



# The Great Volleying Debate

By Mark Renneson

When people talk about being in a “good ready position” for forehand and backhand groundstrokes, what they typically mean is “put your body in a position so it is prepared to receive a ball hit anywhere (short, far, left or right)”. Usually, they envision something like this...



There are very good reasons to be in this position: my body is balanced and not biased toward one side or the other. This neutral position means that I have to move roughly the same distance to move the paddle

whether the ball is hit to my forehand or backhand. I'm not more vulnerable on one particular side. Basically, in this position I'm ready for anything.

So, why is it that some people<sup>1</sup> have advocated that when standing up at the net, where you have even less time to react, you ought to be in this position?



Their rationale is something to the effect of: “look, from this backhand-biased ready position you can play balls on your backhand or at your body. You’ve essentially covered  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the possibilities”. I understand the reasoning but I don’t think we need to be this extreme in our approach.

If you *knew without a doubt* that the ball was coming to your backhand or at your body, this backhand orientation would certainly help. But the

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<sup>1</sup> [Alan Christensen](#), [Deb Harrison](#)

reality is you *don't* know where the ball will be hit. If the ball is hit to your forehand side, it's an incredibly long distance that the paddle has to travel and will be difficult to make a good volley (especially if the ball is hit with speed). By standing in this heavily biased position at the net, you are putting all of your eggs in one basket. You are betting everything that your opponent will hit to your backhand. Guess where a good opponent will hit it if they see you standing like this?

Instead, why not use the same rationale as during groundstrokes? Take a balanced approach that isn't so risky and that gives you a better chance at playing the volley no matter what side it comes to. When you stand comfortably with the paddle out front, you will notice that the paddle tends to lean *slightly* toward your backhand side.



I believe that this moderate backhand bias is sufficient to cover most balls hit to your backhand or at your body while still giving you a reasonable

chance to receive a ball to the forehand. In fact, when you watch top pickleball players<sup>2</sup> (and their close cousins, tennis players) volley, they typically take this balanced approach.

Will you get every volley? No. But by being moderate in your ready position at the net you will have a better chance to play a quality shot no matter what side the ball comes to.

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<sup>2</sup> [Bryan Brothers](#), [Roger Federer](#), [2014 Nationals](#)