

## **The Approach Shot Article**

This article accompanies the approach shot video and refers to various contact moves used when approaching the net. Any ball which is hit and then followed into the net will be referred to as an opportunity ball. However, there are a variety of different opportunity balls depending on where the ball bounces. This is distinguished by various footwork zones in the video i.e. white, red or green footwork zone. The approaching footwork selected will depend on several factors like-

- Height of the approaching ball?
- Which footwork zone it bounces in?
- Personal preference i.e. which shot do you like?
- Are you 2 or 1 handed?
- How quickly you want to get into the net i.e. do you want to take the ball early or delay your shot?
- What works best for you i.e. you might prefer to slice or topspin your approach shot

Note: Some other approach shot contact moves are also commonly used but have not been included i.e. drive volley approaches, running for drop shots and step down approach shots.

Following are the definitions of the approach shot contact moves as seen on the video.

Note: When practicing the approach shots on court (be it shadow tennis or hitting balls) always finish with a split step in the service box.



## **The Front Foot Hop Approach Shot**

The Front foot hop approach shot is an attacking contact move where the ball is hit off the front foot. The player takes off and lands on the same foot in a forward position to the take off point.

Keep the angles in the leg through contact and use the wrist to impart spin not the legs. It is important to hit through the ball and not to jump up on contact or look up (lift the head) too early.

The balance move of the front foot hop is a kick back where the trail leg kicks in behind and sole of the shoe points to the side fence. The kick back will help you extend through your swing and prevent you from opening up too early and losing your balance. By kicking the leg back you can then use it effectively to push you towards your intended recovery position.

The out steps are followed by a neutral stance where the weight goes from the back foot to the front foot and you step **BEFORE YOU SWING!** Keep the front foot pointing towards the net post.

**NOTE:** A player with a 1 handed backhand will naturally close off the stance a little more than the 2 handed backhand when hopping off the front foot!

Keep the angles in the leg through contact and finish the swing before bringing the trail leg kicks behind for balance. Bring the

leg around to 2 o'clock on the right side and 10 o'clock on the left side. It is imperative that you finish the swing completely before the trail leg comes around. This trail leg should be more of a pushing leg than a braking leg i.e. you don't want to be falling onto this leg. You need good body control so you can push off strongly towards the net.

What makes a front foot hop move unique is the fact that the front foot comes off the ground after contact. This gives you the ability to brush up the back of the ball. When doing this still keep the angles in the front leg. You should always contact the ball out in front in line with the front foot with the ball about knee height.

The correct balance move is essential to hit a successful front foot hop. Ensure you make contact and then kick the leg back towards the side fence. What I call a kick back. This will keep the body side on, thus extending the swing through the ball and stopping the ball being dumped in the net. By staying down on the shot and using the wrist to generate the spin instead of the legs, you will help stop the ball from flying out long.

The approaching ball for the front foot hop is generally a slow short mid court ball that has landing around about the service line. I call this an opportunity ball because you have taken the opportunity to approach the net. The reason for choosing to use a front foot hop as an approach shot is the hop of the front foot is very transitional and you can approach the net quickly and fluently. It is a aggressive shot that is important to master as once you feel comfortable hitting of your front foot then you will find transition to the net very natural.

With the front foot hop out steps (steps taken to the ball before the hitting stance is used) are usually simple i.e. either one or two steps to the side. If you take 1 step to the side I call it a step out, 2 steps to the side I call them rhythm steps. Out steps can be used on the forehand and backhand side before setting up the neutral stance (front leg points towards the net).

If the player selects to front foot hop on a ball that is mid court and travelling at the body then the player can run around and use shuffle steps in a C-shaped pattern on the court for a inside out shot or a U-shaped pattern on the court for a inside in (down the line) run around shot. Most players prefer to run around and hit a forehand but running around and hitting a backhand is still very possible if that is the preferred side. The important point about the out steps is to hop in the direction where you want to hit the ball to go thus positioning your feet behind the ball is crucial.

What is most common after the steps to the side is to take 2 -3 shuffle steps down the court towards the ball. I call these forward rhythm steps. Move down the court while keeping angles in the legs and keep the weight back even though you are moving forwards. Just like the step down there should be a feeling of transferring the weight from the back foot to the front foot just before contact is made. And, again like all contact moves make contact with the ball BEFORE the contact move is attempted.

In relation to recovery steps I tend to follow the front hop with a couple of forward steps after the hop and then finish with a split step. The amount of steps taken before the split step will depend on how far you are from the net.

In the video you will see that the front foot hop approach shot is hit on a ball that has landed in the white zone which covers the area that is found 1-2 steps either side of the centre mark.



## **The Forward Transfer Approach Shot**

The Forward Transfer approach shot move is an attacking contact move where the ball is hit off a forward -open stance and the weight is transferred from the back foot to the front foot. The body becomes elevated just before contact as the hips square up to face the net. The weight goes forward out towards the target with a leg curl balance move. The front foot always finishes pointing in the direction of the hit. It differs to the ground stroke forward transfer as you tend to run through the shot and have the stance more open.

The forward transfer is a contact move where the ball is high and floating so a really aggressive move is made at the ball but the angles are kept in the legs through the entire hit. It is important to hit through the ball and not to jump up on contact or look up (lift the head) too early.

The balance move of the forward transfer is the leg curl. This is where the back leg bends towards the butt. The leg curl will enable the player to stay balanced by keeping the body aligned with the chest up, yet, also enable the player to hit the ball flat and hard imparting very little spin to the ball. The leg curl will help you extend through your swing and prevent you from opening up too early and losing your balance. By curling the leg back you can then use it effectively to push you towards the net.

The forward transfer can be hit as a forehand, run around forehand or 2 handed backhand. In general it is not a 1 handed backhand approach shot because with the 2 handed forward transfer the hips tend to square up and face the net whereas with the 1 handed backhand you need to have the hips finishing at a 45 degree angle with the net and the landing foot pointing at the net post. The balance move with the one handed backhand balance move is more of a kick back than a leg curl.

The out steps are the steps that you take before you set up into a forward -open stance. The out steps for the forehand run around transfer approach are shuffle steps in a C shape when hitting inside out or in a U shape when hitting inside in. When hitting a regular forehand I like to teach adjusting steps where small steps are taken to get in position but the last step before contact is large and forwards at 45 degrees.

Keep the angles in the leg through contact and finish the swing (freeze the finish) before bringing the trail leg around for balance. A lot of the time you might take the next ball out of the air because if you are hitting a transfer you are in control of the point.

The approaching ball for the forward transfer approach is generally a slow floating mid court ball that has landed half way between the service line and the baseline. In the video you will see that the forward transfer approach shot is hit on a ball that has landed in the **red zone** which covers the area that is found 2-3 steps either side of the centre mark.

It is important not to rush the transfer move. One of my favourite saying is 'Relax and Win'. If you relax you let the ball drop into your strike zone i.e. to about chest height. Don't panic and try to hit the floating ball too early. Be like a base ball player, who hits the home run only if the ball is struck at the right height and at the right point of contact.



### **The Carrioca Backhand Approach Shot**

The carrioca backhand approach footwork move is where the ball is hit off the front foot. The front foot stays in contact with the ground during and after the hit then the trail leg comes in behind the front leg for balance and to keep the body side on. It is usually hit as a **1 handed backhand slice** approach and is very useful to use as a down the line approach shot on faster and low bouncing court surfaces.

The out steps are followed by a neutral stance where the weight goes from the back foot to the front foot and you step **BEFORE YOU SWING!** Keep the front foot pointing towards the net post.

Keep the angles in the leg through contact and finish the swing before bringing the back leg in behind for balance. It is imperative that you finish the swing completely before the back comes in behind. This back leg should be more off a pushing leg than a braking leg i.e. you don't want to be falling onto this leg but have good body control so you can push off strongly towards the net.

The carrioca backhand approach shot is an attacking contact move where the ball is hit aggressively and taken early and on the rise. The more steps taken down the court before making contact, the earlier you can take the ball and send it back to your opponent. If you take more than 1 step down the court towards the net then I call these advancing steps - forward rhythm steps. This shot will always be hit on a lower ball than

the transfer backhand approach (see above). The reason that it is generally a backhand approach is that the footwork suits a 1 handed slice backhand as the front elbow is away from the body. With the forehand slice the elbow gets jammed by the body, thus a forehand approach will feel more unnatural.

What makes this move unique is the fact that the pivoting foot stays on the ground the whole time which gives you the ability to slice the shot. The approaching ball for the carrioca backhand step down is a slow mid court ball that is landing around about the service line. It is an aggressive shot that is important to master as once you feel comfortable hitting of your front foot then you will find transition to the net a lot more natural. In the video you will see that the backhand carrioca approach shot is hit on a ball that has landed in the **red zone** which covers the area that is found 3 steps either side of the centre mark.

The approaching ball for the backhand carrioca approach is generally a mid-court ball that has landed near the service line. In the video you will see that this approach shot is hit on a ball that has landed in the red zone which covers the area that is found 2 steps either side of the centre mark.



### **The Lateral Hop Approach Shot**

The Lateral hop approach shot is an attacking contact move where the ball is hit off a forward open stance. It is usually a

**forehand move** but can be a backhand move if a 2 handed player prefers open backhands to closed backhands. It is usually not a common 1 handed backhand move.

With the lateral hop the legs stay low as you hop sideways at a 45 degree angle while keeping good angles with the legs. The hips go beyond the ball while there is a lifting of the inside knee for balance. When completing the lateral hop make contact before leaving the ground.

The knee up balance move will help you extend through your swing and prevent you from coming up too early thus losing balance and power. The lateral hop is a great move to create an angled reply thus it is important to cut the angle with your out steps and get to the ball early and stay low through contact.

The lateral hop is a contact move where the hopping foot skims the ground as the hips shift laterally at 45 degrees in a straight line. Try and keep the angle in the hopping leg. Lateral hop after contact and shift beyond the ball! Keep the inside leg up by bending the knee, this also LOADS this leg and gives you balance to push off in the direction of the net.

The Lateral hop approach shot is a attacking move where the player cuts the angle out to the ball and tries to "Do something" by surprising the opponent with a short angled or sharp down the line approach shot.

With the lateral hop set your feet up in a forward open stance. This means having the toes lined up and pointing in the same direction as if standing on a balance beam that is set up at a 45 degree angle. When set up in a forward open hitting stance you must shift your weight forward at an angle after contact as any spinning or rotating of the hips will cause the ball to dump into the net.

The out steps are always 1 or 2 crossing steps as these are fast and simple steps that get you to the ball quickly. A lateral hop tends to be hit off a moving unstable stance with the secret

being staying down through the shot not jumping or lifting on contact.

The body becomes elevated after the hit where the hips shift powerfully sideways or at 45 degrees and both feet turn and finish pointing at the net. The outside foot should end up flat against the ground while it is important to maintain a low centre of gravity while keeping the same distance between the feet. The head must remain still through contact and angles kept in the legs. It is important not to jump up when shifting the weight.

The balance move of the lateral transfer is a knee up, where the knee lifts up at 45 degrees. By lifting the knee you impart a lot more topspin thus getting the lift and heavy fast spin needed to hit a short angled reply or hit a heavy deep ball. The approaching ball for the forward transfer is generally a slow floating mid court ball that is generally landing half way between the service line and the baseline. In the video you will see that the forward transfer approach shot is hit on a ball that has landed in the **green zone** which covers the area that is found 3 steps either side of the centre mark.

The approaching ball for the lateral hop is generally an angled ball to the forehand that would bisect the singles line before the baseline. It is generally a slow angled ball that lands near the service line. In the video you will see that this approach shot is hit on a ball that has landed in the green zone which covers the area that is found 3-4 steps either side of the centre mark.



### **Closed Backhand Pivot Approach Shot**

The closed pivot is a rallying contact move where the ball is hit off the front foot from a semi-closed stance. The move is usually a **back hand move** and suits 1 or 2 handed players and can be hit with **slice, flat or topspin**. The front foot stays on the ground during and after the hit as you stay down on the shot.

Keep the angles in the leg through contact and finish looking under the net tape watching the ball bounce on the other side of the net. Finish the swing before bringing the trail leg around for balance. Bring the leg around to 2 o'clock if left handed and 10 o'clock if right handed. When this leg comes around it should be like a push to the next ball not a brake.

The balance move of the closed pivot depends on the height of the ball. If the ball is low then like a skateboard rider who has hit a bump on the road drop the back knee for balance. This will keep alignment with the body and also help generate racket head speed and enable topspin or slice to be generated. If the ball is higher and you close off the stance, then kick the leg back for balance. The kick back will help you extend through your swing and prevent you from opening up too early and losing your balance. By kicking the leg back or dropping the knee down you also have also gained control of your back leg so you can then use it effectively to push you towards the net.

The closed pivot approach shot is an attacking move where the player is forced forward at an angle and hence made to use

quick crossing steps out to the ball. The player establishes a strong wide closed stance (leg steps across at 45 degrees) and gets balance on the last step before the final step across is made. The player makes contact while staying low while keeping good angles in the legs. The outside leg swings around, extends and stops the body what I refer to as a brake step.

After hitting the closed pivot the outside foot should end up flat against the ground while it is important to maintain a low centre of gravity while keeping the same distance between the feet. The head must remain still through contact and angles kept in the legs. It is important not to jump up when shifting the weight around the pivoting foot.

The closed pivot approach can be hit as a 1 handed slice (usually when pushed wider) or hit using topspin when you are more stable with the stance and not reaching as far. Hitting with topspin really suits a short angled reply cross court.

The approaching ball for the backhand closed pivot is generally a medium to fast angled ball that will cross the singles line before crossing the baseline.

In relation to recovery steps, I am a huge fan of using a crossover step when moving into the net after a closed pivot. This is a lot faster and covers more ground than the side skip recovery steps but is harder to master. I also feel if you know you are going to cross back you tend to stay lower and don't stay and watch if the ball is going in! A major problem however, is that a player can lose their body alignment because they try and recover before the stroke is finished. Therefore ...try and Freeze the Finish for a fraction of a second. A phrase I like to use is "Finish the Tumble Turn before you push off the wall"! A swimmer does it so should a tennis player .i.e. finish the shot before you start your recovery steps.

The best way to crossover back is to ensure the leg closest to the centre drops back slightly (drop step) to clear the way for

the outside crossing leg. (See slide show on grounds stroke and observe dot placement).

In the video you will see that this approach shot is hit on a ball that has landed in the **green** zone which covers the area that is found 3 steps either side of the centre mark.

## **Questions & Answers**

### **Approach Shot Contact Moves**

**Question:** Compare and contrast a groundstroke transfer move with an approach shot transfer move?

**Answer:**

Comparing:

1. Both contact moves transfer the weight from the back foot to the front foot
2. Both have a leg curl balance move
3. Both have a high floating ball that lands mid court
4. Both have a contact point around chest level
5. Both have finish with the racket finishing at shoulder level

Contrasting:

1. The groundstroke transfer is hit off a semi-open stable stance/ the approach transfer is hit off a forward open unstable stance i.e. you run through the shot
2. The groundstroke transfer you recover to the baseline/The approach transfer you follow the shot into the net

**Question:** How do you set the footwork zones in the video on the court?

**Answer:**

Firstly the zones are not set on the court i.e. they relate to where you are positioned on the baseline-

- The white zone or stepping zone is **1** moderate stride left and right from your court position (usually a step out or rhythm out steps)
- The **red zone** or rhythmical zone is **2** moderate strides left and right from your court position (usually cha cha cha or adjusting steps)
- The **green zone** or crossing zone is **3** moderate strides left and right from your court position (usually crossing steps)

**Question:** When do you teach the approach shot contact moves?

**Answer:**

As you have seen many of the groundstroke contact moves are very similar to the approach shot contact moves so it is always best to teach the approach shots after all the 12 ground strokes (month 1 -12) have been learnt and understood. If this is done then the language, learn the look and feel the feel all make sense and with some slight modifications in stances and approaching balls the approach shots can be taught and practiced.

Note: The front foot hop has already been introduced in previous month as an approach shot (see slide show and video)

The moving into the net and split stepping near the net can be easily applied once the ground strokes have been mastered. One footwork pattern that will be new is the foot in behind carioca move but getting into a neutral stance and hitting off the front foot should have already been practiced with the step down and front foot hop moves.

**Question:** What do you mean by select the moves that work for you?

**Answer**

Particularly with the approach shot you will always SELECT TO HIT what approach shot feels comfortable to you and thus gives you the best results. For instance you might prefer to hit a front foot hop on the backhand side because the carioca backhand is harder for you to time or you don't like to slice the backhand or hit the backhand 1 handed. Personal preference is another way of explaining "What works for you!" and the important thing to understand when training is that improving your game takes a lot of experimenting and trial and error.

**Question:** Why are the approach shots contact moves great for fitness on the court or even off court?

**Answer**

Because the approach shots are transitional shots i.e. you move forward and split stepping at the net they are great to use as a warm-up by mimicking the shots while jogging around the tennis court. Or, as part of a running program around an oval or athletic track where you jog for 10 meters and then hit a series of shadow tennis approach shots and then jog again. Both these drills will develop a sound aerobic base (by jogging) but also give you the chance to polish your footwork skills as well.

**Question:** What is the most common approach shot?

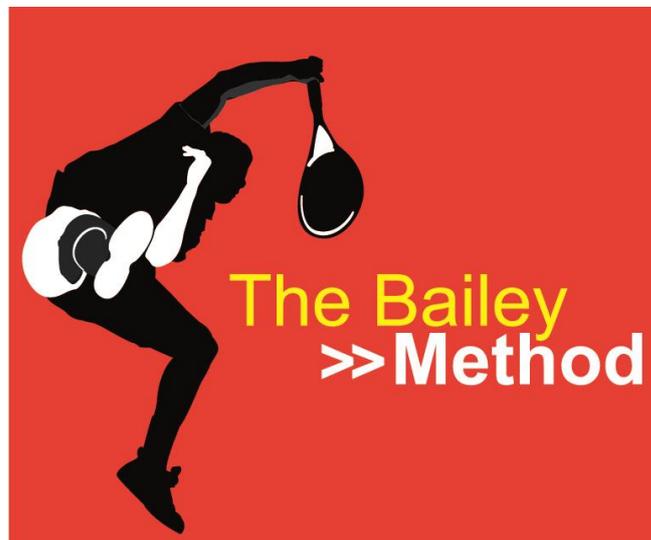
**Answer:**

By watching countless hours of tennis, particularly Roger Federer at Wimbledon I believe the front foot hop is most commonly used. This is because it is most instinctive to hit on a ball that has landed short in the middle of the court, it naturally imparts topspin on the ball and finally, it enables you to hit the ball without stopping. The front foot hop also helps you to get into the net quickly, thus giving your opponent less time to hit their passing shot.

# PAPER ON “Progressively Teaching” FOOTWORK

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**By David Bailey**



## **The Bailey Method**

The Bailey Method is a unique and dynamic approach to teaching tennis footwork, movement and balance. It teaches you how to get ready on the balls of your feet, read an approaching ball, react with your feet and hitting stance, respond with a contact move and recover to correct locations on the court. By using a set language with progressive tennis specific drills and various balance techniques, the Bailey Method develops positive habits, improves fitness, speed, and agility while giving a more responsive and relaxed approach to your tennis game.

### **Teaching the Bailey Method progressively**

Every day I learn a better way to teach The Bailey Method and communicate my beliefs to my students. But, obviously over the years I have found ways of teaching progressively that make sense and gets really good results no matter the skill level of the student.

It is really important for the student to understand that they are about to have a footwork lesson and that the focus is more on the feet than the grip or swing. They must be attuned to this mindset when having a footwork lesson.

The lessons is all about split steps, recovery steps, contact moves, balance moves, reading approaching balls and most importantly learning the language. It is not about hitting lots of balls initially....though once all the moves are learnt there will be very little shadow tennis.

The important point is follow the progressions outline below carefully and don't cut corners or try and introduce too much information at once.

**The following are guidelines only -**

The best way to learn the method is to first "Learn the Look" from the DVD or the video clips in the Players' Lounge. This

introduces the language and the concept and is best to let the student view the moves a week before.

The best contact move to start with is the step down as it incorporates a lot of different "out steps" like the step out, rhythm, cha cha cha, crossover and run around C and runaround U footwork patterns.

### First ....Footwork Patterns

Like mentioned above the first thing I do is work on fundamental locomotion. This includes teaching basic concepts of getting ready, out steps and hitting stances i.e. (below is in order of teaching). Teach these first before starting on the step down -

1. Ready steps
2. Bounce steps
3. Combination of the above
4. Athletic base
5. Mechanics of split step with verbal and visual and timing cues i.e. call out "split step" for verbal cue and show a ball hidden behind the back for visual cues.
6. Introduce footwork zones – (study previous slide shows)
  - Step outs +neutral stance (stepping zone)
  - Rhythm steps (stepping zone)
  - Cha cha cha steps + semi-open stance (rhythmical zone)
  - Crossing steps 1 & 2 + open stance (crossing zone)
  - Running steps + running stance (running zone)
  - Recovery steps i.e. brake, bounce (recovery), crossover, side skip and shuffle

- Runaround footwork i.e. runaround C, runaround U, backwards runaround steps (only if going to teach Lateral transfer and backwards lateral hop in curriculum)

### **Second.....Dots on court to follow: Start with the steps down**

Place dots down on the court....can get these from On court Off court so the steps are comfortable...i.e. practice ready steps on 1 disc, the put 2 down for the split step, then another for the step out, another for the step down, the leg through, the drop step and then the cross back or side skip

### **Third.....Take away discs**

Remove the discs 1-2 at a time till the shadow is mastered without the discs

### **Fourth....Self shadow with, then without, cue words**

The client then practices shadow by themselves but I call out cue words to remind them what to do....next, they have a go at shadowing without cue words.

### **Fifth.... Coach shadow and coach mirror**

I usually then get the player to shadow me! i.e. they stand behind me and swing, step and recover when I do.

Then they mirror me (face one another and shadow)...so I can watch them and give them feedback (this is harder for me as I must swing with my non dominant hand)

Note: Some clients might find stage 4 easier than stage 3 as they are not familiar with the language...be flexible!

### **Sixth... Resistance Equipment or an off court challenge**

I challenge the client to remember the footwork moves and patterns using some piece of equipment or get them to

shadow on a different surface or test their footwork in some other way i.e. Then I get them to throw a medicine ball like in the DVD, or resist the client using resistant bands, sidewinders, vipers, through sand, up slight inclines and declines. Shadow boxing with the allocated steps and Thai chi are also great test of the newly learnt footwork etc....note there is no hitting yet.

This stage is optional, but great for wet days or large groups.

Note: [At this stage there is no hitting of balls](#) and I can really slow everything down and make sure they have a solid understanding and grasp of the out steps, hitting stance, balance and contact moves and recovery steps (it is especially the recovery steps you need to modify as some people just don't feel comfortable or just can't master a front cross recovery step).

The next progressions all incorporate a ball which obviously is much more tennis specific.

### **Seventh....Drop then thrown ball**

Progress the footwork with a self drop after setting up the stance –

- I. Drop to self - into a fence and then over the net
- II. Self Throw - throw to self as you split step- into a fence then over the net
- III. Thrown ball - from the basket (coach thrown i.e. player splits as coach releases the ball)

Note: Some drills are harder to self throw...especially the backhand....and will also depend on the ability of the student to self drop and throw. What is good about the self throw and drop is the player can practice this by themselves with a basket of balls. A coach throw always needs a second person.

However some drills will only suit coach thrown i.e. open backhand for some players

If all is well here and all looks good NOW progress to fed ball and eventually live ball and match play i.e.

**Eighth...Fed ball**

**Ninth...Point play**

**Tenth...Match play**

**Eleventh...Tournament play**

I know this sounds like a long way around things....but I only do these progressions if a student is having problems.....I might show someone the shadow and they can do it straight away

Note: I have designed a disk sequence for all 12 contact moves and even return of serve, volleys approach shots etc.....using the discs on the court so placers can place their feet IN THE CORRECT position is A FUNDAMENTAL TEACHING TOOL of The Bailey Method!

It has had a profound influence on how I teach footwork!

The players can FEEL, SEE AND UNDERSTAND the correctness of foot placement and through repetition get the proper footwork patterns etched in their muscle memory. Great players know where their feet are in space!!! This is essential for all our students to have this same skill and trust in their feet!!!

The thing is that I find rare is that students shadow badly and then hit well. Usually it is easier to shadow than to hit because there is no ball involved.

The easiest moves to master are -

(In order of difficulty...MY OPINION ONLY)

- 2 foot pivot
- 1 foot pivot
- Runaround C and U step down
- Step down
- Front foot hop
- Closed pivot
- Mogul move
- Lateral hop
- Back foot hop
- Transfer move
- Low spin
- High spin
- Lateral transfer
- Backwards lateral hop
- Reverse spin
- Power move ...though abilities and likes and dislikes can vary considerably.

The other way I like to teach the contact moves are

Offensive moves first – step down, front foot hop, transfer, low spin

Rally moves second – 2 foot pivot, 1 foot pivot, closed pivot and lateral hop

Defensive moves – mogul, power move, back foot hop and reverse spin

I know that there is a lot to learn so just take it easy and **don't rush things**. The Bailey method is all about developing balance, athleticism and fitness but the best tip is experiment and **use what works for YOU!**