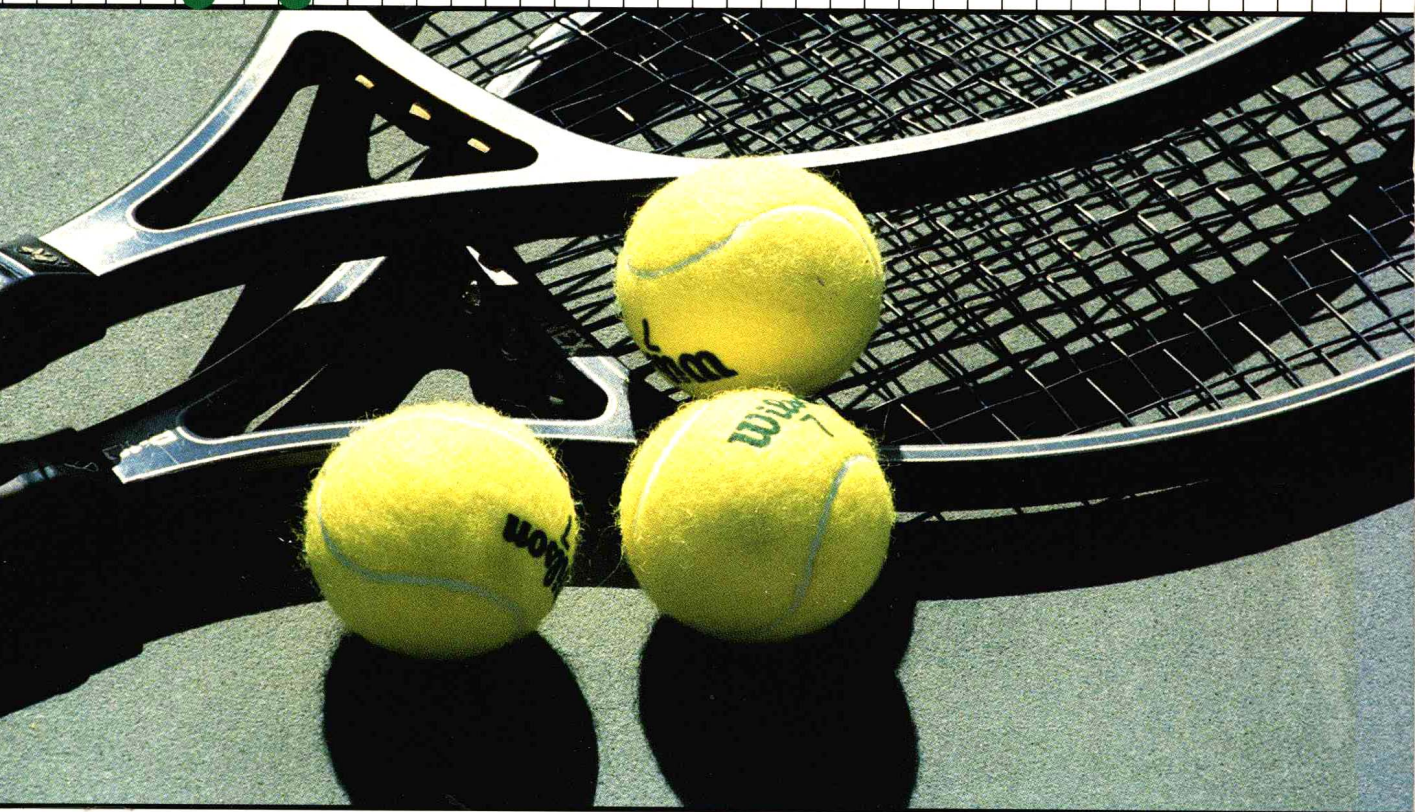


SECOND EDITION

JAMES E. BRYANT

Game Set Match



**A BEGINNING
TENNIS GUIDE**

GAME, SET, MATCH . . .

A Beginning Tennis Guide

2nd Edition

James E. Bryant, Ed.D.
San Jose State University



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Lastly, all the players who have competed and participated in tennis over the past years with the author are recognized here as major contributors based on the many comments they have made and the lessons they have given that have enhanced the knowledge of the author.

Preface

GAME, SET, MATCH . . . A BEGINNING TENNIS GUIDE is designed for a beginning tennis player. It is planned for the student actively receiving tennis instruction and as a guide for future reference.

The chapters are developed in a logical sequence of learning experiences that include: basic tennis strokes; understanding of the behavior and rules that govern play; understanding of the game strategies; individual practice drills; coordination of mind and body into the mental aspects of play; and learning about court surfaces and equipment. Each chapter will assist the reader in understanding the game of tennis in a simplistic and clear manner. Photographs and diagrams provide visual samples of strokes, strategy, and basic concepts. Sections related to skill acquisition are reinforced with capsule learning experience suggestions, and with an “elimination of errors” review to

facilitate an indepth understanding of those skills.

Tennis is a highly popular sport played at all levels of skill and by all ages. It requires a strong foundation of skill, and indepth comprehension of the intricacy of the flow of the game, and an insight into the rules of play. It is a game that is played at an intense level of competition by some and in a spirit of enjoyment by all who understand that tennis is a game. Tennis, as played today, is a never-ending learning experience for the player. It is a complex game that, when played and practiced over the years, becomes surprisingly simplistic and yet always remains challenging.

This material is truly a guide for the beginning tennis player who is taking instruction through courses or lessons, and who will continue to grow with the game through the years.

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Preliminaries to The Strokes in Tennis

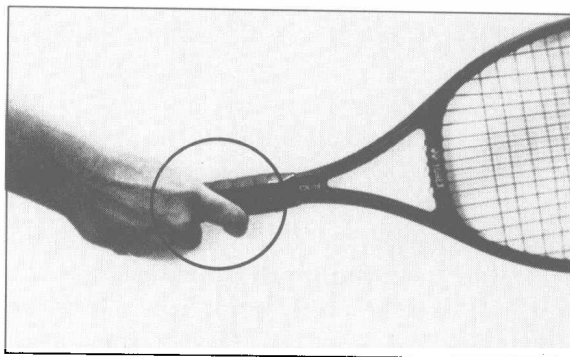
AN INTRODUCTION

To play tennis, it is imperative to know how to hold a tennis racket for a particular stroke, and how to stand and move. Recognizing the spin of the ball, although not of immediate concern to the beginner, is extremely important as the player's skills develop. It is also wise to gain a comprehension of racket face control and have a feel for the ball as the racket impacts the ball. Learning how to grip and control a tennis racket, and how to get ready to hit the ball, are skills that must be established early in the learning experience.

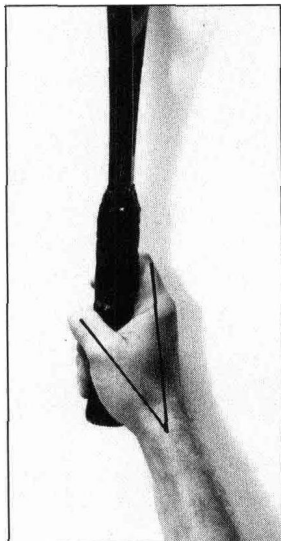
BASIC TENNIS GRIPS

The use of a tennis grip when hitting a particular stroke is directly related to the execution of that stroke. The selection of a tennis grip that fits the stroke is necessary to complete the stroke with acceptable form.

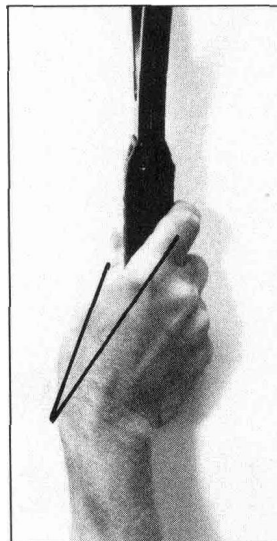
The *eastern forehand grip*, a universally used grip designed for executing the forehand groundstroke, is also called the "shake hands" grip. Place your racket hand on the strings of the racket, and bring your hands straight down to the grip. As your hand grasps the racket grip, your fingers will be spread along the length of the racket grip with the index finger spread the furthest in a "trigger finger" style, providing control. The thumb will be situated on the back side



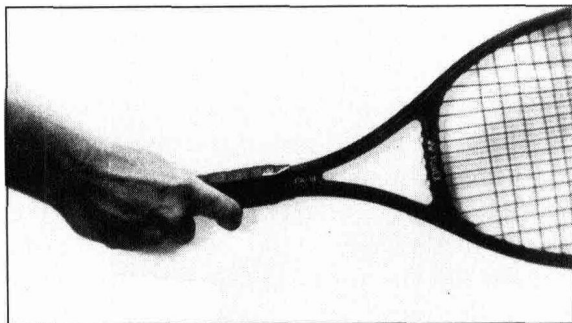
"Trigger-finger" position



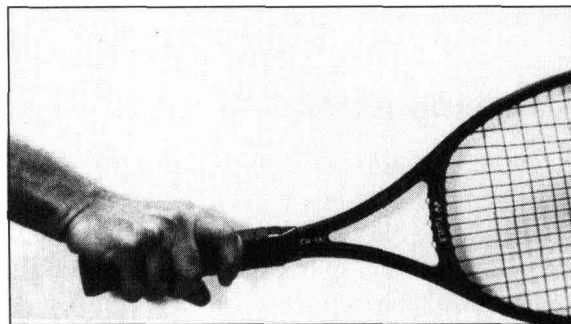
Eastern forehand grip
(top view)



Eastern backhand grip
(top view)



Eastern forehand grip (back view)



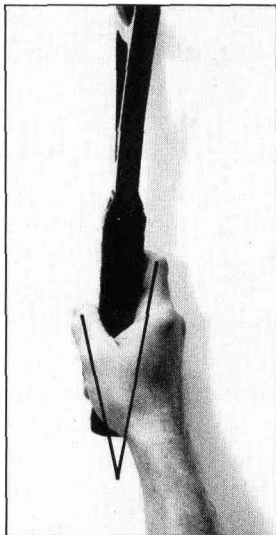
Eastern backhand grip (front view)

of the racket, and a "V" will be formed by the thumb and the four fingers on the racket grip. The "V" points to the racket shoulder when the racket is held in front of the player at a right angle to the body.

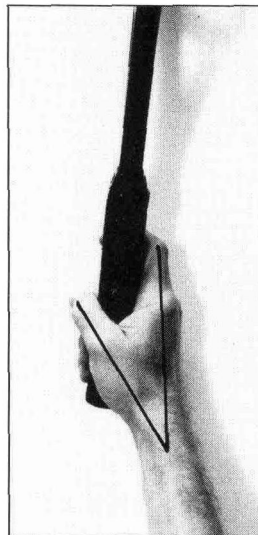
The *eastern backhand grip* is a conventional backhand grip used extensively in tennis. From the eastern forehand grip, roll your hand over the top of the racket grip and place your thumb diagonally across the rear plane of the racket grip. You should be able to see all four knuckles of the racket hand from this position when the racket is

held perpendicular to the body. The "V" formed by the thumb and fingers will point to the non-racket shoulder when the racket is held in front of the body.

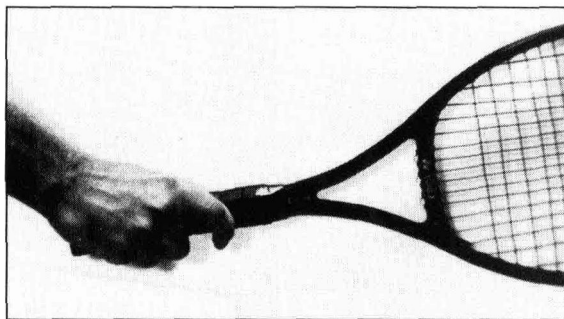
The *continental forehand grip* and *continental backhand grip* are essentially the same. They differ from the eastern forehand and backhand grips in that the hand is placed midway between the positioning of the two eastern grips. The "V" formed by the thumb and fingers points to the middle or center of the body halfway between the racket and non-racket sides of the body



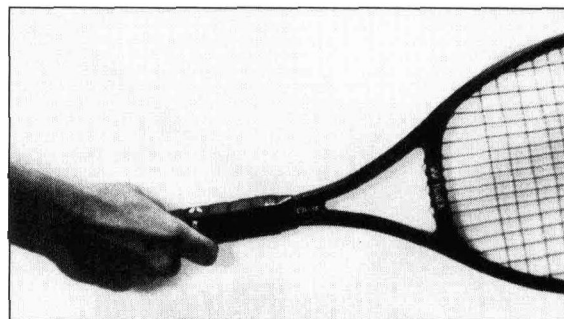
Forehand-backhand
continental grip
(top view)



Western forehand grip
(top view)



Forehand-backhand continental grip (back view)



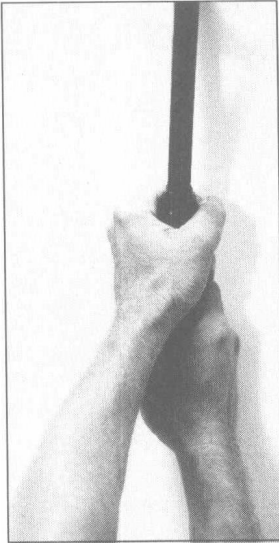
Western forehand grip (back view)

when the racket is held in front of the body. The subtle difference between the forehand and backhand placement of the hands for the continental grip is that, in the forehand grip, the thumb grasps the racket grip, whereas in the backhand, the thumb is placed diagonally across the rear of the racket grip.

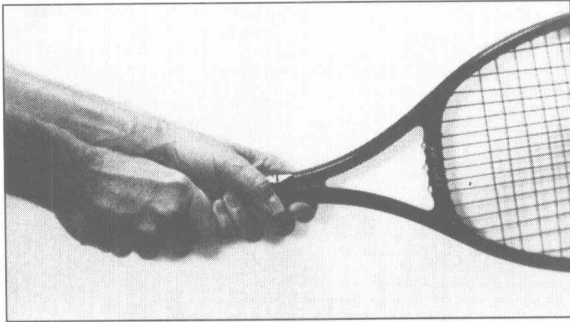
The *western forehand grip* is often used by those who have received no instruction in tennis, or it is used for special strokes. The grip is best achieved by laying the racket on the court and picking it up naturally. The

palm of the hand faces flat against and under the back side of the racket grip. The “V” formed by the thumb and fingers, when the racket is held in front of the body, points beyond the racket shoulder.

The use of the two-hand grips in tennis have become popular in recent years. The *two-hand backhand grip* is achieved when the hand on the racket side grasps the racket grip in either a continental or eastern backhand grip, with the non-racket-side hand butted above that grasp in an eastern forehand grip. The two-hand backhand grip



Two-hand backhand grip
(top view)



Two-hand backhand grip (front view)

must be a snug fit of two hands working together to execute the stroke. There is also a two-hand forehand grip that is used by a few players, but the grip is not widely used at this time.

The selection of the grip is based on a particular purpose. Eastern forehand grips are used for the forehand groundstroke,

while the eastern backhand grip is used for the backhand groundstroke and for special serves. The continental grips are used for groundstrokes, net play, and for serving. The continental grip has the added advantage of requiring little in the way of grip adjustment for different strokes; consequently, strokes are disguised when this grip is used. The western forehand is used with success when hitting topspin forehand groundstrokes. The two-hand backhand is a useful grip, particularly with individuals who lack the strength to hit with more conventional grips or who are seeking more power and control for their groundstrokes. The disadvantage to the grip is that the player lacks reach for wide shots. The two-hand stroke is excellent for players who are willing to move and react to every ball hit to them.

From the perspective of *what grip to use for what stroke situation*, it is suggested that the eastern grips be used by a player who intends to stay at the baseline and hit groundstrokes. When serving, use the continental grip — it will provide control, accuracy, and power for an effective service. As a beginner, you may want to start by using the eastern forehand grip for the serve; however, you should switch to the continental as soon as possible. Going to the net to play a volley shot requires reaction and timing, which means that the grip should not be changed much for a forehand or backhand volley. It is recommended that the player maintain a continental grip for play at the net to avoid miss-hitting the ball and being confused at the net.

Learning Experience Suggestions (Grip)

1. Keep the fingers spread down the racket grip with the index finger serving as a "trigger finger."
2. Be aware of the location of the "V" in relation to the racket and non-racket shoulders.
3. Grasp the racket firmly when assuming a grip.
4. Understand the subtle differences with each grip and the purpose for each grip.

ELIMINATION OF ERRORS

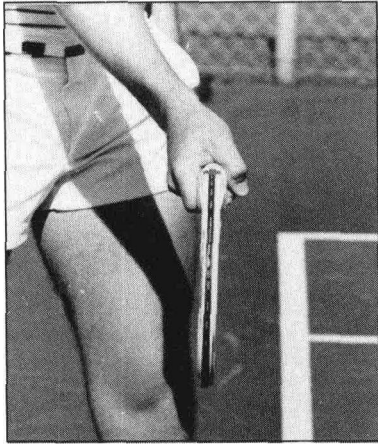
THE ERROR	WHAT CAUSES THE ERROR	CORRECTION OF THE ERROR
Lack of control of the racket.	Grasping the racket in a vise-like position.	Make sure that the fingers are spread along the racket grip
Miss-hitting a ball or poor execution	Too tight of a grip.	Relax the grip. Grasp the racket firmly, not tightly.
	Too loose of a grip.	Tighten the grip. Grasp the racket firmly, not tightly.
	Wrong grip for the stroke.	Check purpose for each grip.

CONTROLLING THE RACKET AND GETTING READY TO HIT

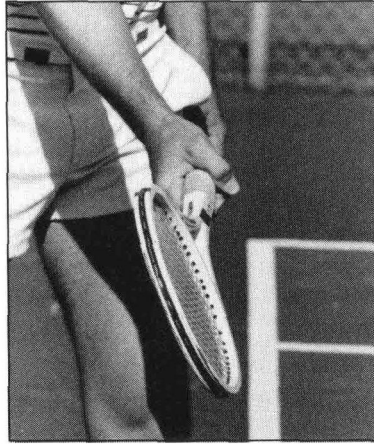
Racket control is essential to good strokes and thus to successful play. Three basic actions are taken when swinging a racket that will provide racket head control and that will consequently accomplish a stroke. The basic *swing action* is reflected in the forehand and backhand groundstrokes and the various lobs. The serve and overhead smashes are described through the *action of throwing*, while the *punch action* is used with

forehand and backhand volleys. By executing each of these actions or patterns, you will eliminate all extraneous motion, which will help you to simplify the action of each stroke.

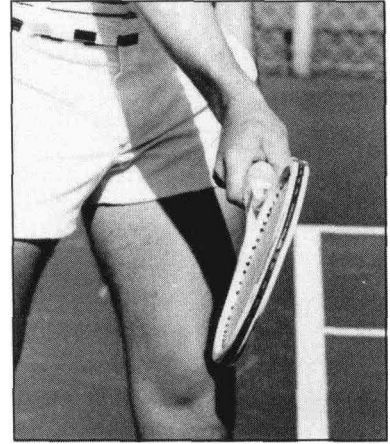
There are also three basic *racket face* positions that affect the control and flight pattern of the ball, followed by the bounce of the ball on the surface of the court. The effect of these three racket face positions on the resultant action of the ball is dependent on the speed of the racket head hitting through the ball and on the angle of the



Flat racket face



Open racket face



Closed racket face

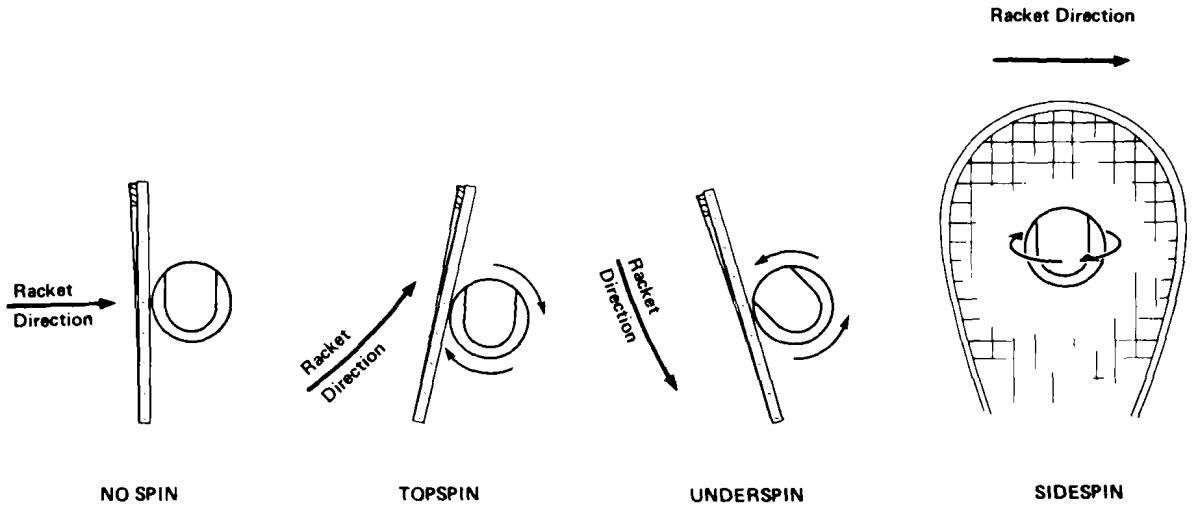
racket face when it contacts the ball. If contact is made with the *racket face flat* to the ball, the flight of the ball will be straight, with the ball falling to the court surface due to gravity. An *open racket face* will cause the ball to have a floating action in its flight, spinning in a backward motion. A *closed racket face* will force the flight pattern of the ball downward due to the ball having a forward spin. Each racket face position is important to all skill levels of players, and understanding what causes the drop or rise of the ball gives the beginning player a greater insight into the total concept of hitting the ball and reacting to the bounce.

Comprehending spins is a direct carryover from understanding racket head and racket face control. A tennis shot that is hit without spin is affected by three aspects of the overall stroke. First, as the ball strikes the racket face, a direct force is applied to the ball that provides velocity and determines the flight pattern of the ball. Secondly, that velocity is countered by air resistance and gravity, with the former impeding the velocity of the tennis ball and the latter pulling the ball down

toward the court. Finally, the ball will strike the tennis court surface at an angle equal to the rebound of the ball off the court surface.

When a ball spins in its flight pattern, the tennis player must also cope with the behavior of the ball as it strikes the court surface. There are three *basic actions for balls in flight*. First, *topspin* is caused by the action of the top surface of the ball rotating against air resistance. This creates friction on the top part of the ball, forcing the ball in a downward path. A second spinning rotation, *underspin*, is caused by the bottom of the ball meeting air resistance and forcing the ball to stay up longer than is normally found with a non-spinning ball. The final spin action of a ball — *sidespin* — is created when the side of the ball meets air resistance and pressure. This causes the ball to veer to the opposite side.

The *action of the ball striking the court surface* is the end result of racket control action on the ball and the spin of the flight of the ball. As the tennis ball makes contact with the tennis court, the ball will behave in a highly predictable manner. A *topspin*



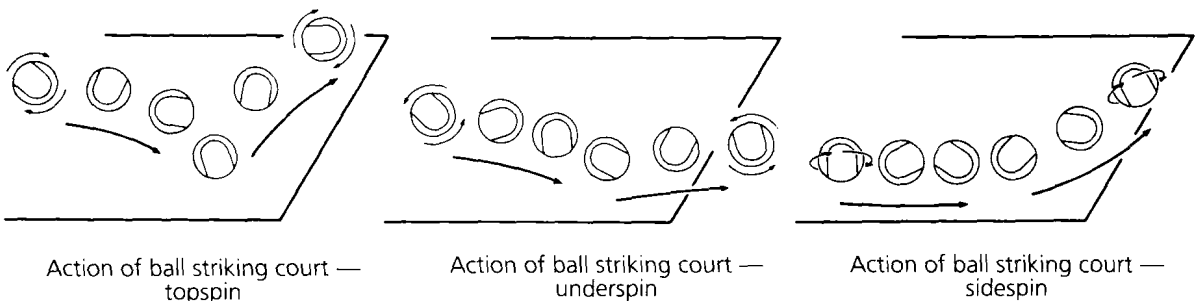
Basic actions for balls in flight

action will hit the court surface with a high, deep bounce due to the forward rotation of the ball. A ball hit with *underspin* is usually hit with power and at a low angle, thus creating a skidding action as ball meets surface. The *sidespin* strikes the court with the same action and direction as the sidespin on the ball.

In summary, there is a cause-effect relationship to racket control and spin of the ball. A flat racket face at contact will cause a flat flight pattern and flat equal angle bounce off the court. An open racket face

will result in underspin during the flight of the ball and a skidding action upon contact with the court surface. A closed racket face will provide a topspin ball action with a resulting high and deep bounce off the court surface. The player should understand that there is only a subtle change in these two racket positions for the slice and topspin groundstrokes at contact.

A closed racket face striking the ball on the side will create a sidespin action followed by a sideward bounce when the ball strikes the court. The beginning player needs to



understand the various spins applied to a ball in order to cope with balls hit with spin, and to learn how to supply spin to various strokes.

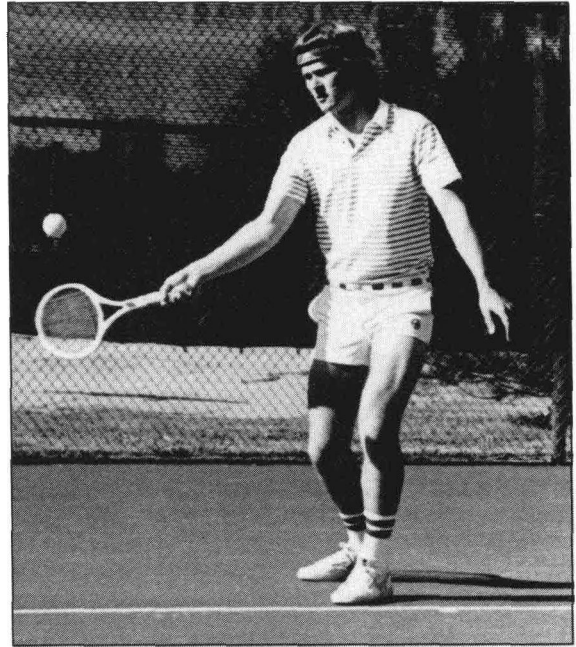
TYPES OF STROKES

As an introduction to the preliminaries of the strokes in tennis, a definition of the *various strokes* should aid in a more complete understanding of the basic skills of the game.

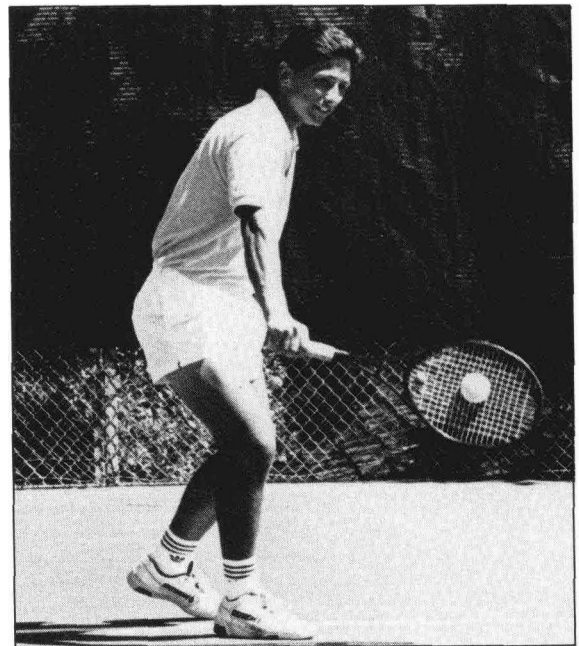
The basic *forehand groundstroke* is a stroke hit from the baseline following the bounce of the ball. The stroke is executed with a swinging action that produces a flat, no-spin (actually, a small amount of topspin is found in most flat shots) movement to the ball. The *backhand groundstroke* is played under the same conditions as the forehand groundstroke with the same ball action. Both are swinging action strokes with the forehand hit on the racket side of the body and the backhand hit on the non-racket side of the body. Both strokes are foundations for more advanced strokes, including *topspin* and *slide (underspin) groundstrokes*. *Approach shots*, which are an extension of groundstrokes, are characterized by a player advancing to the middle of the court to hit a ball. All *lobs* are also an extension of groundstrokes in terms of the swinging action.

The *volley* is a punching action characterized by playing the ball prior to contact with the tennis court. Both forehand and backhand volleys are usually played at the net, with *half-volleys* being an extension of a volley shot.

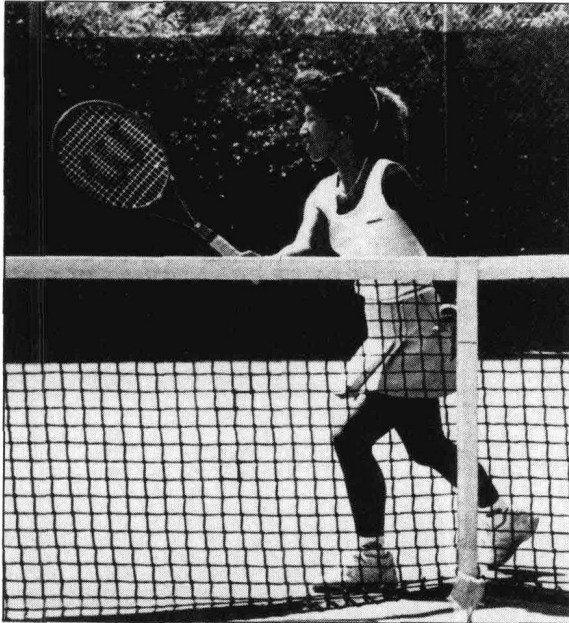
The fourth type of stroke is the basic *flat serve*, and it is described as a throwing action. Strokes that develop from the flat service are the slice service (sidespin), the



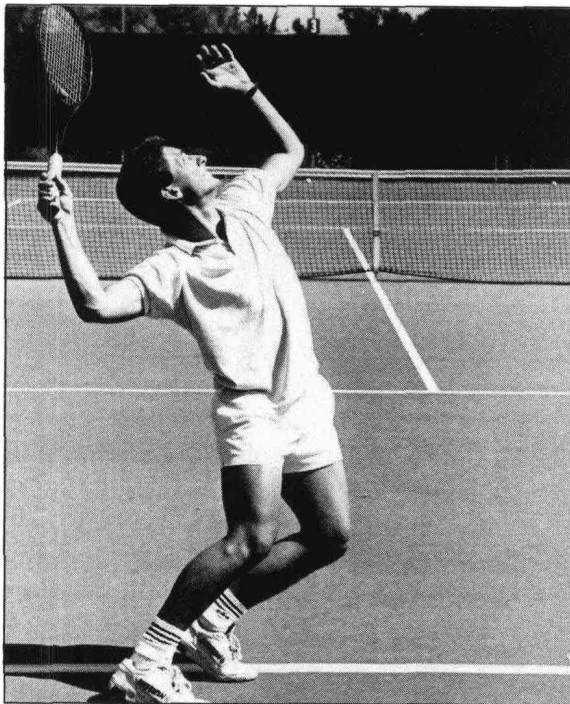
Forehand groundstroke



Backhand groundstroke



Volley



Flat serve

topspin service, and an advanced stroke known as the American twist (another sidespin rotation). The *overhead smash* is a continuation of the basic flat service, with the key parts of the serve reflected in the smash.

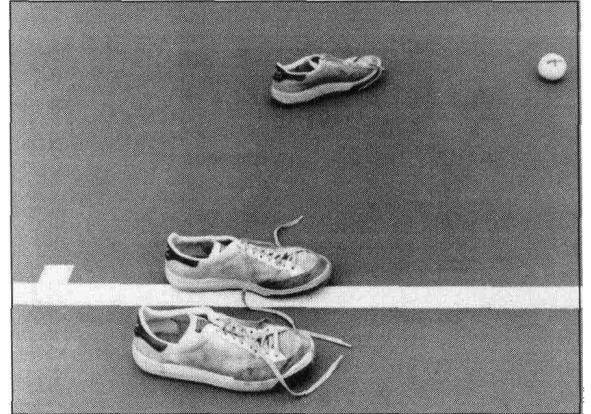
FEEL AND TIMING OF THE TENNIS BALL

The development of a *timing and feel for the tennis ball* is a prerequisite for successful tennis play. Regardless of the racket control, the spin of the ball, and various stroke fundamentals, the execution of each stroke is dependent on feeling and timing of the ball through *eye-hand coordination, timing, and focus*. Eye-hand coordination is based on past experiences of throwing and catching an object similar to a tennis ball in size. The swinging, throwing, and punching actions associated with tennis are fundamental to the ball games of batting, throwing, and catching that most American children played during their childhood. If you have played softball or racquetball, or have engaged in activities like playing catch, the game of tennis will be easy for you compared to individuals who have not had those experiences.

Timing is also related to where the ball will eventually be positioned to be hit rather than where it bounces originally. You must comprehend where the ball will go after it bounces, and set up behind and away from the ball so that you can step into the ball to hit it. Players tend to get too close to the ball or too far away, which causes them to lurch to hit the ball rather than smoothly stepping into the ball. If the ball is too far away, the player can adjust (and not lose timing), by stepping toward the ball with a weight transfer. If the ball is too close, the



Stepping into the ball

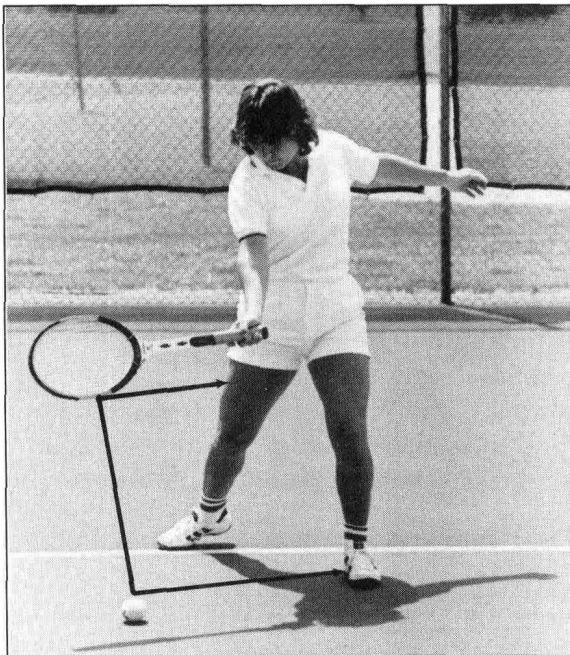


Position of ball and feet away and behind the ball

player should step away, yet forward, to hit the ball.

Part of timing involves controlling the racket head speed. Players under pressure tend to swing too hard or fast, particularly with the return of service. You must remember to play from a relaxed position and control the racket head speed. The same experience occurs with hitting overhead smashes and hitting groundstrokes when the opposing player is at the net. The added pressure tends to break down timing, forcing the player to rush through the stroke. The focal points have to be relaxation, confidence in hitting the ball, and concentration on the ball. Timing is improved immeasurably by watching the ball as long as possible. This is the part of focus that is most often ignored.

The ability to *focus* is extremely important in tennis. The ability to “see” the ball and perceive the racket striking the ball will help the developing player improve rapidly. Being able to focus on the ball is based on the same past experiences as with eye-hand coordination. The recognition of the bounce of the ball in terms of height, the distance the ball is in relation to the player, and the relation-



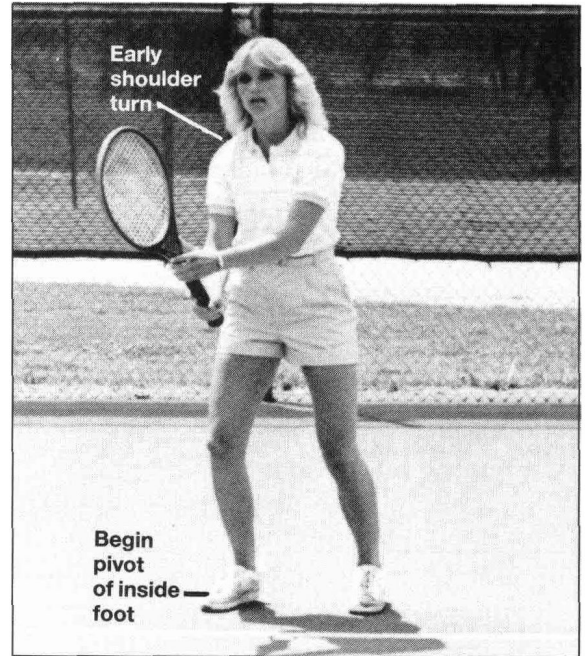
Stepping away from the ball

ship of the ball to the body are part of the focus concept. Additional focus points including moving to the ball, transferring weight into the ball at contact, and being in the correct position at the correct time. A final consideration is the ability to block all outside distractions and focus on the tennis ball as the only target.

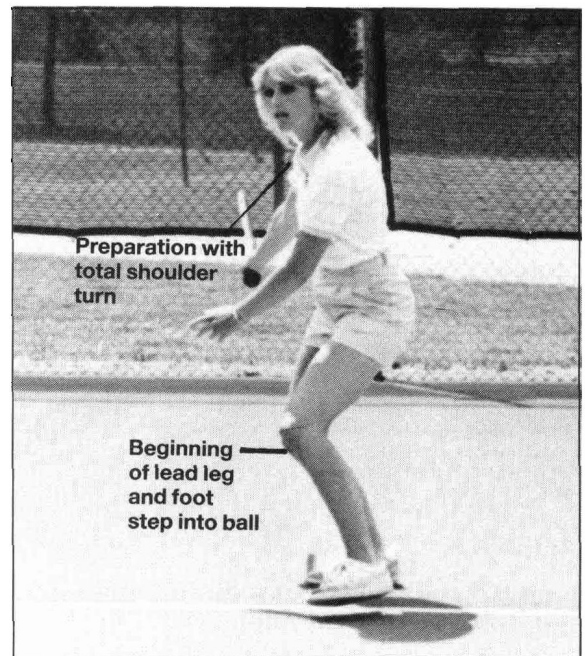
The foundation for timing and feel of the ball rests with establishing a *ready position* from which to hit groundstrokes and volleys. The ready position is the first actual skill presented for the developing player, and it is the foundation for all strokes.

The feet should be spaced slightly wider than shoulder width and should be parallel to each other. The knees are slightly bent, and the weight of the body is centered over the balls of the feet. The buttocks should be “down,” with the upper body leaning slightly forward in a straight alignment. The head should be “up,” looking toward the ball on the opposite side of the net. The racket is held “up” with a forehand grip on the handle, with the non-racket hand lightly touching the throat of the racket. The racket head is above the hands, and the elbows are clear of the body.

The ready position gives the player the opportunity to move equally to the right or left, as well as advance forward or retreat backward. The first response from a player in the ready position is to immediately rotate the shoulders when the direction of the ball from across the net is recognized. A player with good mobility will be able to move the feet quickly from the ready position. If a player can be relaxed in a ready position, keep the weight on the balls of the feet, and then react to the approaching ball with an early turn of the shoulders and quick foot movement, the stroke has been initiated positively.



Ready position for a groundstroke



Ready position — turn of shoulders