

The two-handed forehand (Part 2).

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ABSTRACT

This article is a continuation from an article published in a previous issue CSSR 55, that discusses the two handed forehand. In this second part, the issue of shifting from the two handed forehand to the single handed forehand is discussed as well as the different criticisms that this stroke has received. The main discussion point of this article is the consideration of the two-handed forehand as a solution to aid in the correction of a flawed one-handed forehand. Finally, laterality is also discussed as a feature of players using this stroke.

Key words: Technique, Two- handed forehand, Teaching methodology.

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INTRODUCTION

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 all developed a great game efficiency using a two-handed technique on both their forehand and backhand. Furthermore, Rafael Nadal is an example of a player that played this way up to the age of 10-years-old. Indeed if we let very young players (4-5-6 years old) practise freely with balls, either bouncing or on the ground, they will in many instances perform groundstrokes using both hands on both sides. This article continues the discussion from part 1 of this article, by looking more at the features of this two handed technique.

SHIFTING FROM THE TWO HANDED FOREHAND TO THE ONE HANDED FOREHAND: AN EASY SWITCH

A player that uses a two handed forehand grip can make the move to the single handed forehand with relative ease. Like any technical change, success will not be immediate but the change is relatively straight forward. As a coach, all one should do is instruct the child to remove their left hand (assuming right-handedness). Once the player has removed the left hand, the player must then begin to accustom themselves to execution with the right hand only. The right hand should simply position itself naturally lower on the handle for a full one-handed stroke execution (at the beginning the child naturally brings his hand closer to the heart of the racket for purposes of handiness rather than strength).

Right hand at the bottom end of the handle, left hand above: The one hand from two hands switch is all the easier since the right hand is already in the best position for playing a one-handed shot (whereas the two-handed preparation poses some problems of swing fluidity).



Figure 1. Ludovic hitting a one handed forehand (grip on the bottom end of the handle).

It should be noted that when a child uses a one-handed grip, it is done either for the entire swing (from the preparation to the follow through) or partially, with the other hand taking hold of the racket again towards the end. Coaches should ensure that these procedures respect the stroke fundamentals by verifying that they are efficient both technically and tactically.

CRITICISM OF THIS BROADER STROKE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Learning a two-handed stroke to end up using a one-handed technique can be seen as unnecessarily time-consuming.

At the beginning of the learning process, the motor experience must be wide-ranging even if tennis-oriented at all. The child must practise hitting bouncing balls (or volleying) on both the left and the right side: two-handed / one-handed techniques with the right hand (right-hander forehand – right-hander backhand) and the left hand (lefthander forehand – lefthander backhand).

At this stage, this broader motor experience gives the child a better knowledge of his body as he/she needs time to define

their laterality (a skilled child usually doesn't refrain from swapping hands in order to hit balls on either his right or left side!).

This allows to better learn the basics and to develop proper technical sensations, which are easily transferred from two-handed strokes to one-handed strokes and vice-versa (for instance, in the forehand the rotation is better experienced through the two-handed technique and the forward swing is better acquired through the one-handed technique).

THE TWO-HANDED FOREHAND AS A SOLUTION TO CORRECT A FLAWED ONE-HANDED FOREHAND

The two-handed forehand can help correct several aspects of an imperfectly learned one-handed forehand:

- Excessive swing size during stroke preparation (position of racket and arm much beyond the shoulder line at the end of the preparation): a preparation with both hands naturally limits the amplitude of the backswing.
- Lack of quality in the wrist action during the preparation and ball impact: with a two-handed forehand, the wrists are firmer during the backswing and more toned during the forward swing.
- Improper positioning: with a one-handed forehand, the child can rely more easily on his arms as opposed to his legs in order to reach the ball. The two-handed strokes force him into adopting a more rigorous footwork and making more accurate adjustments to the ball (due to the link between arms and body).
- Impact zone too lateral: either because of an excessive preparation or a lack of dynamism in the stroke (only played with the arm, with no leg drive or rotation of the hips, shoulders, etc.). Two-handed strokes make it much easier to rotate in order to hit the ball in front of the body
- Elbow away from the body at contact: when the arm swings too far from the body - during either the preparation or the end of the shot, but more particularly at ball contact- the shot cannot combine the strength from the arms and legs. However, with the two handed forehand it is easier to maintain the elbows close to the body throughout the entire swing.
- A compensation shot with unintended slice effect: due to all the above reasons but also to the additional power gained by using both arms, two-handed forehands make it easier to brush up the ball.

CONCLUSION

In light of the above, the two-handed forehand is a not a miracle solution: it is useless against a poor assessment of ball

trajectories or limited physical capabilities ... Yet, a less skilled player is more likely to reach the ball and to hit accurately with this stroke.

It is an ideal starting point to ensure early in the learning process a proper shoulder alignment, a positioning of the elbow close to the body both during backswing and forward swing, a smoother rotary motion, etc. It is similar to the one-handed forehand in terms of swing motion and shifting from one to the other is easy.

The fact remains, however, that many players show a marked laterality, have one arm stronger than the other, a dominant eye that affects more or less the orientation of the body, a weak footwork, etc.

Once beyond the initiation stage, it is up to the coach to guide the player toward the future efficiency of his shots (two-handed, one- handed?) in the most varied game conditions.

At the highest level, the two-handed forehand of a player like Santoro was never a real "weapon". However, with his two-handed technique, Santoro would create some problems to the best players (including Federer) due to his game being based on touch, accuracy and depth. On the contrary, Marion Bartoli hits her forehands with a lot of power and takes the ball early... Who can tell if in the future two-handed forehands and backhands won't become the solution to counter the extraordinary power displayed by the best servers in the world?

PUBLICATION NOTE

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