

The inside out forehand: Technique and methodology

Encarna Martín-Lorente, José Campos and Miguel Crespo

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the technical and methodological aspects of the inside out forehand. With regards to technique, the importance of appropriate footwork for the efficient execution of this stroke is stressed. As to the methodology, discovery strategies are suggested. Finally, some on-court exercises are presented in order to improve the footwork technique.

Key words: groundstroke, biomechanics, forehand

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Corresponding author: Encarna Martín-Lorente.

Email:

encarna.martinlorente@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The inside out forehand is played when the player moves towards the left half of the court, with the initial objective of protecting his backhand in order to use the forehand drive (Figure 1). In the case of left handed players, the movement happens on the right hand side.



Figure 1. Inside out forehand from inside in and from inside out.

It is the direction of the ball after being hit that provides the name to the technical movement. Thus, in the case of the shot going towards the outside of the player or the diagonal, it is called the "inside out forehand". On the contrary, if it is used down-the-line, it is called "inside in forehand".

The cross-court inside out forehand is the most commonly used 'inside' shot, as it clears the net over its lowest part, making it safer. The flight of the ball is also longer since it is a diagonal shot, which forces the opponent to move, thus

creating space, providing, a priori, a good attacking position. This stroke generally aims at "locking" the opponent on the backhand side, to look for a winner in the same place, or to aim to the other side of the court.

The down-the-line inside out forehand is a higher risk stroke, which normally finds the opponents forehand drive and needs more speed and accuracy (except when the space has been created before). This stroke is performed with some more spin than the cross-court; the net is higher and the ball trajectory is shorter

INSIDE OUT FOREHAND FOOTWORK AND TECHNIQUE

In general, the movement is a hitting technical movement on the forehand side, the body position is conditioned by the position of the feet which are open and laterally placed, so, the ball can be hit with a more open angle, on the left side of the court, or right side of the court in the case of a left-hander such as Nadal (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Rafael Nadal.

As Reid, Crespo, Santilli & Miley (2005) state, short movements are those in which the player has to move approximately 3 m. max. in order to make a stroke. Therefore, we agree that the forehand footwork in the inside out forehand is of this type, and furthermore, that it is crucial.

In evaluating the movement patterns of professional players on clay, Ferrauti & Weber (2001) observed that approximately 80% of all shots are played at less than a 3 m distance from the ready position on the baseline. In order to play optimal defensive and offensive strokes in short distances, coordination and agility, as well as appropriate and versatile balance are necessary (Bourquin, 2003). The basic short movements are multi-directional shuffles, and side step, as well as small adjustment steps. In the stroke, it is important to emphasise: the lateral movement; getting around the ball in order to get into the right position and get side-on enough; reaching the ball with short steps; preparing the stroke whilst moving around the ball; pointing with the left hand to calculate the distance to the ball; and, thrusting the body forward at the time of impact in order to generate more power to the stroke.

As to the specific footwork in the inside out forehand, Reid et al., (2005) consider that footwork exercises which work on this important aspect of the movement, and thus, the stroke execution, have played a key role for on-court training of many professionals, over the last 15 years. Pato Álvarez, one of the most outstanding coaches in Spain, used many of these exercises with his players during the 80's and 90's, so much so, that they have become a characteristic element of many coaches' toolkits.

In this sense, many authors believe that with the proliferation of very strong baseline players over the last years, the capacity to reach angled balls near the sidelines, in a speedy and efficient way, and to recover, is getting more and more important. The skill of covering the court with efficient movements at short distances is part of the footwork toolkit for most professional players.

The comparison between beginners and advanced players, when preparing a baseline stroke when running, is an example of an important element of the movement that must be trained on-court (Saviano, 2000). Advanced players start the movement towards a baseline stroke in the lower limbs, and the initial rotation of the shoulder happens without excessively moving the racket (Ellenbecker & Roetert, 2003). This allows the player to start the upper body rotation, without this rotation interfering in the movement towards the ball. On the contrary, in these strokes, beginners usually get ready and sprint to the ball with a totally extended arm and with the racket behind their back.

Regardless of the playing level, it is key for players to adopt a balanced position during movement so as to transfer the force as efficiently as possible, and to provide a stable base (for the head) from where to process visual information correctly. It is important to train to keep the correct body position during on-court movement and stroke execution (Ellenbecker & Roetert, 2003; Versteegen, 2003) (Figures 3 & 4).



Figures 3 and 4. Inside out forehands.

TEACHING THE INSIDE OUT FOREHAND: METHODOLOGICAL CRITERIA

Brabene (1996) states that in modern tennis, the forehand stroke must be a "weapon" (65% to 70% of the court should be covered with this stroke) with the backhand being a solid support complement. Furthermore, when the opponent plays a slow ball to our backhand, we must run around the backhand, as much as possible, to play an attacking forehand. The forehand that is played from the backhand corner, allows the player to camouflage his/her intentions. It can be played inside out or down-the-line to the side line. It also provides the probability of hitting another forehand, should the opponent return the ball.

Dent (1996) considers that returning serve (2nd serve) with an inside out forehand is an excellent opportunity to be aggressive with this stroke. The coach or player aim a second service to the opponent's backhand. The receiver runs around their backhand to return with an attacking forehand.

Thus, the receiver must start to move around the backhand as soon as the serving player has thrown the ball up. The highest "percentage" return is an inside out cross-court forehand drive, which forces the serving player to change direction. It is the greater distance on the lower part of the net and allows the receiver to move easily, and to return to the central geometrical position, limiting the opponent's attack angles.

When talking about the footwork needed against a short ball, Farrell (1998) suggests that many players would rather avoid their backhand and play an inside out shot; and, therefore, the coach must teach and train this movement.

On the other hand, the player must be encouraged to “hit his deepest” to the baseline, so that the shoulder and the racket go forward at the same height as the contact point (if the contact point is at shoulder height, as it always should be).

CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

When teaching and training the inside out forehand technique, we recommend using the didactic strategy of guided discovery or problem solving in which the coach creates playing situations that challenge the player to discover the solution.

In this case, this occurs by means of teaching with the constraints approach, and using variability in practice (Martín-Lorente, Campos, & Crespo, 2017).

Open, global, holistic facilitators of adapted solution approaches, that involve a player’s implicit knowledge and reasoning, and an understanding of the demands of the game are, obviously the most appropriate.

Exercise 1

Purpose: Develop specific footwork for the inside out forehand

Place and equipment: Tennis court, racket, target.

Methodology: Shadowing the movement without the ball.

Description: The player is approximately 1 m. behind the centre service line in zone A. The cone is placed as in the figure. The player holding the racket will make the movement to hit an inside out forehand and will make the gesture of the stroke (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Exercise 1.

Exercise 2

Purpose: To develop the specific footwork and hitting for the inside out forehand.

Place and equipment: A tennis court, a basket with balls, rackets, targets.

Methodology: The coach feeds from the basket.

Description: The player is approximately 1 m. behind the centre service line, on the left zone of the court. The cone is placed as in the figure. The coach is approximately half way along the alley on the left side and hand feeds the balls to the area shown in the figure so that the player must move round the ball with the appropriate footwork, just as shown by the black arrow. The player will hit the inside out forehand towards the targets placed on the other half of the court (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Exercise 2.

Exercise 3

Purpose: To develop the specific footwork, hitting and aiming for the inside out forehand in a closed situation.

Place and equipment: A tennis court, a basket with balls, rackets, targets.

Methodology: The coach feeds from the basket.

Description: Similar to the previous exercise but the coach is on the other half of the court, and feeds balls from the basket for the player to move to the ball with the right footwork, just as is shown by the arrow. The player will hit the inside out forehand towards the targets on the other half court, alternating the direction of the strokes (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Exercise 3.

Exercise 4

Purpose: Develop the specific footwork, hitting and aiming for the inside out forehand in a semi-open situation.

Place and material: A tennis court, a basket with balls, rackets, targets.

Methodology: The coach feeds from the basket.

Description: Similar to the previous exercise, but the coach is on the other half of the court in the alley, feeding balls from the basket for the player to make the player move to the ball with the right footwork, just as is shown by the black arrows. The coach feeds three balls per series. One ball to the left, one to the centre, and another ball to the right of the player. No need to place a cone on the side of the player, so that they do not trip over it. The player will hit all inside out forehands towards the targets on the other half of the court, alternating the direction of the strokes (Figure 8).

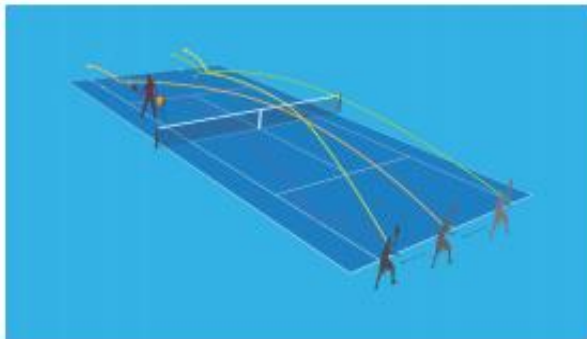


Figure 8. Exercise 4.

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