



The two-handed forehand (Part 1).

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ABSTRACT

Why is this two-handed technique—so often preferred when it comes to teaching the backhand (BH)—not used as much for the forehand, when both strokes appear to be symmetrical? Is the one-handed forehand the only efficient one? This article is part one in a two part series which addresses the issues related to teaching a two-handed forehand.

Key words: Technique, two-handed forehand, teaching methodology.

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WHY TEACH THE TWO-HANDED FOREHAND?

Cultural reasons

Former champions such as Gene Mayer (n° 3), Gildmeister (n° 10) and more recently Monica Seles (ex n°1 WTA) as well as French players Fabrice Santoro and Marion Bartoli have developed a great game efficiency using a two-handed technique on both their forehand and backhand. Furthermore, Nadal is an example of a player that used to play this way up to the age of 10-years-old.

Pedagogical reasons

If we have the wisdom to let very young players (4-5-6 years old) practise freely with balls, either bouncing or on the ground, they will, inter alia, do it using both hands on both sides.

This two-handed technique greatly assists children in the stroke learning process. In this regard, coaches have long been convinced of the benefits of teaching both the one-handed and the two-handed backhand. So, why is it not the same with the forehand?

Basics that the two handed technique facilitates:

- Positioning the body in relation to the ball: both arms are linked to the body right from the backswing and preparation phase, meaning that the lateral alignment of shoulders (parallel to the trajectory of the incoming ball) tends to be naturally more pronounced. As a consequence the player will have to adjust his position using closed stances, which promote a lateral body position before receiving the ball. The positioning process is therefore naturally better through those

early body alignment conditions as a result of the two- handed technique.

- Rotation is more easily achieved (especially if the player wants to hit the ball with power) when both arms are linked to the body throughout the entire stroke. This rotation makes it easier to hit the ball ahead of the body and to follow through upwards in direction of the opposite shoulder.

- The general form and the rhythm of the stroke are ensured since the arms are connected to the body during the entire stroke, which automatically makes for less inadvertent movement (elbows, in particular, always move close to the body).

EVIDENCE OF THE ADVANTAGES

During Tennis 10s sessions, making children perform two-handed strokes on balls situated on ground (then on low bouncing balls) using foam balls predisposes them to align, rotate and perform a full swing.



Figure 1. Thomas, 5-years-old, lifts the ball off and away from the ground (2nd Tennis 10s session).



Figure 2. Marie, 5-years-old, hits the ball back during rally with low bouncing balls.

Hitting the ball: Two-handed forehands (or backhands) are performed from a static vertical ball feed that gives children the time to get hold of their racket with both hands and to organize their body before hitting.

Two early and contrasted body positions can be used before the vertical feed is performed:

The body faces the net: here children have to learn to move around the ball in order to position themselves next to it and to hit it using both hands.

The body is perpendicular to the net: Here the player can adopt either a "closed stance", where feet are aligned with the direction of the outgoing ball flight, or a "semi closed" stance. The end result at contact being similar, with the same diagonal and upward forward swing extending from the front leg stance.

Hitting the ball back: Two-handed forehands and backhands should be performed at first on "easy" trajectories allowing children to hit back without having to reach for a distant ball with a one-handed stroke.



Figure 3. Two-handed forehands.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS TO PERFORM THE STROKES

In terms of desired outcome

When players hit from vertical feeds, at the beginning, favour long, horizontal trajectories in order to give them a better feel of the rotation of the shoulders and of the entire swing, with the racket head remaining at a distance from the body. However, in order to avoid excessive stance rotation or

potential tensing when hitting the ball, you should propose variations in terms of length and power to ensure a balanced stroke as well as a proper follow through.

When players hit the ball back, at the beginning, make them use the swing technique they have already mastered with vertical feeds and transfer it to this new task. In order to do so, you have to considerably facilitate the task by feeding them "easy" balls, i.e. the trajectories must be directed towards a space close to them so that they don't need to move too much. Furthermore, the ball has to bounce ahead of them and allow for a shot with a low contact point. Initially, you should encourage precision shots allowing a well-balanced swing but also various degrees of length and direction (swing amplitude) along with 'out in front' contact points...

STROKE EXECUTION (FOR A RIGHT-HANDED PLAYER)

-The racket must be held with both hands from start to finish

-During the first attempts and trials, the position of the hands on the handle should be experimented with since young players will not yet be lateralized and might become ambidextrous as their motor experience progresses:

Joint hands (one on top of the other) holding the small handle:

-Some beginner children instinctively choose this grip. It is one to be promoted by the coach who then doesn't have to worry about whether the players hit a forehand or a two-handed backhand: they just hit the ball on either the left side or the right side.

Left hand on the bottom of the handle, right hand above and next to it (side to side):

Examples of this grip being effectively executed include the hockey grip (for right-handed players) where the right hand is sometimes placed very high on the stick handle.

Another example included the Golf grip (for right-handed players) where golfers swing or putt with joint hands (even slightly interlocked). Their swing looks a lot like the forehand of a tennis player (actually more like the two-handed backhand of a left-handed player, especially since the left hand grip of a golfer is continental grip).

Right hand on the bottom of the handle, left hand above and next to it:

-Used by the best tennis players this grip is required for high-performance tennis due to the speed of rallies: changing grips between a forehand and a backhand and between a serve and a groundstroke (and to an even greater degree between a forehand volley and a backhand volley) is not possible given the speed of execution.



Figure 4. Rachel's (left-handed) two-handed forehand and two-handed backhand : are those strokes symmetrical?

CONCLUSION

This article has begun to outline some technical features of the two-handed forehand, and how it may facilitate good technical check points for young players. Part two of this article will be published in a future CSSR issue in 2012.

Publication note

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