

Coaching Mastery

Section 2

The Player Development Model: Programming the Progression

Starting with this chapter, I will describe the overall philosophy of the Advanced Foundation and the integral parts of this foundation. In addition, I will include many of the best drills I use in helping students acquire the grips, strokes, and footwork patterns associated with the Advanced Foundation.

Chapter 6

Starting out-An Introduction to the Beginning Tennis Program



Figure 1: Working with my 8-year old daughter, Kyla, has been one of the most rewarding experiences for me. Giving any beginning player the foundation to become the best that they would like to become offers a lifetime of enjoyment of both the sport and the opportunities that come from being skilled.

Using the Advanced Foundation in Developing Beginner Players: (Juniors and Adults)

Note: In this chapter, I will be introducing many of the primary learning practices that can—and should be—used by all beginners; not just little children. The practice drills introduced in this chapter can be used by coaches in team practices for developing large groups of beginners and by teaching pros who have beginning students at clubs and tennis facilities. The information in this chapter is more specifically the “progression” I

recommend. The following chapters will discuss specific techniques and methods used for all strokes.

Author's Quote:

“It is interesting to note that sports and activities that focus on discipline and dedication have been on the rise in recent decades. From Karate to gymnastics, from dance to theater and the arts, these activities focus on not just hard work, but challenging the student in many ways.”

Introduction

As a teaching pro and coach for over 35 years, one of the most often asked questions about tennis is from parents wanting to know the best way to train their kids in the sport. It is not rare to see parents who play tennis to seek tennis instruction for their children. Although, many may want to live vicariously through their children's success, tennis-playing parents in general, want their children to learn better techniques than they did so their children can reach higher levels of skilled play. Non-tennis playing parents usually recognize the skills that come from playing tennis to some degree as well as understanding that tennis is a lifetime sport they want their children to learn.



Figure 2: There are hundreds of books on tennis. However, few focus on the reality of coaching and teaching junior players.

Second to the number of juniors I teach, the next largest learning groups of players are adults who have never played or who have had no formal tennis instruction. The learning progression for adults in the Advanced Foundation is no different than the learning progression for young kids. There may be a different emphasis on phrasing, tone, and personality when dealing with kids, but the drills, tools and progression I use for kids are exactly the same as they are for adults—and vice versa. If a player wishes to reach skilled levels of play—and take pleasure in the more enjoyable rallies and playing opportunities that come with skilled play—then the progression for adults will be exactly the same as it will be for children. I often hear adults look at my juniors and say, “Gee, I wish I could play like that,” as if, because of their age, there is no way they could ever play like that! Of course, this assumption is completely wrong and if any adult will ‘redraw the blueprint’—in other words, relearn tennis in the right way, they can indeed reach equally high levels of play depending on their age and any physical limitations they may have.

And, while there are variables that affect how children will learn, (compared to how adults learn), from attention span to available strength, from perception of fun to hand-eye coordination, there are some very concrete methods that I have developed, used and tested that work well within a wide range of age groups that prove to be very efficient and effective in their use and productivity in nearly all children.

Specific Kids Training

I have heard many pros discuss the various philosophies they have in the ‘proper’ approach to working with kids. Among my 117 books on tennis and many videos and DVD’s, very few take on a realistic or a dynamic learning system for teaching little kids to become skilled tennis players...within a fun, learning environment. On the contrary; many books that focus on little kids spend more time on the element of FUN, and very little time focusing on skills that are related to and relevant to developing a skilled tennis-playing junior. In today’s society, (at least in the United States of America!), there seems to be a significant shift from challenging youngsters, and instead, creating a false sense of ‘success’ in everything they do. While I believe you can and should provide some of this success within any teaching module, the idea of lowering the standards associated in helping everyone have some level of success is something that I don’t believe in. I have had great success in participation, retention and in productive learning—and fun—that I have never had the need, or the urge, to lower the standards in any way! In fact, I have found that it is just the opposite: youngsters enjoy challenges knowing that they will become more and more like the pros they have seen play, as well as enjoying hitting more effective shots, more consistent shots, and having longer rallies as a result of their efforts.

Author's Quote:

“There are two types of ‘fun’...the immediate perception of fun that is from the activity itself, and the long-term fun that is more results-driven. Long lasting fun is more satisfying and certainly comes with a sense of accomplishment.”



Figure 3: Tennis is a great sport for kids at generally young ages. The fact that size and strength are not essential elements to good tennis makes the sport excellent for the vast majority of kids who might be too small for other sports.

There are many articles out there that promote various drills and strategies for kids. However, there has not been a comprehensive guide to move children at young ages through a complete developmental program...one that is focused on helping kids develop optimal methods for progression and reaching their potential. For parents who are looking for simple ways to teach tennis in such a way that is initially ‘fun’ and less challenging, there are a number of books that you can find with this philosophy.

This is not one of them!

Understand too, that many, if not most of the drills, learning patterns and progressions, and strategies within this book can be used to develop beginning adults just as we are using them to develop a junior player. In fact, this series contains the very skill-building drills and progressions we use in working with our adult beginning students within our academy.

What is a good AGE to start?

This question has been asked by parents of young children more than any other question. And, while I make recommendations based on my experience and on the general propensity of children being able to enjoy the learning of tennis—within various age-generalities—there really is not a specific hard-and-fast rule regarding optimal ages for any one kid to be first introduced to tennis. I have worked with three year-olds on up. And, while some kids at 3 or 4 might be able to be on the court for 30 minutes, it is extremely rare.

As far as “on-court” lessons, I usually don’t recommend kids younger than 6 or 7. This is because most children younger than this don’t have the maturity and attention span that makes on-court lessons productive.



Figure 4: Karate has helped strengthen the connection between hard work, discipline and proper technique for my daughter Kyla in how it relates to her tennis. In Karate, the importance of technique teaches kids that size is not an issue in Karate. In tennis, we can see the same correlation.

However, there are many ways to work with kids both on and off the court at any age. Knowing this, the question I will ask you is this: “What do you want your kids to get out of tennis?” This is important because the goal of many parents is to simply have their kids ‘enjoy’ tennis. This is what I call a “Safe” goal because many parents feel that expecting anything more would put too much ‘pressure’ on their children or they believe they would be putting unrealistic expectations on their child if they strive to become ‘good’ at tennis. Yet, as you will read, such limiting goals almost always will prevent a junior prospective tennis player from not only reaching skilled levels of tennis, but they also prevent them from enjoying the game in a way that is long-lasting. Many pros, books and other teaching avenues focus on FUN over teaching, training and the eventual acquisition of skilled techniques for kids. Thus, FUN, must be reviewed here in the context of what we consider FUN for kids. For if we only focus on things that produce immediate FUN, and forgo the development of presumably more difficult tennis techniques in favor of this immediate gratification, we must understand that our goal for our kids cannot be to become more skilled tennis players. As I mentioned in the early portion of this book, learning one method that MUST change is one of the most detrimental teaching methods of tennis one can adopt or be taught. Kids are no different than adults. Once they start playing tennis, the methods they first learn will be what they build their foundation on.

Author’s Quote:

“What is FUN? This is an important question as it will define how you create the sense of ‘fun’ in your program.

And for many, the cycle of trying to fix ineffective methods begins.

Author’s Quote:

“Would it be considered ‘fun’ if we continued to ride a bicycle for twenty years leaving the training wheels on? Would it be ‘fun’ to only throw a football underhand or only bunt a baseball? Fun stems from continued achievements in anything and then the application of those achievements as we participate in such activities.”

Cross-training

Obviously, every child will have a different propensity to want to practice tennis. I believe that all children should be exposed to many different activities and skills at young ages. Musical instruments are, in my opinion, excellent for teaching children the processes of training the mind and fingers (in the case of most musical instruments) and to develop choreographed skills related to melodic principles and mastery. Any form of dance, be it ballet, tap, or in a dance troupe, helps all kids develop balance, rhythm, and fluid body movements. Gymnastics helps in a similar way, developing body control, balance and strength. Other activities such as badminton, ping pong, soccer, Martial Arts, and other sporting activities provide hand-eye

coordination, movement control and balance, and tracking moving objects that contribute to skilled tennis mastery.



Figure 5: Kids and adults alike enjoy the sense of accomplishment. The 'journey' is oftentimes more rewarding than the success that usually accompanies such accomplishments.

When Cross-training can be Detrimental

One problem, however, I see when kids take many activities is that many of them will quit one activity when it gets too 'hard' and then move on to another activity...until that one gets too hard. While not all kids do this, I do see this happen a lot in our community. Where parents believe they are helping their kids experience 'new' things, sometimes it is teaching kids that when the going gets tough, it is time to quit. I believe that prior to the age of 8 or 10, letting kids participate in many different things is quite good. By the age of at least 10, kids should be encouraged to stay in their activities even when they may be struggling or having difficulty. Every parent will need to make their own decision on this topic, however. No one knows their own kid better than a parent. Some kids will overcome such challenges where other kids might have a traumatic experience if they are 'forced' to stay in an activity too long. Parents will need to make these evaluations over time.

Defining FUN

The goal of only having 'fun' not only is a misguided objective that, in my opinion, sabotages the actuality of achieving real 'fun' in tennis, but, as I mentioned, it can often prevent kids from reaching any real potential that they likely have for tennis. I often hear parents say, "I don't expect my kid to be a pro or anything like that. I just want them to have fun." Yet, by lowering the standards to specifically have fun, this usually gets kids playing tennis with the same intensity as backyard badminton, croquet or horseshoes! Tennis participation within this context is not only short-lived, but it certainly diminishes the likelihood of playing tennis at higher levels which is a GREAT DEAL OF FUN!



Figure 6: Working with a child is a balance between encouragement and challenging the student.

I don't believe in a 'militaristic' approach to training our players. However, as I mentioned earlier, I often see too many pros focus on making tennis as 'fun' as possible, yet limiting the challenging aspects in fear of turning kids off from tennis.

I have found that learning skilled tennis can be just as fun—if not more fun—than just letting kids 'play' tennis any way they want with little regard to the proper techniques. In our industry, there is a problem: When working with any beginner, there is actually an 'accepted' form or methodology that is recommended by many in the teaching profession that is designed to get beginners 'playing tennis' as quickly as possible. I have covered all this in the early parts of this book. However, when working with kids, it seems to be more prevalent in terms of limiting any sense of what might be considered 'challenging' in fear that the kids will quit.

This philosophy of focusing on 'fun' over proper fundamentals (or in this case, an Advanced Foundation) does just the opposite. Consider other sports; few, if any, lower the challenging protocol and focus specifically on a fun-only mentality. Ironically, sports that demand discipline and dedication to regimented practice techniques and learned patterns of movements, (i.e.: Karate, Gymnastics, Basketball, Golf, Football...you name the sport!), promote and market themselves as sports that stress goal-setting, achievement within potential, discipline, and character-building, all through the mastery of PROPER skills related to those sports. And, such sports are doing just fine in terms of growth and popularity...far better than tennis! Kids want to learn sports they are familiar within ways that they can emulate their sport heroes. While tennis pros, indeed, possess some advanced swing and stroke patterns that would not be recommended to youngsters starting out, there are ways to train kids in progressive patterns in which they will evolve into hitting the ball like the pros within their abilities.

Tennis seems to be a sport that has an inferiority complex. You can almost hear the anxiety in the marketing of tennis: Learn Tennis FAST! Hit and Giggle. Laugh and Win. The concern of clubs, pros and programs is that if tennis seems too difficult, they won't get any students. In my experience, this perception is not only false; it really has backfired in the long run. Tennis, in the United States, is listed as less popular than Darts and Bowling!

To teach kids to use simple form just because it is comfortable, familiar and easy—if such form will have to be abandoned at some point for more advanced play—kids, like their adult counterparts, will have a difficult time changing to more advanced grips and stroke patterns when they recognize or are told such changes need to take place. I have found that the kids you might lose (from your team or program), if you indeed make your program more challenging, are generally the kids that will quit anyway, no matter how much 'fun' you initially make the sport seem. Such kids have a limited propensity for longevity in any activity and usually very quickly become bored with any 'fun' program.

And 'FUN' can be defined as more than just perceptual pleasure. To me, long-lasting fun is a result that comes from reaching goals; from hitting a ball the way you know you should, from seeing a slice serve curve into the box for the first time using a continental grip, from hitting a sharp-angle volley, instead of pushing the ball down the middle of the court, are all elements of fun when using proper techniques. I believe we need to return to a system of teaching that provides challenging aspects, yet, provide tools in which players can recognize such aspects as well as accomplish such aspects as quickly as a player is capable. Avoiding certain grips, swing patterns or stroke methods because they are 'too hard' ...and yet, such are the very methods we eventually want to accomplish, is a ridiculous strategy if we want to learn those very techniques! Avoiding something for 10 years will not suddenly and spontaneously

occur at, say, the tenth year, fourth month, seventh day, at 4:25pm on a Wednesday! Avoiding something will equate into exactly that: Never acquiring it!



Figure 7: For many, the opportunity to teach tennis to their kids is a wonderful experience.

And worse yet, the longer we use some inadequate method, the harder it becomes to eventually abandon it and take up a new method!

Fun, even among today's "gotta' have it now," limited attention span society, will stem from accomplishing things that we deem valuable and significant. Accomplishing rudimentary shots in tennis just so we can 'play tennis' is like learning to ride a bike for twenty years by keeping the training wheels on! The issue for anyone teaching tennis is this: From tennis teaching professionals to the tennis-parent, kids and adults alike can indeed learn more effective, more challenging methods and **STILL HAVE FUN!**

Parents working with their own children

I used to recommend that all children work with instructors other than their parents. And, in many cases, I still recommend this approach, especially for older kids. This recommendation stems from the conflict that often arises between kids and their parents whenever the parent makes recommendations or critical evaluations during such learning periods.

However, younger kids often are so excited to 'please' their parents, it can be a wonderful experience and motivating factor to have the parents take part in the teaching of their kids. This is one of the reasons I do like having parents watching their kids take a lesson. It must be understood, however, that this is a double-edge sword. That is, if you push too hard or you get upset with your child, they can withdraw completely or become reluctant to want to learn from you.

The philosophy I am offering won't work with every parent/child combination. However, it will be an excellent guideline for parents to use, a blueprint, if you will, of following a progressive methodology that provides for a fun way for parents to take part in seriously helping their kids become excellent tennis players.

Teenage Perception of Tennis

Go to any high school in America and examine the most popular sports. Football, softball, baseball, basketball, volleyball, and depending on the areas, swimming, track and even golf clearly out-rank tennis in terms of popularity. When I say 'popularity' I mean this in two

ways. First of these is the number of athletes that come out for a sport. The other aspect of popularity is the perception of ‘cool’ any of the aforementioned sports have on campus.

I have often said that if I ever got the kids who played the big three sports, (football, basketball, baseball), I would have a huge team of nationally ranked kids. Few of the quality athletes, the strong and/or athletically gifted, go out for tennis. Sure, there are those who do and, generally become great players. I once had the varsity football quarterback take lessons from me and he immediately became one of the best players in the area. Unfortunately, his love of not just football but also basketball (he was also a varsity basketball player), took time away from pursuing tennis with the same quality of time as others, perhaps less gifted, put into their tennis. Ironically, this same student, like so many adults, regretted not pursuing tennis with the same intensity as he did his other sports later on. He recognized, too late, that the competition for basketball and football made it almost impossible to get noticed...even as he was a great athlete in both these sports. There are just so many other great athletes in these more “popular” sports that his greatness was still overshadowed by others even more gifted.

Where other countries revere tennis players, American teens seldom look at tennis as a sport which they can gain a sense of ego-gratifying recognition. We often hear teens in school bad-mouth tennis as being a “sissy” sport. This simple perception is one of the reasons why tennis struggles in the U.S. today. What “Athlete” would want to be seen, let alone explore a “sissy” sport?

Ok. So How SHOULD I Teach my Child?

After asking “When should I start my child in tennis?” many parents ask a second question: “What is the best way to teach my child?”

Obviously, each child is different and each one has a different capacity to learn and absorb learning. Thus, the answer to this question is, “it depends.” Yet, such an answer must be understood that there are methods that lead to more advanced play, and others, as discussed, will lead to limited advancement and a failure to reach a player’s true potential.

Thus, the question is not about “What” to teach, but “How” should we teach them these skills?

One of the common myths of teaching tennis to kids is the idea that you can’t introduce them to more advanced methods early on. Many pros and parents believe that if they challenge young children to more difficult methods, those that theoretically take longer to master and gain confidence in, the kids will be totally turned off and never want to pick up a tennis racquet again!

As with any sport, hobby or activity, some kids will not be destined to become tennis players. Having an 8 year-old daughter, I see kids get involved in many things, gymnastics, dance, karate, musical theater, ballet, sports, etc., only to move on to other activities after awhile. It seems that tennis pros become paranoid if a student doesn’t seem to like tennis and, like public education, will lower the challenge-factor in favor of trying to get all kids to ‘experience success’ in tennis. This includes letting the kids use whatever grip, swing pattern or footwork that they are comfortable with, and then creating games that have little to do with tennis progression and everything to do with ‘hit and giggle’.

Another favorite among some pros is the ‘games-based’ approach. That is, developing games that kids can play that are fun—but are very limited in developing skilled strokes; those skilled strokes that are advantageous to improved tennis performance. I have no problem with using games to make tennis fun. However, to allow kids or adults for that matter, to abandon the

methods that is critical to player development—for the sake of making ‘playing tennis’ fun—is, in my opinion, irresponsible and negligent to say the least!

Author’s Quote

“Like a musician, a tennis player WILL become competent with the unfamiliar if they practice the unfamiliar to the point of comfort and experience.”

Progression of Learning: Kids Tennis

As the Senior Editor for www.TennisOne.com, in 2007 I produced a series of articles focusing on the training of Kyla, my then, 8-year old daughter. I employed every teaching concept with her that I will be discussing in this chapter as well as the concepts I have gone over throughout this book.

Training Kyla has been personally enjoyable and certainly rewarding for both her and me. She has surpassed even my expectations in both progression and performance. She has embraced tennis and knows she is making progress. Her enjoyment stems from both the physical associations she has when she hits a shot well to the type of ‘games’ we play when working on techniques and the fun of doing something with her dad. Every game is dedicated to promoting some aspect of the foundation. While I did introduce Kyla to the stroke patterns of the forehand and backhand groundstroke early on (using the PracticeHit device I mentioned earlier), she didn’t start on-court lessons until she was almost eight years old. One of my joys was when her and I played in our first tournament together, an ‘age-generation-gap’ tournament that paired players who were at least 25 years apart in age. This was after Kyla had been practicing for about 4 months. Kyla played not only exceptionally well, (for only having really played tennis for a few months!), but she and I won the tournament. She held serve several times, hit great passing shots and volleyed several balls that were difficult. In other words, she held her own! More importantly, Kyla employed the advanced stroke progressions we had worked on and never once moved to “dink” the ball over the net. The joy on her face when she hit some excellent shots was priceless! (And hearing all the spectators watching remark how impressive she hit was equally priceless!)

This is not to say that all kids will enjoy the game as she does. I don’t presume to expect all kids to take to tennis and/or stick with it. Unlike many of my contemporaries, I don’t expect all kids to stay in any of our programs. However, it is interesting to watch many teaching professionals do everything they can to make tennis ‘fun’—meaning, if they don’t make it entertaining and, instead, were to challenge their students, they believe they would lose all of the kids in their program. In my programs, we retain and train many more kids than those in facilities much larger than ours who focus on the fun element. I don’t make any bones about it: we tell parents and the kids alike, “You and your kids will not only learn the most productive methodology designed, but you will be expected to work hard, listen, and try to accomplish what I am teaching them.” With this in mind, I don’t make my programs “hard core.” I don’t pressure

kids into thinking that if they make a mistake it is something bad. On the contrary: I focus not on the typical success of “hitting a ball over the net or to a target” but on the attempt of making the correct swing path, using the right footwork, grip and balance.



Figure 7: The continental grip has the racquet's edge running parallel with the forearm. The base knuckle of the index finger is on the second bevel from the top.

Timing and Rhythm or Grip and Strokes or Footwork? Which to focus on?

My students will often hear me say “Great Stroke” even when they completely miss a ball. This is because I KNOW they will eventually make the connection of timing and rhythm. Yet, a player can use all the right swing elements but simply swing a little early or late, or not make contact due to the perception of the hand-eye coordination or timing. I have found that clearly, players who develop the right stroke, with the right grip and footwork, develop the timing and rhythm to make clean contact as they become more and more familiar with the skill.

The element of such timing and rhythm can be accomplished at any point in a player's progression. However, too many pros and coaches neglect the aspect of stroke progression and focus only on trying to develop this timing and rhythm using simple, more familiar grips and swing patterns...with the assumption that these players can change such patterns later on after they have been playing for a period of time. As I have mentioned many times, this is the most unproductive method of teaching tennis to anyone, regardless of age!

Too often, I see pros change a stroke pattern, grip or footwork to compensate for the shot and its direction. This is putting the cart before the horse. As I have mentioned, all players will evolve the timing rhythm and aim with a swing they become competent with. It would be like teaching a piano student to only use their index fingers so they could play a song in their first lesson! Like a musician, a tennis player WILL become competent with the unfamiliar if they practice the unfamiliar to the point of comfort and experience.

Player Development Model (Using the Advanced Foundation)

Working with beginners in groups and in private lessons, I have found that the following progression works for all ages in developing the foundation for kids and adults to not only excel at tennis, but to enjoy the process as well!

Foundation: Where to start?

I have started my daughter Kyla out in the same way I start all beginners, adults and juniors alike. I have found that the ability to gain comfort and familiarity of the continental grip

is such a key component to skilled play in many areas. This grip is, without question, the dominant grip used by top players for the serve, the volley, the overhead and the two-handed backhand (as the dominant hand's grip) as well as things like the slice backhand, and the drop shot. This, on top of the concept that players who start with the eastern grips, or start developing groundstrokes as their first learning element, makes learning the continental grip so much more difficult. Granted, many skilled players and pros even, will make subtle changes in the continental grip for specific volleys and serves. However, these are not only very subtle grip changes they are based on the foundation of the continental grip, not the foundation of the eastern grips. In my experience, it is exponentially more difficult to move from the comfortable eastern grips towards the continental grip than it is the other way around.

With Kyla, as with any parent, I had the opportunity to do things here at home before we ever headed to a tennis court. With toy racquets, I introduced Kyla to holding the continental grip and blocking foam balls to me when she was about 5. We spent very little time on this, maybe a total of 15 minutes over the course of a year.



Figure 8: Here, Justine Henin hits a forehand volley with a clear, continental grip. Notice the racquet linear edge is parallel with the forearm.

Focusing on the Stroke, not the Direction

I also taught her the two-handed backhand and two-handed forehand at that same time using the PracticeHit, a device that allowed her to practice the swing path with the right grips that I wanted her to use, along with practicing the element of timing by hitting a ball that was coming towards her. However, because the ball is on a fiberglass shaft and oscillates back and forth instead of having a ball being hit somewhere, Kyla did not manipulate her swing to try and hit the ball to a target, as so many beginners will do.

As I will discuss in **Chapter 8**, this concept of trying to hit a tennis ball (with directional intention) with a tennis racquet too soon—before a player has developed a proper stroke pattern—is one of the main reasons so many kids and adults fail to develop many optimal strokes and end up often with goofy looking, unreliable swings. Because of the unfamiliarity of hitting topspin, swinging a racquet with a low-to-high swing path, beginning players will manipulate a swing to meet their perception of how to hit a ball over the net. Thus, it will save a ton of time, if not years of frustration, by developing a proper swing pattern first, without using a tennis ball.

Every instructor will want to tailor their program to fit the needs of their students. When working with kids, depending on the age and maturity levels, an instructor may want to shorten or lengthen each drill, decrease or increase the frequency of drills, or add more or decrease the number of drills. Adults take to these drills and teaching tools with as much, if not more, determination.



Figure 9: Here, Andrea Agassi prepares to hit an angle backhand volley crosscourt. Note too, the racquet runs parallel to his forearm just as in the picture seen in Figure 7 & 8.

However you decide to tailor your teaching program, the elements of your program should contain these initial concepts (which should be addressed in this order).

1. Know how to find the continental grip
2. Use tools to gain comfort and feel for the continental grip
3. Implement drills to focus on shots that use the continental grip:
 - a. Volley drills
 - b. Serve and overhead drill
4. Move to the groundstroke patterns: Two-handed forehand and backhand stroke patterns and footwork; topspin and slice.

Why Start with the Continental Grip? (Figure 7 & 8)

Beyond the fact more skilled shots use the continental grip (as I will describe in a moment), for most beginner players, the continental grip is the most unfamiliar and usually the least comfortable. Here are the shots that use a continental grip as the foundation grip at skilled levels:

1. **The forehand and backhand volley.** While there might be subtle differences based on situations volleys among skilled and professional players, those students who learn with the continental grip will be better suited to advance play at the net.
2. **The serve.** The continental grip allows for all types of serve in addition to providing the right grip to develop the fastest racquet head speed.
3. **The Overhead.** Like the serve, the continental grip will allow for high racquet head speed and the ability to do more with the overhead.
4. **Drop shots.** While you can hit drop shots well from a variety of grip positions with practice, it is the continental grip that is best suited to hit effective drop shots.

5. **Slice shots.** Especially on the backhand side, the continental grip creates the best orientation of the racquet to the arm to hit effective slice backhands. Because the slice and the drop shot are hit with essentially the same swing path, the ability to disguise the drop shot with the continental grip is an advantage too.
6. **Angle Volleys.** Often thought of as an ‘advanced volley’, the angle volley is one of the easiest volleys to hit and we use it to learn the volley. But, the severe angle volley is nearly impossible to hit well with anything but the continental grip.



Figure 10: The eastern forehand grip moves the grip one bevel over from the continental grip. The base knuckle of the index finger is now on the third bevel, one down from bevel #2.

7. **Topspin, Two-handed Backhand.** The dominant hand among top players hitting a two-handed backhand is continental.

As you can see, nearly every shot except for the one-handed forehand and one-handed backhand topspin groundstroke is a continental grip-dependent stroke. That would make the development of the grip a priority.

Unfortunately, too many teaching pros and players alike take the easy way out and work on topspin forehands as their first learning stroke. This is because the eastern forehand grip is usually the most comfortable grip to hold a tennis racquet with. There is nothing inherently wrong with learning the topspin groundstroke with this grip first. However, the use of this grip as their first grip to use in tennis makes the development of the continental grip that much more difficult. In addition, because the volley uses a short, ‘blocking’ type of stroke, learning full-swinging, topspin groundstrokes as a player’s first introduction to hitting a tennis ball, it is often difficult to teach kids to NOT swing at their volleys with a topspin-like motion using the more familiar eastern grip.



Figure 11: Using the eastern forehand grip, players tend to “push” the ball with their palm, having to lay the racquet back relative to the forearm. In addition, this grip tends to drop the racquet head down below the wrist forcing the player to hit a much flatter volley.

Downfall of the Eastern Grips for the Volley (Figure 10 & 11)

One of the most prevalent examples of using comfortable grips (in stead of grips that are necessary for more advanced play), is the use of the eastern grips for the forehand and backhand volley. The use of these two grips is arguably more comfortable for players to use in executing rudimentary volleys suitable for playing tennis quickly at lower levels. So much so, players often get a false sense of accomplishment in their use and execution. This feeling is what makes it so difficult to abandon the grips when they realize that they can’t progress any further in their volley execution. It is so pervasive that I feel a need to clarify the reason for this conclusion.

In addition to the overall deficiency in the progression of the volley, the use of the eastern grip on the volley often migrates into the use of it on the serve and overhead as well. Because the eastern forehand grip ‘feels’ so comfortable, its use in one aspect of the game often makes the exclusion of it on other shots nearly impossible...even when players have been trained to use a different grip.



Figure 12: Note the differences between this volley position and grip and that of **figure 11**. (Even with the contact point approximately the same height.) With the continental grip, the player turns more sideways, drives the ball with a stroking motion as opposed to a pushing one, and keeps the racquet more parallel with the forearm and closer to the eyes of the player.

While a player can hit some forehand volleys relatively well with an eastern forehand grip, as volleys become more difficult, the eastern forehand grip becomes less successful. As Arthur Ashe once identified in his book *Arthur Ashe on Tennis*, “a player who uses an eastern forehand grip on the volley will hit topspin even if he is trying to hit the ball flat.” It is common to find players who use an eastern forehand grip on their forehand volleys to hit a topspin volley

in a quick exchange—usually into the bottom of the net—because of this natural propensity to hit over the ball with this grip. These players usually need to consciously try and hit the ball flat or with under-spin. Thus, when faced with a fast exchange at the net when there isn't the time to make conscious decisions, many of these players revert to the topspin-like volley strokes and lose the value of an under-spin volley in this process

In addition, those who use the eastern grips must change grips between the forehand and backhand volley. While a few tennis 'authorities,' (actually, very few!), say there is plenty of time to switch grips, the vast majority of teaching pros know otherwise. At low levels, yes there is time because the typical rally, at lower levels, doesn't contain the higher speeds typical of more advanced levels. At the 3.0 or 3.5 levels, not only is the speed of play slower than, say at the typical 4.0 or above levels, but players also seldom come to the net as often at these lower levels of play. At the 4.5 or above levels, you often have doubles points that feature four players at the net in a fast, rapid-fire exchange between the players. This split-second rally, not only reduces the time necessary to shift grips within these split-second moments, (those that require reactions, not thought), but the ability to hit more effective volleys, is hampered greatly even when a player happens to be able grasp the right grip at the right moment. Obviously, if a player hopes to reach a 4.0 or 4.5 level or higher, using a grip that basically limits you at a lower skill level will be of no help to you in your quest to play tennis at higher levels. (At least, as it relates to volleys!)



Figure13: One of the biggest problems using the eastern forehand grip is that the grip sets the racquet up at nearly a right-angle to the forearm. When the player turns sideways, this racquet position makes the racquet go too far back, literally pointing to the side fence. From this position, the player MUST swing in an angular swing path to even meet the ball square to the intended target.

It was once reasoned that if a player has time to switch grips between a forehand and backhand topspin service return on 120-plus miles-per-hour serves, then most players should have time to change grips for a volley in any given rally. This is blatantly false. Every serve travels about 80 feet from baseline to baseline. In comparison, a typical volley opportunity, one from a passing shot from the baseline, the ball only travels 40 feet or less, giving the volley player less than half the distance to read and respond correctly. In addition, and perhaps more significantly, the speed of the serve diminishes by nearly one third before the bounce and by half soon after the bounce. By the time a serve reaches the opponent's baseline, a 120 mph serve will be traveling about 60 mph! A passing shot, in most cases, will not have bounced before being volleyed, and, will lose only a fraction of its initial speed as it travels usually less than half the distance as a serve.

Another problem with the eastern grips is the position of the racquet as the players makes his or her unit turn. The eastern grip sets the racquet up at nearly a right angle to the incoming

ball, making the player need to literally ‘swing’ the racquet around to get the racquet square to the ball. This is one of the reasons the eastern grips prohibit most players from hitting effective angle and drop volleys. The distance the racquet must swing to achieve a desired angle results in the player hitting this volley much too hard. When players with this grip try the angle volley, they usually hit the volley well too deep to be an effective sharp angle volley.

I will talk more about the volley when we get into specific stroke patterns and volley progressions in **Chapter 7**.

Student Expectations

Because the continental grip is difficult to master, it is important to provide learning tools that help speed up the comfort and familiarity of the grip, while at the same time teach other aspects of the very strokes that use the grip.

There are many such tools which I will provide in the following chapters on stroke development. However, it is important to understand what expectations you and your students will have.

It is well worth the extra time that it usually takes kids—and even adults—to master the continental grip. It will be so tempting to let them use the more comfortable grips that they will probably try to migrate to (often without knowing it!) and even complain about using the continental grip. Yet, if you use the tools provided in this book, the difficulty will be minimized. And, if you explain to your students the importance of the grip, they will understand more the reason for their need to master it!

The progression in this book has clear definition and purpose. I will outline each step along with the purpose and philosophy behind each step.



Figure 14: Here, we are working with a group of Girl Scouts in the toss and catch game. This was a playoff between six girls on who could simply toss and catch the most balls before dropping one.

Beginning Drills to Start

Tennis is one of the more complex sports in terms of keeping score and playing matches. The “fifteen-thirty-forty-game” scoring method along with having to win 6 games, win by two, to win a set, and usually the requirement to win two-out-of-three sets to win a match can be quite confusing. In addition, the serving rotation, where to start and stand for serving and returning, when to switch sides and even tie-breakers add to the confusion.

It can be very easy to teach the scoring rules of tennis while at the same time working on hand-eye coordination and making it all fun.

Scoring Toss and Catch

When I began working with my daughter, Kyla, when she was about 5 years old, we played a game of catch using one of her stuffed animals. If she caught the toy, she got a point. If she dropped it, I got the point. I would call the score out using tennis scoring of 15, 30, 40; game...included deuce and ad-in and ad-out. Within a day, she grasped the concept of scoring a tennis match and she was then the one to call the score out. Not only did she learn to keep score, but she was improving her hand-eye coordination as well as learning how to ‘win’ a match. That is, if she was behind, she would work harder to catch more throws to come back and win the game or set.

In addition, I would have two marks on the floor, one on Kyla’s side, and one on my side. At love all, we both stood to the right of our respective marks, simulating the first point on a real court being served from the right side to the right service box. At the beginning of every tossing “rally”, we switched sides on our marks. At the end of every odd game, we switched sides of where I would toss from. Thus, she was learning the scoring procedures in this remarkably simple game.

We also played “Tie-Breakers” using this same format of tossing and catching. Kyla knew exactly how to score a 12-Point Tie-Breaker by the age of 6!

“Reach with Your FEET Drill”

This drill is a terrific drill to help kids and adults alike start employing their feet instead of simply reaching for balls that are not hit perfectly to them.

Pair players up in twos; use one ball with one player tossing the ball to their partner. The catching player keeps both hand against their hips and can’t move them from this position. The tossing player tosses the ball to either side of the catcher a little ways away from the catcher, making the ball bounce once before the catcher moves and catches the ball. In order to catch the ball, the catcher can’t reach with their hand; they must move their feet and align their hand (that is held against their hip) to the incoming ball after it has bounced once. After catching it, the players reverse roles and the catcher now tosses the ball to his or her partner.

Two Ball, Two Player Toss Game

This is another excellent drill for developing hand-eye coordination. Two players face each other about four or five feet apart. Both players start with one ball in their right hand. They start by tossing the ball to their partner’s empty left hand. They then toss this ball with their left hand back to their partner’s right hand. (Many will initially try to switch hands. Make sure they toss the ball from the hand they catch it with.) You can add footwork patterns to this drill, having the players side step one step and make a “split-step” as they catch the ball, then repeat this footwork pattern to their other side as they toss and catch the ball.

In the following chapters, I will include many more specific drills which you will want to include in all phases of training junior players. Remember too, that virtually all of these drills can be used by adults with equally good success!

Age-Dependent Progressions

The age of a child will often dictate the actual progression I use with beginners. For older kids and adults, I start them all off with volleys then the serve and after these, we then begin groundstroke progressions. Because younger kids are often not strong enough to control the racquet, this progression of volleys then serves as a starting point can be difficult. However, a

child is never too young to start drills that will help them gain comfort with the continental grip that so many shots utilize.

For younger kids, while we employ many of the drills that I will be discussing in subsequent chapters, there are other tools and drills you can use to help kids gain advanced stroke patterns early on. Many of these drills can be done as a competition challenging a group of young beginners to keep focused and learning to compete in tennis even though they are not yet “Playing” tennis on a court or hitting balls over the net yet.

Non-Racquet Drills for Little Kids (Ages 4 to 8)

Many of the drills I am including in this book, have been developed by other coaches and teaching pros. While I try to improve any drill I like, (and I encourage you to embellish the drills found here or personalize them more), I try to always give credit for where I first learned the drill.

In the following set of non-racquet drills for little kids, I credit David Brouwer a highly recognized teaching pro in Michigan. These drills can also be found at www.tennisone.com where David uses video clips of each drill for easier understanding.

1. **Caterpillar Drill:** Line up as many as ten kids in a single-file line anywhere on the court. The coach rolls a tennis ball towards the line and each child must move and then spread their legs apart so that the ball rolls through their legs all the way through the line of kids. After each roll, have the front player move to the back of the line so a new “leader” is at the front of the line for each roll. Roll balls away from the line so that all the kids must move—as a “caterpillar” to make the ball roll through the entire line of kids without hitting someone’s foot.
This drill can be done with teams to see which team can get their ball to get through the entire line the most times in a row.
2. **Fill-er Up:** Holding small cones, players toss a tennis ball into the air and try to catch the ball inside their cone. You can start with kids letting the ball bounce once then catch, twice, then catch, and even three bounces then catch. Then work on catching the ball in the air.
Have contests to see who can catch the most balls in a row without it dropping out of the cone.
3. **Count and Catch Drill:** Toss a ball to a child and tell them to catch the ball after a called-out number of bounces. For example, the coach calls out three bounces and the student must count the bounces to three before catching the ball in their hands.
4. **Popcorn:** The kids hold one cone each. The coach, (or several coaches), toss two handfuls of tennis balls into the air. Each kid tries to catch the balls inside their cone. If they can’t catch a ball in the air, they try to catch one after it bounces until all the balls are caught.
5. **Burglar:** A pile of tennis balls are in the middle of the court. Any number of students is circled around the pile about 15 feet away with each student having a racquet on the ground by their feet. On the command “go”, each player runs to the pile of tennis balls

and takes ONE ball each back to their racquet and sets it on the strings. They go back and get another ball each until all the balls are gone from the middle pile. Then, the coach yells, “Burglar” and each player may run to any other kid’s racquet and steal ONE ball to take to their racquet. After a short period, the coach yells “stop” and the players count the number of balls on their racquet.

6. **Sharks and Minnows:** With a large group of kids, you prescribe one or two players as “Sharks” the rest of the group are “Minnows”. Using the singles court on one half of a court as the “Fish Tank” players avoid being tagged by the shark. When they are tagged, the minnows step out of the tank until all the minnows are finally ‘eaten’ by the sharks. The last two minnows eaten become the next sharks. Remind the minnows that they can’t step out of the ‘tank’ or they are out.

This is a great game to get any large group moving. In addition, it is a great idea to get a crazy hat of some kind to represent the sharks. I attached a shark fin to the top of a “cat-in-the-hat” hat which made it fun to be the shark!

7. **Spider in the Web:** Players line up on the singles side line on the back half of the court. One player is the Spider standing in the middle of the backcourt. On the command from the coach, the players try to run from their singles sideline to the opposite sideline without being tagged by the spider. Last kid to get tagged is the next spider.

Relay Drills

With kids, they love contests and especially team contests. Thus, any tennis drill that you can create a team-competition element, you will add tons of excitement for your junior students.

Relay drills are the best for the purpose of team competitions. Here are a few of my favorite team drills.

1. **Circle Hand-off drill:** A simple drill that pits one circle of players against another, (or any number of circles of players). Have kids from two or more circles, preferably with at least 8 or more kids in each circle. Have all the kids sit in the circle so they can all touch hands. Identify a starting player on each team who will take one ball and pass it to the person next to them. You can see which team can get their ball around the circle and back to the starting person first. You can increase the number of times the ball must go around the circle too. Another variation is to start one ball in one direction and another ball in the opposite direction around the circle. This adds to the attention each player must be giving to the drill. Another variation is to have the kids stand to start and sit when they have passed the ball to the next person and then stand again when the ball comes back around again. This way, you can see how each team is doing.
2. **Team Basketball Game:** Again, with a circle of players, you give each player a ball to start and put a five gallon bucket in the center of the circle. (Put wadded up newspaper or a big towel in the bottom of the bucket. I’ll explain why in a moment.) On “Go” from the coach, the players toss their ball towards the bucket in the center of their team’s circle. If they miss, the ball will go to someone opposite them on their team in the circle. Keep tossing the balls until all the team’s balls are in the bucket. (The towel or the wadded up paper will keep the balls from bouncing out of the bucket if they land it in!) Make sure

you count the balls each team started with and count the balls in the bucket to make sure the team didn't lose a ball!

3. **Caterpillar Relay Race:** Form single-file lines of players starting at the baseline and going back to the back fence, all players sitting down. (Doesn't matter how many kids in each team nor how many teams or lines of players you form.) One ball is given to the kid in the front of the line. He must pass this ball over their head to the next person behind them and so on until the ball gets to the last person. This last person must stand and carry the ball to the front of the line, sit down, and then start the passing brigade again. The team that gets each player through back to having the original first player at the front of the line wins. (Or, you can see which team can reach the net first. However, you will get kids who cheat and sit down much further out in front of their line to get further along.)



Figure 15: Up bounces. While holding a continental grip, the player is working on keeping the elbow straight, the wrist firm and keeping the racquet at a 90-degree angle to the forearm.

Racquet and Ball Drills

I start all beginners with volley type racquet drills and games. There are many reasons for this approach:

1. Because the continental grip is generally the least familiar, it is much better to get kids using this grip as soon as possible. The more you avoid the grip and let them use the more comfortable eastern forehand or even semi-western grip, the more difficult it will become for the child to assimilate the continental grip when it is necessary.
2. Within the Advanced Foundation, the preferred grip for the serve, the forehand and backhand volley, the backhand slice, the forehand and backhand drop shots, the overhead and the two-handed backhand (dominant hand's position), is the continental. In fact with the exceptions of subtle variations, the only grip that is not a continental is the forehand topspin ground stroke. Thus, the continental grip is a fairly important grip...for skilled players!
3. It is much harder, in my opinion, to teach kids the volley if they have first learned the groundstrokes. Since kids have a natural tendency to swing at every ball, starting kids off

with the very shot that emphasizes this makes learning to block balls with a minimal stroke becomes exponentially more difficult.

4. There are many drills you can do with large groups of kids with volleys where they are hitting many more balls than in drills that feature groundstroke patterns. This is because you can pair players up and work a multitude of drills with the volley where they can toss and block specific volleys back to a partner. I have taught over 100 players on one single court with only one assistant pro...successfully!

Please refer to **Chapter 7** for specific technique instruction as well as how to find the continental grip. Many of these drills and progressions can be used at appropriate times with beginner kids as well as beginning adults. Below are introductory drills that are perfect lead-up drills to the ones I will talk about in the next chapter.

Assisted Bounces and Individual Bounces

Holding the junior player's hand while they hold the continental grip, you can have the helps the player learn the rhythm of bounces, keeping the strings parallel with the ground and gaining the feel for the ball striking the racquet while holding the continental grip.



Figure 16: Down bounces while kneeling
on the same knee as the hitting arm.

Continue on with the student trying to do up and down bounces to see how many they can do. Charting players to see if they can beat their "personal best" is a great motivator in these types of drills.



Figure 18: Most of our regular clinics
include juniors, adults and senior players.
The Advanced Foundation has no age-
restrictions!

Ball Roll

Again, holding the continental grip, this time standing and holding the arm straight out in front of the player, elbow straight, and racquet held at a 90 degree angle to the arm, have the student practice rolling a tennis ball around the edge of the frame along the strings. Practice ten rolls in one direction then reverse the rolling ball around the frame in the opposite direction. This

fine motor skill helps players gain more comfort in holding and controlling the racquet holding the continental grip.

Alternating down and up bounces

Standing, the player bounces the ball down once. As the ball comes up to waist level, the player moves the racquet under the ball and taps it once up about a foot, holding the racquet with the arm straight and firm, elbow straight, and the racquet held at a 90 degree angle to the forearm. Repeat this pattern, once down, once up, for ten or twenty times.

Down Bounces (Figure 16)

It can take kids a little longer to learn to bounce continuously while holding the continental grip, but eventually, you will want them to build up to 50 to 100 bounces in a row. This drill builds up the forearm and grip strength while building familiarity with the continental grip.



Figure 17: Up-bounces. Players work on keeping their hitting arm straight, racquet at a 90-degree angle to the forearm, and a relaxed body.

Up-Bounces (Figure 17)

Holding the continental grip and a firm, straight hitting arm, have players practice bouncing balls up off their strings. Work on keeping the racquet head up near the chest (not pointing out in front of the player), and the hitting arm straight and firm. This drill helps build the foundation for the backhand volley as well as build strength in the forearm and, again, familiarity with the continental grip. Also, try and get the student to relax the non-hitting arm as many will tense up this hand and arm!

Bounce with movement

Either bouncing up or down bounces while the student jogs or walks around the court helps coordinate the control of the racquet interacting with the ball and simple movement. This drill will take time for beginners to get a handle on. However, even if they lose control of the ball, emphasize the proper continental grip on both the downs and the ups as well as the ideal racquet head position not dropping below the wrist but maintaining close to a 90 degree angle to the forearm.

A variation of this is bouncing on one foot while maintaining bounces! This is even more challenging as well as being a good conditioning drill to include with your other physical training exercises!

Note: In the following chapter, I will discuss more in-depth ways to get beginners started with the volley. As I have mentioned many times, nearly all these drills can be done with adults and kids. (**Figure 18**)

Down Catches

This is the practice of ‘catching’ a falling object, such as a bean bag or a tennis ball (as players get the feel for it), and holding it on the strings as it falls. A player tosses up the ball or object several feet above their head and then attempts to bring the racquet down at the same speed the object is falling, catching the ball or bean bag as if it were a water balloon or an egg and you didn’t want to break it as you catch it on the strings of the racquet. Tip: Hold the racquet high, come down with the object and DON’T try to touch the object until it is about waist high. Again, focus on holding the continental grip and work on the finesse of soft hands and racquet control.

Volley with Bean Bag: This drill, while I’m sure others have thought of it, was first suggested to me by my assistant, Wayne Bullock. As a way to help beginners get the feel of finding and blocking the ball for the volley, have them try and catch a bean bag on the strings as if they were going to hit a volley. I like to start all my drills with the harder ones first, hence we start with the backhand volley. Similar to the Up-Bounces, hold the arm straight and firm, racquet head held up with a firm wrist, and, of course, using the continental grip.

We follow this up with the forehand volley ‘catch’; using the continental grip, keeping the elbow closer to the body and racquet head up.

Toss and Block Drills: The toss and block drill can be adapted to teach not just volleys but half-volleys, as well as groundstrokes in a productive, yet controlled, environment. In addition, the aspect of tossing the ball works on the timing for beginners and even the tossing player is working on subtle things like aiming (tossing to the partners racquet), tracking the ball as it comes off the racquet and trying to catch it, and as a partnership, you can create little competitions between teams of two players to see who can do the most without dropping or missing a ball.

I recommend that the tossing player step with the opposite foot as their tossing hand as this simulates the footwork for a forehand even as this player is only tossing the ball. Using an underhand toss, the tossing player tosses to the specific shot they are working on. After the toss, the tossing player can hold up their hand to use as a “Target” for the blocking player to aim the shot to.

For volleys, the blocking player, the one with the racquet is focusing on finding the ball on their strings, setting the racquet when they make the unit turn and holding their finish and

making corrections in their aim as they gain control of finding the ball to their strings. A slight under-spin action is desired but not critical at this point. I try not to have players hit volleys flat for many reasons: flat volleys will come off harder than a ball with under-spin; flat volleys tend to reflect downward off a flat racquet; advanced volley patterns usually employ under-spin for a variety of advantages. The faster you can get beginners to feel the under-spin action, the faster they will develop an advanced volley.

Too much under-spin? This is not a major concern to me. The opposite of this flaw is to hit the ball too flat or with topspin. While the goal is not to “chop” at the volley, the feeling of hitting with under-spin is an important concept...to the point where I don't mind seeing players hit too much under the ball. If they are keeping the racquet plane the same and “hitting and holding” it is very easy to get kids to hit with less under-spin. Simply tell them to hit the ball flat. Usually, when a player who does hit with too much under-spin is told to hit the ball flat, they generally hit a very good volley with the right amount of under-spin to make the correction.

Remember: It is NOT 'out in front'!

The phrase, 'hit the ball out in front' has been used for eons by teaching pros. The concept of the phrase is to help players not hit late. However, the interpretation of this phrase can, and often does, lead players to hit some shots wrong. The volley, for example, is not generally hit in front of the body towards the net. When a player turns sideways, then yes, the racquet is held out in front of them...but, this is not out towards the target. When players reach towards the net to make contact with the continental grip, the racquet opens up too much. This is one reason so many players resort to using eastern grips on their volley. The eastern grip requires a player to hit out in front of them because of the racquet being laid back relative to the forearm with these grips. The continental grip will lay the racquet more parallel with the forearm and when the player turns sideways, the racquet is already square to the ball.

Targeting

Before I get into specific drills, it is important to learn the value of using targets. If there is one teaching tool I would recommend you buy first, are large and heavy cones. Too often, coaches buy the cheap light-weight cones. (I was guilty of this!) The problem with these cones are when they get hit, they get shot all over the court! This usually means you have to stop the drill, pick up the errant cone, and set it back up in the place you had it.

It is so very important that the goal of targets is not specifically to 'hit the target'. As mentioned above, it is critical that the player work on specific, desired stroke patterns, grips and footwork patterns that will lead to better play. Targets, THEN and ONLY THEN, will be of maximum benefit. When a player strives to use good techniques, then they can incorporate the value of aiming. For example, if a player is working on a backhand crosscourt, deep volley, (using proper form), and the ball goes short and right, the player then can make adjustments in the aiming of subsequent tries. Each effort will provide feedback to the quality of the aiming that the player is attempting.

When a player is using poor technique, aiming is usually useless. In fact, targets can encourage bad technique should a player hit or come close to hitting a target with such form. There are many ways to hit a tennis ball over the net. Most of such ways are not considered skilled. In drills or practice, a player can often manipulate any form to finally get a ball towards a target.

On-Court Drills: Drills using the court, net and tennis balls

Angle Volley Drills

When players demonstrate consistent control and execution of the volley in all the previous drills, then, and only then, do I then begin to hit balls to them on the court. And the first drill I work on is the angle volley drill. It dawned on me years ago that nearly all teaching pros, myself included, would start beginners out by hitting balls to them from the middle of the court and have them hit back to the middle. When I observed those players who had not progressed much in the volley areas, it was in the inability by these stagnant players to hit significant angle volleys.

Now, while the eastern grips severely limit the ability of players to hit severe angles on their volleys, I noticed that even players who had learned to use the continental grip seldom explored angle volleys. It can be argued that one of the components of advanced volley play is the ability to hit angle volleys in competition when the right situation offered it. I recognized later that the training we were using, hitting balls to players and having them hit them back down the middle of the court was preventing these players from advancing their volley when it came to hitting more effective angles when needed.

Now in all drills I include angle volleys as the initial teaching modality, in addition to working down the line and deep crosscourt volleys as well.

Backhand Angle Volley Drill: In this drill we are emphasizing the ‘set and hold’ principle. This phrase, one I coined years ago, describes a player ‘setting’ the angle of the racquet before the ball gets to them. After contact, the player then ‘holds’ the finish. One of the biggest faults of beginners and even intermediate players in controlling the volley is the fact that they start with the strings pointed well away from the target prior to contact. This means the player will have to ‘swing’ the racquet around just to get the racquet to be in position to hit the ball to a desired target. The ‘hold’ concept is that after contact, the player will want to hold the racquet in this same position. While players will elongate the follow-through as they become more advanced, beginners learn a great deal about aim and, more importantly, creating a repetitive, reliable stroke pattern for each and every volley.

In addition to the backhand angle volley, I move to the forehand angle volley with the same concepts and focus of form, finding the ball and learning how to hit a significant angle on the volley.

One additional note on the angle volley: *Because the angle of the racquet when being held in a continental grip is already set for a forehand or backhand volley, the player only needs to turn the shoulders to adjust the desired angle. In fact, if you watch most pro volleys, you will notice that they turn away from the target with their body when hitting a volley to the opposite side of the court. This is far different than the typical recreational volley player who uses an eastern forehand and backhand grip to volley. These players*

have to turn towards their target because the grip causes the racquet to lay back much further than the continental. This is why so many recreational players have great difficulty hitting angle volleys with significant angle and touch. The eastern grips force the player to 'swing' the racquet to gain the angle needed. This swing limits the touch and, because of this, the player seldom tries to hit with much angle in fear of hitting the ball wide.

Inside Out Volley: This is the volley that is hit on the inside part of the court to an angle out wide. Like the angle volley just discussed, teaching pros often neglect the practice of this angle too. I like the inside out volley as it helps players learn to wait for the ball better and learn to use the angle of the racquet to direct the ball to the desired angle. Often players like to reach for the ball. This drill teaches them the consequences of reaching with the hand forward to hit a volley. (As with almost all shots, remember to 'reach with your FEET...not with your hand!')

Drop-Volley Drills: One of the elements I often witness among teaching pros is the preponderance of drills used to teach players to hit the ball deep, over the net. Even the angle volleys I have mentioned, still have an element of hitting the ball at somewhat of a distance. (Crosscourt angles at the net, from alley to alley, is at least 27 feet!) Having students work on turning sideways and literally blocking a ball to a target just over the net, only 5 or 6 feet away, allows the player to first discover how much power a simple blocked volley can have, (in most cases, the student will block a clean ball and hit it 15 to 20 feet away from them!), and because they are learning the "touch" aspect of the volley, they can concentrate on the technique more than the 'swing' that they perceive they need for deeper volleys. It is often a good idea to reintroduce the "bean-bag" volley catch discussed earlier, as the idea of catching the bean-bag is exactly the same feel they will use in hitting a drop volley.

In the following chapter, you will learn specific techniques as they relate to the Advanced Foundation within all volley applications. In addition, Chapter 13 will outline many of my favorite drills for improving volley applications.

Second Phase: Moving on to the Serve

With beginners of all ages, the best stroke to move on to after the volley is the serve for a variety of reasons. The serve uses the same grip, the continental; the serve is one of the more difficult motions for kids to master, (thus, it is best to start them on it sooner than later!); the serve can be taught effectively in a progressive fashion to a large number of kids at the same time. With beginners, namely kids and especially girls, the overhand motion of the serve coupled with the complexity of making contact on a ball tossed up over our head (instead of a ball tossed towards us, which is usually more familiar for kids), is often not just difficult, but usually very unfamiliar. Most youngsters have not done many activities which involve the overhand throwing motion. Most kids toss underhand to each other when playing simple games of catch. Very few girls have ever thrown a football before the age of 8. And even fewer kids have tossed a ball over their head and tried to hit it with a racquet!



Figure 19: Learning to serve well is not something that happens automatically or quickly. Players MUST be taught proper grip, stance and swing patterns associated with skilled serves.

I will discuss the technical serve elements in **Chapter 8**. Again, the drills, teaching methods and overall progression will be the same for little kids as it would be for adults.

Serve Elements

While I will discuss the serving components later in **Chapter 8**, I feel a summary of the main teaching progressions for the serve are appropriate in this chapter dealing with the development of beginning players.

Like the volley and other aspects of tennis, there are two general approaches to serving dealing with teaching philosophies. There is a tendency, a ‘giving in’ among some pros, to teach the serve using simple grips and service motions that allow a student to quickly ‘get the serve in’ with the argument that the kids can “start playing tennis quicker” by learning to get the serve in quicker.

The other approach, is to teach the more advanced service grip and swing pattern right from the start, understanding that there will be a little delayed gratification in ‘getting the serve in’ using such methods.

Obviously, I am in favor of the latter, not the former.

Let me first say that while learning the continental grip and learning to serve with slice spin can take a bit longer to get a feel for, I will say that any delay is worth it. The real problem is that the faster kids—and adults for that matter—begin to compete using inferior or simple methods, (those that must change for the player to improve and compete at higher levels), the more difficult and seemingly impossible the change will be. Competing, even for little kids playing mini-tennis, or using soft balls, will make the player want to go back to the most comfortable and familiar. (Where have we heard all this before?) Thus, to transition to the more advanced grip and swing pattern will be most difficult.

In my 35 years of teaching tennis, I can tell you that without a doubt, it doesn’t take much more time or effort (compared to the time or effort by those who are taught more simplistic modes of hitting the serve), to teach more advanced service techniques to very young kids. Much like the volley, serving well has very little to do with strength, and everything to do with technique. As with anything, if a student continues to employ a swing or footwork pattern that is initially unfamiliar, what was once uncomfortable will become comfortable. However, if we start off using comfortable, familiar methods, those which will need to change if we hope to advance at some point, we only ingrain patterns that much more...and ultimately making changes to those ingrained patterns almost impossible!

Learning the Serve within the Advanced Foundation

The concept of learning within the Advanced Foundation is to teach any potential tennis player methods that do not have to change for advanced skill levels to be reached. While evolution and player idiosyncrasies will guarantee some element of change as any player develops, the concept of a necessity to change (to more advanced grips and swing and footwork patterns) is the very concept that insures player stagnation and failure to reach their true tennis potential.

The serve, like the volley, is one of the weakest shots among players who stagnate at levels below their ability. Specifically, the ability to hit a strong second serve is the sticky point among such players; but also, the ability to hit more effective, more consistent first serves is directly related to a player's ability to hit effective second serves. Both serves are dependent on spin. Forget the phrase, "Flat Serve." There is no such thing among skilled players. Players on tour, serving well over 120 mph hit with significant spin, upwards of 2000 rotations per minute (rpm) on a so-called flat serve. Second serves are upwards of 100 percent higher, with players reaching ball-rotation speeds of over 4000 rpm's. Unless a player is introduced to the concept of spin, few will not be able to achieve an optimal amount of spin (based on their racquet head speed) nor will they probably hit the right KIND of spin.

Serve Foundation: The Slice

The serve we first teach is the slice. The slice provides the student the easiest spin service motion and it teaches the student how a ball with spin will behave in the air. It is a lot of fun for kids to see that they can make a ball curve. It is usually something so new and something that is almost magical, that they really get a kick out of seeing the ball curve.

The slice also promotes the action of the "edge-on" component as it typically gets kids to lead with the leading edge of their racquet instead of leading with their hand or leading with a flat racquet face to "push" the ball into the court.

Serve Progression

NOTE: Be sure to read Chapter 8 on Serves to learn all the specific patterns and procedures to learning the serve correctly.

Figure 20: Standing sideways to a fence, a player can gain a better understanding of brushing across the ball on the serve.



It is important to get kids and adults alike to feel comfortable with the continental grip. (See "Racquet and reason we like to

Ball Drills" earlier in this chapter.) The move to the serve immediately following the volley is that the grip desired is the same. Moving from the volley to groundstrokes, (or worse yet, starting with groundstrokes first!), students will be moving to a grips and swing pattern that is as far from the serve as you can get!



Figure 21: Standing behind the student, an instructor can toss the ball and swing the racquet while the student holds on to the racquet. (This works best with shorter students!)

When good basketball coaches take on the task of training little kids in basketball, you don't see the coach start players off by shooting baskets with the kids doing the "granny" style of throwing the ball up from between their legs! On the contrary, they use a smaller ball, and lower the basket and have the kids shoot from closer in, using the right shooting technique that is no different than what the men and women pros use. Even as it might be easier to hit the basket—or even make a basket—shooting granny style, there is not one basketball coach who would ever resort to this shooting style just to get kids to feel successful in basketball!

Tennis is no different. We can use shorter racquets, softer or larger tennis balls, AND, we can learn to first serve from the service line instead of the baseline.

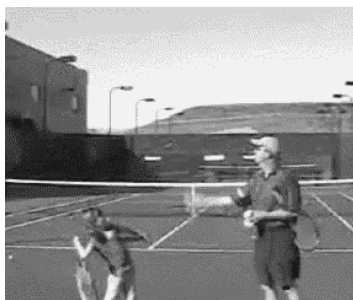


Figure 22: Tossing for the server. This helps the student concentrate on the swing pattern without having to worry about the toss too.

Step One: We start kids with the concept of brushing the ball using a simple drill of holding the ball in their hand while they brush the strings of their racquet across the ball. Moving the strings across the fuzz of the ball and getting them to feel that action is an important first step. If they are right handed, have them hold the ball in their left hand, palm up, while they move their racquet strings across the top of the ball. Make sure they are holding a continental grip as use their forearm, (not their wrist) to move the strings across the top of the ball.



Figure 23: When first introducing the actual hitting portion of the serve, start players at the service line. The students won't perceive the need to swing so hard as they would if they started on the baseline. This allows them to focus more on technique as opposed to strength.

Step Two: *Brushing the ball on “Down Bounces”*. The next step is to have kids learn to bounce the ball while brushing the right side of it, (for right-handers). This is a little tricky as kids tend to spin around chasing the ball the first number of times they try it. But, even just hitting the side of the ball a few times, you are building the “Muscle Memory” of making the strings of the racquet move across the side of the ball. Have them start by bouncing it one time by brushing across the top and right side of the ball (usually holding the racquet at a 45 degree angle) and then catch the ball. Then have them do two bounces and catch. Continue this pattern until they can maintain the bounces in front of them without spinning around.

Step Three: Learn the Swing Path: This drill can be followed by the “Fence Drill” (See **Figure 20**) where the student stands with their toss shoulder against the fence and swing from a “back-scratch” position along the fence. This movement reinforces the action of the racquet as it brushes across the back of the ball.

Guide Drill: (Figure 21) Actually standing behind the player, tossing for them and holding their racquet hand with them, swing the racquet with them. I did this for Kyla once then had her try by herself. I would repeat this and gradually she developed the swing path we were working on. (She didn’t like it when I did this, “I want to do it myself,” was common...but, no question, this drill helped her.) You can do this with shorter kids fairly easily.

Toss Drill I: (Figure 22) Many kids have trouble coordinating the combination of the toss along with the swing they are working on. Standing to their side with their racquet back in the “back scratch” position, you can toss for them and they can hit the serve without having to deal with a bad toss. Bad tosses are common and when kids try to swing at a bad toss, they usually forgo any desired swing pattern and just swing to make contact.

Toss Drill II: Nearly every tennis book talks about the toss and rightfully so. An inconsistent toss creates very inconsistent serves. Placing a towel or simply making a small mark on the court slightly in front of the player and having them toss the ball to land on the mark or towel is a simple way to practice a consistent toss.

Serving from the Service Line (Figure 23)

This is the first progression after learning the grip and proper swing path: learn the service motion from the service line. By starting kids up at the service line, they are not as apt to try and swing with their body and lose their balance or revert to using the eastern forehand grip in trying specifically to get the ball over the net. This is very common when teaching kids to serve from the baseline. Because the combination of the continental grip being unfamiliar, the spin of the ball being new to them, and that hitting a ball with spin doesn’t go as far as a ball hit flat, moving the kids up to the service line helps them work on the technique. I much rather see the kids use the right technique than specifically get the ball in the target area.



Figure 24: When players have a solid understanding and feel for the technique, then you can move them gradually back until they are serving from the baseline.

Certainly using targets provides a sense of success (or failure!), however, when players are introduced to targets too early, they will try any way that feels most comfortable to achieve the target...instead of the proper techniques. I promise you, that in time the proper technique will achieve target success! (It is a little like learning to play the piano...if you expect a kid to play a complex song too soon they will not be able to coordinate the fingers in the right sequence. By developing the fingers through progressive—but proper—patterns, they will gradually be able to play more and more difficult songs with success.) Practice until they can serve 8 out of 10 serves in each service box standing behind the service line. Once this has been achieved, then back them up half way between the service line and the baseline. Again work towards 8 out of 10. Once achieved, have them serve from the baseline. Further progressions include serving to targets in the service boxes as well as serving from different locations along the baseline for both the ad and deuce courts.

Make sure the kids stay sideways, (remind them about standing against the fence drill...or, better yet, have them hit a few standing against the fence first then have them come back to the service line to emphasize this position.)

Step Four: *Gradually serve from deeper in the court.* (Figure 24) As players become more comfortable with the grip, the brushing action and the timing of the motion, back up and get them to learn to aim higher and more to the right (for right-handers) until they can serve from the baseline. It didn't take long for Kyla to start getting her slice serve in with some regularity. I would say it took about a month for her to put it all together and really experience success from the baseline.

Other Tools

Kids and adults all learn differently. Because of this, there will be many situations that a student doesn't understand or "feel" what they should be doing on the serve. Thus, you will want to have several other tools that you can resort to, to help players develop the right progression.

Serving from the Knees: (Figure 25) Because many kids will "over-use" their legs and body, it is sometimes helpful for them to practice serving from their knees. This will help them to also learn to "hit up" on the ball for topspin. Make sure they kneel down sideways to the net and to kneel down on a towel or racquet cover to keep them from hurting the knees against the court.

Serving from the knees also helps them learn to toss more consistently. One additional note when serving on the knees: have players serve softly. Those who use an eastern forehand grip generally reach their peak acceleration after contact, and as such, students who swing with this grip often will hit the ground hard with their racquet if they swing too hard. (I recommend first trying this serve on the knees out on a grassy field to prevent players from breaking their racquets the first time they try this drill.) Using the continental grip, players should look to serve keeping their hitting elbow up high after contact, learning to accelerate the racquet at the top of their swing. In this way, the player will not come close to hitting the ground.



Figure 25: Serving from the knees helps players feel the “hitting up” on the ball for topspin as well as learning to use balance and control in their swing.

One-Foot Serves: Standing on their left foot (for right-handed players), many kids learn to serve with balance and limit the movements of their legs, feet and body when serving. Also, this helps players learn to push off with this front foot and land on it instead of stepping through with their back leg...a common error for many players. Also, this is a great drill to teach kids not to foot-fault!

Serve Conclusion

The serve is one of the most important components of a player’s ability to play tennis well. Having not just a great first serve, but more importantly, an effective second serve provides a great sense of confidence. It should be a weapon for all players since it can be practiced without a hitting partner, and it is the one shot that the player has full control of from the start. Unfortunately, millions of tennis players learned to serve within the context of simple, rudimentary methods, (to “get the ball in”), and, as a result of this learning pattern, stagnate with a serve that is far below that of what they should be able to achieve. By teaching kids (and adults) in the patterns I have outlined, I guarantee you that they will NOT stagnate with a sub-par serve!

The serve is further discussed in **Chapter 8**. This short summary should make it clear that there is a logical and effective progression that will lead all beginning students to learning and mastering an Advanced Foundation serve.



Figure 26: The two-handed backhand provides a solid foundation for developing the proper swing pattern, footwork and topspin.



Figures 27 & 28: The two-handed forehand is becoming not just a great stroke for developing the Advanced Foundation for players starting out, it can be a stroke used for top college players all the way up to the world's best. Stephanie Caplin on the left, a college player, and Gene Mayer a former top 10 world-ranked player both use a two-handed forehand.

Third Phase: Groundstroke Progression

I save groundstrokes as the last teaching progression. You can include it early in your teaching program, even as early as the second or third lesson. However, the volley and serve elements make for better warm up patterns and large group patterns that can lead into your teaching the groundstrokes. Because it is natural for any student to want to 'swing' their racquet at the ball, teaching how to limit the swing with the volley first, and then segue into the serve to teach how spin affects the flight of a ball both help players be 'ready' for groundstrokes.



Figure 29: Lleyton Hewitt has a model stroke for the two-handed backhand.

I start all beginners out with two groundstroke patterns that might be considered “old school.” These are a closed stance on their forehand and backhand, and a straight-back backswing on both sides. These two elements provide for the easiest natural topspin strokes and also provide for a very natural evolution to more neutral and open stances as well as developing a loop swing later that fits them. In my experience working at a resort that insisted teaching the loop swing for every student, I saw that not only was the mandated loop swing not necessarily the right loop for each student, but a large number of students ‘forced’ to employ this mandatory loop, failed to learn to get their racquet head below the ball for a topspin stroke, making it frustrating and difficult for them to learn the aspect of topspin.

From this very traditional framework, it is relatively easy to move towards open stance footwork patterns and very modern forehand and backhand stroke patterns quickly and successfully. In watching players who were first taught open stance, such students often failed to create the proper body coil and weight transfer. In addition, teaching more severe topspin grips early on has been shown to be so awkward that players, in compensating for the uncomfortable position of the racquet create very unfavorable swing patterns that are very detrimental to player progression.

Two-handed Forehand

For kids, I teach almost all youngsters the two-handed forehand. While I have covered the teaching of the two-handed forehand in my previous book, *TENNIS MASTERY*, (the only book in the world to provide a comprehensive guide to hitting this shot!), I feel it is important to discuss this shot both from a philosophical standpoint as well as how to execute the shot for any and all players who would benefit from learning it.

It should be first understood that many kids are simply not strong enough to manipulate a tennis racquet in such a way that they can create a repeatable, stable swing pattern. Most kids under the age of ten will incorporate wrist movements in hitting most forehands as well as not being able to maintain a firm enough grip to hit the ball cleanly with any consistency (especially if miss-hitting the ball!).

Having taught the two handed forehand to both hundreds of juniors as well as many adults; it is without question that this shot has tremendous merit on many levels. But, especially for kids, the two-handed forehand provides the foundation for learning to hit very ‘modern’ forehands very early on, as well as the fact that hitting with two hands helps teach better footwork, balance, and body control.

Technique

I prefer to keep the dominant hand on the bottom, (Monica Seles forehand, although, I was teaching this stroke a good five years before Monica appeared!). The swing pattern is very simple and compact. The hands drop to the right hip (right-handed descriptions here), and the racquet head is pointed down. The step into the ball is with the left foot and the swing mimics any ‘modern’ forehand stroke with the dominant’s elbow finishing high. The non-dominant left elbow stays close to the body at contact and the player’s dominant arm follows through for the old, “Kiss the Bicep” finish.



Figure 30: Drop-fed balls are ideal for developing proper swing patterns and mechanics for beginners.

For more detailed information on the two-handed forehand, please refer to **Chapter 9** on hitting all groundstrokes.

Two-handed Backhand

The model form I use for all beginners is basically a “Lleyton Hewitt” backhand. The grip is continental for the dominant hand, usually an eastern forehand for the non-dominant hand. The swing pattern is almost a mirrored image of the two-handed forehand as the hands drop down to the left hip, the racquet tip points down and the step is into the ball with a traditional closed or neutral stance. There are some key position points that the player can relate to: The hands close to the hip on the backswing; at the contact point, the dominant arm’s elbow stays close to the player’s side, and the follow-through has the non-dominant’s elbow point to the target and the “kiss the bicep” phrase is applicable for knowing where the non-dominant’s arm should be at finish.

Initial Training: Drop Feed

It amazes me to hear pros talk about letting kids ‘self-discover’ tennis strokes through specific live-ball hitting games and activities. As I mentioned, skilled tennis strokes are very seldom (if ever) natural or familiar...especially for kids! I have yet to see a kid develop prolific and effective strokes when left to limited instructional and drill programs. Yes, many kids will ‘discover’ how to “get a ball over the net.” Yet, as most people know there are an infinite number of ways a player can “get a ball over the net.” Yet, there are only a very few ‘skilled’ ways in which skilled players hit a ball over the net within the context of effective, consistent, and progressively improving ways. Observe the millions of adults who try desperately to change from their rudimentary and, oftentimes, elementary ‘dinking’ and ‘hacking’ swing patterns only to find that they simply can’t make the transition.

In developing Kyla's game, it was important for me to have her 'natural' strokes be correct. And, like playing a piano the way you make the unnatural become natural is to practice the desired pattern or skill to the point it becomes natural. Starting with a raw beginner, I believe, makes this a much easier accomplishment than trying to retrain someone who has ingrained patterns that are already established in competition.

Thus, with Kyla, we spent her first couple months with basically all drop-feed drills. However, my drills were far from those that are traditionally seen in beginner-type lessons.



Figure 31: Angle Drop-Fed drills help players learn to hit with more topspin as well as helping develop their ability to hit with more angles.

Angle Drop-Feed (Figure 31)

I wanted my daughter, Kyla, to think about hitting tennis balls not in a 'straight-ahead' mentality. That is, traditionally, beginners are taught to hit tennis balls straight ahead, over the net and pretty much down the middle of the court. At best, many pros might have a student hit crosscourt and/or down the line. But I took this concept to the extreme.

As mentioned in this series on teaching Kyla volleys, we start most all our beginners on angles; angle volleys and, now with groundstrokes, angle topspins.

I started Kyla on the angle topspin forehand and backhand for several advantageous reasons: First, it opened her eyes and developed her ability to know how to hit significant crosscourt topspins. Second, hitting a sharp angle topspin makes the student figure out how to get the ball up and down quickly using spin. Third, using the severe angles helped her see the how different the angles are compared to hitting a down the line. Yet, this concept of learning sharp angles helped develop a more prolific down the line passing shot. The reason is, the sharp angle teaches a player how to get "around the outside" of the ball, causing it to curve. This same curve is then used to hit down the line: the player can actually make the ball curve from outside the court back into the court. This is a very advanced swing pattern that can be learned almost automatically from using these drills.

Down the Line Drop Feed

As I just mentioned, the angle topspin stroke helps the player hit a more advanced down the line stroke. You will want to work this down the line drill from well outside the net post. Have the student hit the ball around the net post down the line and land it inside the singles side line. Use a target in the corner of the singles court for aim. You will discover (as will your student) that you can actually hit around the outside of the ball (just as in hitting the sharp angle crosscourt) and make the ball curve from out wide to back into the court down the line. Once the

student feels this action, you can back them up and work the down the line from further back and even bring them more into their side of the court (instead of hitting from well outside their own alley). You can mix in some sharp angle cross courts to make them feel the hitting action of hitting around the ball.

Remember, much like the aspect of hitting a slice serve on the deuce court and then hitting it on the ad court, a player will need to change their position relative to the ball and court, to hit the same curving ball as the sharp angle topspin when they try to hit this same shot down the line. One of the biggest mistakes that players make is they don't adjust their position relative to the court and incoming ball. So they end up having to change their stroke for each desired direction. For example, a player may hit out around the outside of the ball as we have discussed and hit it crosscourt. However, when hitting it down the line, if they don't rotate more closed, they will have to change the stroke to a "push" or flatter drive to go down the line.

Open Stance (Figure 32)

I seldom will move a player to learning an open stance forehand until they have mastered a conventional topspin forehand with a neutral or closed stance. The reason for this is that the open stance promotes less upper body rotation on the back swing and it tends to encourage swinging only with the arm. It is very easy to introduce the open stance forehand after the player has learned how to hit closed stance. This concept is not transitional as all top players need closed or neutral stance forehand for ball hit on the run and balls where they have to move up towards the net. However, the open stance forehand is a huge shot, a weapon and a must-have for all top players. I introduced my daughter Kyla at 8 years of age, the open stance forehand after she mastered the conventional footwork for her forehand. (She hits with a powerful two-handed forehand with both the open and closed stance.)



Figure 32: The two-handed forehand can easily be hit with an open stance after the player has learned the Advanced Foundation components using a closed stance.

You can start with the open stance by doing a drop-feed drill where the player steps out with their right foot (for right-handed players), and load this foot with their weight as they make their unit turn. From here, teach them to drive through the ball, extending this loaded leg in an explosive drive as the player rotates their upper body into the ball. This torque usually provides more power as well as the open stance can be deceptive in terms of where the player may go with this forehand.

Chapter 9 will cover all the elements of teaching and drilling the groundstroke patterns for beginners all the way up to top-ranked level players.

Conclusion

It is important for all beginners to establish the key components of the Advanced Foundation from the start. No matter what age, these swing patterns, grips, footwork patterns, and strategies can and should be followed as soon as a player decides they want to play tennis! Regardless of whether they want to 'excel' at tennis, the approach should be the same. Given the right foundation, any player at any point in their life, will be able to pursue tennis at virtually any level they choose. If they are introduced to inferior methods, then if they ever choose to pursue tennis at any time in their life, they will be greatly handicapped and become frustrated.

The progressions I have outlined and the stroke methodology which follows this chapter will help insure that all students and players will be better prepared and trained to reach what ever level of tennis they deem worth their time and energy.