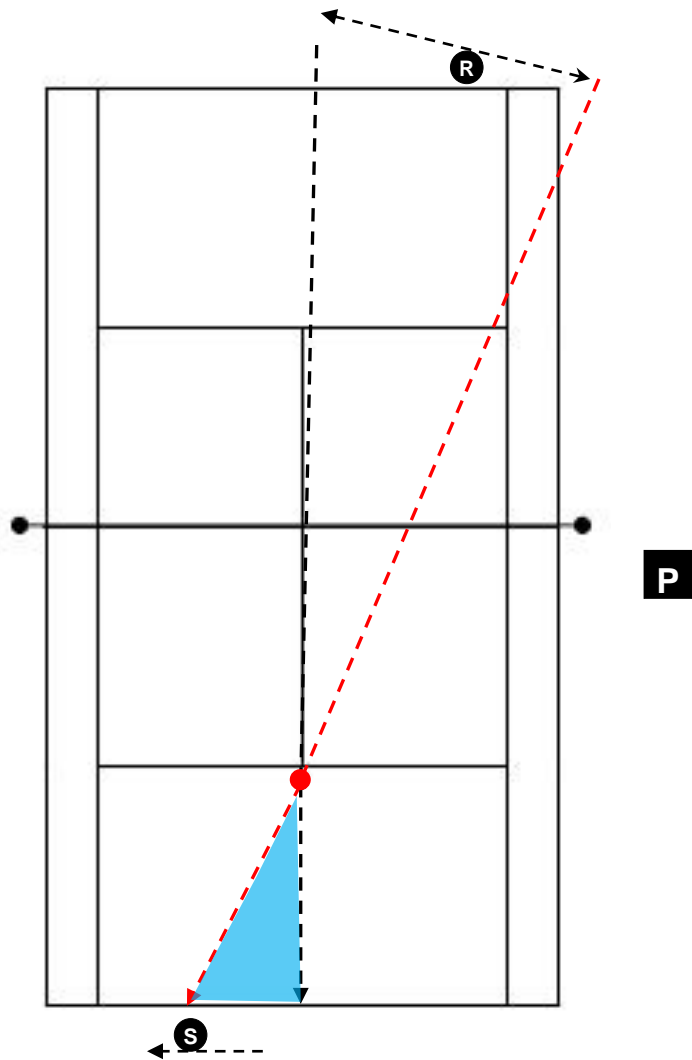
Fun game for developing accuracy on Serves.

The player serves in to a box and he tries to hit it close to the either sideline. If the ball goes in, that is the **mark** and is also the first point he scores.

The player continues to serve balls with the goal of moving the **landing point** of his serves further to the open side of the box. The player should try to move the ball only slight towards the open side, so he has a lot of room remaining and can continue the process.

The score the player gets is based on how many serves **in a row** he can continue to **squeeze** into the open court area. If the ball is missed, or lands on the wrong side of the last shot (like **#5** in diagram) then the player's turn is over.

In the example in this diagram the player gets 4 points because the 5<sup>th</sup> shot was not to the right side of shot 4.



### 8) Serve plus One:

Players learn basic serve strategy and point planning.

The best players on the pro tour make sure to hit their best shot (usually a FH) as much as possible on the **next** shot after they serve. (called the serve +1)

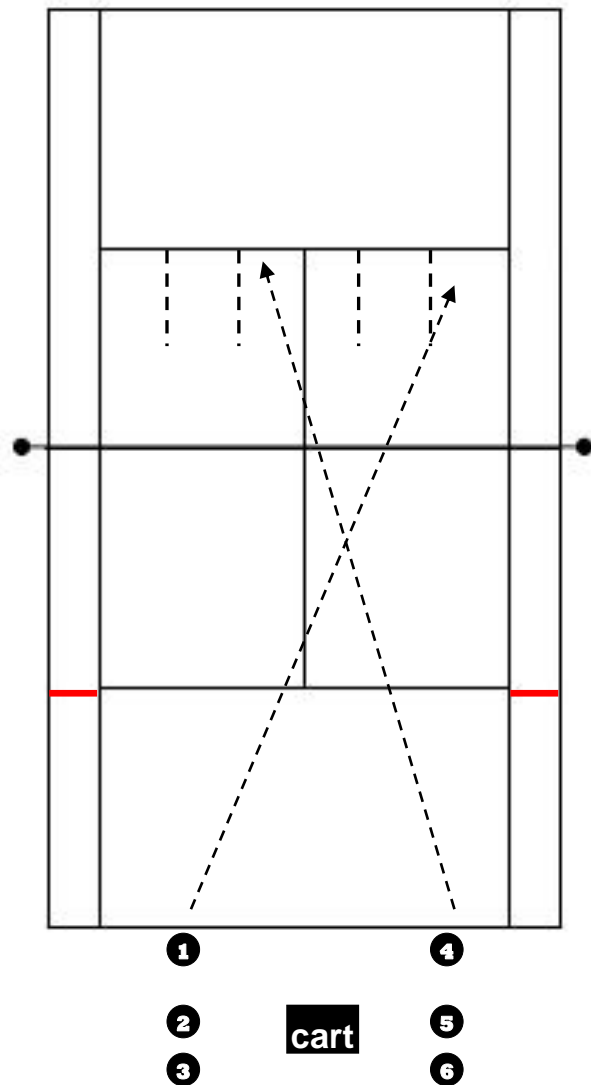
Rafa & Roger average nearly 80% FHs hit on the next shot after their serve. **This is not by accident.**

In this game, players play out singles points, but the server cannot win the point unless he hits his strongest shot on the **next** shot after his serve.

When played properly, the server will start to calculate **where** they should serve so they increase their chances of hitting their strongest shot on the next shot.

This game teaches players to plan out at least 2 shots deep into the point.

**Important:** the coach may have to help the player determine which their best shot (FH or BH) is.



### 9) Line of Shame:

Great fun game that also creates serving pressure.

Level: 3.0 and higher

Players 1-2-3 are all on a team competing against 4-5-6.  
Ball cart is in the middle of the teams.

Players score points for their teams by making serves that land in the box and at least go past the baseline in the second bounce. (use a smaller target area for advanced players)

If players make their first serve (best scenario) they rotate to the end of the line.

If they **miss** their first serve, they must get another ball and try again (thus wasting valuable time of their team)

If they miss their second attempt, they must get another ball and serve from the service line (line of shame). If they make that serve they still get a point for their team, but they wasted a lot of time in doing so. If they miss the serve from the line of shame, they rotate out with no points.

The best-case scenario is to make your **first** serve because you have scored a point for your team and did not waste much time in doing so.

**Variation:** use the serve target areas to make it more difficult.

Check Out BOTH of Jorge's website at...

[CapestanyTennis.com](http://CapestanyTennis.com)

Hope College Professional Tennis Management (PTM)...

[hope.edu/ptm](http://hope.edu/ptm)

**Q & A**