

MasterClass



# SERENA WILLIAMS



Teaches Tennis



# WELCOME TO MASTERCLASS

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SERENA WILLIAMS TEACHES TENNIS

## A FEW FACTS ABOUT SERENA WILLIAMS

- ▶ When asked in a Trans World Sports interview at age 11 what tennis player she would like to be like, Serena responded, "I would want other tennis players to be like me."
- ▶ She has 21 Grand Slam Singles Titles, 13 Grand Slam Women's Doubles Titles, and 4 Olympic Gold Medals.
- ▶ Serena has a max serve speed of 128.6 mph (3rd fastest recorded women's serve.)
- ▶ When Serena watches match footage, she plays it on mute.
- ▶ She has also never read an article about herself: "I don't want it to go to my head. I consider myself an average individual, I just so happen to be a good tennis player."
- ▶ Serena eats a mostly raw, vegan diet.

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Tennis is a fun sport and a great opportunity to learn a lot about life. You can learn how to fight, you can learn how to never give up. — *Serena Williams*

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The serve is the only shot where everything relies on you.

— *Serena Williams*

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# CLEAR MIND

- ▶ A winning serve starts with a clear, relaxed mind. Put the last point behind you and forget about the score; you need to devote all your focus to your form and your serving strategy.
- ▶ The best way to clear your mind is to give it a simple task, that's why top players develop pre-serve routines. Whether it's the way they bounce the ball (like Serena), the way they bend their knees, or take a breath – the trick is to choose an easy habitual task and perform it with total concentration before every serve.

# PRACTICE

- ▶ Serena's pre-serve routine is to bounce the ball 5 times before her first serve and 2 times before her second serve. Now it's time for you to develop your own. Try a few different options ten times each: don't actually hit any serves, just perform the routine and try to clear your mind. Pick whichever routine made you feel the most comfortable and relaxed.

## LESSON RECAP

- ▶ Clear mind
- ▶ Toss
- ▶ Form
- ▶ Contact point
- ▶ Pronation
- ▶ Second serve
- ▶ Variety
- ▶ Adding power
- ▶ Hitting aces

## NOTES

# TOSS

- ▶ More than power, more than placement, Serena thinks consistency makes her serve great. The key to a consistent serve is a good, reliable toss.
  - ▼ A good toss should travel straight up in the air without spinning.
  - ▼ Keep your arm extended and hold the ball in the tips of your fingers. When you release the ball, think about your fingers opening like the petals of a flower. If the ball is spinning through the air, you need to work on perfecting this release by evening out the pressure of your fingers.
  - ▼ If the ball is moving forward or backward, work on when you're releasing. Find the perfect arm position to send the ball straight up.
  - ▼ Your toss should travel high enough that you have to reach for it when you swing through.

# PRACTICE

- ▶ Spending just ten minutes a day on your toss can work wonders for your serve – you don't need a court, and you won't even break a sweat.
  - ▼ Practice somewhere where you're tossing against a visual backdrop – trees, powerlines, etc., and try to send each ball to the exact same spot.
  - ▼ Once things are feeling pretty good, film yourself from a few different angles and see how consistent your toss really is.

## NOTES

# FORM

- ▶ Power comes from form. Before you worry about getting in the gym and developing your strength, work on perfecting your form. Chances are you'll unlock serve power you never knew you had.
- ▶ There's an easy way to think about the form of a serve; first load energy into your core and legs, then channel that energy into your arms and racquet. Remember:
  - ▼ Turn your shoulders and bend your knees during your toss. This is the load-up. The deeper your shoulder turn and knee bend, the more power you'll have in your serve.
  - ▼ Drive your legs upward and turn your shoulders back while your arm reaches high and your wrist whips forward. Don't try to force power into the serve with your arm. It won't work, and it could hurt.

## PRACTICE

- ▶ Serena's Dad used to load an entire shopping cart with tennis balls for serve practice. That's a lot of repetition – and that's what it takes to get your form working and deep into your muscle memory. For now, start with a basket of balls.
  - ▼ Serve through the basket without thinking at all about placement or power; just focus on form.
  - ▼ Are your knees bending and unbending smoothly? Are your shoulders turning deeply enough?
  - ▼ Pay attention to how your body feels after the first bucket. If your arm is very tired and sore, take a break then come back and try again, serving with even less power and more attention to the way your body moves.

## NOTES

## CONTACT POINT

- ▶ Probably the most common serving mistake people make is letting their toss drop too low before swinging.
- ▶ You should be reaching, even jumping to make contact on serves.
- ▶ The higher you connect with the ball the more leverage you have to drive it down with power, and the better chance you have of landing it inside the service box.

## PRACTICE

- On your next bucket of balls focus on your contact point. Your arm should be fully extended and your feet should leave the ground when you swing. Try tossing extra high and reaching for balls you don't think you can get. This should help you find the upper limit of comfort zone – that's your ideal contact point.

## NOTES

# PRONATION

## NOTES

- ▶ Now, time to start adding power. For her strongest serves, Serena tosses further out in front of her, changes her grip and pronates her wrist.
  - ▼ Tossing in front of you means your body has to drive forward to connect with the ball – this reduces spin and adds speed.
  - ▼ Serena uses an Eastern forehand grip, rather than a Continental when she serves for power. This brings the strings into more direct, perpendicular contact with ball. The more your strings are smacking the ball directly – as opposed to brushing across the ball – the less spin and more power you'll hit with.
  - ▼ Pronation is big word for "rotating your wrist." Hold your arm in front of you with your palm facing up, then turn your palm to face the ground – you're pronating your wrist. When you reach up to hit a serve at full extension, you have to pronate to bring the racquet face more perpendicular to the ball.

## PRACTICE

- ▶ Proper pronation on serves separates great tennis players from good ones.
  - ▼ If you haven't already, get comfortable serving with an Eastern forehand grip. To achieve this, look down at your racquet from the bottom of the handle. There are 8 angles on the handle, and each is called a bevel. The blade of your racquet lines up with bevel #1 at the top. Now count to the right to find bevel #3 and place the base of your index finger knuckle there to find an Eastern forehand grip. Hit a few serves and feel how the movement of your arm, wrist and racquet changes.
  - ▼ Changing grips changes your racquet's path. The racquet head and the inside of your wrist start facing toward you as you swing, then as you snap through the serve, they rotate and end up facing away from you.
  - ▼ If this is happening, and it should be, you are pronating naturally. It may feel awkward at first, and you should allow yourself to make mistakes as you serve through a bucket with this new motion in mind.
  - ▼ For some, it feels less like "hitting the ball with the racquet" and more like "throwing the racquet at the ball." As a matter of fact, it is very much like throwing. Our wrists pronate in a similar way when we throw baseballs or footballs properly – and throwing balls can be a great way to get comfortable with the feeling of pronation.

## NOTES

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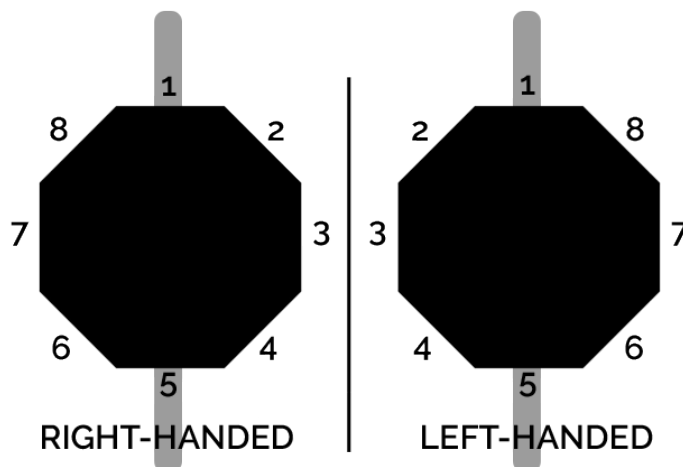
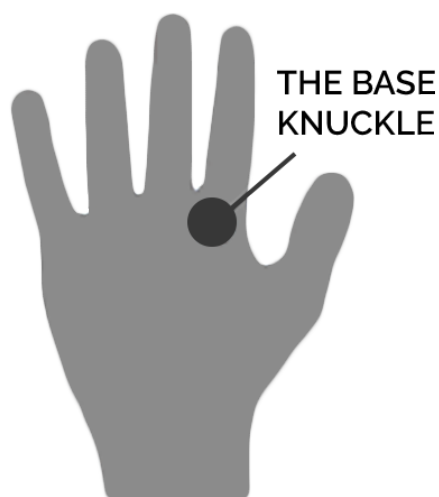
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## SECOND SERVE

- ▶ Double faults waste points and cause unwanted frustration. That's why Serena sacrifices power for a little more consistency on her second serve.
  - ▼ She tosses the ball a little further behind her so that her racket doesn't make flat contact, but brushes up the back of the ball.
  - ▼ This adds the topspin that will help your ball land inside the service box. It will also give the ball a nice high kick when it bounces.

## PRACTICE

- Find the perfect toss for your second serve. Practice tossing the ball behind you like Serena does. Hit your serves hard – if they are flying too long, try tossing further behind you. When they start falling in the service box, you've found your sweet spot.

## NOTES

# VARIETY

## NOTES

- ▶ Adding a kick serve and slice serve to your game can help you catch your opponents off guard.
- ▶ Kick Serve:
  - ▼ A good kick serve generates a high-bouncing topspin on the ball and can be strong play against an opponent who has trouble returning high balls.
  - ▼ Tossing the ball further behind you helps you generate the right spin.
- ▶ Slice Serve:
  - ▼ Slice serves are tough to return because they have a big topspin kick and drift wide after they bounce.
  - ▼ Toss the ball in the same place you would for kick serve, but brush your racquet across the back of the ball as you make contact to give it side spin.

## PRACTICE

- ▶ Serve through a bucket thinking only about topspin – imagine the ball is a clock and your racquet is moving from the 6 to the 12 as it's making contact. Are your shots falling faster? Do your bounces have that big kick?
- ▶ Now serve through a bucket with side spin – if the ball is a clock, this time your racquet is moving from 9 to 3. Are your serves starting to curve?

## ADDING POWER

- Once you're serving with good form consistently, it's time to target select muscle groups and strengthen them to increase your power. There are plenty of great plyometric exercises that help the core and legs; box jumps, jump lunges and burpees will all give you a great overall workout and add to your service power.

## PRACTICE

- ▶ Add some plyometrics to your daily routine. You should be working hard, but not to pain or exhaustion.
- ▶ Also, throwing light medicine balls in an over-the-shoulder motion similar to your serve form can be a great way to add power.

## NOTES

# HITTING ACES

- ▶ Serena's not afraid to try for aces and you shouldn't be either. Saving yourself from running around the court to win your points can be crucial to conserving your energy. And an ace always rattles an opponent.
- ▶ In the 2013 French Open, Serena could tell she was too nervous and tired to win with her groundstrokes. She thought to herself, "Ok, to win this I just need to hit aces," and went on to win 6-4, 6-4. Aces take confidence. Imagine yourself sending a 124MPH ace across the net, throwing your racquet in the air to celebrate, and the fans cheering your well-deserved win.

## PRACTICE

- ▶ Now's the time to put it all together. Review the list below to remind yourself of the key serve components you've practiced. Now when you serve through your next bucket put it all behind you, clear your mind, and try to hit aces.
- ▼ A clear mind.
  - ▼ A reliable toss.
  - ▼ Good energy loading in the legs and core.
  - ▼ A high contact point.
  - ▼ Fast, fluid pronation of your wrist.
  - ▼ Muscle power.

## NOTES