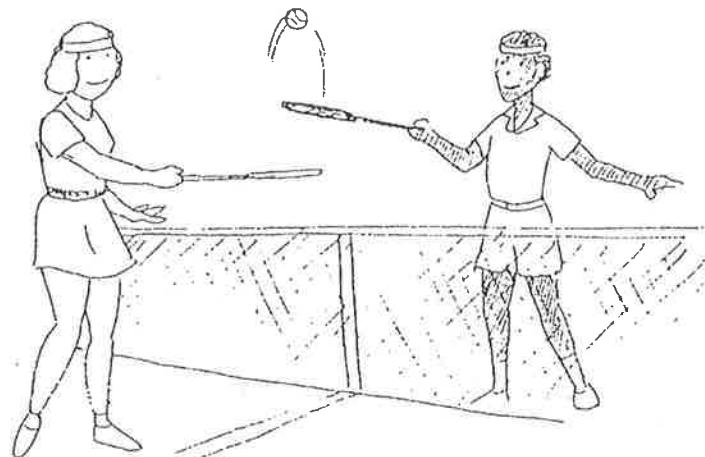


# The Rally Method

by Van Smith

Illustrations  
by Diann Landau



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New Edition 2001  
Illustrated by Diann Landau

## Introduction

The Rally Method is a tennis exercise program designed for people of all ages, for children as well as adults of all fitness levels. Its purpose is to enable players to make progress without the expense of one-on-one instruction from a tennis professional. The exercises are graded, so that everyone can do them. When the whole set of exercises has been done, players will have an enjoyable exercise format, and will also have acquired the building blocks of an excellent tennis game.

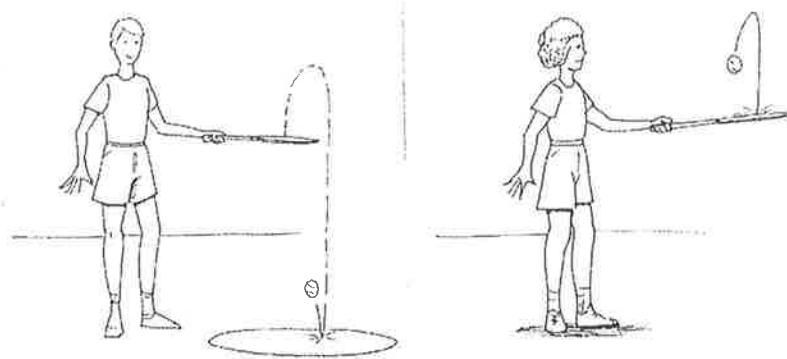
The key to the exercises is that you establish complete, relaxed control over the ball, much like becoming comfortable riding a bicycle. In ordinary tennis, you get control at the end of your tennis journey. These exercises are designed to enable you and your practice partner to have control from the very beginning. Do the Junior Jetter and Jetter exercises until you are completely comfortable with them, and can keep the ball going uninterruptedly. The ball is first hit straight up, not too high, and when you and your partner can rally a vertical ball through the required repetitions, there is the basis of your tennis game. The Jetter exercise, each player hitting the ball straight up and bouncing it on the spot, is the true beginning. Become very good at this.

The second principle of the exercises is to stretch them gradually. After the ball is going up and down consistently and comfortably, gradually increase the distance from your partner, and of your shot. But do not stretch it too quickly. The ball is still being hit mainly up, and just a little bit out. This provides both partners with balls that are easy to keep hitting. When you start hitting the ball to your partner, the shots are too difficult to handle and the practice ends. Keep hitting it mainly up, so that it arrives without a lot of pace, then your partner can hit his shot mainly up, and the ball remains easy to control and practice continues. If you lose the ball, and cannot keep it going, get closer together, hit the ball more vertically, until you have reestablished a comfortable rally. By using the principle of gradually stretching the exercises, with 2 bounces, 1 bounce, and no bounces, you will build your skill and retain control over the ball in more and more difficult situations. Your shots will become longer and harder, and you will still be in control of them. Use the Rally Method booklet as a workbook. When you have completed it, you are ready for advanced strokes and competition, and you can use the exercises for conditioning and review.

The booklet was originally written for children, and I have left the original format intact. However, I have left comments on the facing pages to help make the exercises useful for all players. Look at the exercises, the comments, and proceed, using the suggestions to make the exercise work. From the first vertical rally you know what it is like to get control over the ball and have a comfortable, sustained rally. Get this control and comfort with each exercise. Then you will have the makings of a real tennis game.

This is the most important exercise. It is the simplest, as well as the most deceptive. What tennis has to offer is a bouncing ball. And here it is. This is your chance to become completely comfortable with the ball. Also, if you try to do the counts, you will see how difficult it is to remember something as simple as the number of times you have hit the ball. If you cannot keep simple counts, how can you remember your strategy, much less analyze a competitive situation and evolve a strategy?

## Junior Jetters



1-bounce  
1-person

no-bounce  
1-person

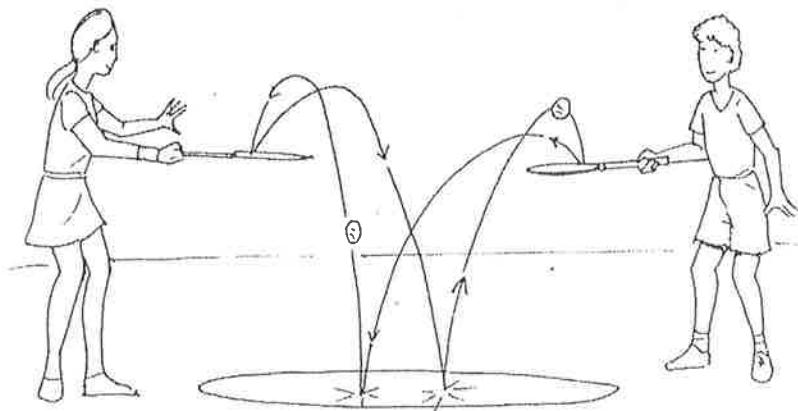
- The Junior Jetter plays with 1 spot
- The Junior Jetter plays 1-bounce (the ball bounces from the racket to the ground and back, and must land in the spot)
- The Junior Jetter plays no-bounce (the ball bounces on the racket and does not touch the ground. The Jetter must stay on the spot)

1-bounce		No-bounce			
Forehand (Fh)	Backhand (Bh)	Fh-Bh	Forehand	Backhand	Fh-Bh
10	5	10	5	3	1
20	10	20	10	5	3
30	15	30	15	7	5
50	20	40	20	10	7
70	35	50	25	12	10
100	50	60	30	15	12

This is the beginning of collaboration. You and someone else are alternating shots. He or she hits it straight up, it bounces, then you hit it straight up, not high, certainly not over your head, it bounces. Think of it as learning to juggle.

Once you are completely comfortable with the rally, hitting the ball alternately with each side of the racket, you have the basic thing. All the other exercises are developments of this rally, so do not rush. Develop it and solidify it. You have to be able to recognize when you are in control, comfortable, and when not, when the ball is out of control, when you are trying to do something you cannot really do. When you can make this recognition, then you have something to get back to. This is the irreplaceable home base. Make sure you have it before you start trying to expand it into the other exercises.

## Jetters



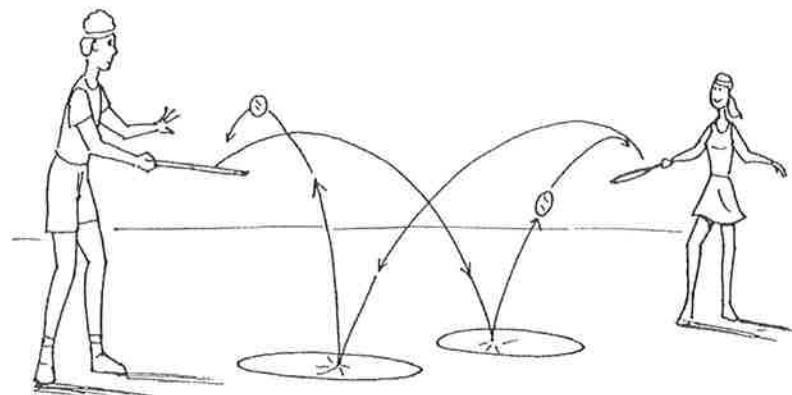
2 Jetters play together, on 1 spot.  
Jetters play 2-bounce

Forehand-Forehand	Backhand-Backhand	Forehand-Backhand
10	5	3
20	10	5
30	15	7
40	20	10
50	25	12
60	30	15
70	35	17
80	40	20

Now you are a go-getter!

Now begins the process of stretching the original rally. Here is where all the errors are made, such as getting too far apart, losing the vertical elements of the shots, hitting the ball to the partner too low and flat and fast, so that they cannot handle the ball and the rally ends. Here also is where you can display your mastery of the method, by getting back close together, lifting the shots more up and less out, and especially regaining the comfort and control of a solid rally. The ability to diagnose rally breakdowns, to recognize when it is no longer happening and to get it going again, are vital, and you can demonstrate that here.

## Go-Getters



2 spot, 2 bounce

Go-getters play 2- bounce, on 2-spots. (The shot from player 1 must land in spot 2, from player 2 in spot 1.)

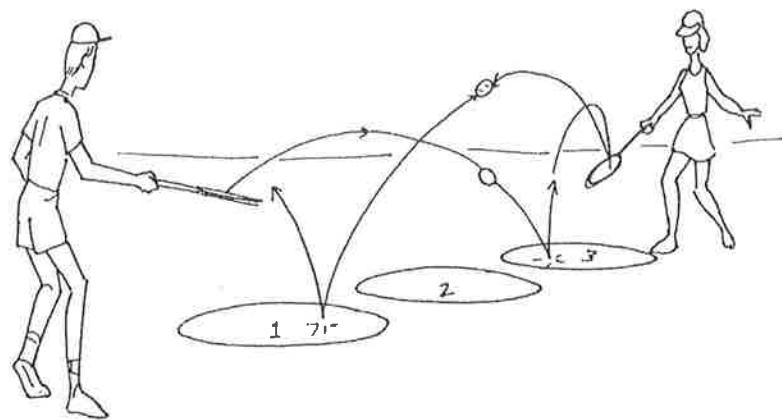
Forehand-forehand	Backhand-backhand	Forehand-backhand
10	5	3
20	10	5
30	15	7
40	20	10
50	25	12
60	30	15
70	40	17
80	50	20

Now you are a Nearly Ready For The Net-ter!

Now there is some distance, and your shots are beginning to resemble conventional tennis shots. While the ball is still hit mainly up, it is also going out more, over to the partner, and their shot is also not bouncing straight up. It is arriving, but you can still handle it. You have gone slowly, stayed comfortable, and are completely within yourselves in a sustained rally.

This is, I am convinced, the experience of tennis most people want. To keep the ball going, like being able to walk, is very satisfying. If tennis is your thing, this is the basic commodity. You can do several things with it, competition, social tennis, exercise. This should be possible in at most a few hours, as little as half an hour. But do not rush it. That natural, comfortable tennis game, which is effectively unobtainable, and which everyone wants, comes from doing lots of this.

### N.F.R.T.N. (Nearly Ready For The Net)



NFRTN'ers play on 3 spots.

They play 2-bounce. (The shot from player 1 must land in spot 3, and the shot from player 2 must land in spot 1)

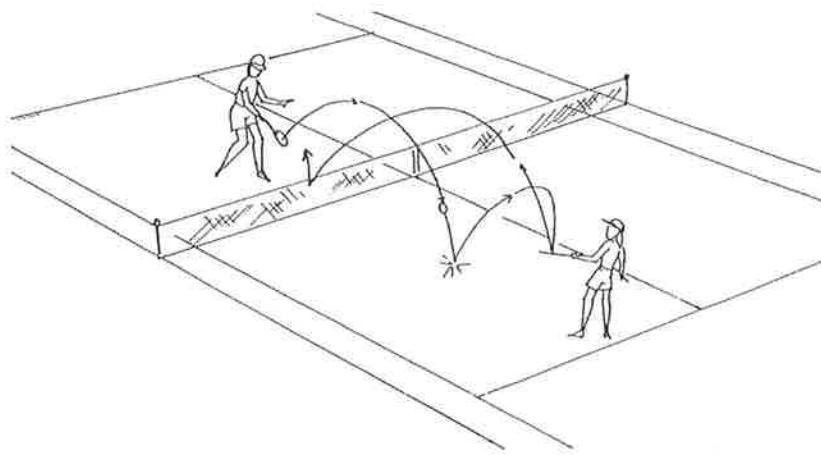
Forehand-forehand	Backhand-backhand	Forehand-backhand
2	1	1
4	2	2
6	3	
8	4	3
10	5	
12	6	4
15	7	
20	8	5

Now you are a Netter!

Now it is beginning to look like "real tennis." You have withstood the temptation to start out by futilely bashing it around, and here is your reward, the beginnings of a tennis game. It is like being told by Father that you are getting a Ferrari for your birthday. What is not to want?

The vertical element of your shots becomes even more paramount when you start rallying over the net, which is your real opponent at tennis. The theme here is the elimination of generic mistakes, the first one of which is hitting the ball into the net. Get it over! Hit it up. The earlier exercises should have demonstrated one fact above all others, which is that you can hit the ball up. You may not keep it within the lines, but you can hit it up. And this is crucial to keeping the rally going.

## Netter



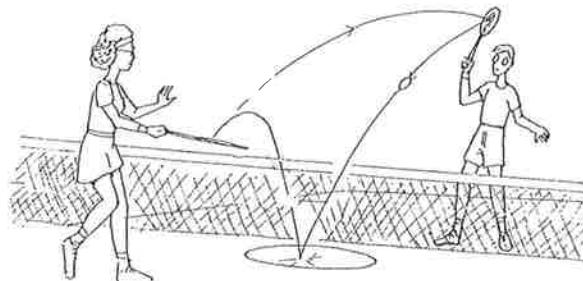
Netters play 2-bounce over the net!  
Netters also work on their finishes, within the rally.

Forehand-forehand	Backhand-backhand	Forehand-backhand
2	1	1
4	2	2
6	3	3
8	5	4
10	7	5
15	10	6
20	12	

Study the illustrations carefully and notice here that she is hitting the ball up to the person who volleys the ball, who is a.) closer to the net, and b.) even has a little upward motion in his volley, which bounces to her. Forehand to forehand, while finding how it works.

No bounce is achieved the same way as the 2-bounce back-and-forth rally. Start by standing close together, and then back up, still hitting the ball, without bouncing, mainly up. As you get further apart, there is more out in your shot, but the key to keeping these rallies, which are great fun, is not drilling a hard, fast ball at the partner that he or she cannot handle. If you do lots of this exercise, and stretch it gradually, the day will come when you can stand into intense fire-fights and keep the ball coming back. You built it here...

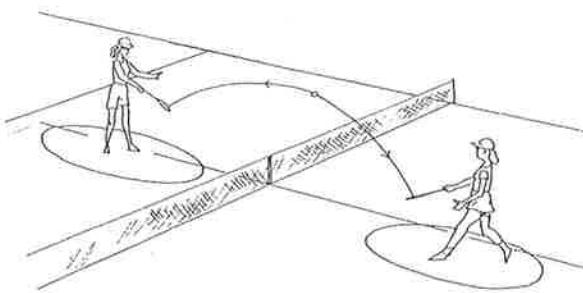
Netters also play 1-bounce, 1-spot



The ball goes from player 1 to player 2 without a bounce, and player 2 bounces it back to player 1.

Forehand-forehand					
1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12

Netters also play no-bounces, 2-spots.

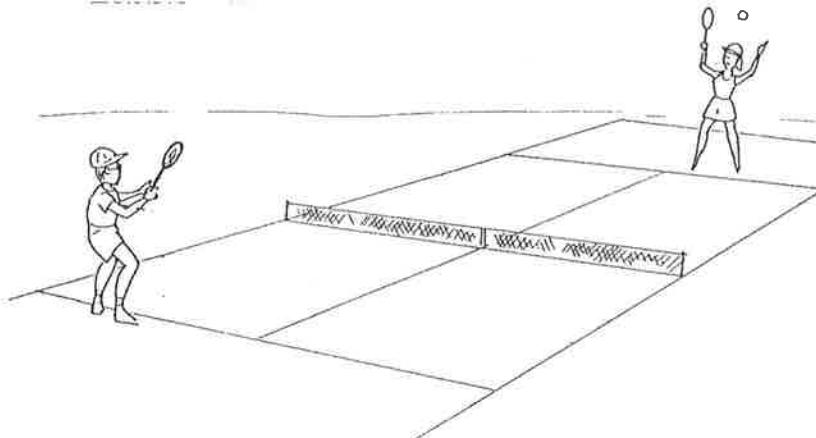


1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18

Now you are a Junior Setter!

The rally method works for the serve as for all the other shots. Focus on consistency and comfort. Stand at the service line, not back at the baseline, and use a comfortable, relaxed motion to serve a returnable ball to your partner. They improve their returns while you improve your serve. The games give a good chance to get the feel of competing, which pays off to keeping it going.

### Junior Setters-Serve



Junior Setters play games on the service court. Player one serves 5 times. Then player 2 serves 5 times. If the ball goes into the net or outside the lines, the other player (who did not hit that ball) gets the point. First player to 11 wins!

Here begins a kind of practice known to every expert of any sport. How many can you get in in a row? Here you are just hitting serves from the service line, but even so, getting 10 in in a row, landing the ball in the service court on the other side of the net, is more difficult than you might think. You will stretch this exercise like the others, moving further back and finally arriving at the baseline. From there, 10 serves in the service box is the challenge you have been looking for.

Now more skill is also demanded to these one-bounces over the net. You are also hitting backhand to backhand, which is more difficult. But, you know how to make these experiences work. The same with no-bounce.

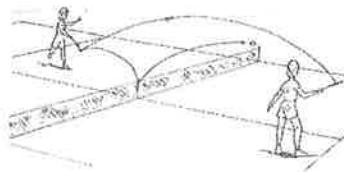
### Junior Setters-Serve



Player one serves to Player two, who catches the ball and serves it back to Player one. The ball must not go into the net or outside the lines.

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10

### Junior Setters 1-bounce



#### Forehand-Forehand

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10

#### Backhand-Backhand

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10

Junior Setters play no-bounce over the net.



#### Backhand-Backhand

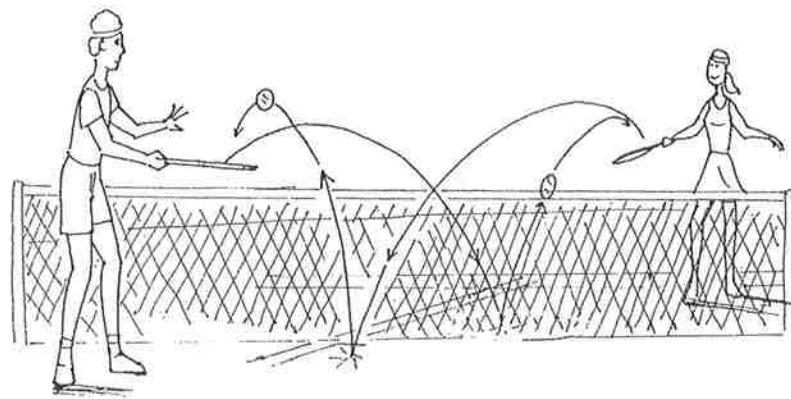
1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10

#### Backhand-Backhand

1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10

Here are some long rallies, 200 shots in one rally. If tennis is you thing, this is what you have been looking for. Hitting a ball with a racket skillfully can be very satisfying, as this exercise, and these long rallies, demonstrate. You may find that the counting can go, that your rallies are far exceeding these counts. But the effort to remember your counts can be very helpful, as later when, for example, you start noticing in a match that you are exiting points too quickly. That is a version of the monitoring that is there in the counting.

And Junior Setters play 2-bounce over the net in the service



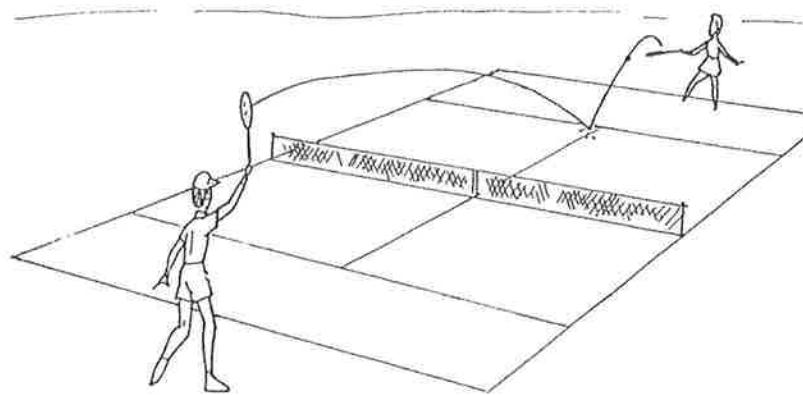
The rally must be continuous.

Forehand-Forehand	Backhand-Backhand	Forehand-Backhand
20	5	3
40	10	5
60	15	7
80	20	10
100	30	15
150	50	20
200	80	30

Now you are a Setter!

Tennis is traditionally a competitive activity, and you are ready now for a great pleasure, playing successfully in competition. Your Ferrari has arrived. Matches are at least as demanding of thought as they are of stamina and physical skill, and by closely monitoring your rallies in learning how to keep them on track, you have anticipated the skill of intelligent match play, that rare commodity. When you win, it is because you can stay in points longer, whereas losing is another way of saying that you are the first one out of the rally.

### Setters-Serve



First person to win 6 games wins the set. Setters also play No-bounce, 1-bounce, and 2-bounce on the larger court.

	Forhand-forehand	Backhand-backhand	Forhand-backhand
No-bounce	5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 50, 75, 100	1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 15, 20, 25	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
1-bounce	5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45, 50	1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
2-bounce	10, 25, 50, 75, 100, 150, 200	5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 50	1, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15

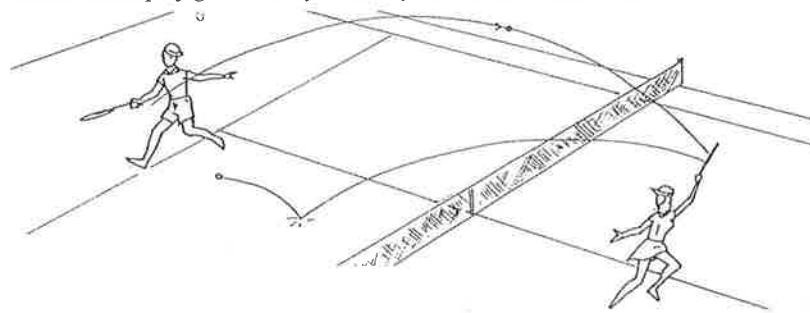
These advanced exercises, overhead-lob, up-and-back, are a world in themselves and in their way as difficult as the most strenuous match. The only hope to succeed with them is by establishing a simplified version, as with netter one-bounce. Look carefully and you can see the lob-overhead exercise in embryonic form.

More advanced exercises, like tougher matches, are very demanding. But notice that many times, as with the overhead drill, you are basically in one spot and hitting shots every 3-5 seconds, and therefore have no reason to get so tired. It is the excitement, the newness of the context, which contributes to exhaustion. In keeping with the monitoring theme, ask, "Should I be getting this tired? Aren't I over spending?"

At this point, you can create your own exercises, one partner at net, the other on the right or left side of the baseline, for practice of put-away volleys (which are not because the partner is now playing from the corner) and put-away passing shots (which are not, because the partner is shading from the middle to the down, the line, which you are practicing). You are rallying winners. It is free money! Create, in short, the drills to address the specific areas of your game you want to work on. Practice actively and creatively, instead of just shoving it around, and let them say, "He's got game," and "she's got game."

## Better Setters

Better setters play games. They also rally their over heads and lobs.



Overhead / lob

10	20	30	40	50	60	70
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They also play lob-overhead-pass-volley. Player A hits Player B a lob, B hits an overhead, A hits a ground stroke off the overhead, B volleys the pass. 4 shots equals one count.

Lob-overhead-pass-volley

1	3	5	8	10	12	15
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They also play up-and-back. A hits B 2 volleys and a lob. B retreats and A advances to the net, where he gets 2 volleys and a lob from B. This is 1 up-and-back.