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CHAPTER



FOREHAND SKILLS



The forehand has become the weapon of choice for most tennis players today. How well a player hits this shot forecasts the style of play. The forehand is often central to the game plan for both sides of a match; a player can build a game plan around using it or combating it. A good forehand has power, consistency, accuracy, and variety. It enables a player to overpower an opponent, go from defense to offense with a single shot, or put an opponent on the defensive in order to transition to the net. Players with a strong forehand include Andy Roddick, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Venus Williams, and Serena Williams.

The forehand plays a large part in the process of a balanced groundstroke attack. Depending on individual strengths and weaknesses, a player can use it offensively to stay in a point until the right opportunity comes around or even to play a strong defense. An effective forehand is not only about power, it is also about the way the player uses it, such as to set up net play or a killer backhand down the line.

Over the last 40 years the forehand has evolved from the classic Continental grip into more choices such as the Eastern, semi-Western, and full Western grips. Players have used classic forehand styles within an attack style strategy—flat balls or balls hit on the rise—but they focused on placement and finesse. Today the way players strike the ball is considerably different. Racket technology and advances in proper technique have made hitting the forehand more of a full-body workout designed to deliver a striking blow. This is apparent in the professionals and young juniors of today. The modern-day forehand strategy is more aggressive and designed to hit a winner from the backcourt or take time away from an opponent in an effort to control play.

Today's forehand also depends on a big serve. Modern tennis could be called the serve-and-forehand era. When technology and sport science advanced greatly from the mid- 1980s through the 1990s, the conventional ways of winning points, such as the serve-and-volley, or the Swedish way, of outlasting an opponent on the court, became less effective. The return came back faster and the ball was struck with greater velocity. Thus, the forehand became a weapon. Instead of a chess match, tennis became a power game and, consequently, the emphasis changed toward the first strike.

This chapter covers offensive and defensive styles as they relate to the forehand, the various forehand shots, the technique for those shots, and the characteristics of a good forehand. Chapter 3 provides drills needed for developing a great forehand weapon.

CHOOSING A FOREHAND

Today's game is ruled by the forehand first. Even if a player's most powerful weapon is the backhand, the forehand must be strong. The player needs to develop the forehand well in order to counter the opponent's forehand long enough to use the backhand effectively.

The quality of the forehand shot determines the player's offensive and defensive nature and provides the player with the basis for the resulting game style and plan. So, when learning or reviewing technique, it is vital that the player stay current. The goal is to have great technique for every shot, so the player should constantly try to improve. All players must be able to execute a variety of both offensive and defensive forehands.

Technique is important in a player's development, and it dictates what the player's better shots will be. A player should choose a grip, stance, and stroke (swing path) that correspond to the goals for the forehand and can help the player develop to the highest levels.

There are five types of forehands: the Eastern forehand, the semi-Western forehand, the Western forehand, Continental forehand, and the slice forehand. Each shot is characterized by its grip and has a different technique for its use. The player should first choose the most comfortable grip, which in turn dictates the type of forehand and the technique

for hitting it. Still, it is important to master multiple grips in order to shift between forehands, such as the defensive slice versus an offensive winner or a forehand rally shot.

The Eastern and semi-Western forehand grips are the most versatile. The Continental and Western forehand grips are used less often because they have limitations in hitting certain shots, such as high and low balls. The Western grip can be used aggressively on higher bouncing surfaces such as clay or hard court. A person using the Western grip has to be proficient at quickly changing to other grips for certain shots, such as from a Western forehand to an Eastern backhand grip on a one-handed backhand (see *Forehands and Grips*, p. 5).

FOOTWORK AND BODY POSITION

No matter what forehand technique a player chooses, the player needs to use proper footwork and body position to get set to hit the ball. Knowing how to move quickly and efficiently results in greater choices for controlling the ball.

Movement

Movement to the forehand side is vital to the success of the shot. The player should keep the feet moving at all times when the ball is in play and split step when the opponent hits the ball. A *split step* is jumping an inch or two (2.5 to 5 cm) off the ground and landing on the balls of the feet, ready to move (see figure 1.1). For balls hit to the right side, the player should step out with the right foot (see figure 1.2) and try to line up the right foot behind the incoming ball. For balls hit to the left side, the player should step out with the left foot and line it up behind the incoming ball. Once lined up on the ball, enough weight should be loaded on the leg and foot to establish balance as the player begins to push off and transfer weight into the shot. In other words, the first step gets the player to the ball quickly and efficiently, making the execution of the whole shot easier.



Figure 1.1 Split step.



Figure 1.2 Step to the right after split step.



Figure 1.3 Open stance.



Figure 1.4 Semi-open stance.

Stances

Three types of stances are used in tennis: open, semi-open, and closed. A player's stance is dictated by the shot being hit and by personal preference. The player should use a stance that creates the best platform for the player's legs to push off and hit a powerful shot. As long as a player knows the proper technique for the different stances, all three can be effective.

Open Stance

In an open stance (figure 1.3), the player uses the back leg to load and set the feet in a manner that keeps the body relaxed, balanced, and open to the shot. A player should experiment with the open stance to see what feels the most comfortable for control and power. The grips and strings used today are based on topspin and allowing the arm the maximum ability to swing freely. The degree to which a player uses an open stance depends on shots hit by opponents. Strong, high-bouncing shots hit out of the player's strike zone may require more of an open stance because of the lack of time to prepare and to line up the feet on the ball. Windy conditions, playing left-handed servers who swing wide, or playing great right-handed kick serves on the ad side of the court can require an open stance as well.

Players can use the open stance on all of the forehand shots. It can be used on shots hit directly to the player or on tougher balls that require stretching. The open stance gives the player the advantage of getting to more balls and hitting them aggressively. It gives the arm ample space to strike the ball and swing freely, especially on those tougher, higher balls. Drawbacks of hitting with an open stance relate to the amount of power a player achieves through the hitting zone. A shot hit from an open stance relies on angular momentum (created by rotation only), which produces less power compared with a square stance that combines linear and angular momentum.

Semi-Open Stance

The semi-open (also known as semi-closed) stance, shown in figure 1.4, is a form of the open stance and is used regularly when players move around their backhand to hit a forehand. Some players like to hit with an open stance regardless of the oncoming ball but others prefer to use a semi-open stance for a shot that is hit directly to them, giving them the option to hit through the shot more by using linear and angular momentum. This stance is especially useful on shots where the player is pulled away from the center of the court and needs balance through contact. The back leg loads as it does with the open stance, but the front leg comes a little more in front and to the side. A player can use this stance on all forehand shots.

Closed Stance

When using the closed stance (figure 1.5), a player sets the back leg in the loaded position but brings the front leg directly in front of the back leg to effectively close the hips and shoulders to the net. It is also known as the *square* stance. The use of this stance depends on a player's preference and how quickly the player moves to the ball. If a player can get to the ball in plenty of time and prefers to set both legs (one in front of the other), the closed stance is more powerful. A closed stance is best used on shots that are hit directly to the player. It becomes increasingly difficult to hit a closed stance when stretching out for wide shots.

FOREHANDS AND GRIPS

Figure 1.6 shows a view of the bottom octagon of a racket and, for the purposes of grip discussion, numbers each of the bevels of the racket handle. All of the grips are based on how a player positions the bottom knuckle of the index finger, or the index knuckle (see figure 1.7), on the bevels. Figures 1.8a and b on page 6 show the placement for the index knuckle for a right-handed and a left-handed player for all of the forehand grips.



Figure 1.5 Closed stance.

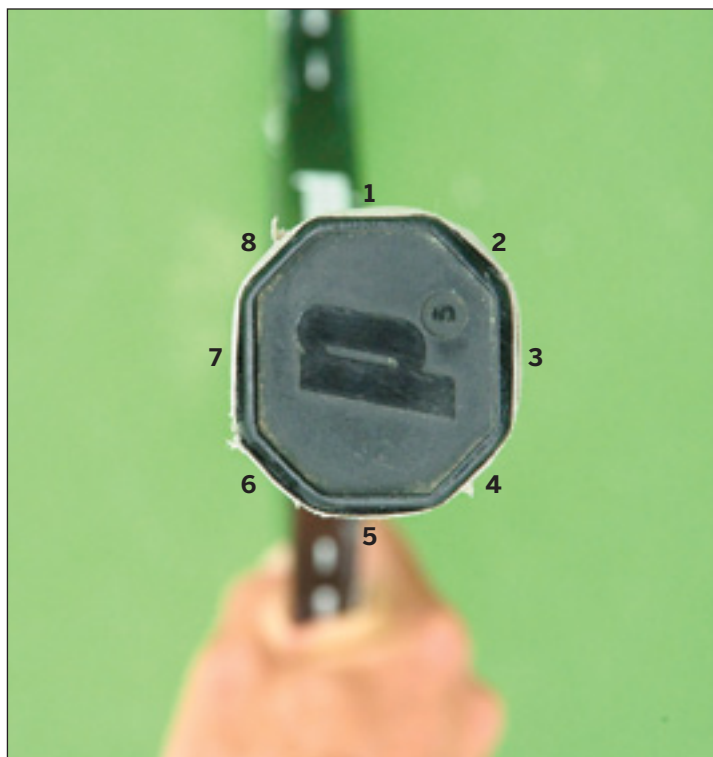


Figure 1.6 The eight bevels of the racket.

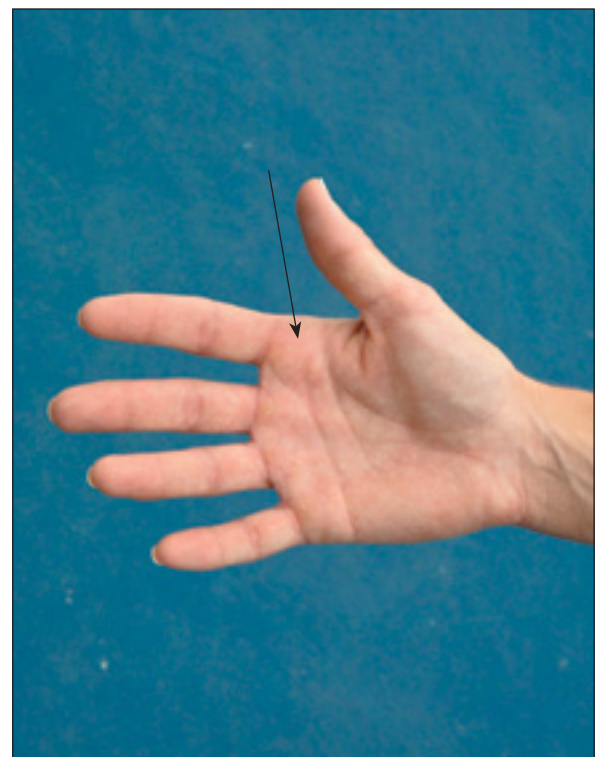


Figure 1.7 The index knuckle.

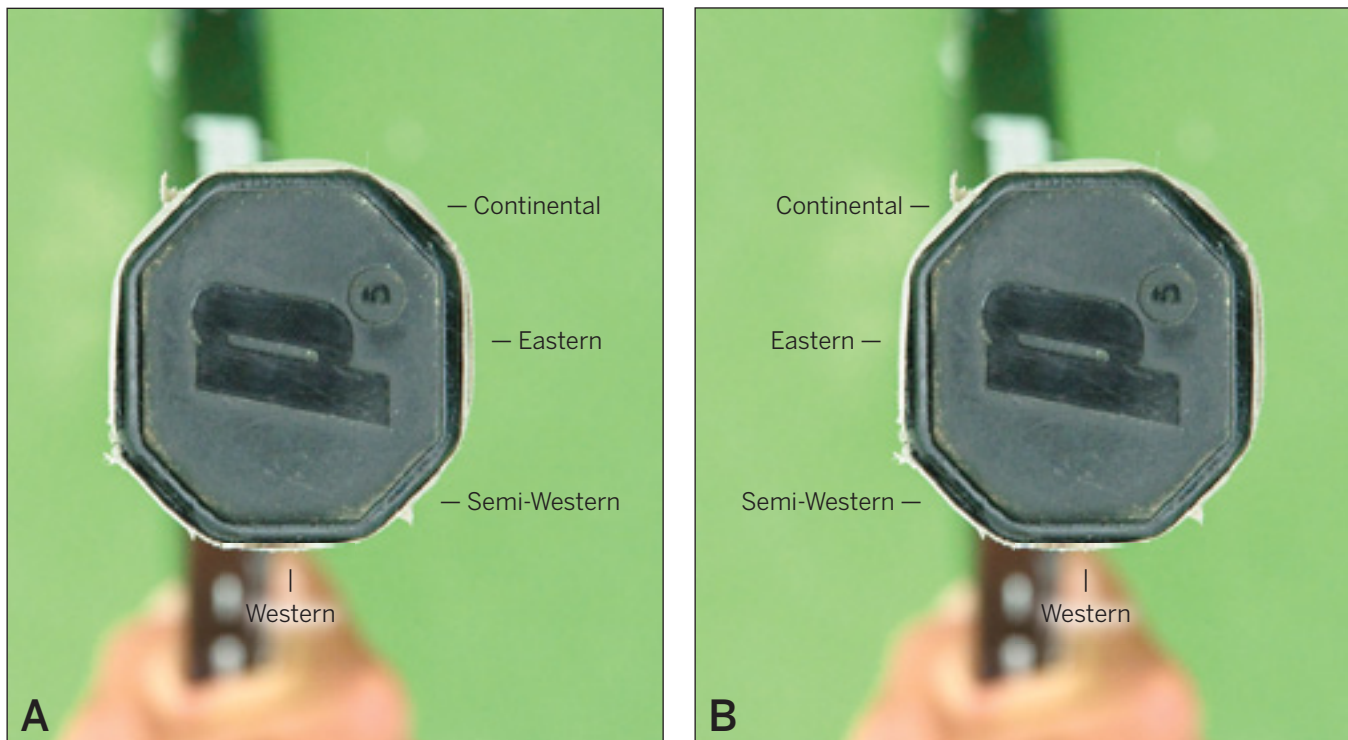


Figure 1.8 The location of the index knuckle on the racket for (a) right-handed players and (b) left-handed players using the forehand grips.



Figure 1.9 Continental grip.

All current grips can be traced back to the Continental grip shown in figure 1.9. Tennis pioneers used the Continental grip because the game was originally played on grass, where the ball bounced low. This grip is now primarily used for slice forehands, backhands, the serve, forehand and backhand volleys, and the overhead. The Continental grip is a great grip for low balls and balls hit at hip level. To find this grip, the player puts the dominant hand flat on the strings and moves the hand down to the grip. The top part of the grip is in the V between the thumb and forefinger, and the index knuckle is on bevel 2 of the racket handle for right-handed players and bevel 8 for left-handed players (refer to figures 1.6 and 1.8).

One limitation of hitting with this grip is that it can be difficult to combat the heavy topspin that most players use. Rather than having to switch grips to cope with various ball heights and spins, most players transition to using the Eastern or semi-Western forehand grips, which can be used to play any forehand. Using a hybrid grip (somewhere between the Eastern and semi-Western grips) is an option that allows players to tailor their grip to match their swing.

Eastern Forehand and Grip

The Eastern forehand (see figure 1.10) is one of the most versatile grips in modern-day tennis. For the Eastern forehand grip, the index knuckle is on bevel 3 of the racket handle for right-handed players and bevel 7 for left-handed players (refer to figures 1.6 and 1.8). As shown in figure 1.10, the racket begins to close if the player holds the arm in front of the body.

The use of this grip depends on the player's swing and how much topspin the player wants to put on the ball. The Eastern grip does not automatically create as much topspin as the semi-Western grip. A player needs to develop strong wrists and a higher loop (to sweep under the ball more) to achieve the same topspin with the Eastern grip that is already built into the semi-Western grip. The Eastern forehand grip is popular with players who like to drive their forehands (flat) as well as use topspin.

The main disadvantage of the Eastern grip is the reduced ability to counter (defend) against a ball that bounces high. The Eastern grip has a slightly more closed face on the takeback, so to use this grip for countering high-bouncing balls, a player needs accurate timing and strong wrists to be able to impart topspin back to the opponent.



Figure 1.10 Eastern grip.

Semi-Western Forehand and Grip

The semi-Western forehand (see figure 1.11) is the most popular forehand technique in today's game. Top professionals, such as Rafael Nadal and Venus Williams, as well as juniors use the semi-Western forehand grip. For right-handed players, the index knuckle is placed on bevel 4 and bevel 6 for left-handers (refer to figures 1.6 and 1.8). The racket face if you were to hold the racket in front of you would be slightly more closed than the Eastern forehand.

The semi-Western grip is designed for players who are trying to produce a lot of topspin on their shots. Because the racket face is slightly more closed than in the Eastern forehand, it allows the player more flexibility to counter an opponent's high-bouncing shot. The main disadvantage of this grip occurs when countering a low or slice shot. If a player is not properly loaded and low enough to accept the oncoming shot, then it is a struggle to get under the shot in an appropriate fashion.



Figure 1.11 Semi-Western grip.



Figure 1.12 With the Western grip, when the racket is turned over to playing position, the palm will be completely under the racket.

Western Forehand and Grip

The Western forehand technique uses a grip that is more extreme than the Continental, Eastern, and semi-Western forehands as shown in figure 1.12. For this grip, both right-handed and left-handed players place the index knuckle on bevel 5 of the racket handle (refer to figures 1.6 on page 5 and 1.8 on page 6). This grip puts the palm of the hand completely under the racket handle.

The main advantage of the Western forehand grip is the amount of topspin it can generate. This grip is the choice for a player who wants to hit the ball with a lot more topspin (especially on higher balls) than the other two more modern grips. Players who play on clay courts or slow, hard courts may gravitate toward this forehand grip. Usually the player who uses it is used to slower-paced or higher-bouncing shots. If the player exclusively uses slower surfaces against the same types of opponents, then perfecting the Western forehand could be an advantage.

Unfortunately, the disadvantages of this grip can be numerous, especially for players who play on various surfaces. A player using this grip is susceptible to lower shots and slices from an opponent, which, if played on a faster surface, can present a challenge. On a faster surface the ball doesn't bounce as high, so a player has to make different swing adjustments. It is more prudent to develop a stroke that can adapt to all surfaces. Also, because of the many grip changes that can occur during a point, the extreme nature of the grip makes it harder to switch to other grips.

In addition, the technique required to hit a Western forehand can be too extreme. The grip causes the wrist to lay back more than with the semi-Western or Eastern forehand. This makes it difficult to extend the wrist through the point of contact. Because the grip is so far under the racket handle, the elbow bends more and becomes almost in line with the bottom of the butt cap of the racket. This sometimes causes swing problems for a player, such as dragging the racket head, and hampers the player's ability to smooth out the swing.

FOREHAND AND STYLES OF PLAY

Tennis has five styles of play: aggressive baseline play, all-court play, serve-and-volley play, rallying baseline play, and defensive play. Aggressive baseline play and all-court play are considered offensive and are built around the forehand. Serve-and-volley players build their games around their serve and attacking style, but they can still use the forehand as a weapon. Rallying baseline play and defensive baseline play use the forehand as a rally ball or in a defensive manner.

A player's style is based on what forehands are the player's favorites, the technique for those shots, overall on-court personality, and the player's aggressive or defensive nature. A player can change or improve playing style by adding shots to the repertoire and improving technique. A player should try to establish one particular forehand shot as a weapon, then add and develop other shots to complement the particular style. One of the main goals of choosing a grip is to use one that corresponds with the player's style of play. Table 1.1 shows the type of forehand technique that players can use in each style of play based on grip choices.

Table 1.1 Techniques for Styles of Play

Type of technique	Style of play				
	Aggressive baseline	All-court	Serve-and-volley	Rallying baseline	Defensive baseline
Eastern forehand grip	X	X	X	X	X
Semi-Western forehand grip	X	X	X	X	X
Western forehand grip	X	With good use of different grips		X	X
Continental forehand grip			X		X

POINTS OF CONTACT AND STRIKE ZONES

Players should know the correct contact point and strike zone for the shots they want to execute. Their court position, movement, and racket preparation should match that contact point. Three points of contact are possible: attack, rally, and defensive. They fall in a horizontal plane (see figure 1.13). Although players must address each individual ball in a groundstroke, the style of play sets the tone for the types of shots they want

**Figure 1.13** The points of contact include the (a) attack, (b) rally, and (c) defensive.

to execute. For example, aggressive baseline players predominantly want their contact points in front to maintain the attacking style of play. The strength of the opponent's shot also dictates a player's contact points. A player needs to use shot selection and contact points together to keep a rally going and to help establish control of a point.

The attack point of contact is in front of the body or in front of the front foot. The attack point of contact is usually a crosscourt shot or any shot that is played from a position of strength in the court. This position is usually inside the baseline. For example, a down-the-line forehand may be contacted a little late, but it is attacking if the court position is inside the baseline. However, a player can possess a weapon that is hit with an early contact point but from deeper in the court; as long as the success rate stays high, it is attacking.

The rally point of contact is between the hips and is offensive if a player hits with heavy topspin. The later contact point allows for maximum load to be drawn from the legs in the execution of the shot. A rally point of contact is used to neutralize a player and increase the chance to get a better opportunity later in the rally. Rally shots are usually played crosscourt or as a high, heavy down-the-line shot, and they are usually executed from the baseline or just behind it.

The defensive point of contact is in line with or behind the back hip and is usually played as a high, heavy shot to get back into the point or a ball hit with a higher trajectory. This contact point suggests a good shot from an opponent or possibly poor movement to a shot. Players usually use a defensive contact point when they are behind the baseline and playing defensively.

The three strike zones—lower-level, midlevel, and upper-level—fall in a vertical plane (see figure 1.14). Great players can hit winners from all three strike zones. The mid- and lower-level strike zones are especially preferred for hitting topspin. Most players should attempt to meet the ball in the ideal, midlevel strike zone.

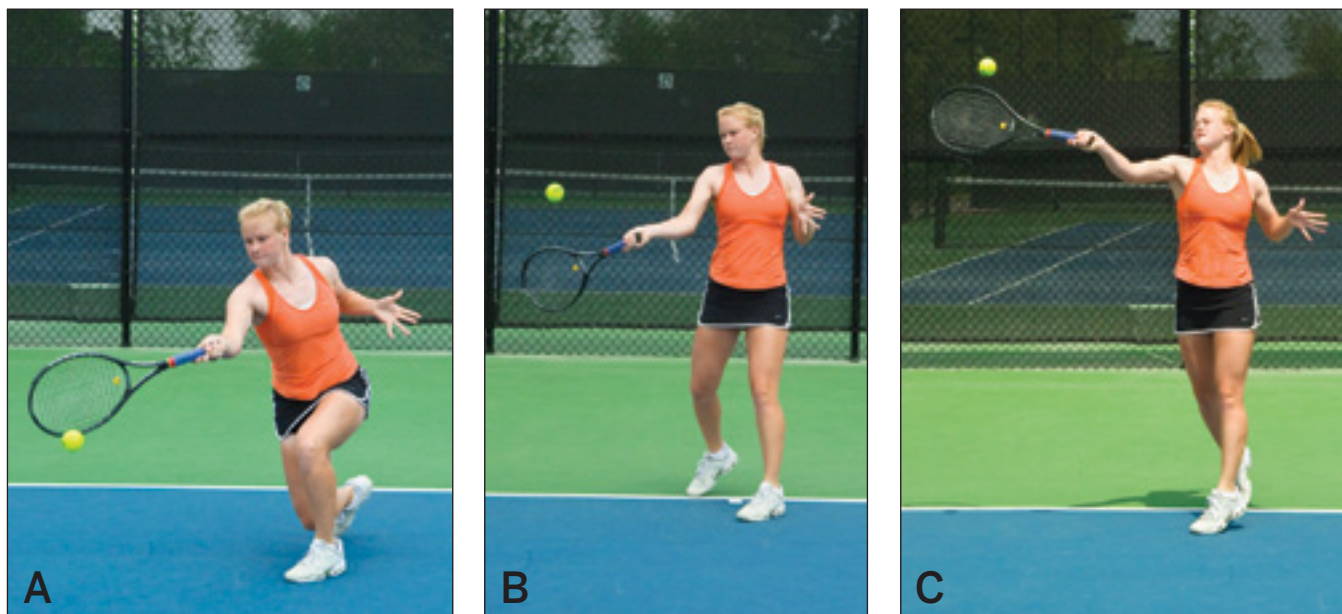


Figure 1.14 The strike zones include the (a) lower-level, (b) midlevel, and (c) upper-level.

The upper-level strike zone is at shoulder level or higher. Usually a ball hit from this strike zone is hit with heavy topspin or a higher trajectory. In today's game, a common offensive strategy is to step back from a high-bouncing shot to let it come down farther into the preferred strike zone so the player can answer with an effective shot. Players from earlier generations may have scoffed at this idea; they would have taken this ball earlier to prevent giving up court position. Ultimately, though, a player's goal when hitting in the upper-level strike zone is to execute a quality shot that gives a better opportunity on the next shot.

The mid-level strike zone is between the shoulder and the knee (as is the strike zone in baseball), and it is used for shots with a rallying type trajectory that gives the player depth on the shot. Because most shots can be executed well in this strike zone, players need to be able to move and play in a court position that allows them to hit as many shots as possible in it. An aggressive player who moves well can do this. An opponent who hits high-bouncing and penetrating shots to a player near the baseline can make hitting balls in the midlevel strike zone difficult because they can force a player backward in the court.

The lower-level strike zone is below the knee and down to the ground. This strike zone is usually used for a low ball from the opponent or a ball that a player is late getting in position for. It can still be aggressive if the player attacks the ball with power from the legs and takes it early. A player who perpetually hits balls in this zone is usually relegated to playing defensively. A player who tries to be aggressive from a defensive position is playing low-percentage tennis.

The strike zone depends on where a player feels most comfortable executing a shot, the depth of an opponent's shot, and the potential bounce of an opponent's shot. Players who do not like to hit high-level shots around shoulder level must learn to take the ball earlier in their preferred strike zone. The styles of play also influence strike zones. Players using aggressive baseline and all-court styles need to be able to attack from all three strike zones. Because of the nature of the transitioning style, players using the serve-and-volley style must be able to aggressively hit balls low in the strike zone because many of their shots are taken on the rise. Rallying baseline players are more comfortable hitting balls in a midlevel strike zone, and defensive players hit shots from a mid- to lower-level strike zone because of their defensive nature or poor movement to the ball.

STROKE TECHNIQUE

After choosing a grip to suit individual game style and goals, the player is ready to take a closer look at the technique needed throughout the stroke pattern. The following text breaks down the different actions that make up the phases of the forehand stroke: preparation and backswing, forward swing and contact, and follow-through. The breakdown presents the technique and chain of events for executing a successful Eastern forehand.

Two of the other forehands, semi-Western and Western, require some slight modifications to accommodate their grips but otherwise follow the same pattern. The stroke-specific modifications are noted. The fourth type of forehand, the slice forehand, can actually be executed with two different grips (Continental and Eastern, though most commonly Continental) and requires a bit more modification. The counterattacking slice approach is addressed in *Playing the Forehand* on page 27.

Preparation and Backswing

In the ready position (between shots), the arm is comfortably to the side with the elbow bent and placed midway between the waist and shoulders. The racket head is up and pointing slightly backward with the wrist taut. The core of the player is low and comfortable and getting ready to rotate for loading. As the ball approaches, the shoulders and trunk begin the unit turn and loading process. The player makes a half turn of the shoulders backward (see figure 1.15) for a rally ball or a quarter turn (45 degrees) for a ball hit deep or if the player is in a hurry (that is, in open stance).

As the shoulders and trunk rotate, the wrist and racket face also begin to pull backward and loop in a high-to-low fashion. The player must comfortably bend the elbow behind the body to allow a fluid full swing that loops under the ball to create the desired low-to-high movement (see figure 1.16). The racket head is up and the face of the racket is outward. The racket should set in the same direction of the back leg that is loading for the shot.

As the shoulders and racket pull back, the front arm goes forward to provide balance and to track the oncoming ball. How far in front to pull the arm depends on the player's comfort and balance. The arm can be held out straight in front or a little farther back, but no farther than the potential contact point. At the same time, the player's weight starts to shift easily backward; the back leg bends. The player should keep the body weight toward the back foot and with the knees bent until the loop begins.

Players should experiment with the grip to find the proper amount of loading for the legs. They should find a comfortable core position that provides the desired power and topspin. It is helpful to think of the load in terms of how much power and topspin the player is trying to generate. Too much loading of the legs followed by an upward unloading of the legs creates topspin and not as much power. Loading lightly on the legs to push upward and outward to the target area produces a more powerful shot.



Figure 1.15 Unit turn.



Figure 1.16 Preparation and backswing.

COACHING POINTS

The following problems are common in the forehand preparation and backswing, and players should work to avoid them:



- **Overrotation.** Overrotation issues occur when a player competes against an opponent who hits hard or high-bouncing deep shots. Overrotation can cause mistimed or late contact shots. A lack of timing or a late contact reduces the power a player can generate and may cause the player to shank the ball. Players should be careful not to over-rotate the hips and shoulders or have the racket set behind the back.
- **Poor front arm position.** A front arm positioned too far back causes a player to contact the ball late and be improperly balanced backward. Another problem, which coaches call *dead arm*, happens when a player prematurely drops the arm before contact or does not use the arm at all, leaving it to dangle next to the body.
- **Two-part backswing.** In this situation, a player sets the racket in a quarter turn initially until the ball bounces and then brings it all the way back to a half turn while preparing to swing. When players make the early preparation and then make another preparation farther back, they hit the shot with a late contact point.

Semi-Western Forehand Modifications

- This grip usually functions better with an open stance. The open stance allows the arm to swing more freely through the shot.
- As the racket is taken back, the racket head should tilt backward slightly more than with the Eastern grip. Because of the laid-back position of the racket, the wrist lays back slightly more than with the Eastern grip.
- The player needs good trunk rotation and loading of the legs (weight is back, the feet are set, and ready to move forward), but because this grip turns the racket face farther down, a little more load of the legs is needed to come under and hit the ball squarely.

Western Forehand Modifications

- Because the wrist lies back far in this grip, the elbow comes in line with the wrist. The elbow can hamper a fully extended swing, thus reducing power.
- The Western grip reduces power, so the trunk rotation and loading of the legs needs to be more pronounced than even the semi-Western grip.
- The stance for this shot is more open than the open stance used with the semi-Western grip. With this grip, the player needs more room to properly swing through the ball.

Forward Swing and Contact

As the trunk rotates forward, the arm starts to extend in a low-to-high fashion out toward the oncoming ball. The size of the loop the player can take while swinging depends on the oncoming ball. A deep ball requires a quicker takeback, a smaller loop, and perhaps initially a lower preparation of the arm. A slow-paced ball allows for a full or longer takeback with a bigger loop and possibly a higher-set position. On a slower-paced shot, the player has the opportunity to time the loop to gain maximum acceleration.

As the racket is prepared on the backswing, the player starts to transfer the body weight from the back leg to the front leg, using the back leg to push forward and transfer evenly and fluidly to the front leg and eventually the front toe. Performing the loading drills in chapter 3 can help keep the weight back and provide a stronger base to more effectively push off the back foot onto the front foot.

The path of the swing is dictated by the position of the elbow, so it is important to keep it bent comfortably at the beginning of the loop (elbow a few inches lower than 90 degrees) and straighten as the swing progresses toward contact (see figure 1.17). If the elbow is positioned properly, the path of the racket head starts to lead the elbow and the racket face starts to square up to the oncoming ball.

The front arm has been comfortably taut in the location of the preparation phase throughout the backswing, but as the player rotates the body forward, the front arm starts to pull away naturally with a little tension in the arm. The front arm pull-away is smooth, not abrupt or jerky, and should be at or near waist level of the player.

The manner in which the racket arm is extended upward and toward the shot depends on the particular grip, stance, and loop of the player and the type of shot the player is trying to hit. A flat ball has a straighter trajectory, and a heavier-topspin or loopier ball has a higher trajectory. The swing should be natural and fluid.

Just before contact, the wrist and racket head begin to accelerate upward and outward to square up to the ball. An attacking contact point should be slightly in front of the front foot at the level of the oncoming ball, slightly behind (or farther back) for a rallying shot, and even farther back for a defensive shot or shot hit in a more open stance. The player's head remains still and focused on the ball through contact as shown in figure 1.18.

CRITICAL CUE:

Players should focus the eyes slightly before the contact point and use it as a guide for when to swing the racket head powerfully.



Figure 1.17 Forward swing.



Figure 1.18 Contact point.

Semi-Western Forehand Modifications

- The forward swing is slightly more upward to catch the shot squarely on the racket head.
- Because the grip turns the racket head farther down, the wrist must generate more acceleration in order to get brush on the ball. The contact point is slightly behind the front foot of the player, allowing for the racket head to stay through the contact a little longer, which will impart topspin on the ball.
- The legs come from a more loaded position and explode upward, holding the weight as long as possible.

Western Forehand Modifications

- An open stance is used, and the legs uncoil from a more pronounced loaded position than with the semi-Western forehand.
- Because of the severity of the grip, the racket head must come from a lower position and sweep under to hit the ball squarely. The arm extends out farther and sweeps from an even lower to higher path to generate power. The elbow is closer to the body because of the laid-back wrist, so the pathway of the swing flows closer to the body than with the semi-Western and Eastern grips. Because of the extra topspin imparted on the ball, this modification uses the rally point of contact and the mid- and upper-level strike zones.
- The elbow eventually extends, but it is in line with the wrist as the loop begins its forward swing and extends outward after contact.

Follow-Through

After contact, the arm and racket head keep extending out toward the intended target until the racket head starts to go toward the opposite shoulder (see figure 1.19). The height of the ball dictates the follow-through. Hitting a higher oncoming ball means the player is likely to follow through with the racket head lower on or near the opposite shoulder. A flatter oncoming ball brings the racket head higher up.



Figure 1.19 Follow-through.

COACHING POINTS

Rafael Nadal has perfected a new follow-through that goes straight up and finishes on the same side as the defensive point of contact. This follow-through is known as the *reverse forehand*. This is a very advanced follow-through for imparting extra spin on the ball, and it is particular to Nadal's swing. Beginners should use the follow-through that ends up over the opposite shoulder and then experiment with lower follow-throughs as they advance.



The wrist is in line with the elbow, allowing the racket face to extend upward and outward. The proper extension and flow of the arm determines the depth and power of the shot.

The trunk rotation continues throughout the shot. It is what drives the racket head and it concludes when the follow-through is complete. The player should hold the follow-through for a split second to complete the swing.

Semi-Western Forehand Modifications

- The player should try to keep wrist cocked a little longer on the follow-through and then flip or snap it with the focus on the thumb turning over.
- The weight transfer is not from backward to forward as with the closed stance. The open stance used with the semi-Western grip requires a weight transfer to a front foot that is turned open (or facing the opponent). The weight should transfer with the hips turning toward the target in a balanced fashion. Transferring too fast or too much toward the open leg causes flaws in the mechanics of the stroke.
- The finish is out in front and should settle toward the opposite shoulder but slightly lower than with the Eastern grip.

Western Forehand Modifications

- The main points of the Western forehand are discussed in the semi-Western section.
- Because the grip is so turned over, the player can't help but feel the elbow becoming involved with the swing on this grip. The elbow does jut out, but the player should still try to lead with the racket head. This can cause some issues for the elbow, so players should monitor their swing closely.
- The follow-through usually ends across or slightly above the waist of the opposite side of the body. Because of the lower preparation, the follow-through is extended higher, and the arm is extended to just above waist level or slightly higher.

SPINS AND LOCATION

Forehands can use topspin ranging from no spin to extreme topspin (high and heavy), and they can place the ball short, deep, angled, and down the line. Using the different spins and placements can develop the forehand into an all-around weapon. As already mentioned, the different grips correspond to differing degrees of difficulty in executing the various forehand techniques. The following text presents the techniques required for maximizing the player's range and effectiveness across the various spins and court placements of the ball.

CRITICAL CUE:

To produce the optimal swing path, players should imagine hitting through three balls instead of just hitting one.

Flat or No Spin

To hit a flat ball, the player must find the proper wrist position that squares up the racket head. This differs among players' swings and how they use their legs, but the goal is to have the arm and wrist in position behind the ball to extend the wrist out straight forward at contact. Good use of pushing off from the legs provides the depth on the shot. Because of the position of the semi-Western and Western grips, the wrist would have to lie back accordingly to get the correct racket head placement. The player should feel as if he or she is throwing the wrist out toward the shot. It should feel as if that wrist is going through the ball.

Topspin

To hit topspin on a shot, the player brings the racket head underneath the ball (visualize the top of the racket head when the racket head is at the side of the body) and brush up on the ball with acceleration; the racket head extends and the wrist turns at the same time. The player uses the legs to come under the ball and aid in the brushing up of the ball. How the racket face strikes the ball determines how much power and topspin will be on the shot. A slight closing of the racket face produces some additional topspin but it is not a major contributor to topspin, although it is commonly mistaken as one. It helps for the player to envision the ball hitting the top of the racket head with the thumb turning over rapidly during the hit. The swing path of the racket contributes to topspin by going upward to brush the back of the ball for topspin and going outward for power. The modern-day forehand has a slightly closed racket face and is swung outward and upward.

High and Heavy Topspin

This shot is similar to the topspin shot but it creates a higher trajectory, or arc, that combines power and topspin. Greater emphasis is on leg strength going upward for this shot. The player wants to sweep under the ball and extend the arm and wrist outward and upward. To create arc, the player must stay balanced a little longer, strike the ball upward, and brush the ball with the racket face.

Backspin, Sidespin, and Underspin

Players can add variety to their game by adding backspin, sidespin, and underspin to their shots. The trajectory for the backspin shot is usually higher because it is meant to barely go over the net and bounce back toward the net. A player creates backspin by using a severe slice—a very strong high-to-low movement of the arm. The player has balanced forward momentum up to contact and then the arm cuts down on the shot with the racket face open and staying open past contact. The body stays balanced to provide stability for the swing.

Sidespin is used when a player tries to get a ball to go or slide away from the opponent. Sidespin should be hit with a lower trajectory. A player creates sidespin by using the same movement as on a blocked approach shot (see page 134), but instead of using only slightly higher-to-lower arm movement, the player uses the wrists to open the racket face and push the racket head out in an inside-out fashion. The player keeps the momentum forward after contact.

An underspin shot is a slice. This ball is meant to cut but, depending on the strength of the shot, it stays low and makes the opponent hit up. The racket head is slightly open and should be directly behind or slightly above the pathway of the ball. The player moves through the shot with balance and contacts the ball with the racket head coming down on the shot and slowing or stopping immediately after contact. The player should keep the momentum forward after contact.

Crosscourt

The contact point for a crosscourt shot is in front of the front foot (the attack point of contact). The player should square up the racket head to encourage the feeling of hitting straight through the ball. It may help to imagine slightly contacting the outside of the ball. The wrists snap across the outside of the ball. The player should focus on the thumb creating an arc through the ball with proper extension. This ball is hit flat or with topspin and is meant to land in two main areas of the court: deep—2 to 3 feet (0.6 to 0.9 m) from the baseline and alley, or midway between the baseline and service line on the outside third of the court. The hips also rotate toward the target area, not too quickly, but smoothly and with acceleration.

CRITICAL CUE:

Because this shot is hit with such force upward, the players should imagine their bodies and feet leaving their shoes.

Down the Line

The player aims to contact the ball later in the rally contact point. The body positions itself with the shoulders slightly squared to the net. They are slightly less squared for a ball hit from a crosscourt shot and more squared from a ball hit from a down-the-line shot. The player extends the arm out toward the target with the body flowing in the same direction. The front toe of the player should turn toward the down-the-line target. This shot should be hit with the feeling of coming around the outside of the ball (or the contact point).

Deep

To hit an area deep in the court—2 to 3 feet (0.6 to 0.9 m) from the baseline, the player extends the arm out to the intended target. The swing depends on the coordination of the arm, wrist acceleration, and follow-through. The emphasis is on extension and keeping the arm extending outward until it finishes the swing. The body and swing weight of the racket is used to help extend the arm, which is the reason movement and weight loading is so emphasized.

Short

When a player hits the ball short—on or near the service line, the player should focus on an extension to the target but might use a more accelerated wrist snap to hit topspin that will bring the shot in before the alley. The player uses a shorter backswing and then extends out and across the body on the finish. The wrist snaps down on higher balls in upper-level and high midlevel strike zones.

COACHING POINTS

If players have trouble hitting to any of the following specific locations, a number of troubleshooting tips can help.

- **Hitting crosscourt.** A crosscourt shot that goes wide may mean the player came around too fast, turned the hips too soon, or caught the ball too far in front and on the outside. A ball hit toward the middle signifies a late contact point, hitting on the inside of the ball, or improper body position.
- **Hitting down the line.** If the ball is consistently being hit wide, the player should adjust the feet or the contact point. The player may be late getting prepared and with the contact. When a ball is hit out or past the baseline, it usually signifies that the ball was not hit with the proper amount of topspin or arc. It could also mean the stroke was not completed.
- **Hitting deep.** Balls hit too deep (past the baseline) usually indicate too much power and not enough spin, improper body position, or a miscalculation of arc and trajectory. Other possible problems include having the racket face too open on contact or loose strings on the racket. When balls consistently land too deep, players should first check their footwork and then add more topspin to their shots.
- **Hitting short.** Balls that land short indicate a few possible problems: The body was not in proper position to execute the shot, the player lifted the head during contact to cause a weaker shot, the player mistimed the shot, or the player miscalculated the arc or trajectory needed for the shot.



PLAYING THE FOREHAND

All players want to be able to hit great forehands in any situation. To approach that level, they need to be aware of their own performance and work to improve it. It is important for players to understand the strengths and weaknesses in their forehand to help decide what types of shots and strategies to use. A good forehand is a weapon, a rally ball, a shot that is hit aggressively to help set up other shots, and a defensive tool.

As previously mentioned, a player's style of play combined with the player's favorite shots dictates the shots that are best to master first. Table 1.2 shows which shots can be hit with each of the forehand techniques. Practicing and perfecting the technique with these shots helps the player hit deeper and more penetrating shots, gain control of the point, and reach higher levels. Regardless of which shots are a player's favorites, it is important to know how to hit every forehand shot because there will be a time in every match when the player must use every shot in this book.

The phase of play during a game affects how a player plays the forehand. Anywhere in the court from the baseline to the net, a player may need to be in an offensive, transitional, rallying, counterattacking, or defensive mode. Combining these phases of play with a combination of locations, spins, and tactics gives a player many options to construct and win the point. A player has five shot options for playing the forehand: a put-away, an attack, a rally, a counterattack, and a defensive shot. In the putaway phase, the player is hitting a winner. With an attack shot, the player is setting up to finish the point or put it away. A rally is for neutral shots. With a counterattack a player is in a defensive situation but manages to go on the offensive. The defensive shot is for getting out of trouble.

Table 1.2 Technique for Forehand Shots

Forehand shots	Type of technique			
	Eastern	Semi-Western	Western	Continental*
Forehand crosscourt drive	X	X	X	
High, heavy crosscourt and down-the-line shot	X	X	X	
Down-the-line forehand drive	X	X	X	
Short-angled forehand crosscourt	X	X	X	X
Inside-out forehand	X	X	X	
Inside-in forehand	X	X	X	
High-to-low forehand	X	X	X	
Reverse forehand	X	X	X	
Stretched-out-wide forehand	X	X		X
Moonball forehand	X	X		X
Counterattacking slice approach	X			X

*Although hitting some groundstrokes with the Continental grip is possible, doing so will not help players develop their game.

Offensive Forehand Shots

Generally it is better to be on offense than defense. Playing offensively is advantageous because it allows for more options, which can help the player take control of the court. Offensive forehands are hit from the backcourt with one of two goals in mind: to end the point with a winner or to put an opponent on defense or out of position with the depth and placement of the shot. A player's best offense is attacking with the forehand in various ways. The following text describes all the different shots that should be in each player's arsenal.

Forehand Crosscourt Drive

Maria Sharapova makes it look easy when she drives her opponent deep into the corner with her flat crosscourt forehand. Her strategy is to drive the ball hard crosscourt with little topspin, getting her opponent to either make an error or simply back up in the court. This allows Sharapova the opportunity to step in and control the court.

How The forehand drive is hit in an open stance with the Eastern grip for a potentially flatter ball and the semi-Western grip for more built-in topspin. How open the stance is, depends on the player's positioning. The crosscourt flat shot requires the attack contact point and the midlevel strike zone. This shot can be hit flat with no spin or with spin and some arc to the ball (topspin that makes a shot get up and down quickly and gets off the court). Acceleration of the racket head and the arm still goes from low to high but extends outward just before contact.

Where Because of the degree of difficulty associated with this shot, the player should try it only when prepared and properly behind the ball. Being behind the ball means that body movement to the ball and racket preparation is efficient and proper, so the player is balanced enough to execute the shot. Poor execution can lead to errors and a loss of control of the shot. The crosscourt drive is usually executed when a player is standing between 2 feet (0.6 m) to the right or left of the hash mark and the alley. When positioned outside the alley, the player should hit the ball higher to allow recovery time. The player should aim for the far corner on the opposite side (the box behind the service line and in front of the baseline), and the trajectory over the net should be lower but still carry to the deep part of the court.

When A player usually hits this shot when in a position of strength. A forehand crosscourt drive can be a weapon that pushes an opponent deep in the court and helps set up the player's game style. One of the most common strategies of a strong crosscourt drive is to look for a weak reply and attack down the line to end the point, help transition to the net, or play strategically.

The player's position affects the timing of the shot. Usually, the player is positioned near the baseline or inside the baseline and anywhere within 4 feet (1.3 m) in from both sidelines. This position can vary for each player; it depends on how effective the player's drive is.

High, Heavy Crosscourt and Down-the-Line Shot

Caroline Wozniacki has an effective high, heavy shot that she uses strategically. Wozniacki is fast and moves well around the court, but the high, heavy topspin forehand gives her time to reset and push an opponent back. This shot is not built for power, but more as a good use of variety.

How Players can hit this shot with an Eastern, semi-Western, or Western grip. Because of the height the shot creates, the player must get under the ball more, so the player's loading ability is emphasized. Executed effectively, this shot gives the opponent a higher arcing ball with extra spin that feels heavy and difficult to control. The trajectory of the

shot requires the hips to explode upward and outward and the legs to drive up under the ball. A player that loads too much on the shot requires extra effort to be fluid on the swing. The ideal strike zones for this shot are the lower-level and midlevel strike zones. The best points of contact are the rally and defensive points of contact.

Where This shot should be hit when the player is in a technically good position to execute the shot. This shot is usually executed deeper in the court or behind the baseline and on a higher-bouncing ball. Because the high, heavy ball is a high-percentage shot and has more loft, it is an ideal shot to execute from a deeper or wider position on the court.

This shot is meant to land deep crosscourt or down-the-line (behind the service line and before the baseline) and bounce higher in the court. Sometimes a player with heavy topspin can get away with hitting a shorter-landing high, heavy shot because the bounce is so great. A poorly executed high, heavy shot that lands short could spell trouble for the player if the opponent is adept at taking the ball on the rise or has an effective down-the-line shot.

When Players usually hit this shot for offensive purposes, but they can use it for defensive purposes also. Currently Rafael Nadal is the best at this shot, and he frequently uses it when up in the score to create weaker responses from his opponents. Because this shot is hit with a higher trajectory than the drive, the bounce is higher. This forces an opponent to choose whether to hit the ball while standing close to the baseline or move back in the court to hit it in the midlevel strike zone. In the first option, the ball will land in the opponent's upper-level strike zone, and most players don't like to hit this type of reply. In the second option, the player has more time to set up the next attacking shot because the opponent has backed up to meet the looping ball in the midlevel or lower-level strike zone. Either option is likely to cause a weak reply, giving the attacker the opportunity to continue offensively in the rally.

Down-the-Line Forehand Drive

Venus Williams is known for her down-the-line forehand drive. She can effectively change the ball's direction to her advantage. When she is in a crosscourt rally, she constantly looks for a down-the-line forehand she can rip and then transition forward.

How Players use the usual groundstroke grips for this shot, and it is in the midlevel strike zone. The contact point is one to two ball widths behind the flat drive, but it is still considered an attacking point of contact. The player charges in the direction of the oncoming crosscourt or diagonal shot, which requires waiting to meet the ball slightly later in the attack point of contact to take the ball up the line. The player's movement is also slightly different from hitting the flat drive because on this shot, the front toe is turned slightly in the direction of the down-the-line shot.

Where As a drive, this shot should be hit between the service line and the baseline. A down-the-line drive hit short of the baseline can cause errors if hit with underspin or backspin. The end location of the shot depends on what the player is trying to accomplish in the rally. A shot hit to the sideline is meant to end the rally. For a player changing the direction of the oncoming shot, a ball hit farther away (2 to 4 feet, or 0.6 to 1.3 m) from the sideline is desired in order to establish a favorable pattern in a rally (such as a down-the-line drive that the opponent answers with a crosscourt to the player's stronger side) or because the opponent's weakness is on that side.

When This shot functions as a weapon that hits to the open court to take advantage of an opponent's weak crosscourt shot or poor movement, or as part of a strategy to dictate play by keeping the opponent running. Most down-the-line shots are hit in an

effort to change or end the point. This shot develops when the player has backed up an opponent in the court, the opponent has hit a weaker crosscourt shot, and the player wants to end the point with an aggressive down-the-line shot to open the court or to change the pattern of the rally.

The degree of difficulty for this shot is greater than for many other shots because a down-the-line shot goes over the higher part of the net and because the distance of the shot must be shorter than a crosscourt shot. Additionally, changing the direction of an oncoming ball is tough. A player should hit this shot when receiving a short or slow ball or when the player is so far off the court that this is the last option.

Forehand Crosscourt Short-Angled Shot

Serena Williams has an attacking game that uses the forehand crosscourt short angle to open up the court so she can get her opponent on the defensive and attack to her advantage.

How This shot is hit with topspin, slice, sidespin, or no spin. The topspin shot is more common and aggressive; the slice, flat, and sidespin shots are more for finesse. The contact point of the angled shot varies. If the player is creating the angle, the contact point is slightly in front of the crosscourt flat drive (attack). If the player is reacting to an angle, the contact point is later than that of the down-the-line shot because the player has extra movement for this shot and is trying to create a greater angle (rally to defensive). The height of the contact point is in the mid- to lower-level strike zones. Throughout this shot the player must have good balance and early racket head preparation. The player must also have greater racket head acceleration in the event that a topspin shot on or near the alley sideline is needed.

Where The player hits this shot while standing on one half of the court, inside or near the baseline. The player aims to hit diagonally crosscourt, for or near the opponent's service line on the opposite side of the court.

When The main purpose of hitting an angled shot is to pull an opponent off the court. The deeper angled shot (landing past the service line crosscourt and bouncing off the court and into the alley) and the shorter angled shot (landing crosscourt near the service line or before it) should be included as part of every game style. This shot is a good way to keep an opponent on the defensive. After a player hits either a crosscourt hard drive or a high and heavy ball and the reply is weak or hit at an angle, the player has the perfect setup for the forehand crosscourt angled shot. Most tennis rallies are played lengthwise through the court (using deep or short balls). So, a player who can use an angled shot is able to test an opponent's variety of shots, ability to angle a shot back, and movement to the ball.

The player can hit this shot more or less aggressively depending on the desired result. The more aggressive version is created from either the opponent's angled shot, allowing the player to create an angle off the reply, or from a weak ball, allowing the player to strike the ball earlier and create the desired angle. Either way, the shot is hit with a lot of topspin. The goal is to have the shot move up over the net and then drop fast with spin on the opponent's side, heading out toward the doubles alley. The less aggressive approach uses more placement and finesse when replying to an angle or creating an angle. This shot is generally effective, but especially effective—and even essential—against an opponent who does not like to move side to side or is tired after a long match.

Inside-Out Forehand

Andy Roddick has a great inside-out shot that pulls the opponent off the court so he can dictate play. The angle he creates, plus the power his game is centered on, puts his opponent on the defensive.

How The movement and execution of this shot requires practice because the player runs around the backhand and creates space between the body and the ball. The player can hit this shot in different ways, including hitting a high and heavy ball inside out, hitting a flatter ball, and hitting a sharper angle. All of these options are effective if a player can execute them effectively. The sharper-angle version is the most difficult, but it is especially effective on clay courts because they give more time to run around to the next shot.

The proper technique for the inside-out forehand starts with the player making a semicircle around the incoming ball on the backhand side. This movement can be done in a variety of ways:

- **Step-back method.** The back leg steps behind the front leg, turning the player's hips and shoulders as they begin to make a semicircle and move forward.
- **Lateral shuffles.** Similar to the step-back method, here the player does a number of lateral shuffles to cover more ground before stepping behind or in front of the body. Andre Agassi used this technique.
- **Backpedal steps.** The player simply turns and backpedals with both feet to get into position to move into the shot. Roger Federer is known for using this movement.

The stance is open or semi-open and, because the body is running around the backhand, the shot is hit in the midlevel strike zone and contacted at the rally point of contact. The arm and wrist extend, and the wrist contacts the ball in an inside-out fashion. The body maintains its balance and drives to the inside-out corner or angle.

Where The inside-out forehand is hit diagonally crosscourt. This shot should be hit from about 1 foot (0.3 m) off the center of the court to the backhand side to approximately midway between the center and the alley. The player aims for a shorter inside-out forehand to land near the service line and deeper in the court about 2 to 3 feet (0.6 to 0.9 m) from the baseline and alley.

When The main purpose of the inside-out forehand is to be able to use the forehand to the opponent's backhand. This shot is one of the most effective forehand shots used today because it can be a part of the overall inside-out, or three-quarter court strategy (mainly using the forehand to control the court or to create an angle for the next shot). This shot gives the player's game more variety than just hitting crosscourt or down the line. Many coaches teach the inside-out forehand as part of a strategy, so a player's ability to hit the shot becomes imperative. The impetus of this strategy derives from maximizing a player's forehand opportunities.

Inside-In Forehand

Roger Federer uses this inside-in shot to perfection. His movement is so smooth that he makes this sometimes difficult shot look easy. This shot, hit off a returned inside-out shot, keeps the player on the run and is also considered a winning shot.

How This shot takes a great amount of movement and is hard to hit, but with the proper technique and timing, it is one of the best attacking forehands. This shot is hit in the midlevel zone and is contacted in the attack or rally point of contact. It requires the player to get in a better position to change the direction of the ball.

Where A player usually hits this as a second shot off an opponent's weaker crosscourt reply or off an easy second serve. Similar to the location for the down-the-line shot, a player hits the inside-in shot near the sideline for a winner and farther away from the sideline to keep the opponent moving or to change a pattern. The depth of this shot determines its success. A ball hit behind the service line allows the opponent less time to respond and sets the player up to hit another forehand.

CRITICAL CUE:

Getting to the side of the ball is not good enough. The player must think, *to it and through it*.

When A well-placed inside-in forehand keeps the opponent running and on the defensive. This shot is also an aggressive shot and is meant to create an opening to advance to the net or hit a winner.

COACHING POINTS

Two problems are common with the inside-in forehand:

- **Contact timing.** If the player contacts the ball too far in front, the player's balance will be off, causing errors. Late contact also defeats the purpose of the shot: taking time away from an opponent.
- **Poor positioning.** When the player is not in a good position to strike the ball or hurries it by trying to hit too big of a shot, problems arise. The ball must be hit precisely because the player is working with a smaller court area and the shot is hit over the higher part of the net.



High-to-Low Forehand

Venus Williams uses the high-to-low forehand especially well. Her attacking style of play mandates that she hit this shot well. For her, it is the type of shot where she can move up to a ball and take it at high level of contact and still drive through the ball.

How The footwork incorporated for this shot necessitates a move forward. The ball is either at its maximum height or heading in that direction, so the player's positioning is critical. The preparation of the racket should be slightly higher to accommodate the upper-level strike zone. The player loads backward, focused on keeping the chest balanced through the shot. The player should focus on hitting straight through the ball and using an extension that starts high and finishes lower to the target because of the height of the ball. The contact point varies depending on the ball hit by the opponent, but generally it is in the upper level strike zone and in front of the front foot (attacking). On this shot, a player hits the ball straight because gravity and spin bring the ball down automatically. The follow-through goes toward just beneath the shoulder level on the opposite side of the body. This is a timing shot because the player is incorporating swing with the bounce of the ball and extending the arm out and slightly downward.

Where This shot is usually hit inside the baseline, but it could also mean a killing shot that is inside the service line. The shot is either hit to the outer thirds of the court (putaway), deep in the court (2 to 3 feet, or 0.6 to 0.9 m, from baseline and alley), or down the middle deeper (2 feet, or 0.6 m, from the baseline) to transition to net. Usually, a player hits this shot because to avoid moving backward and giving up ground in the court. The player focuses instead on taking time away from the opponent and hitting an attacking ball.

When To hit this shot, a player must be able to hit a high ball aggressively and be able to hit the high-to-low swing path. This shot is important to hit when the player feels able to take advantage of the opponent's positioning. This is a good ball to attack on when an opponent has hit crosscourt and the player wants to step up and hit it down the line. It can work as a down-the-line shot that the player wants to hit behind the opponent or crosscourt to the open court. It is a great way to go on offense and transition to the net.

Reverse Forehand

This shot has developed through the years for retaliating against deep topspin shots. Rafael Nadal has revolutionized the use of the reverse forehand. Even though he doesn't use it on every forehand, he does use it to hit an offensive ball from a defensive position in the court or when he wants to increase the intensity of his attack. He may be answering a deep ball hit by the opponent and wants to hold his ground or he is deep in the court and wants to establish offense.

How A player hits this shot with the normal groundstroke grips. The player hits with a hurried swing and focuses on accelerating the racket head quickly through the hitting zone without moving back in the court. The motion itself is a great upward thrust that brings the swing behind the head instead of out in front. The reverse forehand hit on the baseline is usually contacted in the defensive point of contact and on the rise off the ground in the lower- and midlevel strike zones. When hit from deep behind the baseline, the reverse forehand is the turbo version of the high and heavy forehand with added spin and arc.

Where This shot can be hit to any location, although it is favorable to hit it to a spot that doesn't allow the opponent to keep the player on the defensive. The fact that the player is staying near the baseline and handling a deep shot from the opponent can cause frustration, causing the opponent to go for more on the shots and make an error.

When This shot is mainly used when the opponent hits a deep ball and the player wants to counter it. Usually, the player is near the baseline and does not want to give up court positioning. The player's goal is to hold that court position and use great acceleration (topspin) to return the ball deep to the backcourt.

Defensive Forehand Shots

A defensive shot usually means a player is on the run, on the defensive, or can't hit with pace or depth, in which case a player is reacting to an opponent's shots. This is a necessary skill because defensive shots can eventually lead to more offensive shots. The stretched-out-wide forehand shot allows a player time to get back in the rally and keep the point going. The moonball forehand shot is used as a tactic to allow for more time on the recovery or to upset an impatient opponent.

Stretched-Out-Wide Forehand

This shot, also known as the squash shot, is Kim Clijsters' signature shot. It is disheartening to a player who thinks she has hit a great shot only to have Kim run over and get it back. Clijsters is good at turning the shot into an offensive shot because the shot she normally hits is well struck and well placed, thus allowing her more time for a recovery so she can get back into the point and regain court positioning.

How The best grip to use for this shot is the Continental or Eastern forehand grip—whichever gives the player the best cut at the ball. This shot looks like what it is, a desperation shot. The strength of the outside leg is of major importance because it gives the player the balance to take a good cut at the shot. The player whips the wrist and racket head to a location behind the oncoming ball. The contact point in this scenario is either in front or behind, depending on the desperation level. The player tries to swat at the ball from a high-to-low position and on the outside of the ball, making enough contact to slice the ball back into the court. The contact point is as far out as the arm will extend and wrist will allow to snap down and across the ball. The player tries to hold

position as long as it takes to gain balance before recovering. The strike zone for this shot depends on the positioning of the player. When the player is on the run, the lower strike zone is usually used.

Where Where to hit this ball depends on the player's movement and how out of position the player is in a rally. Usually, the player is in the alley hitting this shot. The location of the shot can be anywhere back in the court. It would be great if players had so much control that they could actually place this shot to a specific location, but frankly, anywhere in the court makes it a successful shot.

When This shot is hit when a player is on the run and out of position on the court. When a player is out on a full stretch, it is sometimes easier to hit a slice forehand than a regular forehand. This slice forehand is a great defensive tool because it can surprise an opponent who thinks they have hit a winning shot, only to have it returned in an unusual manner.

Moonball Forehand

The moonball forehand by definition is a ball hit high with little or no spin. Today's professionals occasionally use it, but only when they are desperate and want to have time to recover and throw off their opponent's rhythm.

How Players should use their usual forehand grip for potential topspin on this shot, and the Continental grip for a flatter shot. This shot is hit high into the air to any location with a flat ball or topspin ball that goes at a very high trajectory; the height is up to the player. The player essentially lifts the ball up and follows through upward. Position of the contact point on this shot is rally to defensive point of contact. It is really more of a push shot with more loft. The angle of the racket face is open. The shot is struck in the midlevel or upper-level strike zone if the player is out of position and not able to establish proper preparation, or in the lower-level strike zone if the player is desperate and getting to the ball late. This shot is meant to be pushed up and as deep as possible.

This shot is especially effective for beginners because opponents have not acquired the skills necessary to combat it. The difference between the moonball shot and the lob is that the player is in a better strategic position on the lob. The lob is hit defensively or offensively for placement and to put an opponent out of position. The moonball is more desperate and should be hit when the player can barely get to the ball.

Where The player can hit this shot from anywhere in the court. Toward the alleys is best for defensive purposes, and in the center of the court is best for strategic purposes. The ball should land as close to the baseline as possible for full effect and to keep the opponent from hitting an easy volley or overhead.

When This shot is used when the player is trying to get back in the court off an opponent's offensive shot. The player can also use it if an opponent doesn't know how to handle this shot and is becoming impatient with the pace. Using the moonball may upset an opponent; it is often referred to as pushing, or getting the ball back without much pace. As a player improves and competition improves too, this shot becomes less successful as a strategy.

Counterattacking Slice Approach

Though the counterattacking slice approach is an offensive shot, any good tennis player must be able to adapt to varying situations. A player may need to counterattack a ball when he or she is in trouble because the ball is too low or because, perhaps, the wind has blown the ball into the player's body. This shot is seldom used as a first choice because topspin prevails in today's game, but when a player is forced to come up with an answer, this shot can work really well.

How This shot is hit with a Continental or Eastern forehand grip. This shot should be hit on the rise, and the backswing must be short to maximize the player's movement forward. How much time the player has to move forward dictates how far back to take the racket. The player uses a deeper takeback for more time and a shorter takeback for less time. Whenever possible, it is always best to take the ball on the rise, giving the opponent the least amount of time possible.

To hit with a slice, the racket head should be at the level of the oncoming ball or slightly higher. The racket face is open and moves in a slight high-to-low action for more underspin and straight through for a flatter slice. The player's stance is more closed or going toward closed as the player moves through the shot. The contact point can be anywhere from the attack to defensive point of contact. A ball hit on the rise as an approach is struck in the lower- to midlevel strike zones. The racket head continues through contact and finishes down and across the ball, thus creating underspin. For a slice that has a lot of spin on the ball, the racket head moves more down and across; for a more penetrating but flatter slice, the racket head moves slightly downward and outward. The feet adjust around the ball to achieve balance and proper striking distance. The feet continue to move through contact and toward the target.

Where The counterattacking slice approach is usually played near the service line and is hit down the line to the open court, either deep in the court or shorter in the court to surprise an opponent, or crosscourt to wrong-foot an opponent. The shorter-approach version should be used when an opponent does not like to move forward.

When This approach is used when a player does not have enough time to swing on the shot or is moving too fast through the ball to take a topspin swing. This type of approach is used against speedy opponents when time is of the essence. It may also be used strategically when an opponent shows a lack of skill hitting low balls or balls on the run (in the backcourt or shorter in the court). A transitioning slice forehand stays low over the net, which can help the player get better positioning at the net.