

EXC 1004: Extra-Curricular Credit

BADMINTON

One of my Life's true Passions! Blessed was that day when I chose this sport: I've been playing Badminton since the age of eleven and now I form part of the Maltese National Squad. It's a game played on an indoor court by two or four players, with rackets and a shuttlecock.

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Aims

My main objective behind opting for this extra-curricular activity, is to generally improve my skills in this sport, the latter being physical, technical and tactical abilities. Another personal goal is to obtain better results, than I managed to attain last year, in the various competitions that the Maltese Badminton Association organises during the year. Some of the most important events are the following:

The Individual League:

In this league one competes independently and not in a team like in the Mixed League. What's strange and at the same time exciting in this league, is that the sexes compete against each other. This year I'm competing in the second division and I must confess that I'm finding it real tough competing against males. My aim, this year is not to win this division and compete in the first division next year, (because this division consists of the best six male players of Malta), so I would be of a much inferior level. However, my aim is to do well in both singles and doubles, enough not to be relegated next year!

The Mixed League:

This tournament consists of four teams (Birkirkara Medairco A, Birkirkara Medairco B, Paola Wolves and Shuttles B.C.) playing against each other in league format. The two main contenders of this event are Birkirkara Medairco A (of which I form part) and Paola Wolves. In this tournament, I compete for Birkirkara Medairco A together with another two women and four men. I really look forward to this and I hope we can maintain our title as Champions.

The Maltese National Championships:

This event includes all the five games of badminton, i.e. men's singles, ladies' singles, men's doubles, ladies' doubles and mixed doubles, and will be held between the 27th April and the 1st May 2003. My personal goal is to really do well in the mixed doubles and ladies doubles as these are my favourite games. Plus I don't really consider myself as a single player even though I do participate in all three categories.

International tournament:

This year Malta is organizing an international tournament that will be held between the 9th and the 11th of July 2004. The teams who have confirmed in taking part in this event are from Lichtenstein, Iceland and Syria together with the Maltese team of course.

Background

How did Badminton come to exist?

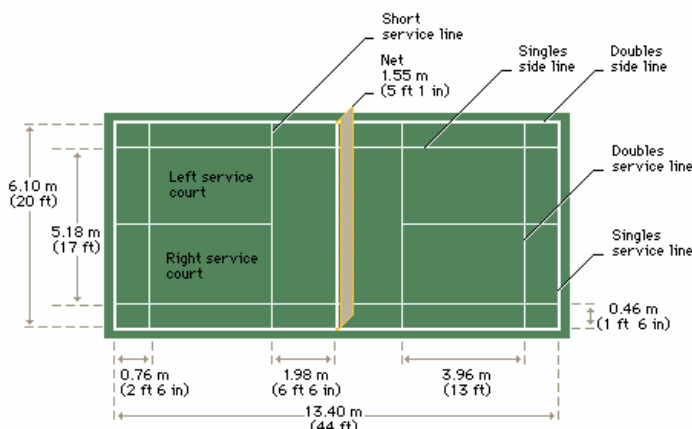
The game is named after Badminton in Gloucestershire, England, which is the family seat of the dukes of Beaufort. It is believed to have been invented there in about 1867. It is possible, however, that British army officers had already devised it as a recreation in India and brought it to the Beaufort family.

Its most obvious forerunner is the old English game of battledore and shuttlecock, and a similar game was also played in China over 2,000 years ago. Badminton became popular very quickly and the Badminton Association was founded in Great Britain in 1893. In fact, in Malta the game was introduced by the British Servicemen way back in the 1950's. By late 1960's the number of British Service personnel on the island diminished and interest in the game of badminton started to decline. Then, in 1970, a group of Maltese revived the game and the Badminton Association of Malta was formed.

The sport has also flourished in Denmark, Japan, China, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand. A very high proportion of champions (both men and women) come from the Far East.

How is the game played?

Badminton is a game played on an indoor court by two or four players with rackets and a shuttlecock. The net is fixed so that its top edge is 1.52 m from the floor at the centre and 1.55 m at the posts. The racket is lightweight and



approximately 66 cm long, while its head is 21 cm wide at its broadest point. The shuttlecock has a cork base fitted with 16 goose feathers to stabilize it: many of the feathers are now made of nylon or plastic. The court resembles that in tennis.

The scoring differs from tennis however. In singles, the server starts in the right service court and serves into the opposite right service court. If the server wins a rally, one point

is scored. The next service is from the left court to the opposite left court. This alternating process goes on so long as the server is winning points. Only the server can win points: should he or she lose a rally, the other player does not win a point but instead wins the right to serve. As in tennis, points are won when a player cannot return the shuttlecock or hits it out of the court. In men's badminton 15 points wins the game provided the score of the winner exceeds that of the loser by at least two points. If the score reaches 14-all, the player who first reached that figure can nominate to play on to 15 or 17 points. In women's play, 11 points wins a game and if the scores are level at 10 each, then there is an option to play on to 13 points. Women's doubles and Mixed doubles matches play to 15 points.

The sport abounds in positional play and delicate movements, especially in the doubles game, where long rallies are commonplace. There is a wide variety of stroke play ranging in power from delicate drop shots up to fierce overhead smashes, and the players need quick reflexes as well as a sharp turn of speed.

The Five different Badminton Games:

As mentioned earlier in the assignment, there are five different badminton games:

1. The men's singles (male vs. male)
2. The ladies' singles (female vs. female)
3. The men's doubles (two males vs. two males)
4. The ladies' doubles (two females vs. two females)
5. The mixed doubles (a male and a female vs. a male and a female)

However, my discussion will focus on three of these games (which I have experienced):

The Ladies' singles

In the Ladies' Singles game, it is very important to have a good overall technique and precision of all shots. Since the player has to cover all the court by herself, possessing good footwork skills may be one of the best sources of advantage in this game, however in the Maltese context this really lacks. Good footwork allows you to reach the shuttle in advance, and thus be more comfortable in striking the shot. In order to have good footwork skills, a singles player should be fast, agile, and flexible. In the singles game it is also important to make your opponent move in order to open the court and have a good preparation to attack. This requires good visual skills and concentration. You also need to have power in the upper body, this will enable you to direct the shuttle where

you want it giving it loads of power, which in turn will make it difficult for the opponent to return.

The Ladies' doubles

The Doubles game is somewhat different. As in this game two people cover the entire court speed and agility are not as important as in the singles game. However, this game requires more strength as the object of the game is to continuously attack the opponents, building up pressure in order to win the point. This fact ultimately requires additional concentration and reflexes as opposed to the singles. Again, the footwork in the doubles is different from that of the singles game. Teamwork and good positioning is another important characteristic of the doubles game. Due to the fact that I'm not a fast player but a very strong one I consider myself to be more a doubles player than a singles player.

The Mixed doubles

The requirements of this game are very similar to that of the men's doubles when it comes to the physical and technical abilities of the players. However, the tactical skills demanded by this game are quite different, as traditionally the male positions himself at the back of the court ready for attacking. This is done as usually the male possesses the most powerful strokes and is therefore in a better position to attack. In turn, the female goes up to the net ready to attack any mistakes committed by the opponents.

The Four Elementary Badminton Strokes:

In every game of badminton, the player can hit the shuttlecock either with his backhand or with his forehand. Basically, the game of badminton consists of four rudimentary strokes:

1. The clear or lob
2. The drop or net shot
3. The drive
4. The smash

The **clear** is the most basic stroke of the game. It is when the player hits the shuttlecock from the back of his court to the back of his opponent's court. This is a defensive stroke and is usually played to move the opponent away from the middle of the court, the base.

The **lob** is when the player strikes the shuttle from the front of his court to the back of the opponent's court. The purposes of this stroke are similar to that of the clear.

Another stroke used in the game of badminton is the **drop**. There are two types of drop shots; one is played from the near end of the net and is usually referred to as the **net shot**, and one is played from the back of the court. However, both shots should fall on the opponent's side and as close to the net as possible. These two strokes are considered the most delicate shots of the game.

An attacking shot in Badminton is the **drive**. The drive is the shot where the player hits the shuttlecock to travel parallel to the ground and across the net at close range. Again, the aim of this shot is to build up pressure on the opponent, trying to get a weak return in order to kill the shuttlecock in the following stroke. It can also be used in order to turn from a defensive position into an attacking one. This shot is mainly used in the doubles game.

The last but most powerful attacking shot is the **smash**. It is when a player returns a high shot powerfully in a downward direction. The function of this shot is to build up pressure on the opponent and to end the rally with a point. The smash is used widely in the doubles games.

Although badminton may seem simple, in reality, these shots are quite difficult to learn. Perfect execution of all the shots mentioned above requires a good amount of hard work and serious training.

Method

In this section I'm going to discuss the means by which I plan to improve my overall performance in Badminton that is, my training schedule.

My Training Schedule

Day	Time	Training
Monday	18:00 – 20:00	Light intensity
Tuesday	16:00 – 17:30	Cardiovascular and weight training
Wednesday	16:00 – 17:30	Cardiovascular and weight training
Thursday	18:00 – 20:00	High Intensity
Friday	20:30 – 22:30	Club Training (Moderate Intensity)
Saturday	15:00 – 17:00	Light intensity
Sunday	09:00 – 12:00	Competitions

Training sessions are usually held at the New Sports Complex at Vittoriosa, St. Martins College and St. Aloysius Sports Hall.

On **Monday**, the national coach usually starts the week with light intensity training, allowing our bodies to recover fully from the Sunday competitions. Hence, this session normally focuses more on improving the techniques and on the tactics of the game.

High intensity training is allocated on **Thursdays**. These sessions concentrate on increasing speed and agility, and on improving flexibility. During club training which is on **Friday**, we undergo some moderate training, training being very much game-like.

On **Saturday**, the coach favours low intensity training. The reason for this is to allow time for recovery before an important day of competitions on Sunday. Like Monday, this session focuses on techniques and tactics. On **Sunday** it's competition time. The various competitions organised by the badminton association are played on this day, in the morning at St.Martin's College.

To play competitive Badminton with any point of success, we must be 'fit'. It is not enough, for us players to have a good knowledge of the tactics of the game, it is equally important that a badminton player ought to have strength, mobility and stamina, otherwise we end up gasping, exhausted and in a sorry state. A successful Badminton player should have the stamina of a marathon runner, the speed and mobility of a sprinter, the strength of a weightlifter and a lot of mental power.

A Badminton player must work hard in order to have stamina. I have to undergo hard cardio-vascular training at least two times a week, minimum, in order to delay fatigue and increase the efficiency of the heart, lungs and blood supply. The easiest way of achieving stamina is by long-distance running, jogging, sprinting etc.

As I mentioned above a player of Badminton should be strong. The coach never stops to say repeatedly that we ought to go to the gym and do weight training in order to strengthen the muscles of our whole body. However as I'm still a student it is often difficult and expensive to enrol in a gym thus what I have done is, I bought some free weights and I practice at home whenever I have the time usually on Tuesday and Wednesday as the schedule illustrates.

No Pain, No Gain! This saying is very true because I must work hard to increase the standard at which I play, so that I could win regularly for my country.

Results

The Badminton season has just started, so the results below are still fractional. In fact out of the four main competitions that will be held this year by the Badminton Association of Malta only one has started.

The Individual League:

This tournament is half-way through and unfortunately I'm not doing very well in singles as I was sick and gave two walkovers. However in doubles me and my partner are doing quite well and results are encouraging, taking into consideration that we are the only female couple competing against the opposite sex. We lost two games, drawn two and won one. Last Sunday the second round started and we drawn our first game. Overall we are occupying third place. I have improved my level of play both tactically and physically. I'm reaching more and feel secure that we'll win some other games. You can search for the updated results either on local newspapers or by entering the Malta Badminton Association website on www.badmintonmalta.org.

Discussion/Conclusion

In the brief descriptive title I wrote, that badminton is 'One of my Life's true Passions!' In fact I have always thought this to be true, as at all times not enjoyed myself but also felt that I belong somewhere. During each session I forget all my worries and preoccupations and focus on improving, giving my best and having fun.

Well I must confess I'm looking forward to this year's season. I'm taking it seriously and I'm feeling more confident on the court. Even if I'm in my last year at university, and sometimes I'm pressed with academic work, I still make it a point to train as regularly as possible.

As the results so far clearly indicate, in my opinion, this season might end up being a very successful one. I am very pleased with the improvement that I've shown during the past few months, both physically and mentally. However, there will always be room for improvement. I truly hope that after this year I can be crowned Maltese Mixed and Doubles National champion in badminton for the first time in my sports career.

References

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Online: www.badmintonmalta.org.

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The Shuttlecock

...is made of delicate feathers and it can reach a speed of around 200 miles per hour .

Ladies' Singles

Myself playing singles
in a Tournament in Italy

Ladies' Doubles

Mixed Doubles

The usual attacking positions of the male and the female in mixed doubles.
Playing Doubles with my current partner during an International
Tournament organized in Malta.

