

Sword and Shield of the Early Racquetball Conquistadors

by Bo Keeley

San Diego racquetball early royalty Bud Muehleisen and Charlie Brumfield used a noble offensive and defensive strategy in the beforehand days of racquetball jousts. Dr. Bud, also known as, The White Knight, and Brumfield, The King of the Court and Holder of all Titles, employed the sword and shield technique to astonishing effect.

In the sword and shield, the forehand is the sword used to kill all setups and to administer the royal torturous tour of the court to those willing to run down shot after shot and die a slow death via racquet. By design, virtually all offense comes from forehand shots so to employ this regal game plan your forehand sword had better be sharp, and Muhl and Brum owned two of the sharpest.

The backhand is used as a shield originally to hit lob after lob on the paddleball court to protect against any attack and reverse court position. Over time, as the game switched from wooden paddles to strung racquets, the shield came in the form of a constant diet of deep ceiling shots, around the world balls, and high Z shots to fend off even the best offense and to force the shooter to try to win the match from a dangerous 36-40 feet deep in the court.

How could they have won some 100 (!) national and international championships between them when they only shot the ball from one side of the court? The game was slower and players with fast feet and quick minds had time to step around a backhand, set up and attempt a forehand from anywhere except within one thin foot of the backhand side wall. In addition, both players could attack offensively from a defensive position with two of the best overheads the sport has seen.

Was the shield ever used for offense? Yes, but rarely. The backhand was only used as an offensive weapon in front of the short line where it's a high percentage put away even for a less than stellar backhand stroke.

In addition to the classic Sword and Shield approach, top players in the early era of the game employed an offensive and defensive strategy to reach 21 points as fast as possible while trying to assure their opponents were kept off the score card. You would play conservative defensive oriented racquetball when your opponent was serving, never giving up a free or easy point on the race to 21. When you served, and the worst case scenario was a side-out and a kill shot was rewarded with a point on the board, you'd play far more aggressively, trying to run off points on a flight to twenty plus one. Often times you'd save a favorite serve or shot you hadn't used just for the twenty first point, keeping it like an ace up the sleeve to be drawn only to end the match.

In today's fast, furious pro game, the offensive and defensive theories no longer apply as sharply to eleven point sprints powered by big racquets at over 170 MPH, but just might help you in your next club or tournament match and you could be King of your court.