

✿ James E. Bryant ✿

# GameSetMatch

## A TENNIS GUIDE

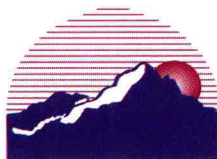


# GAME • SET • MATCH

## A Tennis Guide

**FOURTH EDITION**

**James E. Bryant**  
San Jose State University



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Englewood, Colorado 80110

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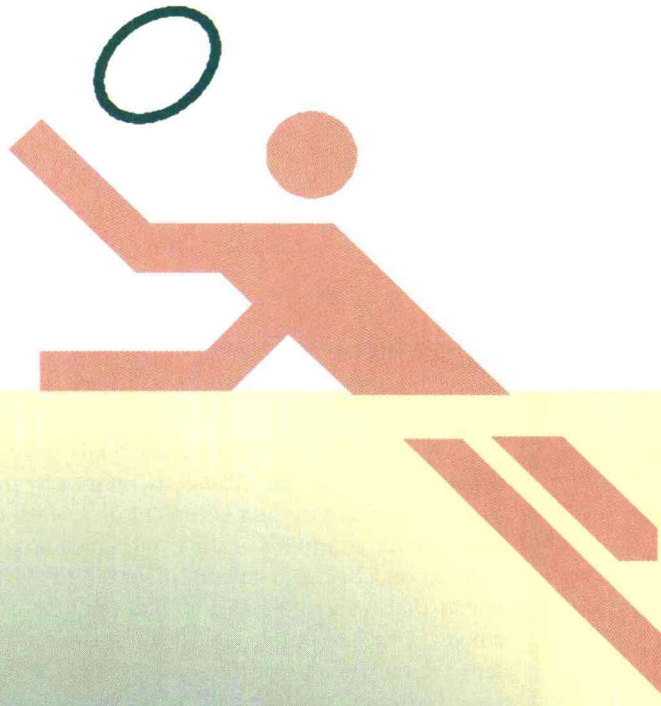
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# Preface

This fourth edition of *Game, Set, Match . . . A Tennis Guide*, is written primarily for the beginning or novice tennis player, but it is also appropriate for the intermediate player. It is for students who are actively receiving instruction and who plan on continuing to play tennis as a lifelong activity.

New features will enhance the learning experience of players. Photographs and diagrams have been updated, and the color photographs add clarity and perception. The USTA Tennis Rules have been updated to provide accurate information regarding the rules. The *Instructor's Guide* has been revised to assist the instructor in coordinating use of the book with the practical experience of learning to play the game on the tennis court. New "Cues" have been developed for the *Guide*.

Tennis is a highly popular sport played at all levels of skill and by people of all ages. It requires a strong foundation of skill, an in-depth comprehension of the intricacy of the flow of the game, and an insight into the rules of play. It is a game 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 simple and yet always remains challenging.

*Game, Set, Match* provides players with a visual and written analysis of tennis. Students will profit from reading the descriptions of the skills and reviewing the photographs to gain a mental image of execution of the skill. They also will gain from reading and understanding how physical fitness and mental preparation are critical to their improvement and development as a player.

The two strategies chapters provide a base for development of thinking on the court, and the etiquette and rules section will enable the student to make sense of the intangibles of tennis. Two informational chapters regarding the tennis court and equipment, and tournament play and resources will aid students in understanding the fringe parts of the game.

This material is a guide for the tennis player who is taking instruction through courses or lessons. I hope everyone who reads and studies this book will continue to grow with the game and reap its rewards through the years.

James E. Bryant

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since 1986 numerous individuals have contributed to the continual development of *Game, Set, Match* as reviewers, models, illustrator, and as sources to provide as accurate and complete of a book as possible. I want to extend a personal thank you to all of those who have in some way permitted me to gain from their knowledge and talents in order to write a book for the beginning tennis player that truly allows for skill development and growth. In particular, I want to convey a special thank you to my former students who have given feedback and served as a true test of the practicality and applicability for the book as designed for a beginning or intermediate player.

Specifically, I want to thank those who have been instrumental in the development of this fourth edition. These people include my editor, Ruth Horton, for her support and encouragement, Joanne Saliger for the great design of the book, and photographer Eric Risberg, who created the quality photographs that show tennis skill at its best. In addition, I extend a thank you to the Cupertino Tennis Center, Cupertino, California, who provided beautiful facilities for all photographs. And finally, a major thank you goes to Anh-Dao Nguyen and John Hubbell, San Jose State University tennis coaches, who not only performed the proper skills that were photographed but also made suggestions that made the book that much better.

James E. Bryant





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# The Preliminaries to the Strokes in Tennis

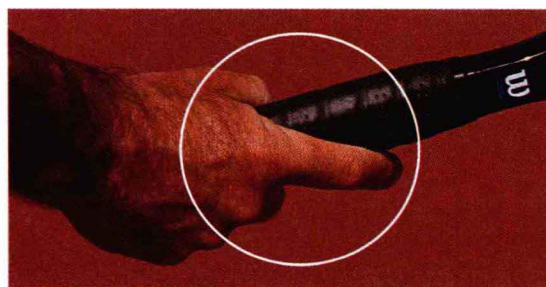
**T**o play tennis, a person has to know how to hold a tennis racket for each stroke, and how to stand and move. Recognizing the spin of the ball, although not of immediate concern to the beginner, is extremely important as the player's skills develop. Comprehending racket face control and having a feel for the ball as the racket impacts the ball are additional needs. 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

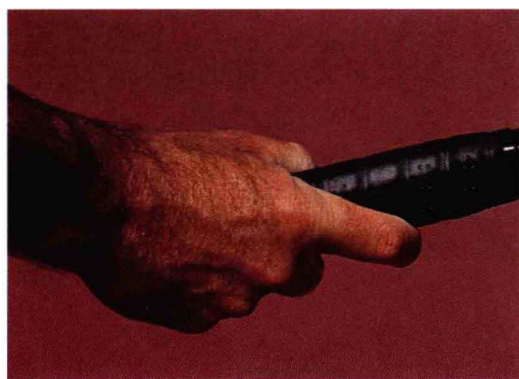
The tennis grip used when hitting a particular stroke is directly related to execution of that stroke. Selecting a tennis grip that fits the stroke is necessary to complete the stroke with acceptable form.

The *eastern forehand grip*, a universally used grip designed for executing the forehand groundstroke, is also called the “shake hands” grip (Figures 1.1– 1.3). 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 farthest in a “trigger finger” style, providing control. The thumb will be situated on

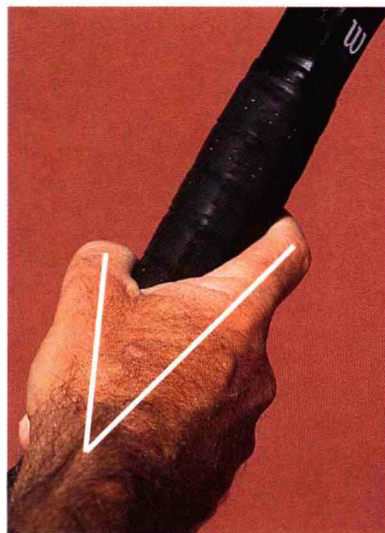


**Figure 1.1** “Trigger-finger” position.

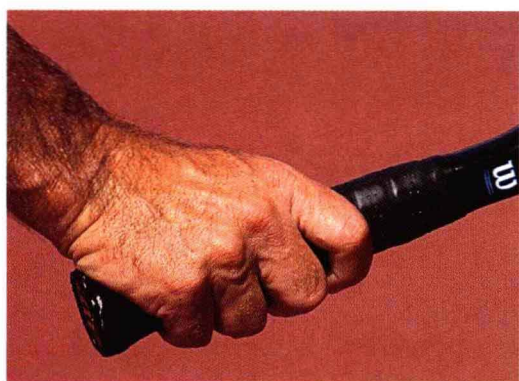




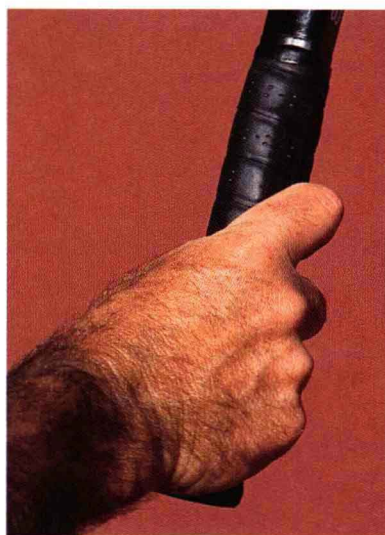
**Figure 1.2** Eastern forehand grip (back view).



**Figure 1.3** Eastern forehand grip (top view).



**Figure 1.4** Eastern backhand grip (front view).



**Figure 1.5** Eastern backhand grip (top view).



**Figure 1.6** Forehand-backhand continental grip (back view).



**Figure 1.7** Forehand-backhand continental grip (top view).

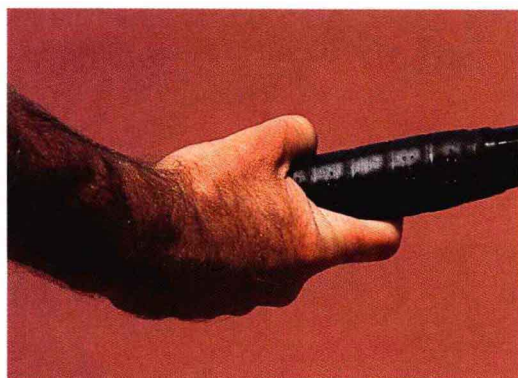
the back side of the racket, and the thumb and four fingers will form a "V" on the racket grip. The "V" points to the racket shoulder when the player holds the racket in front at a right angle to the body.

The *eastern backhand grip* is a conventional backhand grip used extensively in tennis (Figures 1.4–1.5). 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 holding the racket 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 (Figures 1.6–1.7). 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 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.



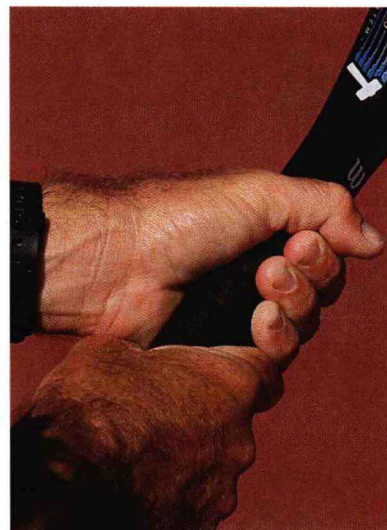
**Figure 1.8** Western forehand grip (back view).



**Figure 1.9** Western forehand grip (top view).



**Figure 1.10** Two-hand backhand grip (front view).



**Figure 1.11** Two-hand backhand grip (top view).



### Trigger Finger

*Remember: All grips require that the index finger serve as a trigger finger to provide control of the racket along with a relaxed and flexible grip.*

The *western forehand grip* (Figures 1.8–1.9) is often used by those who have received no instruction in tennis, or it is used for special strokes such as a top-spin forehand groundstroke. 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 two-hand grip in tennis has become quite popular. The *two-hand backhand grip* (Figures 1.10–1.11) is achieved when the hand on the racket side grasps the racket grip in either a continental or an eastern backhand grip, with the non-racket-side hand butted above that grasp in an eastern forehand grip. The two-hand backhand grip must be a snug fit of two hands working together to execute the stroke. A few players use a two-hand forehand grip, but the grip is not used widely at this time.

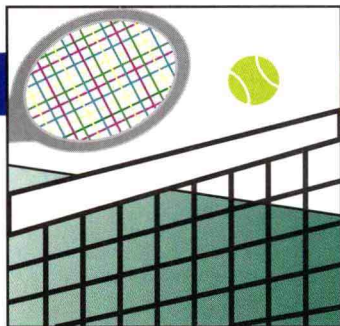
Selection of the grip is based on the purpose. Eastern forehand grips are used for the forehand

groundstroke. The eastern backhand grip is used for the backhand groundstroke and for special serves. The continental grips are used for groundstrokes, net play, and 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 using this grip. The western forehand is used with success when hitting top-spin 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, the continental grip 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 grip 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 mis-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 between each grip and the purpose for each grip.

## ELIMINATION OF ERRORS (Grip)

The Error	What Causes the Error	Correction of the Error
Lack of control of the racket	Grasping the racket in a vice-like position	Make sure the fingers are spread along the racket grip with a trigger finger.
Mis-hitting a ball or poor execution	Grip is too tight	Relax the grip. Grasp the racket firmly, not tightly.
	Grip is too loose	Tighten the grip. Grasp the racket firmly, not tightly. Check grip size. If the grip is too tight, the racket will turn in the hand when a return shot has high velocity.
	Wrong grip for the stroke	Check purpose for each grip.





## CONTROLLING THE RACKET AND GETTING READY TO HIT

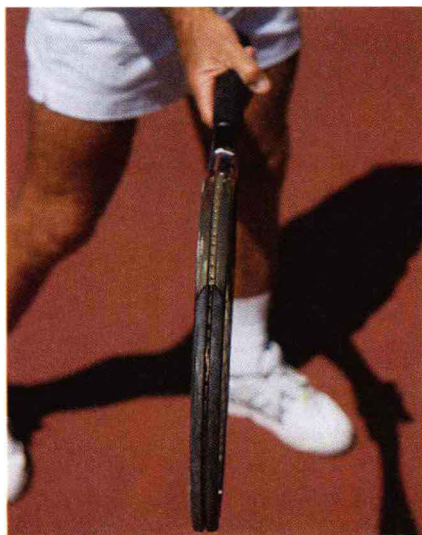
*Racket control* is essential to good strokes, and thus to successful play. Three basic actions when swinging a racket will provide racket head control and consequently will accomplish a stroke. The basic *swing action* is reflected in the forehand and backhand groundstrokes and the various lobs. The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

Also, three basic *racket face* positions will affect the control and flight pattern of the ball and the bounce of the ball on the surface of the court. The effect of these three positions on the resultant action of the ball depends on the speed of the racket head hitting through the ball and on the angle of the racket face when it contacts the ball. If contact is made with the *racket face flat* to the ball (Figure 1.12), the flight of the ball will be straight, and the ball will fall to the court surface from gravity. An *open racket face* (Figure 1.13) will cause the ball to have a floating action in its flight, spinning in a backward motion. A *closed racket face* (Figure 1.14) will force the flight pattern of the ball downward because the ball has a forward spin.

Each racket face position is important to all skill levels of players. Understanding what causes the drop or rise of the ball gives the beginning player 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 ball's flight pattern. Second, that velocity is countered by air resistance and gravity; the former impedes the velocity of the tennis ball and the latter pulls 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.

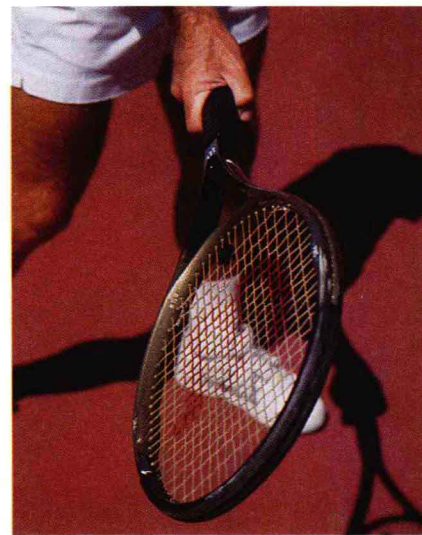
When a ball spins in its flight pattern, the tennis player also must cope with the behavior of the ball as it strikes the court surface. There are three *basic actions* for



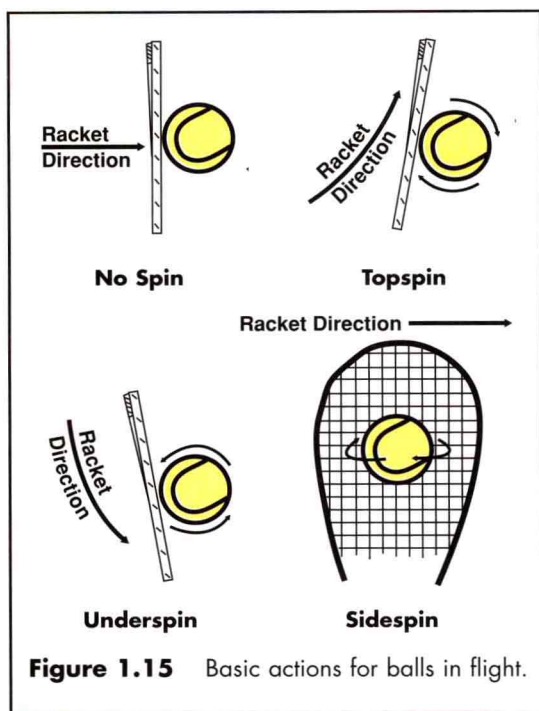
**Figure 1.12** Flat racket face.



**Figure 1.13** Open racket face.



**Figure 1.14** Closed racket face.



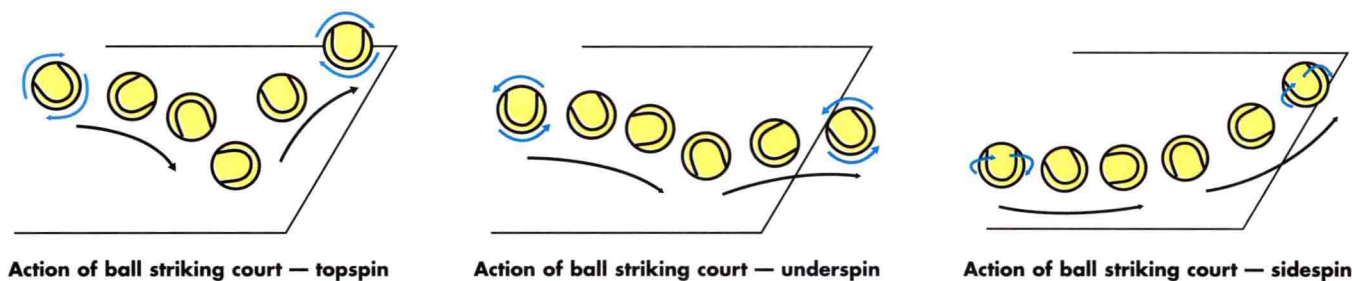
*balls in flight* (see Figure 1.15). First, *topspin* is caused by the action of the top surface of the ball rotating against air resistance. This creates friction on the top part of the ball, forcing the ball in a downward path. A second spinning rotation, *underspin*, is caused by the bottom of the ball meeting air resistance and forcing the ball to stay up longer than normally is 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 (Figure 1.16). As the tennis ball makes contact with the tennis court, the ball will behave in a highly predictable manner. A *topspin action* will hit the court surface with a high, deep bounce because of the forward rotation of the ball. A ball hit with *underspin* usually is hit with power and at a low angle, 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, racket control and spin of the ball have a cause-effect relationship. 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 these two racket positions for the slice and topspin groundstrokes produce only a subtle change 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.

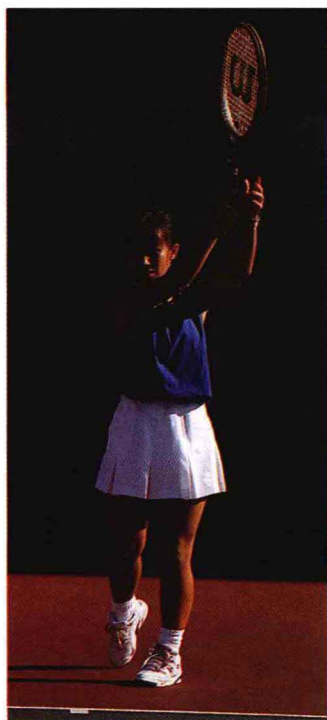


## TYPES OF STROKES

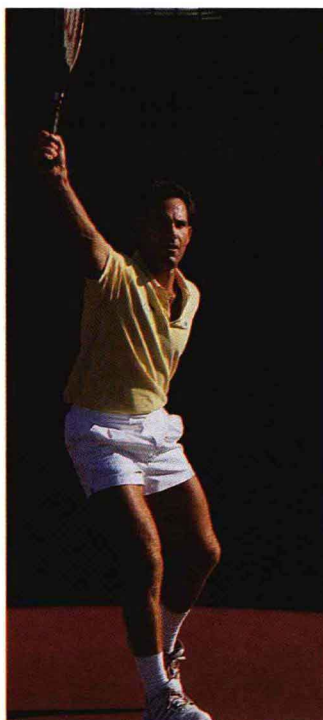
As an introduction to strokes in tennis, a definition of the various strokes should enable better understanding of the basic skills of the game.

The basic *forehand groundstroke* (Figure 1.17) 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, most flat shots have a small amount of topspin) movement to the ball. The *backhand groundstroke* (Figure 1.18) is played under





**Figure 1.17**  
Forehand groundstroke.



**Figure 1.18**  
Backhand groundstroke.

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.

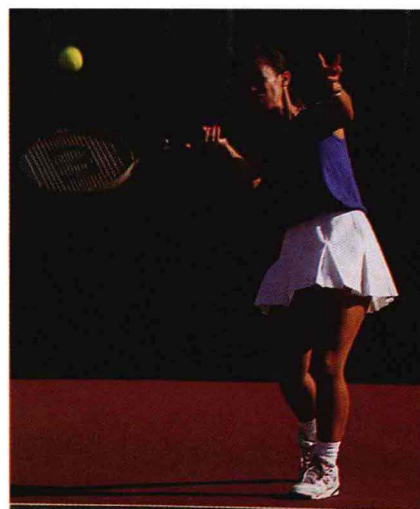
Both strokes are foundations for more advanced strokes, including *topspin* and *slice (underspin) groundstrokes*. *Approach shots*, which are an extension of groundstrokes, are characterized by a player advancing to the middle of the court to hit a ball. All *lobs* (Figure 1.19) are also an extension of groundstrokes in terms of the swinging action except there is a lifting action designed to hit the ball deep to the baseline and with a loft.

The *volley* (Figure 1.20) is a punching action characterized by playing the ball before it contacts the court surface. Both forehand and backhand volleys usually are played at the net. *Half-volleys* are an extension of a volley shot.

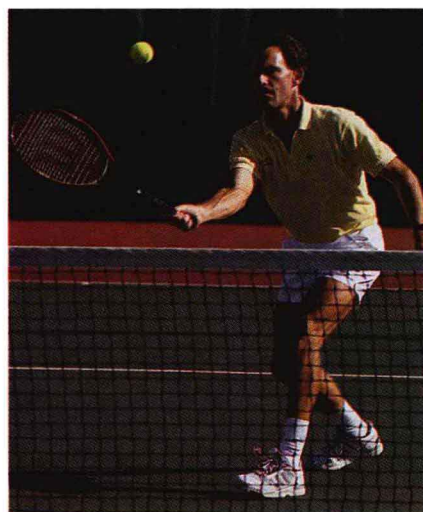
The fourth type of stroke is the basic *flat serve* (Figure 1.21), and it is described as a

throwing action. Strokes that develop from the flat serve are the slice service (sidespin), the topspin service, and an advanced stroke known as the American twist (another sidespin rotation).

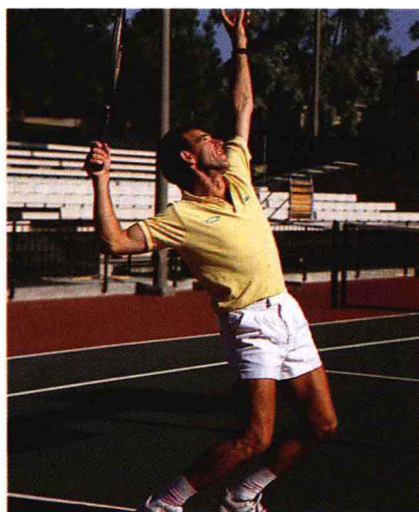
The *overhead smash* (Figure 1.22) is a continuation of the basic flat service. The key parts of the serve are reflected in the smash. It differs from the serve in that the



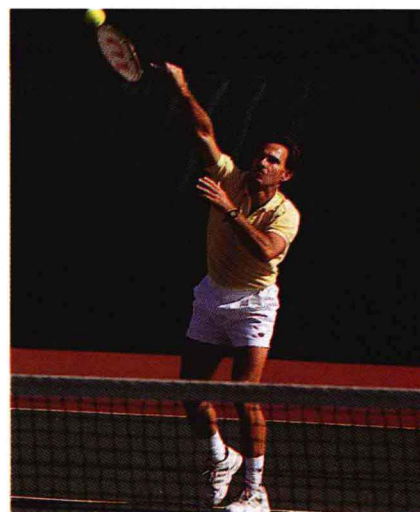
**Figure 1.19** Lob.



**Figure 1.20** Volley.



**Figure 1.21** Flat Serve.



**Figure 1.22** Overhead Smash.

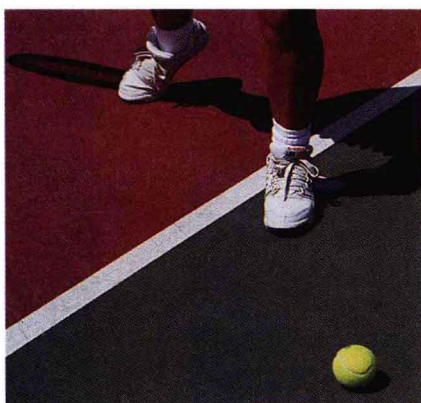
ball is hit either on the fly or after a bounce on the court surface when the offensive player is positioned near the net.



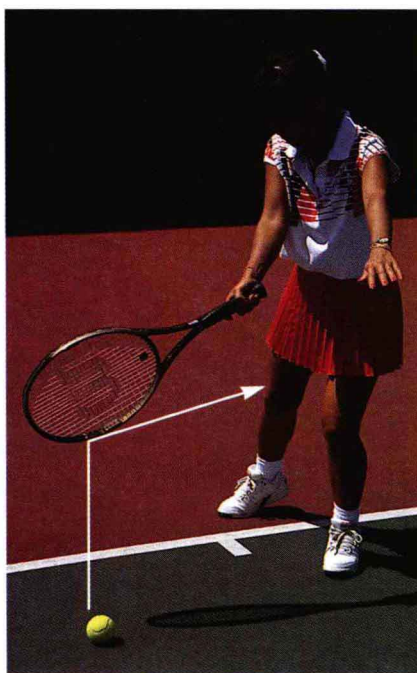
## FEEL AND TIMING OF THE TENNIS BALL

The development of *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, execution of each stroke depends 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 in size to a tennis ball. The swinging, throwing, and punching actions associated with tennis are fundamental to the ball games of batting, throwing, and catching that most American children play 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.

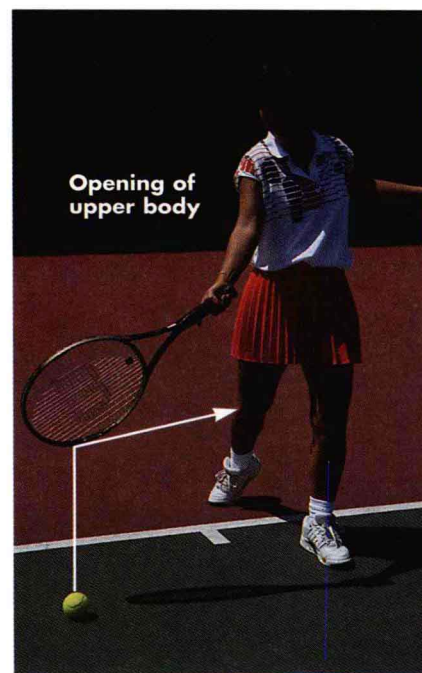
*Timing* also is related to where the ball eventually will be positioned to be hit rather than where it bounced originally. You must comprehend where the ball will go after it bounces, and set up behind and away from the ball so you can step into the ball to hit it (Figure 1.23). Players tend to get too close to the ball or too far away, which causes them to lurch to hit the ball rather than smoothly step 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 (Figure 1.24). If the ball is too close, the player should step away, yet forward, to hit the ball (Figure 1.25). The key factor in stepping away is the opening of the upper body as the racket is brought through the ball at contact.



**Figure 1.23** Position of ball and feet away and behind the ball.



**Figure 1.24**  
Stepping into the ball.



**Figure 1.25**  
Stepping away from the ball.



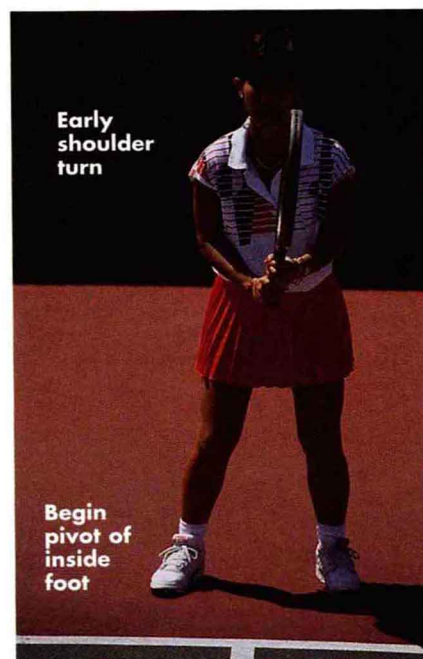
Part of timing involves controlling the racket head speed. Players under pressure tend to swing too hard or fast, particularly with the return of service. You must remember to play from a relaxed position and control the racket head speed. The same is true with hitting overhead smashes and groundstrokes 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. Recognizing the bounce of the ball in terms of height, the distance the ball is in relation to the player, and the relationship of the ball to the body are part of the focus. Additional focus points include moving to the ball, transferring weight into the ball at contact, and being in the correct position at the correct time. A final consideration in focusing is the ability to block all outside distractions and keep the tennis ball as the only target.

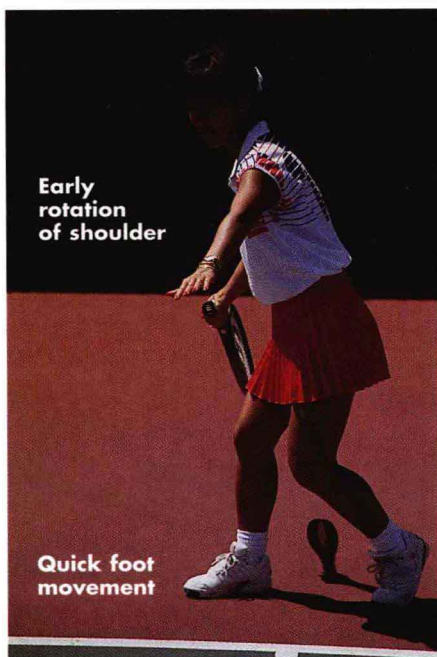
The foundation for timing and feel of the ball rests with establishing a *ready position* from which to hit groundstrokes and volleys (Figure 1.26). The ready position is the first actual skill presented for the developing player, and it is the foundation for all strokes.

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.

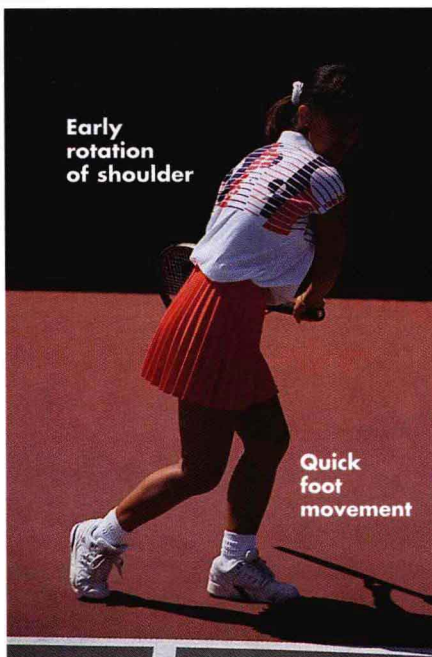
The ready position gives the player the opportunity to move equally to the right or left, as well as advance forward or retreat backward. The first response from a player in the ready position is to rotate the shoulders immediately when recognizing the direction of the ball from across the net (Figures 1.27–1.28). 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.



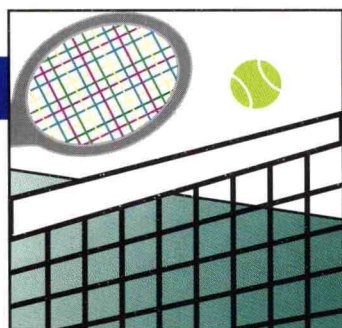
**Figure 1.26** Ready position for a groundstroke.



**Figure 1.27** Ready position — turn of shoulders (forehand).



**Figure 1.28** Ready position — turn of shoulders (backhand).



## Learning Experience Suggestions

### Ready Position

1. Maintain a base with the feet shoulder-width apart.
2. Focus on the ball on the other side of the net.
3. Keep the knees bent slightly and the weight on the balls of the feet.
4. Be relaxed and ready to react.
5. As the ball crosses the net, turn the shoulder and move the feet.

### ELIMINATION OF ERRORS (Ready Position)

The Error	What Causes the Error	Correction of the Error
Falling off balance.	Feet too close together.	Widen the base.
Mis-timing the ball.	Not focusing on the ball and not getting shoulders rotated early with feet moving.	Watch the seams of the ball and rotate your shoulders early.





## Study Questions

Answers to Study Questions can be found on page 139.

1. The eastern forehand grip is described as
  - a. trigger finger, V formed by index finger and thumb with V pointed to racket shoulder.
  - b. grasp of racquet, V formed by index finger and thumb with V pointed to the racket shoulder.
  - c. trigger finger, V formed by index finger and thumb with V pointed to center of chest.
  - d. trigger finger, V formed by index finger and thumb with V pointed to non-racket shoulder.
2. The continental grip is described as
  - a. similar to a 2-hand grip.
  - b. half way between an eastern forehand and western forehand grip.
  - c. half way between an eastern forehand and eastern backhand grip.
  - d. half way between an eastern backhand and western forehand grip.
3. The continental grip is used most effectively for
  - a. playing the baseline.
  - b. playing the baseline and the net.
  - c. playing the baseline and serve.
  - d. playing the net and serve.
4. The basic racket control actions are
  - a. punch action, swing action, and throw action.
  - b. punch action and swing action.
  - c. throw action and swing action.
  - d. punch action and throw action.
5. The three types of spin imparted on a ball in flight are
  - a. topspin, sidespin, underspin.
  - b. reverse spin, topspin, backspin.
  - c. reverse spin, sidespin, topspin.
  - d. sidespin, reverse spin, and slice.
6. Timing and feel for the tennis ball requires
  - a. eye-hand coordination, focus, and foot coordination.
  - b. eye-hand coordination, timing and focus.
  - c. focus, foot-coordination and timing.
  - d. foot coordination, eye-hand coordination and timing.
7. The first response from a ready position is to
  - a. rotate shoulders.
  - b. turn the racket side shoulder.
  - c. turn the non-racket side shoulder.
  - d. rotate the shoulders with the direction of the ball seen across the net.
8. The tennis racket should be grasped
  - a. tightly.
  - b. loosely.
  - c. firmly.
  - d. in a vice like grip.