Coaching Mastery

Chapter 9
Getting Started:
Groundstrokes & Specialty Shots

Using the Advanced Foundation to establish optimal development for groups and individuals

Topspin Groundstrokes: The 'Bread and Butter' of Tennis Strokes

Figures 1 & 2: Groundstrokes are the bread and butter of all top players. David Nalbandian and Maria Sharapova have similar foundations in hitting their topspin forehands.

After the serve, the groundstrokes will be a player's predominant shot-of-choice…unless they are strictly serve and volley players or those who usually hit the return and approach immediately after. In today's professional game, the groundstroke is the name of the game. Even among all-court players, today's men and women's tour is significantly dominated by players hitting groundstrokes.

At junior levels of tennis, groundstrokes are probably even more frequently hit as many juniors are simply not taught to volley well and seldom practice the volley game. Yet, without a volley, players end up having to camp out at the baseline and, unless forced to come to the net by a well placed drop shot or accidental miss-hit, most juniors only come to the net to shake hands at the beginning and end of most matches. However, those players who have developed a good volley game, they not only play doubles well, but they have many more options than just trying

to out-patience an opponent or trying to hit winners from the baseline. Those who work on an all-court game are able to adjust and change their game-plan when specific opposing strategies might call for it.

Figures 3 & 4: Whether you hit one-handed backhands or two, there are specific foundations that you will want to make sure all your students master. Here, Roger Federer (left) and Lleyton Hewitt execute their one and two-handed backhands respectively.

Yet, even within an all-court game, players will want to have a ground game that is sound and offensive, giving such players the opening to come in and finish the point. But, perhaps more importantly, players will need to create groundstrokes that keep them in any given point, a sort of "feeling out" of an opponent. In many cases, a player may only need to keep an average of three or four shots in play before a typical opponent simply breaks down and misses. The average match is won far more often by who made the least number of errors than who made the most winners!

Figure 5: Here a group of our junior players practice using a shadow-swing to learn and improve their groundstrokes.

But, with the advent of more topspin-laden power on the ground game, players who do come to the net must face a much more powerful response by an opponent in higher levels of play. Such topspin provides a far more offensive forehand or backhand than was seen in the game thirty years ago or more. Besides serve power, the biggest change in tennis over the last three decades has been in the power of the typical groundstroke. While the slice approach shot and conventional volley have not changed in that same period of time, the topspin pace and spin have made coming to the net much more daunting for those who do move forward. Not just in reacting to such fast responses, but doing something with the volley becomes much more difficult.

Certainly, as we have seen with the return of serve becoming more effective after about ten years of dominant serving games, we will probably see more players attempting and learning

to volley such powerful shots with equal effectiveness. It makes sense that when a player is faced with a faster ball, the ability for the player at the baseline to recover and run down a volley becomes that much more difficult too. Thus, I believe in time, the volley game will have somewhat of a renaissance. However, I don't think we will ever see the game return to a full-on serve and volley, chip and charge strategic dominance as we saw throughout the 1940's through the 1970's.

Thus, you will want to make sure that your players have a dominant groundstroke game, including topspin forehand and backhands. Also, as I will cover at the end of this chapter, players will want to develop an effective backhand slice as well as an effective drop shot off both the forehand and backhand sides.

Figure 6: Working with large groups of players in an effective learning environment, using proper learning techniques and the right foundation, you will produce the highest number of skilled players.

Drill Progressions

I have found that players who are taught in a specific progression end up developing effective groundstrokes. Especially when you are faced with teaching a large group of players, it is critical that you teach methods that are effective for all the members of a group. While certain stroke aspects may work for a few players, you will not want to take a chance and teach something that prevents players from not just progressing, but from becoming a potential champion in the process!

Having worked with extremely large groups, both in my coaching career as well as working with large numbers in tennis clubs in various clinics, workshops and camps, I have found a progression that literally works for everyone. The methods I teach within my Advanced Foundation assure that all players will develop the key fundamentals that allow them to progress and reach higher and higher degrees of effectiveness and consistency yet still providing for individuality and player uniqueness that is common within such large groups.

As I have mentioned before, don't be afraid of teaching 'tennis clones'. This phrase, while traditionally used as a derogatory statement among those who think that providing a similar training method for large masses is a bad, let me tell you they are so wrong it is scary! You can train a thousand players exactly the same way, using the same drills, techniques, and even train them in a 'militaristic' fashion…and no two players will play exactly the same! It is literally impossible to teach in such a way that every player will play the exact same way! It can't be done. I have trained identical twins exactly the same way and even these players take on subtle to significant patterns that clearly separate them. Look at the Bryan brothers; the top doubles team in the world as of this writing…Bob and Mike are twin brothers, identical twins, no less, and yet they don't play alike either!

Initial Teaching Patterns

Before a single tennis ball is actually hit, it is important… no, ***CRITICAL***, to first develop the proper swing pattern if the player hopes to become a skilled tennis player (as far as groundstrokes are concerned!) When a player is first allowed to hit a tennis ball, most players who have no understanding of proper tennis strokes, topspin, or footwork patterns associated with skilled tennis strokes will seldom, if ever employ such techniques without previous and dedicated instruction. This is because for most people, such skilled stroke patterns are completely unfamiliar. Thus, when faced with the prospect of hitting a tennis ball, anyone without a clear understanding will use nearly any form EXCEPT that which we would consider 'skilled form' to make the ball go towards a given target.

The Concept of WHEN to use TARGETS

Using targets on the tennis court during drills has been practiced for decades. Certainly, the use of targets helps provide feedback to the player on the outcome of a shot. When we miss a target, we can identify a 'three-dimensional' aspect to why we missed: High or low, left or right. Unfortunately, while such information tells us what direction we may have to use to aim with for future shots, the use of targets doesn't provide player feedback on the ***quality of the stroke***. And understanding this difference, between the feedbacks of stroke quality versus target quality, is important to both the student and the teacher.

Figure 7: Working on the proper form is the first priority. After the fundamentals of optimal form have been mastered, then players can—and should—use targets to develop their aim. Here, Kyla my 8-year old daughter works on hitting—and aiming—a severe crosscourt backhand.

Figure 8: The PracticeHit is a device that players can work on their groundstroke form while hitting a ball that moves back and forth on a flexible shaft. This also helps in teaching the student timing and contact zone.

Understanding the Ego

In any lesson, especially a group lesson, the aspect of hitting a target is a supreme ego-gratifying experience. In this respect, it can be easily seen why targets are such great motivators in terms of focus during practice. However, players who are interested in becoming better through better form or technique must understand that hitting the target is NOT the primary concern.

For those wanting to know how to train your young children in becoming the next multi-millionaire tennis player, (or simply wanting to have your children reach their tennis potential!), or those older players who want to change that ridiculously terrible backhand, you need to get rid of the balls and the targets!

Every player, young or old, when presented with hitting a tennis ball towards a target will usually resort to the most familiar stroke pattern, grip, or swing they feel will help them hit the target. Think about it. If you didn't know any better, would you try to hit a target with any unfamiliar grip or swing pattern? Remember that comfortable methods are more confident because of their familiar feeling. Unfortunately, if the goal is to develop more refined or sophisticated strokes or grips, players who find these newly learned strokes and grips uncomfortable will seldom feel confident in using them to hit a target…and certainly won't be confident in using them to try and win a match!

When working with very young children, I use only a "PracticeHit", a device that has a foam ball attached to a fiberglass shaft, that oscillates forward and backward, (like a metronome) when hit. (See **Figure 8**) (Information about the PracticeHit can be found at www.practicehit.com .) This device provides the challenge of hitting the ball as it comes towards the student—developing not only the stroke technique, but also the necessary aspect of timing when swinging at a ball coming towards you. However, the device provides no concept of where the ball might go. And this is exactly what I want.

Little kids and adults too, when pressed into a hitting environment with real balls and targets, will lose consciousness of what they are trying to do in terms of strokes and grips, especially when trying to hit a ball towards a specific target. The fact is you don't even need to have cones or other targets on the court. Simply having a net and the other side of the court is enough 'target' for players to abandon what they are trying to do in favor of simply hitting the ball the only way they know how!

When my daughter was five, I used predominately the PracticeHit and, only occasionally, did I toss balls to her to swing at. (**Figure 9**) (Not on a tennis court, only on our driveway.) I honestly didn't think she had much coordination since she seldom hit the ball when tossed to her. But, because we focused more on the success of using the practice hit, she had no trouble developing the swing pattern I wanted her to have.

Figure 9: When my daughter was five, we spent not more than twenty total minutes over the course of one year. This minimal time spent was enough for her to gain a very solid groundstroke foundation.

We worked at this only about 10 times over the course of two years. When she was five and a half, we went to the courts for the first time. I first dropped balls to her forehand and backhand side. While her first few swings missed the balls completely, her strokes were nearly perfect each time. Without me having to say much at all, she used these same, desired strokes, and simply 'found' the ball by trial and error. She did not resort back to a different swing pattern because the swing pattern we had worked on, even in such a short period of time, was her most familiar pattern. Within a few minutes, my five-year old, was hitting topspin forehands and backhands over the net with form that is associated with skilled play.

Now Come the Targets

Once a player develops a desired swing pattern with the correct grip and footwork, then targets become a critical part of their improvement. Instead of changing the swing pattern or grip to the more familiar to attempt to hit the target, the player adjusts the timing and/or the feet, or the swing path, to meet the ball and aim better. This is seldom possible when players are too familiar with inferior or detrimental strokes.

Such players might actually be able to do it in practice, but seldom in competition. Competition reveals, even more than targets, whether a player has mastered a grip or stroke. Because competition now involves keeping score, (as opposed to the simple immediacy of hitting or not hitting a target), players will be even more likely to revert to the most familiar strokes and the false sense of confidence such strokes or techniques provides.

Ball Machines and Hitting Walls

Like targets, ball machines and hitting walls can either contribute to a player's development or actually hinder it. If a player adjusts to either a ball coming from a ball machine or a ball coming off a wall, by using familiar strokes, grips or techniques, (which may be ineffective or non-progressive), the player will only develop a greater affinity for such inferior shots. I usually refer to this as 'a player getting better at being bad."

Players must be clear on what shots they are practicing and becoming familiar with. Nothing is more frustrating for me to watch, than a player hitting terrible strokes against a wall or off a ball machine! Especially on a wall, the player can actually hit targets on a wall fairly consistently using inferior—but familiar strokes. However, the wall does not provide the feedback as to whether the shot would have landed in or sailed long. How many racquetball shots are effective in tennis? Not many! Yet, I see many players hitting on a wall using their wrist, similar to that which we often see racquetball players use, because the nature of hitting on a wall creates a shorter response time to react to the ball coming towards the player. That is, because a player usually stands approximately the distance from the wall as they would from the net, the player does not have the extra time to see the ball land on the other side of the net nor see the ball for the distance as it is returned from the other side of the net. Against the wall, players have approximately half the reaction time to see and make appropriate movements and strokes than they would if they were hitting the ball over a net to another player.

Walls and ball machines can be very helpful…when the player knows and can control what they are working on. So often, players have the ball machine set too fast and end up developing even worse habits because they don't have time to establish the desired stroke pattern

they want to work on. So they end up slapping at the ball just so they don't miss it. When a player understands this limited reaction time, understands the correct footwork, swing pattern and stroke, a player THEN can use a wall to improve their reaction time and subsequent stroke to a target on the wall and develop a rhythm for hitting many balls in succession.

Players often hit too hard on a wall, or stand too close. It isn't as important to me that a player hits the ball on one bounce when hitting against the wall; it is important to me that they move their feet and stroke the ball using the correct swing pattern and grip. Then, working on hitting targets on the wall or across the net will pay off!

Using the PracticeHit Device (Figure 10)

As mentioned, the PracticeHit teaching aid is a tool that I have really found to be ideal in teaching the Advanced Foundation. There are many ways to employ the PracticeHit device in developing individuals as well as large groups of players. In **Chapters 10 & 11**, I will discuss the many ways to use this device with groups. However, here, in this chapter, I will introduce how to use the PracticeHit when working with an individual…in terms of starting them off on the right foot when it comes to groundstrokes.

Figure 10: The PracticeHit is one of the best training devices I have found.

Forehand Groundstroke

The forehand topspin forehand is probably the most influential shot in today's tennis game. Every top player has a killer forehand. Yet, many recreational players have a mediocre forehand at best. While the forehand often is the most comfortable side for recreational players, the techniques used often are such that these players only swat at the ball or dink it over the net. The fear of hitting the ball with pace prevents such players from learning to hit more effective shots.

Among skilled players, there is probably more diversity among forehands than any other shot. The reason for this is mainly seen in the grips. Players today can hit big forehands with everything from eastern forehand grips to semi western grips to full western forehand grips. Each grip will dictate changes in the swing path. In addition, the stance for the forehand can be open stance, neutral stance and closed stance. These stances also contribute to diversity in the stroke patterns. Finally, player idiosyncrasies are most apparent on forehands. Backswings and follow-throughs can be as different as grips and stances.

However, within such diversity, you can still identify the foundation between nearly all skilled players' forehands. This foundation is the point of understanding which will dictate whether a player develops a forehand weapon.

What are the key 'ingredients' that we can identify in all these diverse forehands?

Topspin Main Ingredients

For any topspin shot to be effective and consistent, there are four main elements that must be achieved:

1. **Low to high Swing pattern:** Topspin is generated when the strings of the racquet brush up the back of the ball as it moves through the ball. Thus, any topspin stroke will require the racquet to get below the contact point prior to hitting the ball.

Figure 11: Monica Seles reached Number One in the world using a two-handed forehand and won 9 Grand Slam titles and 53 Career Titles.

2. **Repeatable swing path:** The ability to gain consistency in any shot stems from the ability of the player to repeat, on command, a particular stroke. The topspin is no exception to this rule. And, for a player to hit with consistent pace, the swing must be very reliable.

3. **Proper Footwork:** It is critical for every player to arrive within the optimal distance to the ball at contact for these first two ingredients to be achievable. It is very dependent on the player being able to move to the moving ball so that contact is made within a similar location for the same desired stroke every time. In addition, the right footwork for each shot is also critical for the stroke to be successful.

Figure 12: Top French woman, Marion Bartoli is top 20 in the world on the WTA Tour with a two-handed forehand.

4. **Keep the Plane the Same:** No matter what form, technique, grip or swing pattern you use, this phrase, "Keep the Plane the Same" is a simple, yet incredibly important concept that must be understood and executed. The concept is to keep the string bed of the racquet the same through the contact phase of any shot. No twisting, rolling, flicking or slapping at the ball. These movements change the hitting surface of the racquet significantly. Whether you are slicing a backhand, hitting a massive topspin forehand, or finessing a crosscourt topspin backhand, or even hitting a flat shot, for aiming and consistency to be achieved and improved, there must be no variation of the racquet face within the contact phase of any stroke.

The key to training a forehand so that the student can evolve his or her personality and personal idiosyncrasies is what the Advanced Foundation is all about. But, getting players to the point where such uniqueness can contribute to a shot is very dependent on the progression in which they learn the shot. Thus, let me divulge what I have discovered in teaching tennis for 35 years!

Figures 13 & 14: The two handed forehand (Left) mimics many of the components of a two-handed backhand (below). This element makes learning both strokes that much easier.

One and Two-handed Forehands

I will introduce my teachings of the forehand for both one and two-handed execution. I will start with the two-handed forehand as this shot has been shown to help youngsters and adults both create the four 'ingredients' in manufacturing a skilled forehand. Players, those who start by learning with one-handed forehands, often fail to learn how to do execute two of these

ingredients: One, they use too much wrist so that the swing is not repeatable, and two, they often don't learn to get the racquet below the contact point to execute topspin or learn to move the racquet head up to create topspin. Many can indeed learn such aspects with one hand; however, I have found that teaching two-hands on the forehand (using the methodology I will present) helps nearly all players develop a very effective forehand. And for those working with large groups of players, finding a teaching method that helps EVERYONE is certainly a valuable tool!

Figure 15: The two-handed forehand can easily be hit with an open stance.

Two-handed Forehand

The two-handed forehand is not as unknown or new as some might believe. Forty years ago, Pancho Segura was one of the world's best using a two-handed forehand. More recently, Monica Seles was number one in the world, dethroning the great Stefi Graf until Seles was stabbed in the back by a crazed German Graf fan. Even upon her return, Seles was one of the top five in the world for quite some time. Today, there are over a dozen tour professionals ranked in the top 100 in the world using two-handed forehands. On the women's tour, there are half-dozen top 100-ranked players using two-handed forehands. While certainly not an astounding number, the simple fact that there are several top-ranked players shows that the two-handed forehand can be taken to the highest levels.

But, from a teaching standpoint, I found over fifteen years ago that the two-handed forehand was an incredible teaching tool; not only for the ease in which players integrated and assimilated the three ingredients I mentioned earlier, but also for many other, more subtle advantages.

These advantages include teaching players to stroke with balance; they almost automatically make the 'unit turn'; the two-handed forehand helps player hit with less arm and helps prevent taking an excessive backswing. Other advantages include keeping the forehand more compact and manageable as well as helping players take balls earlier off the bounce. And, for players who really have struggled with hitting an effective one-handed forehand for years, the two-hander helps such players overcome the natural tendency to revert back to old habits. One additional advantage is that the two-handed forehand 'mirrors' the two handed backhand. (**Figures 13 & 14**)

Without question, working with large groups of beginners, the two-handed forehand is superior in terms of ensuring all the students master the Advanced Foundation components. It isn't that the one-handed forehand can't be taught to many students well; it can. However, there is a large portion of players who have difficulty in creating and emulating proper swing mechanics, no matter how good the teaching pro or teaching progression is. Yet, for such

players, I have found that the two-handed forehand is almost a self-working tool for teaching these players the right foundation.

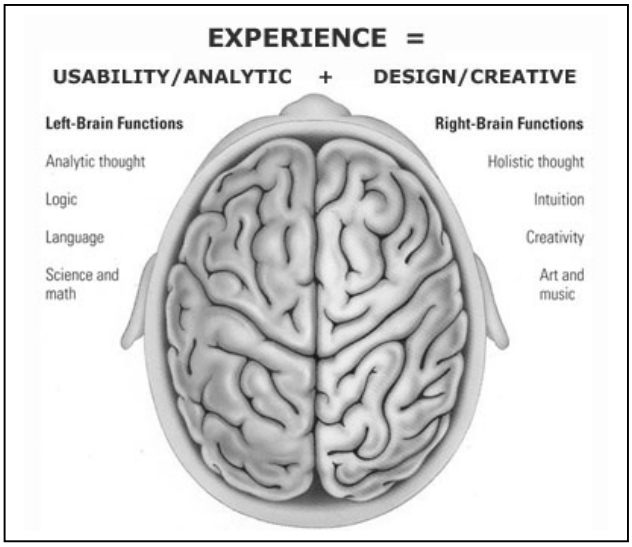


Figure 16: The brain's two hemispheres control different cognitive and creative responses. By using two hands on the racquet, you are more inclined to employ many of these positive, contributing elements that each half of the brain controls.

You will be able to determine very quickly, usually within one or two practices, if a player can hit one-handed forehands well enough to progress with it. If there is any doubt, I prefer to teach the two-handed longer than not. It is so easy to switch those who are destined to use a one-hander. In fact, for many, the two-hander feels so great that many students will get really good with the advanced techniques using the stroke very fast and find, like so many top-ranked juniors and pros on tour have found, that the shot can indeed be their weapon!

But, this is not to say that you have to use the two-handed forehand at all. In fact, during my first 15 years of teaching I never taught the stroke. (I didn't know anything about it at that time!) But, after I started learning more about the two-handed forehand, I discovered both the vast improving nature of the stroke for all ages, but also I started recognizing how good this shot could be hit by more advanced players and pros alike.

Another advantage of the two-handed forehand in terms of a learning tool: it mimics the two-handed backhand almost as a mirror image. That is, the arm, body and footwork positions look almost identical and can be taught simultaneously with ease.

Right and Left Brain Learning

When I was speaking at the World USPTA Convention in Florida a few years back, I was approached at the end of my presentation by a fellow pro, Walt Oden, who was also speaking at the same convention. His topic was the concept of right and left brain learning in tennis and how it is important to incorporate learning tools that address the strengths in players based on whether they are right or left brain dominant.

He commented to me that one of the values of the two-handed backhand was that the player, in using both hands, employed both hemispheres of the brain more intricately than a player who only used a one-handed backhand and helped explain why the two-handed backhand has become the norm among tennis players. By incorporating both hands the player employed both his or her right and left halves of their brain. In a nutshell, because the right side of our brain tends to control the left side of our body, (and the left side of our brain controlling our right

side), a player who plays with only their right hand is not employing the left side of their brain as much as someone who is using both hands. Thus, if a player is left-brain dominant, this one-handed player is not using their most dominant side of their brain.

Walt was really excited about my lecture on the two-handed forehand on several points: He had never considered teaching the two-handed forehand prior to hearing my arguments for teaching the shot. But, he also realized that my teaching two hands on both the backhand and the forehand maximized his concept of teaching strokes that insure that the player is taking advantage of both sides of his or her brain.

Not being a neurosurgeon or a medical researcher, I can't say for sure how much of this really makes a difference in how well a player learns tennis. But, from my limited understanding of the brain's capacity to operate in this manner, it would seem logical, if not 'mentally sound' to learn tennis with both hand, if not for any other reason than this

I will discuss the learning patterns of the one and two-handed forehands later in this chapter. First, let me discuss the philosophy of learning drills.

Teaching the Mechanics of the Forehand and Backhand Groundstroke within the Advanced Foundation

Like the volley, when using the two-handed forehand in conjunction with the conventional two-handed backhand, you can teach both strokes at the same time as one is nearly a 'mirrored image' of the other. (**See Figures 13 & 14**) Within the Advanced Foundation, the two strokes mimic each other and each shot can contribute to the learning of the other.

Figures 17 & 18: Backhands are hit either with one hand (as in Justine Henin's backhand above), or with two hands, (as with Lindsey Davenport below).

Initially, I will start here with the backhand stroke (one and two-handed), and then move on to the two-handed forehand as well as the one-handed forehand.

Two Backhands

I think we all know there are two general methods in which a player can execute a topspin backhand groundstroke: A one-handed backhand and a two-handed backhand. The

question for you might be which one should you teach? The problem for nearly all players beginning to address this question is that the one-handed backhand "feels" easier to hit than the two-hander. The reason for this is that the one-handed backhand offers a similar sense of freedom of movement as the one-handed forehand. In addition to this simplified explanation, the double-handed backhand requires greater emphasis on proper footwork. Usually when a player is introduced to the two-handed backhand, the player feels so severely limited in their ability to get in a comfortable and in a balanced position to hit the ball cleanly, that they quickly abandon any further exploration of the shot and revert back to the one-handed backhand… as flawed as it may be!

Figure 18: Like Justine Henin above, Lindsey Davenport became Number One in the world in Women's Singles, however with a two-handed backhand

However, this seemingly limiting component of the two-handed stroke is one of the reasons why the two-handed backhand is indeed the best stroke to learn first! The two-handed backhand forces players to get in proper position. Because players can hit the one-handed backhand from a variety of positions, (most of which are not associated with proper form or consistent reliability), it is difficult for players to develop the discipline needed for proper footwork. In addition, the two-handed stroke generally helps players develop topspin faster than the one-hander. And if you currently possess a one-handed backhand—one that you know is inadequate—it is never too late to learn the two-handed stroke…even if you have been playing for years. This is not to say that a one-handed backhand can not be properly learned and executed successfully. Later in this section I will offer the procedures for hitting the one-handed stroke giving you power to make decision for yourself. It is however, my recommendation for all players to learn the two-handed backhand first. After given it ample time for improvement, it is usually far easier for a two-handed player to change to a single hand backhand than the other way around. Even for intermediate and advanced players, learning the two-handed backhand can open your eyes and understandings of the backhand, allowing many of you to discover a completely new and exciting way to hit your current backhand better!

If you are an intermediate or advanced player, several ideas presented in these sections will offer you additional tips to improve your existing stroke as well as open your eyes to ways that can fine-tune your backhand into becoming a weapon.

Figures 19 & 20: (Above and below): Today, many top players stand in a ready position with their racquet pointed down. Below, Andy Roddick gets ready to receive the serve.

The Two-handed Backhand Topspin Groundstroke

One of the elements that helps learning two-handed backhand correctly is the inherent use of **Key Position Points** that the two handed stroke provides during the course of the swing, (which will be discussed). If these key position points are met, a "proper" two-handed backhand is almost self-working! With only a few exceptions, the two-handed backhand is clearly the most similar stroke among the pros. Watch for the similarities of the stroke between all the pros, men and women. You will quickly recognize these Key Position Points in most all of them once you have studied them here.

Ready Position (Figures 19 & 20)

Unlike the volley, which has most all shots hit with the racquet moving down from high to low in the course of the short stroke, the topspin groundstroke is hit with the racquet moving from low to high with the strings moving up the back of the ball. This difference alone should signify a difference in ready position between the two strokes. Because the racquet must get below the ball at some point during the topspin groundstroke, the player can shorten the distance that racquet is taken back during the backswing by lowing the racquet head during the ready position. Depending on the type of backswing used by a player, (loop, semi-loop or straight back), the ideal height of the racquet during the ready position can vary between players. Many players on tour today hold their racquet with the head of their racquet almost touching the ground! I will mention this ready position again when I address the backswing later in this section.

Figures 20: Compare the similarities of Andy Roddick's ready position to that in Figure 19 above.

Figure 21: For a right-handed player, the right hand is continental; the left hand is an Eastern Forehand grip. It is easy to see why the two-handed backhand is often referred to as a "left-handed forehand"!

One issue in the ready position that can be debated is the position of the off-hand. Some players prefer to position the non-dominant hand at the throat of the racquet. From this position, the hand can slide down the shaft of the racquet during the back swing. Lindsay Davenport is a classic example of this method. On the other hand, many players will elect to hold the hands together in the backhand position while waiting for the ball. This obviously minimizes the time needed to grasp the proper grip for the two-handed backhand.

SPLIT-STEP

The most important part of any ready position is the balance of the player just prior to their opponent's contact of their shot. One of the biggest mistakes players make during any point is the lack of a split-step, maintaining the subsequent balance necessary to make a controlled move to the next shot. Next time you watch a match on television, note this move by every player during every point. Basically, the split-step is accomplished by the player, pausing their directional movement by a slight split of the feet. This momentarily places the player's center of gravity over both feet and in a position to move in any direction deemed necessary by their opponent's shot. Highly accomplished players make this move extraordinarily subtle and smooth. However, you will still see this split-step accomplished by watching both feet bounce to this position just prior to their recognition of their opponent's shot followed almost simultaneously by their movement to where the ball will need to be hit from. A split-step should be executed prior to every ball hit to you. No matter where you are on the court, it will be crucial to be in a balanced position prior to the recognition of where you will need to be to hit your opponent's next shot.

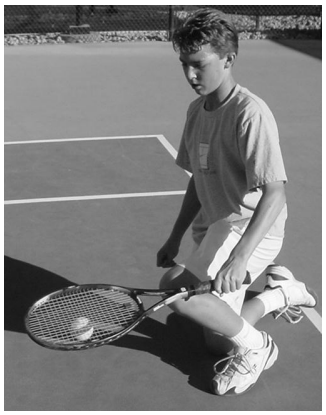


Figure 22: Here, A.J., a right-handed player is bouncing the ball left-handed with the Eastern forehand grip. This will condition the "off-hand" to be more coordinated and skilled for the two-handed backhand.

Players coming to the net that don't execute a proper split-step are often passed by even softly hit balls. This is because they can't stop their body's inertia in time to change direction for even these slower paced balls. For players rushing the net, it is far more important to make this split-step and maintain balance than it is to try to get to the net too soon! Players who make the split-step will be in much better position to make a wise and effective volley or half-volley than the player who is out of balance trying to get to the net without the use of the split-step.

Grip (Figure 21)

The most dominant grips used by top players is a Continental grip on the dominant hand, (right hand for right-handed players), and an Eastern forehand grip on the other hand. The dominant hand is held at the bottom of the racquet handle with the non-dominant hand gripped comfortably just above. (The hands should be touching but not overlapping.) Most two-handed backhands are technically stroked with the same general pattern as a "left-handed forehand." (Again for right-handers.) There are a few exceptions. Tennis great Jim Courier hit his two-handed backhand with almost the exact same form as most one-handed backhand players hit. The grip necessary for his type of backhand is an eastern backhand grip for the dominant hand and almost a semi-western grip for the upper hand. Since this grip is somewhat unique to only a few players, most top players today follow the continental/eastern forehand grip combination.

Figure 23: Once the player recognizes the shot coming is a backhand, the shoulders turn, facilitating the backswing. Note the right shoulder points towards the incoming ball.

Because the two-handed backhand stroke closely resembles a "left-handed forehand," there are a couple drills I highly recommend to all two-handed backhanders. These drills will help all players become more proficient at hitting the two-handed backhand.

Drill #1: Bouncing Drill Continental

This drill is described in the Volley section

Drill #2: Left Hand (or off hand) Eastern Forehand Bounces

This is the same drill as #1 except for the player uses his or her off hand, (left hand for right-handers), and uses an Eastern forehand grip instead of the Continental. Because the two-

handed backhand is dominated by the combined use of both the right and left hands, it is equally important that the player train both hands in developing strength and coordination.

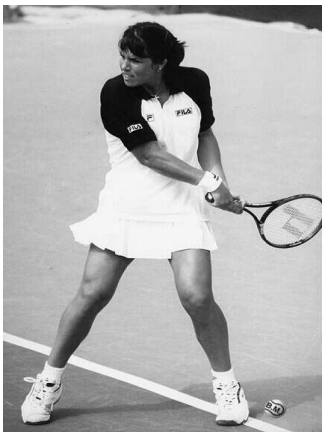
For right-handers, kneel down on your left or right knee and bounce the ball on your left side or in front of you. (**Figure 22**) Using the Eastern forehand grip, the player should attempt to bounce the ball at least 50 or 100 times consecutively. If you have never done this, it will be initially difficult to bounce 10 in a row, let alone 50! However, within a few days of consistent practice, this will get better quite quickly. Keep the wrist firm and use the arm instead of a floppy wrist to bounce the ball.

The added coordination you gain from this drill will translate into more precision and skill when you hit your two-handed backhand.

The Two-Handed Backhand Stroke

Backswing (Figures 23, 24 & 25)

After the split-step, once the player recognizes the ball will be hit with a backhand, the next move is essential. The shoulders must turn and the arms take the racquet back. For beginners, I recommend a "straight back" swing. That is, the racquet stays low with the arms straight and the racquet head pointed down towards the ground. This position is the most efficient in terms of getting into a position to hit topspin. Obviously, from this position, when the player deems it time to swing at the ball, the racquet only needs to come up to the point of contact. (Unlike the loop back swing where the racquet will start above the ball prior to "looping" down below the ball before contact.) When a player needs to move to the ball, it is wise to be moving with the racquet back in the backswing position. This will allow the player to simply swing forward at the ball when they arrive. Many players will run to the ball only to find themselves having to suddenly take the racquet back AND swing at the ball all at once. This is why many beginners and intermediate players feel rushed every time they have to hit a ball! (And, why they often find themselves hitting the ball late!)



Figures 24: Notice the tilt downward position of the wrists. This keeps the racquet head below the ball prior to contact. The amount of brush upward on the ball will dictate the amount of topspin the player will apply. Note the neutral stance in Figures 24 & 25.

Advanced players have learned to move and get their racket back in position in plenty of time, for most shots. (Which is another reason they are advanced players!)

Figure 25: Note Andy Roddick's backhand: racquet head tilts down on the backswing, hands close to hips; stance is neutral.

During the backswing, the wrists should lock the racquet in this pointed down position. The wrists will remain in this position through contact.

During the backswing, players will want to flex their knees once they have moved into position to hit the ball. By bending the knees prior to contact, players can move their weight up and forward during contact, adding greater body inertia and force to the stroke. This is not going to make a huge difference in racquet speed. However, for advanced players, this small percentage will make a difference in their effort to have an edge over other advanced players.

Loop Swings

Most advanced players create a semi-loop or a full loop backswing. These swings utilize gravity in creating a more continuous swing once the racquet starts its backswing. The full loop is created when with the racquet head taken back high, usually above the shoulders. A semi-loop swing starts the racquet back just above the waist. However, the timing of using either loop swing is far more critical due to the racquet literally having to change direction all in one continuous motion.

Figure 26: Here, the racquet head is pointed down and the racquet face is also tilted down. This is the perfect preparation position for the topspin backhand. (Note here, the stance is closed.)

Author's Note: Since most all players develop the loop swing almost automatically, (as their stroke became more defined), I generally teach the straight back pattern as

the player's foundation. I have found that beginners, who are taught the loop prior to their learning how to control their racquet head on the backswing, tend to have difficulty deciphering where their racquet head is prior to contact. This lack of control limits a beginner's ability to hit topspin properly.

The course of the loop swing takes the racquet head back above the waist or above the shoulders, (in a full loop backswing). As the player continues the swing, the racquet head drops down below the ensuing contact point and then is brought back up in one motion to hit the ball. For the most part, this stroke is continuous. However, oftentimes players will pause at the backswing, holding the racquet at the high point of the loop progression. The downward motion and subsequent brushing up of the ball then are done as one sequence.

Often, a common problem associated with players learning the loop swing too early in their development is an inability to get the racquet head down below the ball prior to contact; this results in the player hitting the ball too flat or with under spin instead of the desired topspin.

Generally, players will develop a natural loop in their swing as they progress. Players can usually add the loop component easily if they learned the "straight-back" backswing first.

KEY POSITION POINT #1 (Figures 23, 24, & 25)

The hands drop down near the left hip at this backswing point. For added emphasis on learning how to hit topspin, the player can actually have the racquet head touch the ground on the backswing. (This will give the player a physical attribute to associate the backswing to.) The wrists tilt downward allowing the racquet head to drop well below the contact point. The more the racquet head is pointed down below the wrists, the more topspin is available to the player. (As long as the head of the racquet doesn't rise up prior to the start of the forward motion of the stroke.)

A very important point during the backswing is that the racquet face, (the hitting side of the strings) is NOT facing up. If the racquet face is open at this point, the player will either have to roll the face of the racquet closed during the contact phase or end up hitting the ball sky high. As a general rule of thumb, the angle of the racquet face should be pointed down at an angle between 5 and 15 degrees. Generally, players who want to hit a lot of topspin on their backhand will add the greater amount of tilt downward of the racquet face during the backswing.

Figure 27: The racquet continues to contact with the racquet maintaining its relationship to the forearms.

Contact (Figure 27)

After a player has gotten the racquet back and has properly moved to the ball, the racquet will now swing upward and forward to contact the ball. With the two-handed backhand, this is almost self-working. From the low backswing position, the arms move together towards the point of contact. The wrists remain locked in the same position as they were during the backswing. Just prior to contact, the right foot will step forward and slightly across the body. This "Closed Stance" position helps prevent the player from opening the hips and shoulders too early.

***Advanced Notes*:**

A move by a few more advanced players has the backhand being hit with an "Open Stance" position. Research has shown that more power can be generated if this open stance is used properly. The key to a proper use of the open stance is a complete upper body turn. If the shoulders don't turn all the way, (sideways to the net or more), the player will either pull the ball too far to the right or end up pushing the ball out away from their body towards the target in a very ineffective move.

Figure 28: Open Stance Backhand by Serena Williams

Notes on Open Stance Groundstrokes (Figure 28)

An open stance groundstroke does create greater torque for the body to use during the course of a swing. (Greater torque can produce greater power.) However, because we seldom ever hit a ball as hard as we can, the question I pose to players is, if this move for some players does not produce accurate strokes, will more power be an advantage or disadvantage? Obviously, more power used on inaccurate strokes will produce far more errors. Players who learn the more conventional closed stance backhand (and forehand for that matter) will be able to transition easily to the open stance stroke if this is desired. This is because the closed stance provides a better method of learning how the shoulders and upper body turn in preparation for the shot.

KEY POSITION POINT #2

For right-handed players, the right elbow will stay fairly close to the body at contact. The right elbow bends as the racquet moves up to strike the ball. The left arm can stay relatively straight, bent (Figures 29 & 30) or straight (Figure 31) at contact. This combination of the elbow close to the body and the left arm driving through the ball creates a proper racquet plane of motion for topspin. If the racquet head remains below the ball prior to contact, utilizing this Key Position Point will insure topspin on your backhand.

KEY POSITION POINT #3 (Figures 29 - 31)

A key position point for most players is the straight line from right elbow to the tip of the racquet through the contact point. This is created by the downward tilt of the wrists held through contact. This is very common among most top two-handed backhands.

Figures 29, 30, & 31: Note the Key Position Points 2 & 3 demonstrated in these three pictures of Nikolay Davydenko, Mary Pierce and Andy Roddick: Dominant arm's elbow stays close to the body and the extension of the forearm leads directly in a straight line through the center-line of the racquet to its tip, (as represented by the straight line in each picture).

Follow-through (Figure 32 & 35)

As the arms move through the contact point, the left arm will pull the racquet up over the right forearm. Because the right elbow is the pivot point for the swing, the left arm, (along with the right forearm and hand), act as the force needed to hit the ball. It is important for the player NOT to break the wrist and forearm position through the contact point. Players sometimes "flick" the left hand over the right hand causing the racquet face to change position at contact point. This "rolling" the racquet over the ball is very inaccurate.

Figure 32: It is important to "Keep the plane the same" within all strokes. Here the racquet and arms continue with no break in the wrist.

After the ball has left the strings, the arms continue in a relaxation phase of the stroke. The left arm continues up and the right elbow usually will lift up away from the side of the body.

Figure 33: A third-class lever speeds the resistance through its motion. Here, Fulcrum (F) (Shoulder point); effort applied by the hands (E) ; Load (racquet face, R)

- **Two of the biggest mistakes players make in attempting the two-handed backhand are when they either pull the right elbow across the body during contact, or, they lead with the right elbow pulling the racquet through contact with the right arm. Both of these actions contribute to poor form and little, if any topspin.**

Figure 34: Key Position #5: "Kiss your Bicep" of your non-dominant arm.

Physics Note: This relationship of the arms and racquet create a third-class lever. The object of a third-class lever is to create speed of the applied force. The strings of the racquet apply the force of the hands and arms, (and body as we will discuss in a moment), to the ball. (**Figure 33**)

KEY POSITION POINT #5 (Figure 34)

The left arm continues up during the relaxation phase to the point where the biceps of the left arm come up to the chin of the player.

A great tool for teaching little kids is to say, "Kiss your biceps" on the follow-through. This gives the kids an exact point of where their arm must finish on the follow-through.

Figures 35: Note Andy Roddick's position near contact: His hips remain sideways to the target.

- **Footwork Blunders**

  The most notorious fault for players when executing groundstrokes, (forehand or backhand) is when they allow their legs to swing around opening up their body. This error is caused when either the back foot sweeps around the body during contact or the front foot pulls back. As you can see, either move will open up the hips and the shoulders early. This results in the player pulling the shot to the right on the backhand. The player's body usually recognizes this result subconsciously and the player ends up pushing the ball back towards the target in an abbreviated swing. Done enough times in this fashion, the player begins to develop this pushing type stroke as their main backhand and fail to produce strokes that can improve and be effective.

  Another fundamental flaw created by this opening up of the body during the swing is the player actually using the speed of the body turning as their racket speed. That is, the racquet moves through the stroke at approximately the same speed as the body is turning. This produces an incredibly slow swing.

KEY POSITION #6 (Figures 34 & 37)

As a player finishes the follow-through, keep the back toe down on the ground for as long as possible. This will help prevent the over-rotation described above and yet, encourage the player to lean slightly into the ball at contact.

Body Rotation (Figures 34 – 37)

I have purposely left the issue of body rotation for the end of this section. There are several reasons for this. First of all, the body rotation, (the act of turning the shoulders or upper body during the course of the swing), is basically self-working if a player executes the stroke instruction described above. The position of the two-handed backhand sets up the shoulders correctly, when the racquet is taken back. When the player executes the swing to hit the ball, again the body rotation through to contact is self-working. A player need not emphasize the rotation back. Typically, when a player consciously tries to utilize the proper body rotation, they tend to do it much too early. Also, body rotation produces only a small percentage of racquet head speed even when correctly applied. It is the combined movements of the body, legs and arms that provide the quality of stroke speed. Players who sacrifice stroke form in the name of additional body rotation end up defeating the proper stroke intention.

Figure 37: Even long after contact, you will see players retain a sideways position in many backhand strokes. (Key Position #6)

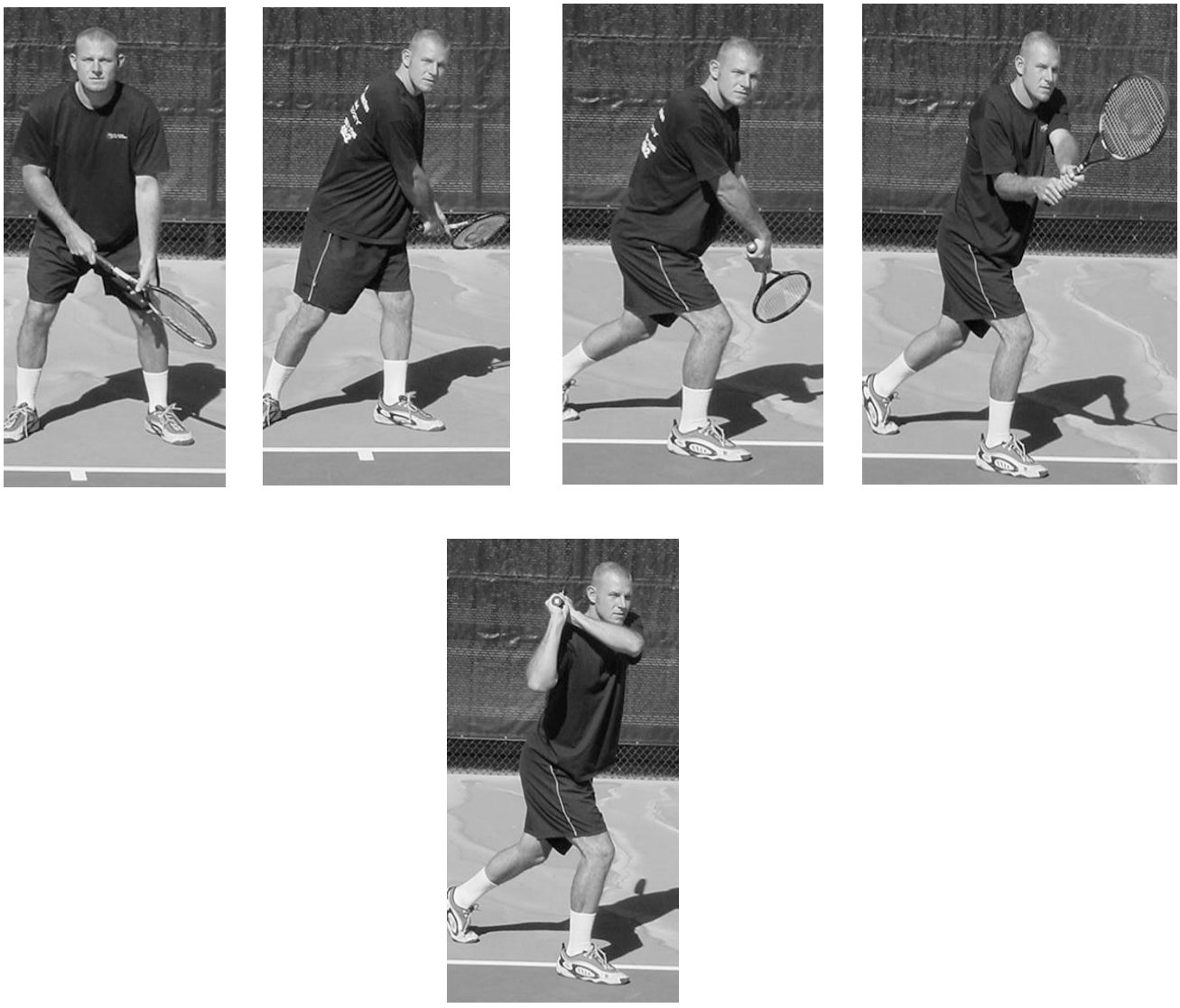
Body rotation refers to the "kinetic chain" of larger muscle groups working in harmony with smaller muscle groups in the course of an athletic move. As you have noticed, I did mention during the backswing instruction, the shoulders and upper body do indeed turn sideways, (with the right shoulder pointing usually towards the net or on-coming ball). The act of the arms working in the correct sequence mentioned will institute the correct body rotation for most all players.

One-Quarter Turn Principle

Beginning players tend to over rotate, especially at contact and follow-through. Generally speaking, the maximum preparation turn and recoil from that turn is one quarter. Observe the vast majority of top players and you will notice that, although the racquet moves almost, (and sometimes greater than), 360 degrees around the body, the actual turn of the body is this one quarter amount. That is to say, the shoulders starts by facing the net, followed by the body (or shoulders) turning

sideways prior to contact. At conclusion of the follow-through, the body finishes back facing the net. Occasionally, you will observe the pros recoil greater than their starting point. This exaggerated over-rotation is usually a result of the force applied to the ball. The body's natural inertia carries them past this one-quarter return. However, it is important to notice that at contact, the body seldom is over rotated as we see so often in beginner and intermediate players.

Two-Handed Backhand Sequence Review



In this sequence of pictures, notice the right shoulder's complete movement during the execution of the two-handed topspin backhand. The upper body makes one-quarter turn sideways followed by the same one-quarter turn back after follow-through. Notice the racquet makes almost a 360 degree swing in the process. (Pointed back on the backswing, and again pointed back on the follow-through.)

One-handed Backhand

Hitting the backhand with one hand offers some advantages in terms of reach and freedom of movement. However, as I have mentioned, these same advantages are the reasons that players who often learn the one-handed backhand never develop their backhand as a weapon. Because we can reach out and hit one-handed utilizing minimal footwork and generally poor form, players tend to not get in the right position for hitting the stroke…resulting in questionable technique. Likewise, because the one-handed backhand does not have the second hand on the racquet for stability, one-handers, (who have not developed proper form and technique), often are seen slashing and hacking their backhand with little or none of the refinement we associate with a reliable backhand.

Because most beginners are now taught with the two-handed backhand, we are seeing fewer and fewer one-handed backhands on tour. And those players that do exist on tour hitting the backhand one-handed usually learned hitting the two-handed shot first. However, because there are still many players that developed their backhand with one hand, many of them will have difficulty trying to make a change to the two-handed backhand. Thus I am providing the proper technique used to master the one-handed backhand here in this section.

Author's Note: Many 3.0 and 3.5 players who use a one-handed backhand use such unorthodox form that they have to resort to unorthodox strategies when hitting it. If these strategies prevent the player from improving, I usually recommend "overhauling" their backhand. That is, start from scratch and develop the two-handed form described in this chapter. Even though this will take time and effort, it will eventually result in the player hitting a backhand that will provide sustained improvement, in both the stroke and in the strategy they will be able to employ, once they begin hitting a more formidable backhand. Keep in mind, that typically, players who simply try to make adjustments to their flawed one-handed technique, because the change is too close to their old form the player usually reverts back.

Basic One-handed Backhand Technique

(Within the Advanced Foundation)

Figures 38 & 39: Note the similarities in one-handed backhands between two world-number-one ranked players, Roger Federer (above) and Justine Henin (Below).

Much like the one-handed forehand, there is a great deal of variety exhibited among players who hit the one-handed backhand. Historically, the one-handed backhand has seen a shift from the continental grip, (as was used predominantly in the 60's), to a full Eastern backhand

grip among many of the top players today. There are a few players on tour who do opt to use a Continental grip for their one-handed backhand. However, most of the one-handed backhand players we see on tour now use the more powerful full Eastern backhand grip (**Figure 38**) and even a severe Eastern backhand grip for many. (See **Figure 39)**

Ready Position

There is no change in the ready position as described earlier in the two-handed backhand section. The player will want to make sure the off-hand is positioned at the throat of the racquet to help facilitate the proper backswing as will be described below. Because most advanced players today change to the Eastern Backhand grip for their backhand, some players like to hold this position at the ready position. These players feel more comfortable making the grip change from the backhand to the forehand grip when the ball does comes to their forehand. However, some players prefer to hold either a neutral Continental grip or an Eastern Forehand grip and make the adjustment for the backhand during the backswing. Each of these grip positions is entirely acceptable for building your backhand foundation. The key is that any change be done immediately during the backswing.

Backswing

Just as the two-handed backhand, the turn on the backswing is similar. I do recommend that the player use the off-hand to help take the racquet back. This hand also acts as a stabilizer so the dominant hand can make the grip change if needed. Players who don't use the off-hand in making the backswing often lose control of the racquet's head when making the turn. These players traditionally take the racket back too high or let the wrist flex or allow too much play in the racquet head during the swing.

KEY POSITION POINT #7 (Figures 38 & 39)

Keep the racquet face pointed slightly down during the backswing. If the racquet face is open, (with the strings pointed up), the player will have to roll the racquet face to a flat or slightly closed position just prior to contact. As I have mentioned before, the rolling of the racquet through contact for any stroke will reduce the consistency and reliability of any shot.

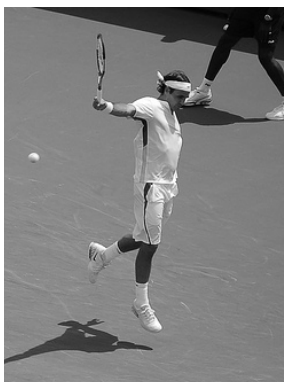
Figures 40 & 41: Note that upon the backswing, Gustavo Kuerton (left, a one-handed backhand player), and Kim Clijsters—who hits with two hands on the backhand, look nearly identical upon the unit turn.

Shoulder Rotation

Because the two-handed backhand creates the proper shoulder turn during the back swing, little conscious control is needed to rotate the proper shoulder turn with that stroke. However, with the one-handed backhand, players oftentimes only take the racquet back with the arm and remain somewhat fixed in facing the net. Most top one-handed players will take the racquet back with almost the same mechanics as a two-handed stroke. Generally, the non-dominant hand cradles the racquet at the throat throughout the backswing component. This position helps bring the right shoulder (for right-handers) sideways, pointing towards the target. This point of the backswing is critical in order to produce the proper setup for the remaining parts of the backhand.

Contact and Footwork

Just like any topspin stroke, the racquet head must start below the ball prior to contact. As mentioned in the two-handed stroke, the racquet head should drop down during the backswing with the wrist tilting down. It is at this point the wrist should lock and the racquet motion should be generated by a combination of a firm arm and slight body rotation.



Figures 42 & 43: Key Position Point #8: Observe Roger Federer's backhand (left) where his arms spread apart like an umpire signaling "SAFE" in baseball. (Right)

The contact point should be further out in front of the body than the two-handed backhand, anywhere from 6 to 15 inches in front of the front knee. The more out in front contact can be made, the more the player can hit strong, sharp angle crosscourt shots. At contact, the racquet will be held almost at a 90 degree angle to the forearm with the racquet strings moving up and through the center point on the back side of the ball.

The footwork of the one-handed backhand can incorporate either a closed crossover step or stance, or an open stance. I highly recommend the student learn and develop their foundation with the closed stance. This position teaches the player not to over rotate during contact and helps create greater control on both crosscourt and down-the-line shots. Players, who step out with the non-dominant foot for the backhand, (open stance), tend not to get their upper torso turned enough sideways. However, it is fairly easy for players who have mastered the close stance stroke to begin hitting with a proper open stance backhand. In fact, it is another natural progression for most players who learn the closed stance backhand to evolve to the open stance backhand as competitive experience dictates.

KEY POSITION POINT # 8

As the player begins their swing up through their backhand, typically, the non-dominant arm will move back. This move is similar to an umpire making an exaggerated "SAFE" signal in baseball. This move of the non-dominant arm helps keep the player from over rotating through the shot. This movement of the arms is even more apparent during the slice backhand which will be discussed a little later.

"Keep the plane the same"

If I had to pick my favorite and most valuable condensed phrase, this is it. It literally describes the racquet face as it should be during the contact point of virtually every shot in tennis. When hitting the one-handed backhand, one of the biggest faults made by players is the tendency to flick the wrist or roll the racquet face over the ball at contact. It has been proven that the ball is not on the strings long enough that any of these movements will make a measurable difference in spin. What these extraneous movements actually do is create inconsistency at contact. Any movement of the racquet face during contact will change the relationship of the strings to the ball on virtually every stroke. Thus aiming will be of minimal help. Let me explain.

If a player, hitting their backhand with the racquet face rolling over the ball, hits the ball late, the ball will tend to go too high. (The racquet face was too open at contact.) Seeing the ball go long or too high, our player now aims lower on the next shot. However, if on a subsequent backhand, the player hits the ball too early and the racquet face has rolled too far and over the ball, the player's shot will end up going into the net. Thus, in this scenario, the player's need for aiming was a lost cause.

This illustration certainly magnifies how a common fault can lead to a player's lack of confidence! The solution to this problem is to develop a swing pattern that keeps the plane of the racquet, (the string face), the same on each and every swing. Now, if a player hits the ball too high or too low--or too far left or right—the player can aim accordingly on subsequent shots and have a certain amount of confidence that the ball will do what they want it to do.

Follow-through

Because the contact point is further in front of the body and doesn't utilize the off hand to help drive the racquet through and up the back of the ball, the follow-through is generally longer

and not as far around the body as the two-handed backhand. For a solid topspin backhand, it is important that the follow-through is strong and full, allowing the racquet head to generate momentum and acceleration through contact. Players who tend to cut their follow-through short generally have to decelerate the racquet quickly. These players tend to push the backhand instead of driving the ball with topspin.

Similar to the two-handed backhand, it is important to keep your back leg back through contact. Equally important is to not step out of the backhand early with the front foot. Both these moves open the body too early during the stroke. Most skilled players work to pause their feet at contact in most cases to maintain the integrity of the body during contact.

During contact and follow-through, the off arm moves in the opposite direction as the hitting arm. This spreading apart of the arms helps maintain a solid sideways body position through the contact point. When players fail to use this hitting tip, they notoriously try to swing the racquet through with their upper body, pulling the racquet across themselves instead of up and through the target line.

Slice Backhand

Prior to this point, all the instructional backhand information has described hitting with topspin. Because topspin allows a player to hit balls that clear the net with greater error room and still with high velocities, we see a far greater number of top players hitting predominately topspin backhands. However, the slice backhand also offers several advantages and strategies, making it a stroke that every good player should master.

Introduction

The slice backhand produces basically the opposite resulting spin on a tennis ball as the topspin. The aerodynamics, the biomechanics, and the ensuing results produced by slice shots, offer many effective advantages that all players should understand as well as be able to produce.

Figures 44, 45, & 46: Justin Gimelstob executes a slice backhand return of serve. Note the high racquet head as he makes his unit turn, arm straight and locked at contact, and his arms separating after contact keeping his upper body sideways through contact. Note too the back leg 'kicks' back slightly to help maintain his sideways position through the stroke. One final observation, note the racquet fact 'stays the same' throughout the stroke.

Mechanically, the slice uses gravity to assist the stroke. Because of the downward slicing action of the racquet on the ball, gravity helps generate the racquet speed through the shot. Also, because of this principle, the player tends to maintain the racquet head steady through the shot better and longer, helping produce more consistent results and improved aiming abilities.

The backspin produced by the slice backhand, (and forehand for that matter), is very useful in approach shots as the ball stay lower as it clears the net as well as after it bounces on your opponent's side of the court. If you are coming to the net, it is usually more advantageous to force your opponent to hit up to you at the net than to be able to drive down and past you with topspin passing shot. The down-side of the slice is that it can only be hit so hard until it literally can't land in the court. This is because the slice or under-spin action on the ball when hit harder and harder actually causes the ball to rise against gravity until the forward velocity diminishes enough for gravity to overcome the spin and speed of the ball.

However, in addition to the advantages I previously mentioned, a player can hit a slice with a strong, aggressive swing, yet, not have the ball travel so fast that it goes out. That is, a player using slice changes the velocity of the ball, (converting the force of the swing to spin instead of forward velocity), and thus can hit a slower moving ball—with spin—which gravity can keep in play better than if the player hit the same forceful shot flat. As I mentioned in **Chapter 8** on volleys, one of the ways a player becomes the dreaded "dinker" is by hitting balls flat. When players hit flat shots with any amount of force, the element of aim becomes exponentially more important. Thus, when players who do hit flat, notoriously they hit softer balls to keep the ball from being hit too hard and to help them keep the ball in play. A player who hits with slice, can hit with a more forceful stroke, not having to resort to dinking the ball or pushing the ball softly just to keep it in play.

Figure 47: The unit turn on the backhand slice brings the racquet high with a fairly straight arm. (I recommend students to hold a very strong, straight arm to learn this.)

Mechanics of the Slice Backhand

Essentially, if I were to summarize the slice backhand in one sentence, I would say that the shot basically emulates the backhand slice volley only with a full back swing and follow-through. With that said, I would recommend the study of the backhand volley discussed in **Chapter 7** if you haven't already.

Figure 48: Contact: Slice the BACK of the ball, not the bottom. The body stays sideways and the arm remains straight. Compare this position to Figure 45.

Ready Position

As with all tennis shots, a player should attempt to be in a ready position with the racquet held in front ready to hit any shot. When behind the baseline, because most every shot anticipated will be a groundstroke, the ready position described at the beginning of this chapter (on the two-handed backhand) is a good place to start.

Back Swing ***(Figure 47)***

Unlike the topspin backhand, the racquet does not need to drop down below the ball prior to contact. On the contrary, the racquet needs to start much higher than the contact point on the slice backhand. How much slice desired will dictate the height of the backswing once a player has mastered the foundation for the shot. Some players like to hit a big slice while others like to hit a flatter slice. Both shots are hit the same way with the only changes in the racquet height on backswing and the amount the racquet face is beveled open at contact.

The most important part of the backswing is the shoulder turn. Much like the volley, the best slice backhands are hit with the player standing sideways to the net at contact and beyond. Players who open up on the slice backhand will have a difficult time controlling the direction of the shot.

Take the racquet back high with the off hand cradling the throat as you turn sideways to the ball. (**Figure 47**) Because it is mechanically difficult to hit a slice with a two-handed backhand grip, it is recommended to use a one-handed backhand with a Continental grip. Keep the hitting arm straight on the backswing, just as the backhand volley. The difference between the volley and the slice backhand groundstroke at this point is that the racket is taken back further so it is basically pointing towards the back fence.

The Slice Stroke ***(Figures 47 – 79)***

I usually always recommend the slice backhand be hit with a closed stance. That is, the right foot (for right-handed players) will step across and towards the projected contact point. (See **Figures 47 - 49**)

As the ball approaches, the player will drive the straight right arm down and forward. The racquet head does NOT catch up or pass the hand! It is very important that the racquet position in relation to the hand and forearm does not change from backswing through contact and beyond.

Figure 49: Similar to the topspin one-handed backhand, the follow-through maintains the racquet orientation to the arm, the body stays sideways, the arms spreading again as if signaling the baseball "SAFE".

The contact point is generally even with the knee of the front leg. Do not try to swing early. This will cause the racquet face to be open too much at contact. Keep your weight forward slightly but don't lean so far forward that your back leg has to step around to keep from falling. The slice must be hit with good balance. In addition, the slice backhand or forehand should be hit fairly 'linear'…meaning the racquet hits the ball in a downward arc but in line with the target as long as possible. Many students will try to swing around their body, (like a topspin-like stroke), and they lose the integrity of the swing. Just like a volley, the racquet should be hit the ball on a fairly straight line to the target.

To help maintain the required balance, the off hand shoots back, simulating an umpire signaling "Safe" in baseball. (**Figure 49 & 50**) This counter movement of the off hand helps maintain not only balance, but also it acts to keep the shoulders from over rotating at contact. The player should remain sideways until long after the ball has left the racket. The path of the racquet should be down and through the intended trajectory line. If the player opens up too soon, the slice comes to much across the body away from the intended target.

When hitting the slice as an approach shot, one of the biggest mistakes players make is they try to start stepping towards the net too soon, causing them to step through the shot with their back foot. This will cause the body to open up too soon and the player usually will hit the ball into the net or too far to the right. Make sure you complete the backhand slice through contact before moving forward towards the net. Top players actually "glide" sideways through the slice keeping their bodies sideways through contact yet still be able to be moving forward during the shot. This requires timing and discipline that will be learned better if the player pauses slightly during the shot, allowing the player's body to stay sideways.

The Slice as a Defensive Shot

Because the slice is easier to manufacture, it is an excellent shot to use in a defensive situation. When an opponent has hit a very aggressive groundstroke, the speed of the ball will make a topspin stroke difficult and usually inaccurate. A defensive slice is hit no different than an approach slice. Because the ball is coming faster, usually a shorter backswing is mandated. The firmness of the racquet arm and wrist can utilize your opponent's power in a controlled slice return

that won't necessarily get you in trouble. With practice, a player can control this hard hit ball with graceful yet effective pace as well as placement.

Spin Advantage

One other component of the slice that makes hitting it literally feel easier is what I call the "Spin Advantage." When any ball is hit to you, slice or topspin, after the bounce, the ball will have topspin towards you. Thus, by hitting slice, you are hitting the ball—applying the same kind of spin the ball already has on it as it comes towards you. You end up changing the ball's direction—but not the type of spin. This element makes the slice literally feel better than hitting topspin. This is because when you hit topspin, you not only are changing the ball's direction, (hitting it back towards your opponent), but you also have to change the ball's topspin towards you to topspin away from you.

So, a ball that is rotating 2000 rpm's (rotations per minute) towards you after the bounce must be hit with at least a 2000 rpm topspin swing just to negate the topspin the ball had coming towards you. You would need to hit a 3000 rpm topspin just to get 1000 rpm's of topspin on your own shot. The friction of the strings not having to change the spin of the ball when hitting a slice feels simply easier and smoother than the feel of the strings brushing up against the spin of the ball for topspin.

Advanced Backhand Patterns

As a player develops the advanced foundation for their backhand, other effective derivatives of the shot can be learned. Strategically, players who begin to hit effective backhands look for ways they can move their opponent around more. This "opening up" of the opponent's court provides opportunities to hit more winners.

Consider the hierarchy of strategy for any tennis player:

- Get the ball in over the net
- Get the ball in opponent's court
- Get the ball deeper in opponent's court
- Get the ball to opponent's weakness
- Hit the ball to opponent's corners
- Move opponent around with greater angles
- Hit the ball harder

The first four strategies deal only with minimal lateral directional differentiation. They pretty much only deal with hitting the ball fairly straight in a direction over the net. As players develop their skill, placing the ball more in the corners is the next developmental strategy. However, if you study the geometry of angles as they relate to a tennis court, you can make your opponent run considerably longer by using shorter angles to the sides of your opponent's court.

Thus, one of the highest levels of tennis skill can be measured by a player's ability to hit greater angles. This ability requires an increase in ball rotation or spin. Spin is the physics component that creates an upward or downward movement of the ball beyond the scope and constant of gravity. Topspin is the key to getting the ball to drop faster, clear the net with higher margins of error, and to hit harder and still get the ball in. But, topspin is also the key to hitting greater angles. I will discuss teaching tools and drills later in this chapter which will help you teach these more advanced—and desirable—strokes. Let's first move on to discussing the Forehand Groundstroke as it applies to the Advanced Foundation.

Forehand Instruction

Advanced Forehand Foundation

While there is a wide discrepancy in the form and technical components of even the top players in the world, the forehand, (ether the one-handed or two-handed methods taught in this book), consists of very dynamic and comparable advanced foundations and structure.

Figure 50: Fabrice Santoro and his two-handed forehand.

Figure 51: For young children, a lack of strength, body awareness, and balance can lead to poor one-handed forehands.

Figure 52: Stephanie, a player who struggled with her one-handed forehand for years after learning it wrong at another club, took to the two-handed forehand and gained great success, taking her tennis to the college level.

The two-handed forehand (**Figure 50**)—as it is taught here—provides almost all players with same "Advanced Foundation" and general swing-mechanics as a "conventional" one-handed forehand. That is, the two-handed forehand incorporates the majority of key position points utilized by an advanced single-handed forehand. As I have seen among the thousands of players I have taught, those who were introduced to the two-handed forehand first generally made faster and earlier strides in hitting better topspin forehands as a whole than those who only learned hitting the one-handed forehand from other pros.

It is important to point out that I do believe the two-handed forehand is not for everyone, nor do I believe the best two-handed forehand is superior to the best one-handed forehand. Yet, over the past 18 years teaching the two-handed forehand, I have found what a valuable tool this stroke is to know not only how to instruct its use, but how it can truly help students develop a formidable forehand relatively quickly.

While I do teach the stroke within four distinct student situations, (listed below), I also teach those individuals who exhibit appropriate abilities, the one handed forehand. There have been many examples of talented players, both adults and juniors alike, who quickly became comfortable hitting the two-handed forehand. However, as a guideline, there are four situational rationales I use for specifically teaching the two-hander:

a. Very young children who don't have the strength nor physical comprehension of what their racquet is doing. **(Figure 51)**
    i. The two-hander provides significant strength and a natural swing pattern that makes it relatively easy to learn a proper topspin forehand.

b. Adults and juniors who have learned the one-handed forehand yet are having difficulty creating consistency and/or ample topspin on the forehand groundstroke. **(Figure 52)**
    i. Even intermediate players who knowingly hit a suspect forehand will immediately experience a higher level of topspin and consistency. It is far easier for players to repeat a consistent swing pattern with the two-hander. This is especially true for players who don't generate topspin on their forehands.

Figure 53: Senior players can enjoy tennis with less or no pain when hitting two-handed forehands. It is a wonderful shot for those who have limited strength as well.

c. Seniors or adults who have pain associated with their arm, wrist or elbow. **(Figure 53)**
    i. Two hands obviously share the stress and impact vibration that would normally be absorbed by the joints, muscles and tendons of the single arm of the one-handed forehand.

d. In a beginning group setting. **(Figure 54)**
    i. In a group of beginners, the two-handed forehand provides everyone, regardless of ability or potential, a foundation to building a successful forehand on. It automatically incorporates better footwork, swing patterns and body rotation.

Among top players we still see a dominance of one-handed forehands. And we will probably see this for a long time. However, as we have seen the acceptance of the two-handed backhand as being a potent weapon over the last thirty years, I believe we will see a significant shift of top players utilizing the two-handed forehand over the next decade or two. The reason I believe this is because it is already being utilized very effectively at the advanced junior levels. In tournaments and team play, we see a growing group of top juniors utilizing the two-handed forehand. Certainly not as prevalent yet, (because of the still-favorable mechanics for many players executing decent topspin with only one hand), the two-hander, however, is already being recognized as a viable weapon as well as a terrific learning tool for a great number of players.

Figure 54: In a large beginner group clinic, the two-handed forehand provides much more success in attaining the Advanced Foundation as it pertains to hitting advanced forehand stroke patterns.

Because very few teaching pros hit or know how to teach the two-handed forehand, the proliferation of the stroke has been, (and still is), very slow. (Of course, through this book, I hope to change this!) When Monica Seles proved the stroke could be taken to the highest level on tour, (Number one in the world), players began to see its potential. However, many players and teaching pros identified Seles' stroke only as an isolated instance of success or a simple case of extremely rare achievement. (Incidentally, this was the initial critical response of Borg's and

Connor's two-handed backhands too!) Yet, since today, relatively few players have been introduced to the stroke, it would be hard to draw such an empirical conclusion from such a small experimental field! Curiously, it would be interesting to compare the number of successful players who currently are using the two-handed forehand to the vast number of players who use the one-handed forehand.

Figure 55: Marion Bartoli of France has shown that the two-handed forehand can be taken to the highest levels of the women's tennis professional tour.

Of course, we are now seeing many examples of the two-handed forehand emerging with success on the pro tour. Marion Bartoli's Wimbledon final in 2007 has made pros and students of the game sit up and take notice that, once again, the two-handed forehand could be taken to the highest level of the game. **(Figure 55)**

Two-hands as a Learning Tool

Over the years, I have found the two-handed forehand a remarkable learning tool for players of all ages. Initially, I used the stroke to teach little kids and high school girls who were having difficulty creating topspin with their forehands. I found that players who had trouble knowing what their racquet was doing on the forehand oftentimes swung down on the ball. Consequently, most of these players could not brush up the back of the ball to create the desired topspin.

Upon introduction to the two-handed forehand, these students quickly developed a progressively advanced forehand foundation. Most of these students, (nearly 70%), stayed with the two-handed stroke for their career. It is without question that these players developed a dominant topspin forehand faster than if they had never been introduced to it at all. In addition, those players who elected to switch to the one-handed forehand found that they had a better foundation through learning the two-handed forehand beforehand. Certainly, these players developed a true and progressive one-handed forehand faster and with a better overall foundation than those players who had similar difficulty on the forehand who didn't learn the two-handed forehand first.

Adults and Senior Players Using Two Hands

It wasn't long ago that I found that older people have an equally positive response to the two-handed forehand.

Figure 56: Senior players do exceptionally well with the two-handed forehand. It is different enough for them to override their existing forehand and it often creates enjoyable sensations in such players by learning something very new.

While I was providing tennis clinics for the Huntsman World Senior Games here in my hometown of St. George, Utah, I discovered what an impact this stroke had on the "50 and better" tennis playing population! I had nearly 20 participants in my final clinic of the week, a clinic advertised as a "revolutionary approach to the forehand." **(Figure 56)** Of course, none of these players had any idea what the revolutionary technique I would be teaching was going to be. I began the clinic feeding four lines of players each about a half-dozen shots to their forehand. I had the others watch the group that was hitting. Then I would rotate and repeat this scenario for each group. It was an amazing thing that each of these players witnessed: No two players seemed to hit the same forehand! My only instructions were to hit a topspin forehand to a target. Ironically, some players who hit slice forehands actually thought they were hitting topspin! Some hit flat, some hit open stance, some closed, some fell backwards as they swung, some stepped through with their back foot during their swing, and some slapped at the ball like racquetball players.

After a ten-minute introduction to the two-handed forehand, I had players mimic the swing pattern for a few minutes and repeated the drill with players watching each group hit. What transpired over the next fifteen minutes was indeed revolutionary. Every single player hit topspin. Every single player hit with better balance and proper footwork. Every single player saw how each player's stroke was certainly more congruent with what they knew as a more refined swing pattern. Many of these players hit topspin for the first time in their tennis-playing career! Many developed a far better topspin stroke than they had ever done previously. Seeing the smiles of joy from many of these players, each finding something new and effective, was enduring to say the least!

Solving Forehand Problems

Look at the following forehand problems:

- Can't hit topspin
- Erratic control
- Inconsistent forehand
- Uncertainty on how to hit the forehand
- Dink the forehand
- Can't hit sharp angles crosscourt

If you possess any (or all!) of these forehand problems, the two-handed forehand is a must for you. Understand the following:

1. If you learn the two-handed forehand, you will develop a swing pattern that will improve your one-handed forehand in every problem area listed above.

2. If you attempt to hit the two-handed forehand, you won't suddenly lose your existing forehand! (As many seem to fear anytime change is explored!)
3. If you stay with the two-handed forehand for several weeks, you will not only improve your forehand, you will improve your footwork and balance throughout the course of the swing.

The following instructional portion will be dealing with the two-handed forehand. Because the one-handed forehand is still the dominant stroke as viewed by most players, I will follow the two-handed forehand instruction with a complete description of how to hit the conventional one-handed forehand correctly. Understanding both strokes is helpful for players developing either forehand. The footwork, racket swing-path, and the action of the strings are essentially the same for both strokes.

Two-Handed Methods

During my 15 years of teaching the two-handed forehand, I have had the pleasure of discussing the stroke with several authorities on the shot. Interestingly, those who have used the stroke effectively have actually utilized distinctly three different two-handed methods. Through my study of the stroke, I have researched these three basic and distinct methods. Each method has advantages and disadvantages that should be discussed. Understand that while there are three distinct methods to the shot, only one method has multiple advantages over the other two. This will be discussed further after I introduce the three methods. It would be a good idea to have a tennis racket available to simulate each method. This will make you that much more familiar with each concept.

Here is a summation of the different two-handed models that are currently being hit by players:

Method #1: No Forehand…Two Backhands

One method is simply to not hit a forehand! That is, the player switches his dominant hand so that he is hitting either a left-handed backhand or a right-handed backhand. In terms of mechanics, this is really the easiest to "hit"… however, the hardest to be ready for. That is, the player must switch both hands up or down depending on what side the ball is hit to them on. I have seen a few players become proficient at this, learning how to prepare the hands to make the transition in a quick manner.

Figure 57: Jan-Michael Gambill, a right-handed player would switch his right hand to create a left and right-handed backhand on each side.

The obvious disadvantages include the switching of the hands and the fact the player will still need to learn and master a one handed stroke on each side to hit slice ground strokes.

The mechanical advantage to this method is that it places the hand of the arm crossing over the front of the body at the bottom of the racquet. This allows for greater reach and length on the backswing. Jan Michael Gambill, a former top-20 world-ranked player used this method. **(Figure 57)**

Method #2: Dominate Hand on Top

Gene Mayer, **(Figure 58)** a two-hander on both sides who achieved a world ranking as high as #4 in singles and #2 in doubles, used the method of placing his dominant right hand on top of the left hand for his forehand. This model is basically hitting as a left hander. The forehand is actually a left-handed backhand, (like the model described above), but the backhand side is technically a left-handed forehand with the right hand on top. In other words, there is no switching of the dominant hand. It stays on top. (This will make more sense after we discus the third and most reliable method below.) This method does not require the hands to shift on groundstrokes. However, for volleys, serves and overheads, the right hand must move to the bottom of the grip (from its position above the non-dominant hand). This transition is somewhat difficult, especially for players who do come to the net.

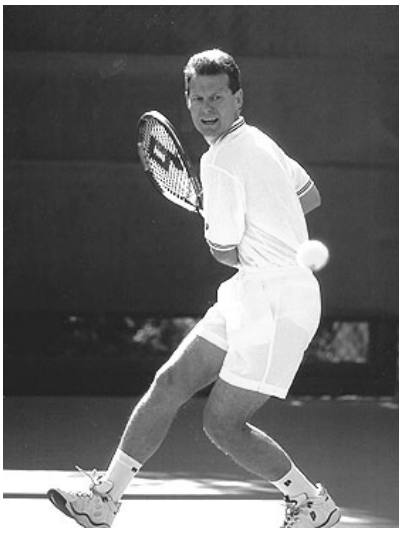


Figure 58: Gene Mayer used two-hands on both sides. However, while he would keep his dominant right hand on the bottom of the grip for serves and volleys, he would put his left hand on the bottom for his two-handed forehand and backhand.

Method #3: Dominate Hand on Bottom

This is by far the most emulated swing pattern among top players today. Former world number one player Monica Seles hits her forehand this way. The dominant hand remains on the bottom of the grip and the off-hand stays on top; essentially the same grip as the two-handed backhand with minor adjustments. This is the stroke that I will present to you. If, by chance you seek to explore the other methods I just mentioned, you will be able to experiment using the information offered throughout this section.

Figure 59: Marion Bartoli, like Monica Seles before her, keeps her dominant hand on the bottom of the grip.

Today, Marion Bartoli of France (**Figure 59**), Peng Shuei of China, Fabrice Santoro, also of France, and several others on tour favor this method.

There are many advantages that this stroke offers. All of which will be described in detail within the following pages. It is also the best overall method for teaching the Advanced Foundation to your students as a group as well as teaching individuals.

The Two-handed Forehand Mechanics

Grip

The dominant hand on the two-handed forehand is no different than that used in executing the one-handed forehand. I prefer an Eastern forehand grip for the dominant hand and usually an Eastern forehand grip on the upper, non-dominant hand. Because of the shortness of the reach due to the off hand on the top of the racket, it is not only more comfortable to keep an Eastern grip with the non-dominant hand, it also helps produce a smooth topspin motion for the two-handed forehand.

Figures 60 & 61: Above, the general right-handed grip for the two-handed forehand. Bottom, the initial unit turn and arm position for the backswing. Note the wrists do NOT cross.

There is no switching of the positions of the hands on the grip. For right-handed players, the right hand stays at the bottom, the left hand is on top. I have encountered a few players who actually switch their hands and hit basically a backhand on both sides of their body, (as described previously in Method #1). While this is not as impossible as it sounds, the switching of the hands

in competition is cumbersome. I don't recommend this method, as it does not lend itself to a good forehand foundation.

Many top players who hit with both hands on both sides maintain these grips for both their two-handed forehands and backhands. Most players who learn to hit with these grips make subtle grip changes as they evolve into more prolific two-handed players. My recommended grips will give you the foundation to either stay with these or make your own slight variations to suit your idiosyncrasies, as you become more skilled.

Two-Handed Forehand Hitting Sequence

A B C D E F

Ready Position (A)

Like the two-handed backhand, the ready position of the two-handed forehand is identical. The racket head can be held high or low in anticipation of a groundstroke.

Preparatory Backswing (B)

Once the desired stroke is determined to be a forehand, two initial swing patterns are initiated: a) the shoulders turn so that the left shoulder, (for right-handers) is pointed towards the net; b) the racquet starts it's backswing with the racquet head pointing down and back.

The hands stay close to the right hip at this stage.

Key Position Point: The right elbow bends and pulls back. **(Figure 62)** This is very similar to the one-handed forehands of Steffie Graff, Pete Samprass **(Figure 63)** and many other top tour professionals. For a bigger backswing, bend the right elbow and turn the shoulders more. This pulling back of the elbow is similar to the act of "elbowing" someone standing behind you.

Figure 62

Advanced players tend to create a loop backswing, starting the racquet high on the backswing as opposed to the "straight back" pattern described here. Top one-handed players often use nearly a two-handed backswing on the forehand as we will discuss later in this chapter.

Figure 63

Backswing Notes: Because the two-handed forehand is usually shorter due to the left hand being stretched across the body, I recommend that the player use a Straight Backswing only in learning the shot. A loop swing can—and should—be explored later after the stroke fundamentals have been mastered. (Please see notes on the one-handed forehand backswing that follows for more information.)

Cautionary note: It is critical that the wrists don't cross each other on the backswing. If this happens, the racket face opens up and forces the player to roll the racquet over to come back square at contact. This will diminish the player's capacity to brush up the back of the ball for the desired topspin.

Figure 64: Don't let the wrists "cross" over each other. Take the racquet back with the arms apart as seen here.

Full Backswing and Step *(C or Figure 65)*

As the ball approaches, the player steps into the shot with the left foot. The racquet has reached its full backswing position here. Notice the racket is almost pointed back at 180 degrees from the ready position. This is plenty of backswing needed to generate power. However, some players who want more racquet head speed and distance will want to turn the arms and shoulders more.

Figure 65

Key Position Point: Notice the chin rests almost upon the top of the left shoulder. Also note that the left arm creates almost a straight line through the racquet's center to the end of the racquet head. These two points help the player identify their position.

Contact point *(D or Figure 66)*

Here, the racquet head has come up to meet the ball in a low-to-high swing pattern. The racquet is laid back in the right hand and the left hand is riding along at the top-front portion of the grip. The natural motion of the left and right hands driving up through the ball is what makes the two-handed forehand such a dynamic stroke for topspin.

The use of the left hand through the stroke assists the right hand in brushing up the back of the ball. During the phase from backswing to contact, the hips and shoulders begin a one-quarter turn back towards the net. However, this turn is natural and should not be done consciously. In reality, the racquet "pulls" the hips around…not the hips pulling the racquet through.

Figure 66

The Kinetic Chain and Angular Momentum

As with every full-swing stroke in tennis, this transfer of the "kinetic chain", (the movements starting from the legs and hips ending up with movements of the shoulders arms and racquet), produce the initial swing pattern. However, as we have mentioned on the forehand groundstroke and serve, this initial rotation must stop just prior to contact. If not, the racquet will be swung with the turn of the body and not the rhythmic speed of the arms moving through the stroke. Much like cracking a whip, the large muscle groups must stop to speed up the hand holding the racquet.

It is this transfer of movements that produces "Angular Momentum"…increasing the speed of an implement through rotating body components.

Primary follow-through sequence ***(E or Figure 67)***

As the racquet continues up through the ball, the body remains sideways allowing the racquet to rotate both through the trajectory line longer and up the back of the ball. If a player over rotates here or rotates too early, the swing slows down. (Please read the explanation on over-rotation below for more information on this.)

Figure 67

Key Position Point

Like the backhand, the pivot point is the elbow of the inside arm. Here the left elbow remains close to the body as the right arm drives the racquet up and through the ball.

The left forearm in coordination with the right arm pulls the racquet up over the left elbow. This sequence makes the two-handed topspin forehand almost self working!

Note that the racquet face has remained in the same plane from start to finish. As with all consistent strokes, the longer the plane is kept the same through a stroke, the more reliable the swing pattern.

Full follow-through *(F or Figure 68)*

The relaxation phase of the swing occurs during the follow- through of the stroke. The arms complete the swing by the inertia of the racquet literally carrying the racket on around the neck. The body stays balanced at this point with the important "Toe-drag" of the back foot.

At this point, the arms lift due to the upward force of the racquet brushing up the back of the ball.

Figure 68

Key Position Point: Toe-Drag (Figure 68)

When a player swings, a natural tendency is to allow the back leg to swing around. (Or the front leg to pull away.) This movement makes the player rotate usually early. It also signifies an imbalance in the player after contact. Players should hold their follow-through for a fraction of a second before re-establishing the ready position in time for the next shot. Many pros can be seen holding this position after many groundstrokes.

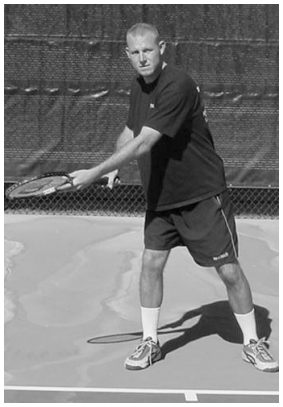
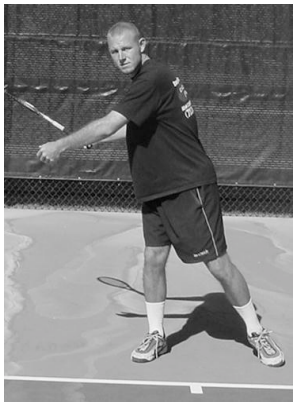
Figure 69:

After contact, usually on the run, the player will release the back foot and let it swing out to "brake" the player's sideways movement. Here, Andy Roddick brake steps with his right foot in finishing a forehand topspin stroke.

The One-Handed Forehand

Obviously, more players still use the one-handed forehand as their main stroke on the forehand side. Using the two-handed forehand as a learning tool will improve most players' ability to hit a solid one-handed forehand if they choose to do so. However, many players will still elect to hit only the one-handed forehand both in the formative period learning as well as during the accomplished and competitive stage of play. You will notice almost all the key elements found in the two-handed stroke mimic those of the one-handed forehand.

One-Handed Forehand Sequence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Figures 70 & 71: Compare the forehands of Pete Sampras (Left) and Kim Clijsters (Right) with the corresponding model form above each picture. While there will always be basic idiosyncrasies that will differentiate all players, you should be able to identify the Advanced Foundation components within each photo.

One-Handed Forehand Mechanics

Figure A. Grip and Ready Position

More than any stroke in tennis, the one-handed forehand is the most diverse among top players. This diversity a result from the wide range of grips top players are seen utilizing in accomplishing their stroke. There are basically four main grips that can be utilized when hitting a forehand:

- Continental
- Eastern Forehand
- Semi-Western Forehand
- Full Western Forehand

Figure 72 & 73: Ready Position: Neutral grip on left, Semi-western grip by Lleyton Hewitt on right.

Each of these grips usually dictates a particular swing pattern that will be most accommodating for each grip. An entire book could be written about the use of each grip and its accompanying swing pattern. What I have found is that the Eastern forehand grip provides for an advanced foundation for the one-handed forehand while at the same time, allowing each player to evolve into a more topspin/offensive grip as desired. The Eastern grip does not seem to prevent a player from evolving their forehand topspin stroke. In fact most of my players automatically begin utilizing the Western grips as they master the stroke associated with topspin.

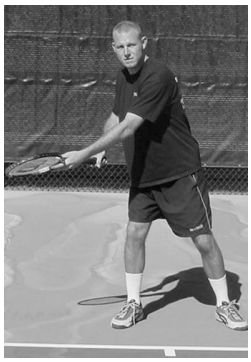

Figure 74 & 75: The Unit Turn usually employs the off-hand or arm in helping the body rotate for the forehand. Left, the model form uses the off-hand to help carry the racquet back. On the right, James Blake has released this hand.

Someone might ask then, "why not teach the Western grips at the onset of learning?" The reason is the Western grips are so dependent on the proper stroke and timing sequence that realistically, most beginners would never be able to achieve such a stroke pattern. By using the Eastern forehand grip, players develop both the stroke pattern and the string action on the ball—of brushing up—that they can, with relative ease, evolve their grip to these more extreme positions with minimal or no frustration.

Ready Position ***(Figure 72 & 73)***

As mentioned before, the ready position consists of a balanced position, allowing for the player to move in either direction. In **Figure 72 & 73**, the player is holding a Continental grip, as if prepared to hit a two-handed backhand. Some players prefer to hold a backhand grip in the ready position, others prefer to hold their forehand grip. (An Eastern, Semi-western, or full western.) Either way is correct. The key position is to have the left hand on the racquet at the throat or in the two-handed position. This will allow the player to use the left hand to steady the racquet as the player shifts to the desired forehand grip.

Figure B. Turn **(Figure 74)**

Notice how similar the turn is to that of the two-handed forehand stroke. A skilled player will use the shoulders to initiate the backswing. (Much like the volley!) Thus, the hands are basically in the same position as that of our two-handed forehand player. (Please see figure .)

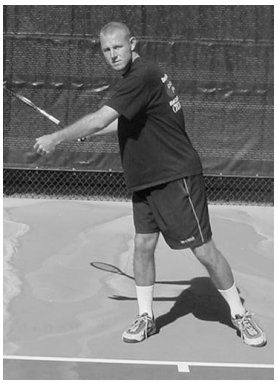

Figure 76: Half loop backswing

Figure C. Backswing (Figure 76 & 77)

There are three basic backswing techniques:

a) **Straight Back**: This method is the most basic and simplistic; however it also is not as comfortable for most players. When taking the racquet back, the player keeps the racket head low and points the racquet down and directly behind them. This method simplifies the timing of the stroke in that it give the player ample time to start the contact phase of the swing with minimal or no need to take the racquet back or down prior to this phase. The straight back swing keeps the racquet head pointed down below the contact point. From this point, the player only needs to decide when to hit the ball. Because the racquet is below the ball, the player will generally always have a low-to-high swing pattern. This pattern is obviously needed to brush up the back of the ball, and subsequently produce the desired topspin.

Figure 78: Dropping the racquet into the "slot" well below the ball for topspin.

b) **Half-loop Back Swing:** The racquet being taken back about shoulder height characterizes the half-loop swing. Here the player begins to utilize gravity in the rhythm of hitting the ball. By using any loop swing, the player keeps the racquet head above the ball prior to the stroke. As the player begins the hitting phase, the racquet is able to drop down and then sweep back up, (hence the name, "loop") in one continuous motion. The initial swing pattern integrates the force of gravity in starting the racquet's movement.

Figure 77: Full loop by Andy Roddick

c) **Full Loop Back Swing:** As the name implies, the player creates a full loop pattern in the forehand swing. Starting well above the shoulders, skilled players will often pause here as they wait for the ball. Because the swing pattern is more complex, (due to the distance the racquet must travel down prior to moving back up to brush the ball for topspin), this backswing is more difficult to time. It is recommended that players first adopt the Semi-Loop backswing prior to expanding to this more efficient yet more skill-dependent swing pattern.

Figure 79: At contact, the racquet remains in the "same plane" from the full backswing portion to contact and beyond.

Figure D. Racquet Drop and Step (Closed Stance)
Figure 78

Regardless of what backswing technique you use, the racquet head must drop down below the ball prior to contact, if you are attempting to hit a topspin forehand!

The traditional forehand that all players should learn to hit incorporates a "closed stance" footwork pattern. Like the forehand volley and the two-handed forehand, the right-handed forehand has the left foot stepping in and across the body prior to contact. This helps the player rotate the body sideways, a critical move in executing an effective forehand.

Note the racquet head position here. **(Figure 78)** The racquet head is well below the ball and the face is closed. As the racquet moves up to hit the ball, this racquet orientation to the arm will be maintained from this point until well after contact.

Figure E Contact (Figure 79 & 80)

At contact, the racquet is reaching its acceleration peak with the racquet head moving up the back of the ball. Notice how the shoulders have opened up slightly at this point to allow release of the racquet arm through to contact. It is at this point the rotation of the shoulders stops, allowing the arm and racquet to literally whip through the ball. If the shoulders were allowed to continue rotating, the swing speed slows down. This is due to the fact that by over rotating, the player would pull the shot too far to the left. The body subconsciously recognizes this and lays the racquet back to counter this undesirable turn. Usually, the player who opens up too early must push the ball towards the target. In addition, swinging at a speed equal to the speed of the body turning is incredibly slow! It is the combined rotation to contact and the subsequent brake of this upper body rotation that provides for the kinetic chain to release the stored energy of the body from the coil at backswing.

Figure 80: In action, the forehand just after contact by Tommy Robreto; note the leg position and the racquet moving up through the topspin shot.

Figure F. Follow-through (Figure 81 & 82)

The follow-through is a tell-tell sign of proper or improper mechanics. A player who has utilized flawed technique prior to the follow-through will be hard-pressed to finish the swing in such a way as I am describing here.

Obviously, the topspin follow-through provides for a continued upward swing pattern. (If the racket was moving up at contact, this pattern will be retained through much of the follow-through.)

Figures 81 & 82: The finish includes a balanced body with the racquet usually finishing higher over the opposite shoulder. (However, there are many other finishes I will talk about.)

Key Position Point

The right elbow and the butt cap of the racquet point to the target area at the full finish of the stroke. The back of the hitting hand is near the left cheek of the player.

In addition, the back foot remains down, (or back), through the contact phase, just for a moment before releasing and swinging around to provide a "Brake Step" for the player. The off hand can catch the racquet at this point.

Additional Finish Patterns

Today, the modern forehand can have at least three distinct finishes: High over the non-hitting shoulder; lower, over the opposite hip or waist; or very high over the head or even the same shoulder as the hitting arm, (called a "Reverse Forehand")

Figures 83 & 84: Rafael Nadal (left) and Kim Clijsters both will often finish with a "Reverse forehand" finish which is where the hitting arm finishes up over the hitting shoulder. (For Nadal, being left-handed, his finish is over his left shoulder; fro Clijsters, her right shoulder.)

Each finish is predicated on the swing path, grip, and desired spin. However, using the Advanced Foundation finish as described in this section is a perfect finish to build each of these additional forehand follow-throughs on.

Forehand Slice

The forehand slice has many of the components of the slice backhand. Namely, staying sideways, using a continental grip, and a linear swing path. Because the hitting arm is on the back part of the body on the forehand, the slice, like the topspin forehand does not require the body to be held as sideways as the backhand. However, it is still excellent practice to work on being sideways on the forehand which will help retain the integrity of the stroke. The forehand slice is simply a longer version of the forehand slice volley. (As described in **Chapter 7**)

Training Drills and Progressions

Drop-Feed Drills (Figure 85)

As a progression from the Toss and Block Drills, as used in learning volleys, "Drop-Feed" drills are the equivalent to Toss and Block Drills in terms of being able to help students develop the proper and desired stroke mechanics for the groundstrokes.

Figure 85: Drop feed drills allow the player to focus on a specific shot multiple times in a controlled setting. Here, I'm working with my8-year old daughter, Kyla, on a put-away short ball from a drop-fed drill.

Drop-Feed drills are exactly as the name implies: the coach or other players simply 'drop' the ball and the student/partner works on a particular stroke.

While drop-feed balls are far from what a player will see on a tennis court, (in terms of a ball actually coming towards them), the advantages of using a drop-feed drill are several:

- They are a good progression from the toss and block drills
- They allow the player to work on the stroke instead of negotiating the bounce and the incoming trajectory
- They allow the player to focus on the stroke mechanics instead of trying to rally a ball back and forth. As mentioned in the previous chapter, when faced with hitting a ball that is both coming towards them…as well as trying to hit the ball to a specific target, players will unconsciously revert to form that they perceive as successful. Using Drop-Feed balls, the play will be able to consciously work on the mechanics of the

desired stroke, making the more advanced and prolific form more comfortable and familiar.

- They provide a sense of success that builds confidence with a desired stroke.
- They can be manipulated to be more advanced in terms of adding movement, aim and difficulty
- They provide the means to employ many students on one court in both a hitting capacity as well as an easy way for students to be the "teacher" in terms of dropping balls for fellow students as they work on their strokes.

Groundstroke Progression

Understanding the aforementioned 'ingredients' that are critical for any player to gain more and more effectiveness, confidence and dependability in their groundstrokes, you will undoubtedly understand why I use the following progression in teaching groundstrokes.

Regardless of whether you are working with adults or kids, raw beginners or those who have been playing for decades with inferior form (who recognize the need to change and improve), the general progression for developing groundstrokes will be nearly the same. The key to anyone developing a solid topspin forehand and backhand will be entirely dependent on the achievement of the ingredients I listed earlier in this chapter. Thus, any player wanting to develop a new groundstroke pattern (or those learning one for the first time), will need to adhere to the following progressions.

1. Define and execute forehands and backhands upon command.
    a. **Shadow Swing**: following the swing of a demonstrating coach or pro, students replicate the swing path and footwork using the proper grip.

    b. **PracticeHit**: Using the practice hit device, work on stepping into a forehand or backhand, hitting the ball, recovery and repeating.
        i. After the stroke is repeatable, players can work on moving towards the ball, hitting and holding the finish after having moved a few steps to the ball. Work on taking little steps as you get closer to the contact point.

Segmented Swing Tool (For Groundstrokes)

This is one of the best teaching tools I have used.

In a nutshell, the concept is to break down the backswing and follow-through of a forehand or backhand groundstroke into five segments. With contact being "Zero", (**Figure 88**), the backswing moves back in incremental segments with "Five" being a full backswing. (**Figure 86**) The follow-through is similar with "One" being a follow-through just after contact and a "Five" being a full follow-through. (**Figure 89**) As a coach, you can call out something like a "Two-three" which would be a "Two" backswing and a "Three" follow-through. Students have a much greater perception and association in using these numbers representing their backswing or follow-through "sizes". Simply saying something like, "Shorten your backswing," a student has no comprehension of "how much" to shorten the backswing. By giving these components a numbered "value" players can much easier and with much better perception breaking down the swing in a controlled manner.

Figure 86: This would be a "5" backswing

Figure 87: This would be a "3" backswing

Figure 88: This would be "Zero" at contact

Figure 89: This would be a "5" follow-through

c. **Toss and Hit:** Instead of volleys, (where we used the "toss and block" drills), use the toss and hit drill with a partner by tossing a ball that bounces before being hit with a forehand or backhand topspin. Use a longer distance between the tossing player and the hitting player to give the tossing player time to catch the stroked ball.
    i. Emphasize a short backswing:
    ii. Start off with a "One-Two" segmented swing pattern on these balls. (Obviously, a very short backswing and a fairly short follow-through. (See **"Segmented Swing Tool"** on previous page.)
    iii. Build upon the segmented swing pattern using progressively larger segments. Mix up segments as well, (using a larger backswing, yet a shorter follow-through), to help players dictate their swing pattern on command.

d. **Drop-hit:** Start with sharp angle topspins from the sides of the court, hitting twenty or thirty forehands then backhands to a target near the net and the far alley. (**Figure 90**)
    i. Learning first from this angle will teach students to not just hit straight ahead as so many beginners learn. It creates better body position relative to the swing path desired, and it teaches players how to get the ball 'up and down' quickly using topspin in hitting this sharp angle.
    ii. Drop-hit balls down the line from outside the net post. This drill, usually after first learning the crosscourt angle, teaches students to 'bring the ball back into the court' using spin.

Figure 90: Here, Kyla, my daughter, works on hitting sharp-angle topspin backhands. This drill is one of the best for all levels as it teaches how to get the ball up and down quickly with topspin as well as opening up the court with angles.

e. **Drop-hit with movement**: working on lateral movements as well as movements towards the net.
    i. Back and forth: Forehand and backhands using the sharp angle drill.
    ii. Multiple balls moving towards the net: Holding 6 balls, start the player back by the back fence and drop one ball at a time while the ball-dropper moves backwards towards the net and the hitting player moves forward for each successive shot.
        1. This drill teaches the student to learn to hit with more height over the net on deeper shots and lower, more topspin-specific shots as they get closer to the net.
        2. Work on topspin forehands crosscourt, backhands crosscourt, both shots down the line, inside out forehands on the ad court and inside out backhands on the deuce court.
        3. Work on changing the ball's direction by having the student hit down the lines and crosscourt shots alternately or change on every two balls.

Pro-Fed Drills

Depending on progressive rate and ages of students, you usually can move into "Pro-Fed" drills at this point.

Work on tossing balls to players on the same side of the net as your students. Toss from ten to fifteen feet away. (Remember to have your students aim crosscourt away from you or down the line if you are tossing from an angled position. However, even as you have moved through the previous drills used to develop the stroke, the timing will take time to master. So be alert in case your student hits a ball at you!)

Author's Note: "Changing a ball's direction"

Some pros say changing a ball's direction, (hitting a ball that is approaching the player crosscourt and hitting that ball down the line…or vice versa), is more difficult than hitting the ball in the direction it was approaching the player from. And, from a reflective angle, it can be. However, there are many players who love to change the ball's direction and do very well in executing this. In my opinion, it is really a matter of timing. Since the angle of the racquet at contact, combined with the timing of the swing will dictate the resultant angle that the ball will rebound off the racquet with. Thus, to determine that angle of any shot will be determined by this timing. It is no more difficult to hit a ball aiming right than it is to aim left.

However, the difficulty comes in the way so many millions of students are trained. That is, traditionally, the pro stands in the middle of the court and tosses balls to be aimed in the general direction of the pro. In fact, most pros start players hitting down the middle of the court to give the student some perceived level of success, (by hitting the ball "into the court")!

However, if you introduce the timing and aim of hitting down the line shots from a severe crosscourt feed, or if you feed down the line and have the student hit severe crosscourt shots, you start them right from get-go in learning to direct the ball intentionally.

Segmented Swing Drill

Again, I would suggest employing the Segmented Swing Drill previously discussed. This will help the student with the timing of the ball now coming TOWARDS them.

Vary Your Toss Angles

Don't just stand straight ahead of your student to toss balls. You can immediately get them to learn to "Change the ball's direction" even when they are still mastering the stroke components by tossing balls from different angles and have them aim to different target areas.

Increase distance and speed: Move to the other side of the net and continue feeding drills to the forehand and backhand

Feeding Variations

A. Feed from the alley
B. Feed from service line
C. Feed from the baseline

Feed from near the student: This is where you throw balls harder and train the student to take a shorter backswing and hit the ball on the rise.

Sharp Angle Drill for Advanced Players

One of the early teaching drills includes my "Sharp Angle" topspin drill. (**Figure 90)** This drill opens the door for players to start developing angle topspin at a very early stage. But, I also use this same drill with very advanced players as well. In fact, with advanced players, you can pair up

two players, one hitting forehands, one hitting backhands, with one other player dropping balls to each player. Do these from both sides of the net post so players work both the severe angle crosscourt inside-out as well as inside-in.

You can also work this drill using the slice stroke. I like the sharp angle drills for the slice because the player does not perceive a need to hit the ball as hard as they would if they were aiming down the line or deep to the baseline. Even though the distance is not much shorter, (hitting sharp angles from alley to alley), the player feels it is much shorter and thus can work on technique instead of trying to add power they don't really need.

Figures 91 & 92: Players learn a great deal about balance and control when they work on hitting while standing on one foot.

One-footed Groundstroke Drills (Figures 91 & 92)

As I mentioned in Chapter 7 on volleys and Chapter 8 on serving, you can employ drills that develop balance by hitting off one foot. This same concept can be used very effectively on groundstrokes. Depending on the ability levels of your students, there are a number of one-footed drills you can do. I will list a couple of them here:

1. **Single shot, no movement**: Have a player stand on the deuce or ad court and hit groundstrokes while standing on one foot the whole time. For right-handed players, have them stand on their left foot for forehands and their right foot for backhands. (As players become more advanced, you can switch the foot on which they are balancing on. However, for most players, the balance foot I recommended here helps creates a sound balance foundation.) You can do this drill as a "Drop-Hit" drill earlier in a player's development so that there is not as much movement to the ball.

2. **Three ball shot drill with movement**: As mentioned in Chapter 13 on drills, you can feed two or three balls with students moving across the court, (usually across the mid court area or at or behind the baseline), but include the one-footed movement to the ball and during the hit. This means, the player will need to hop to the ball then adjust and then hit the ball and hold the follow-through all while being on one foot.

3. **Back**-out Movement on one foot: Same as the previous drill but instead of moving towards the ball and hitting, the players "back-out" to hit each shot. That is, players standing on the deuce side are fed balls towards their backhand. However, instead of

turning and hitting a backhand, the player backs up and hits a forehand all while hopping and setting up for the stroke on one foot.

When changing from one Technique to a New Technique remember that you will need to employ many DIFFERENT drills to help the players override their old methods and ingrain the new, more desirable techniques. Players and coaches must understand that any change is going to be met with frustration and even refusal. Coaches must educate the value of any technique and the players must buy into the benefits of such methods. Remember that any technique can be mastered with the right amount of effort, practice, concentration and dedication. However, because players want to win so bad, the power of going back to the comfort levels of old methods is very strong…to the point that players will never move on to more effective play, even as they know that such methods will help them down the road.

This is why you, as a coach or instructor, must instill new methods through creative and unique drills that are not necessarily the type of drills you might use to work on aiming and consistency. Rounding-Out drills and drills like the previous 'One-footed drills' will help your students make the transition from mediocre strokes to more effective skilled strokes.

Conclusion

There are a myriad of drills that you can develop and augment for developing groundstroke (topspin and slice) proficiency. There are many books, DVD's and websites dedicated to the issue of drills. It would be redundant and impossible for me to include the literally hundreds of drills that are out there. However, I hope I have provided some of my unique drill ideas that you can use to employ your own ideas and personal favorite drills to help your students become exceptional players. The drills in this chapter as well as throughout this book are presented because of the value to the student, the coach or pro, as well as the overall effectiveness the drills offer in terms of helping players reach their potential in tennis.

Praise for David W. Smith's TENNIS MASTERY

One reason why I think Tennis Mastery is such a great book is because of the discussion of Smith's advanced foundation. I just finished reading the book for the 5th time and loaned it to a 3.0 friend of mine. I find it to be a magnificent teaching tool and recommend everyone adding this book to their library. Reading this book was an epiphany of sorts for me. ***Drew, 06/07***

This is a brilliant book that should be required reading for any coach of the game. What I love about the book is that he uses pictures of actual pros hitting the ball and he shows you what they have in common. It's hard to believe, but most tennis books don't do this. When an author has actual pictures of pros proving their point, the argument gains instant credibility. There really is a lifetime of tennis wisdom packed into Tennis Mastery. It's one of the most comprehensive tennis technique books ever published. And there are some unique tips in there that you won't find anywhere else. ***Jeff, 05/07 www.hi_techtennis.com***

To be read again and again. A lot of clear indications to enhance tennis playing. I would really advise it to anybody who is interested in a rational step forward.
Pierpaolo, Rome, Italy. 4/07

Tennis Mastery is a must read. People do get stuck with poor mechanics and weak grips. They just never progress beyond the 3.0 stage. I see it every day and I know they could play so much better. I would highly recommend it. ***ED, 03/07***

I have read his book, Tennis Mastery, and I would highly recommend it. I have read several tennis instructional books, and I think Tennis Mastery is the best by far. It covers every stroke, with very good illustrations. I would say his book is a must read for true students of tennis.
Stroke, 03/07

This book is a gem, probably the most important and insightful tennis publication to appear since Gallwey's masterpiece of the 1970s. While its revolutionary content may make some pros a bit uncomfortable, it surely hits home for the many of us who have stagnated our game in the 3.5 mediocrity about which you write. ***Roy, Virgina, USA. 11/05***

I bought Tennis Mastery this past year and have really enjoyed it. If I didn't learn one thing from this book (and I learned far more that one thing) I learned the incredible use of the two handed forehand for my wife who is a new student to the game. This book has terrific tips, especially the "Advanced Foundation" principles. ***Josh A. 9/05***

David Smith's book Tennis Mastery has some excellent material on the two-hand forehand. His book has detailed information on swing pattern, footwork, different grips, etc. which you will find very helpful. Although I have been playing only four years, I have moved up a rung every year on the NTRP ladder and have had some tournament success as well in the three years I have been using the stroke. ***From TW Message Board, AZ 06/05***

Well, I totally loved it! I always wanted to learn how to hit with both hands off of both sides, and this is the first book that actually shows you how to do it! When I implemented the 2 hand forehand and 2 hand backhand after about the 4th day of trying it out, I kept getting comments like: "I want to learn how to hit that way!" "Where did you like to hit like that? (positive tone)" One of my hitting partners say that he couldn't believe that I am already so good at the 2 hand backhand after only 2 weeks of learning it from this book! This is about the most excited that I have been since "Winning Ugly". This is a very, very interesting and engaging book! Smith has a very engaging writing style! I give an A! I think that you will enjoy it! A well spent $24! ***John from TW Message Board 06/05***

As a section editor for a professional academic journal, I have rarely seen a better or more sincerely written book. It is a textbook model of substance and human sensitivity.
Ned, St. George Utah, USA. 03/05

A real eye-opener! This book will change the way tennis has been taught. It provides clarity for the pro and the student. ***Mike, Garden Grove, CA, USA. 03/05***

As a corporate member of the U.S.P.T.A, I attend many tennis instructional presentations. However, never have I found a source of tennis instruction that combines superb information while at the same time be a truly enjoyable read as TENNIS MASTERY is!
Anthony, Canada. 03/05 www.practicehit.com

"A wonderful read! Easy to understand not just the teaching aspects, but also the logic behind every concept! TENNIS MASTERY is a far cry from the dry, listless tennis books that seem to exist today." ***Scott, Houston Texas, USA. 03/05***

I'm totally enthralled by this book and have played better these past 2 weeks (since plowing through it) than I have played in years -- and enjoying it so much more.

William, Santa Fe, New Mexico. 02/05

Praise for David W. Smith's COACHING MASTERY

Comments: As simply a tennis parent I was afraid the book wouldn't be a very good fit for me. Gave it a shot anyhow and glad I did. From stroke development, to program development, to basic player development, it covers them all. And if you think you don't need the "program development" piece like I thought I didn't, well, think again. Whether you're looking to create a winning HS program or just incite a little more interest around your club or with local juniors, Dave gives great, proven ideas. In fact, he made me think about a career in tennis organizing--something we need desperately in my opinion. And if you're looking for some of Dave's unique coaching techniques, namely the 2-H FH, it's in there, too (remember, Dave believes in the 1-H FH, too, but recommends for some that a 2-H may provide a good initial foundation. It worked for my daughter and wife). Go get a copy...unless, of course, you're the parent of a youngster in my kid's age division/region. You can skip it.
From: *Bama'Best. 2/09*

Comments:"I've been involved in tennis for 55 years, as competitive player, coach and educator. In these years, I've built up a library of tennis books and read them all. But I've no hesitation to say "Coaching Mastery" is the most complete reference. Every tennis teacher and coach worth his salt, should read "Coaching Mastery".
From: *Desmond Oon. 12/08*
USPTA Master Pro

Comments: Great book! This book is perfect for all players of all ages to learn tennis the right way...and a great tool for parents, pros and coaches to use to define the best progressions for their students. This book is huge, like a college text book, with a wealth of information. Highly recommended.
From: *Brian, wwnc radio, North Carolina (Sportsfreaks Talk Radio). 8/08*

Comments: I just received Coaching Mastery and I cannot put it down. I have been coaching tennis for more than 20 years, and have tons of books and videos, but this is the best by far.
From: *Paul E., U.S. 7/08*

David W. Smith's *Coaching Mastery*

Innovative and Effective Tuition for All who Teach Tennis

About the Author

In 2004, the Tennis World was greeted with a revolutionary text on tennis: David W. Smith's TENNIS MASTERY…a book that has been labeled as an "Epiphany" for some, an "Eye-opener" for others, and a "Measure for tennis literature" for others still. TENNIS MASTERY has been also called the "Greatest tennis instructional book since Gallwey's Inner Game of Tennis."

David Smith's 30-plus years of teaching tennis includes a wide variety of successful venues: From coaching one of the most successful high school tennis teams in the U.S. to being the head pro at a world-renown tennis club, to owning his own tennis teaching academy, Dave has continued to produce tennis champions and successful players and teams everywhere he has taught. As a high school coach, his personal team win-loss record of over 1000 team wins against less than 25 losses is one of the most successful U.S coaching records. He has taught over 3000 players including over 100 state, national or world-ranked players.

Many of you know David from his articles written for www.TennisOne.com where he is the Senior Editor of the world-wide recognized website for tennis instruction. His innovative approach to teaching tennis has also earned him such recognition as being one of only 40 Tennis Professionals recognized as a Wilson Racquet Sports "Premier Advisory Staff" members.

Dave has published over 100 articles including feature pieces for USPTA's ADDvantage Magazine and Belgium's "Tennis & Coach" magazine. Dave has also been a feature speaker at various USPTA conventions and divisional workshops. He has been a motivational speaker for such programs as the National Honor Society.

David is married to Dr. Kerri Smith, a pediatrician in St. George, Utah. They have two children, Kyla Marie (who, at 8 years of age is featured in several of Dave's articles on training junior players), and Keaton Bruce, who is four years old.

1n 2009, Dave co-authored the top-selling book about Walt Disney and Disneyland, HIDDEN MICKEY, a first-of-its-kind action-adventure mystery for adults, (age appropriate for 12 and up), a story that delves into the history of Walt Disney and Disneyland through a "Historical Fiction" mystery similar to the movie National Treasure. Within the book, Dave uses his six years experience working at Disneyland for an "Insider's View".

Dave has also parlayed his expertise in the art of Magic, using his magician skills to educate pros and entertain audiences around the country with expert close-up and sleight-of-hand magic. In addition, David is a bass and guitar player who has played in several bands when he lived in Southern California.

(Above) Author David W. Smith (top, far left), with some of his junior beginners at his St. George Tennis Academy. "By giving them the right tools, every kid has the potential for greatness."
(Right, top) David Smith speaking at the 2006 USPTA Southern California Convention.
(Right, bottom) David Smith speaking in Colorado at the Intermountain USPTA Convention.