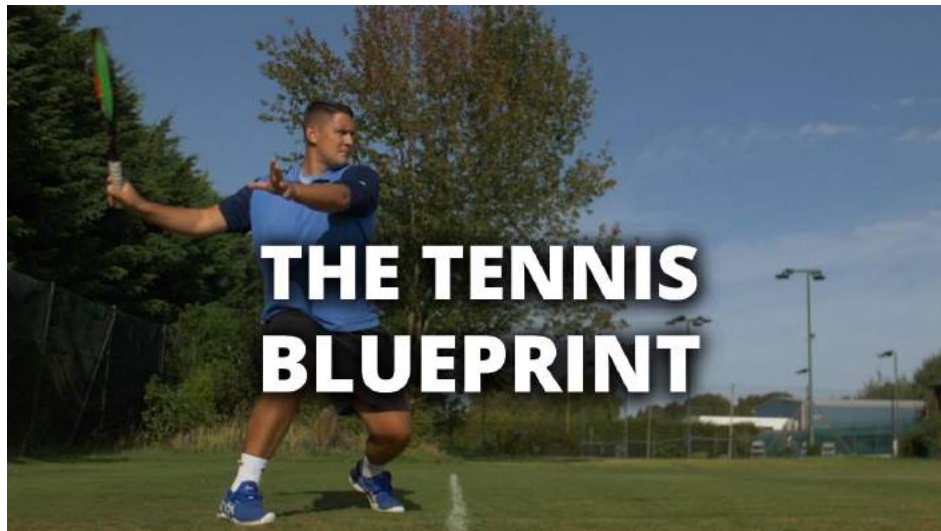




The Tennis Blueprint



Inside this PDF, we'll cover:

1. Serve
2. Forehand
3. One-Handed Backhand
4. Two-Handed Backhand
5. Volleys
6. Serve Power
7. Singles Strategy
8. Doubles Strategy

How To Serve In Tennis



How To Serve In Five Steps:

1. Grip
2. Ball Toss
3. Trophy Position
4. Pronation
5. Follow Through and Finish

Step One - The Grip

The grip you use to serve with will dictate your entire swing. Large numbers of club players tend to use a forehand grip to serve with, which causes many problems as they progress and want more power and spins on their serve.

The majority of pro players use the continental grip to serve with and the pros who don't use an exact continental grip will use some sort of variation of it. The continental grip is also known as the chopper grip. This is the same grip we use to hit slices, both the forehand and backhand volleys and the overhead smash. This grip allows you to impart both power and spin on the serve.

If you use a forehand grip to serve with, you might be able to get lots of power because the grip allows you to hit the ball very flat, however your consistency and accuracy will suffer greatly and generating spins will be very hard, if not impossible.

As you will learn later in this PDF, supination and pronation on the serve will help you generate extra control, power and spins and this action is only able to occur if we're using the continental grip.



Step Two - The Ball Toss

The ball toss on the tennis serve should be a very simple and straightforward action, yet millions of tennis players around the world struggle with it.

One of the best ways to "tame your toss" is to toss the ball around 4-6 inches higher than your ideal contact point. Most players that struggle with their ball toss throw the ball way too high, which causes erratic and inconsistent tosses.

By tossing the ball high, it tends to:

1. Break the momentum on your service motion, often causing players to have to stop in the trophy pose or when they drop the racket behind their head and wait for the ball to drop down to their contact zone.
2. Causes the ball to go all over the place, especially in the wind. The higher you toss the ball, the faster your arm will be travelling up prior to the release, which causes you to lose control of the toss, making it unreliable.

So to have a consistent ball toss on your serve, try to have a steady tossing arm with a down-up motion and aim to toss no higher than six inches above the contact point. Hold the ball in your fingers (not fingertips) instead of in the palm of your hand and release the ball when the hand reaches head height.



Step Three - The Trophy Position

Reaching a good trophy position on your serve is fundamental to having a good serve. The trophy position is a lot like a normal throwing pose. Imagine yourself about to throw a tennis ball, that position you reach just prior to launching forward, is the same action we want to achieve on the serve. Now imagine yourself throwing the ball upwards, as opposed to forwards.

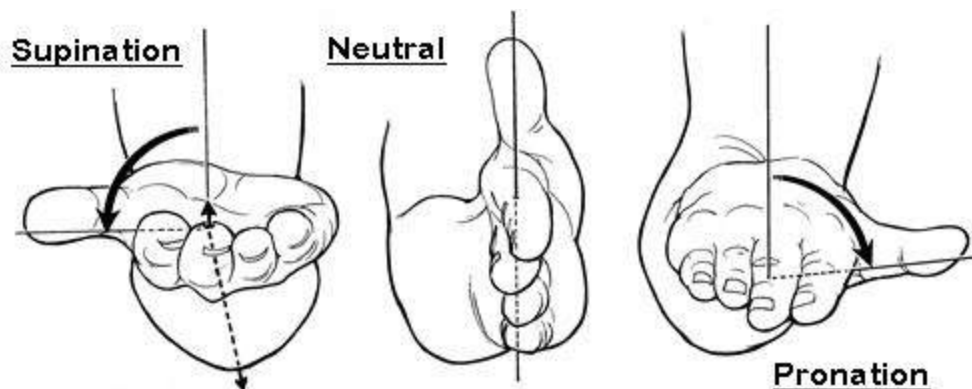
A good trophy position should include:

- The tip of your racket pointing up towards the sky
- Your non-hitting hand pointing towards the ball
- The right shoulder dropped back and down
- A good knee bend, ready to launch the body off the ground
- Your head looking up towards your target - the ball



Step Four - Pronation

The biggest servers all use supination and pronation during their service motions. Prior to contact the forearm, if relaxed and the player is using the continental grip, should supinate. When in supination the palm of the hand and the strings (side you will hit the ball with) will be facing the left side of the court, if you supinate further your palm will be facing slightly backwards also.



The more supination occurs prior to contact, the more you can "snap" your racket through the contact zone using pronation.

Some players will use very little supination prior to contact and then go straight through with pronation, however Pete Sampras used a great deal of supination on serve to generate more "whip" through contact. The racket is now "on edge" and it looks like the player will hit the ball with the side of the racket.



From this position, the strings start to open up and the player pronates their forearm and upper arm.

At contact the palm faces towards the target. This twist with the forearm and racket will continue if done correctly to the point of full pronation where the palm and strings face the right side of the court. For many WTA players this is the main issue they face on serve, not achieving the full range of motion with pronation. They tend to pronate up until the contact point but then stop pronating after contact and finish the swing with their arm in a neutral position and the strings facing down the court.



Notice that Roger Federer's strings go from facing the left side of the court prior to contact to facing the right side of the court after contact. On kick serves, Federer will finish with his strings facing the back of the court as he doesn't open up his shoulders.



Step Five - The Finish

One of the main causes of serve breakdown or even worse, injury from the serve is an incorrect finish or follow through. When you hit your serve, your body should be in a relaxed state and the follow through should be relaxed and allow the arm and body to slow down in a natural way using the correct muscle groups.

If we swing the racket at high speeds during the contact zone, then suddenly stop altogether or finish in the wrong way, the stress will be felt greatly in the shoulder, elbow and wrist.

If this is done time and time again, the result can be serious injury.

A natural, relaxed follow through should take the racket all the way to the left hip, a great way to remember this finish is to imagine your racket is a gun and you are placing it back into a holster. The elbow should be bent when you are finishing to take the stress off your shoulder joint, a straight arm places a great deal of stress there.



Next Lesson - The Forehand

How To Hit The Perfect Forehand In Tennis



The Perfect Forehand In Five Steps:

1. Foundation
2. Unit Turn
3. Power Position
4. Racket Lag
5. Follow Through and Finish

Step One - The Foundation

Your grip will greatly influence your forehand. We recommend using a semi-western forehand grip as this will allow you to hit aggressive topspin but also flatten out the shot.

Having a good ready position with the racket head higher than the grip level, holding the throat or grip with your non hitting hand and set up with the racket in the middle of your body will set you up well for the rest of the stroke.

Having a poor ready position will cost you valuable time and make the swing more complicated. By having the tip of your racket pointing up towards the sky, you'll already create some leverage in your arm and racket head.

This will make step four much easier to achieve.



Step Two - Unit Turn

As soon as possible, after you recognise the ball is coming to your forehand side, try to turn your upper body sideways to the net. This will be your left shoulder if you're a right handed player.

By rotating the upper body, you'll help kick start the racket preparation and you'll store energy in your trunk muscles, especially the obliques. If you do nothing with your arms but simply coil your upper body, the racket will go from a 12 o'clock position (facing the net) to a 3 o'clock position (facing the right side of the court).

The best players in the world are able to initiate this coil almost as soon as the ball leaves the opponents strings, way before the ball passes the net. The earlier you can do this, the better. This will allow the coil - uncoil motion to take effect later in the swing.



Step Three - The Power Position

Reaching a good power or back position with the racket head higher than the grip level will create good leverage in the racket and arm. This position will look different from player to player but some of the common traits are:

- The non-hitting hand should be across the body helping you balance the upper body but also track the oncoming ball
- The racket head higher than the grip level
- Shoulders coiled fully, with left shoulder facing the net
- Chin resting above the left shoulder
- Space between the elbow and body



Step Four - Racket Lag

Creating good racket lag where the head of the racket lags behind the grip will give you leverage over the ball. Leverage over the ball will help you generate extra power and control.

This action should happen naturally without forcing the wrist to go into extension, it should happen as a result of the stroke mechanics and by setting up in a good power position. Most pro players achieve some degree of racket lag prior to making contact with the ball, although Federer and Nadal have two of the best lag positions on the tour.



Step Five - The Finish

Using a good follow through and finish. A poor follow through can destroy the stroke but also lead to injury.

During the contact zone, you want the racket to be accelerating and not slowing down, unless you're absorbing power on the shot. For the most part you want the racket travelling through the contact point with good speed and you want to finish using a complete follow through, at the very end of the maximum swing path. A good finish will help the muscles relax in a natural way and reduce the risk of injury.

There are many different types of forehand finishes but the most commonly used one on the ATP tour is the across the chest finish. This is where you pull the racket into your body, finishing with the hitting elbow across the chest with a good bend in that joint. The racket will wrap around the left shoulder. Some players will also finish over the left shoulder.



Next Lesson - The One-Handed Backhand

How To Hit The Perfect One Handed Backhand In Tennis



The Perfect Backhand In Three Steps:

1. Unit Turn
2. Power Position
3. Contact Point and Finish

Step One - Unit Turn

Your grip will greatly influence your backhand. We recommend using an Eastern backhand grip as this will allow you to hit aggressive topspin but also flatten out the shot. Roger Federer, Stan Wawrinka and many other great one-handers use this grip.



When you're in your ready position, you'll most likely be holding the racket in your forehand grip, which is a good thing. However, to make sure you start off your backhand well, use your non-hitting hand to hold the throat of the racket. Having a good ready position with the racket head higher than the grip level will set you up well for the rest of the stroke.

Having a poor ready position will cost you valuable time and make the swing more complicated. By having the tip of your racket pointing up towards the sky, you'll already create some leverage in your arm and racket head.

This will make step two much easier to achieve.

As soon as possible, after you recognise the ball is coming to your backhand side, try to turn your upper body sideways to the net. This will be your right shoulder if you're a right handed player.

By rotating the upper body, you'll help kick start the racket preparation and you'll store energy in your trunk muscles, especially the obliques. If you do nothing with your arms but simply coil your upper body, the racket will go from a 12 o'clock position (facing the net) to a 9 o'clock position (facing the left side of the court).

The best players in the world are able to initiate this coil almost as soon as the ball leaves the opponents strings, way before the ball passes the net. The earlier you can do this, the better. This will allow the coil - uncoil motion to take effect later in the swing.



By turning early and pointing your right shoulder to the net, you'll be able to use normal running or sprinting steps to get to many balls, a common error players do is they move to the ball with side steps which takes too much time and also tires them out.

Side steps can and should be used when recovering, as you want to be facing the net on the way back.

Step Two - The Power Position

Reaching a good power or back position with the racket head higher than the grip level will create good leverage in the racket and arm. This position will look different from player to player but some of the common traits are:

- The racket head higher than the grip level
- Shoulders coiled fully, with right shoulder facing the net
- Chin resting above the right shoulder
- Space between the hitting hand and body
- Non-hitting hand holding the throat of the racket



The idea behind this position is simple, if you were to stop or pause in this position for a second or two, you could still generate good power from this position, from here now you want to feel like the preparation is complete, now all that is left to do is swing forward towards the ball and complete the swing.

Step Three - The Contact Point and Finish

The contact point is the most important part of the stroke. You can do everything perfectly but if you make contact late or with your strings in a bad position, your shot won't work properly.

You should aim to make contact out in front of your body, with an almost fully extended arm. By doing this on your one-hander, you'll be firm at the contact point and have your body supporting the impact. If you make contact too far to the side of you, the arm and shoulder will take the force of the shot.



During the contact zone, you want the racket to be accelerating and not slowing down, unless you're absorbing power on the shot. For the most part you want the racket travelling through the contact point with good speed and you want to finish using a complete follow through, at the very end of the maximum swing path.

A good finish will help the muscles relax in a natural way and reduce the risk of injury.

On most backhands, you'll want your racket head to finish up quite high, somewhere around shoulder or head height. This will ensure you've brushed upwards on the ball and used a low to high swing-path which will help you lift the ball but also generate good topspin to bring the ball in the court. Your non-hitting hand should stay by your left

pocket, or pull back and down to counter the right hand going up.

Federer and Dimitrov use the stretch the chest finish while Wawrinka uses a more relaxed follow through, both work well and maintain balance in the upper body at the end of the stroke.



Next Lesson - Two-Handed Backhand

How To Hit The Perfect Two-Handed Backhand In Tennis



The Perfect Backhand In Three Steps:

1. Unit Turn
2. Power Position
3. Contact Point and Finish

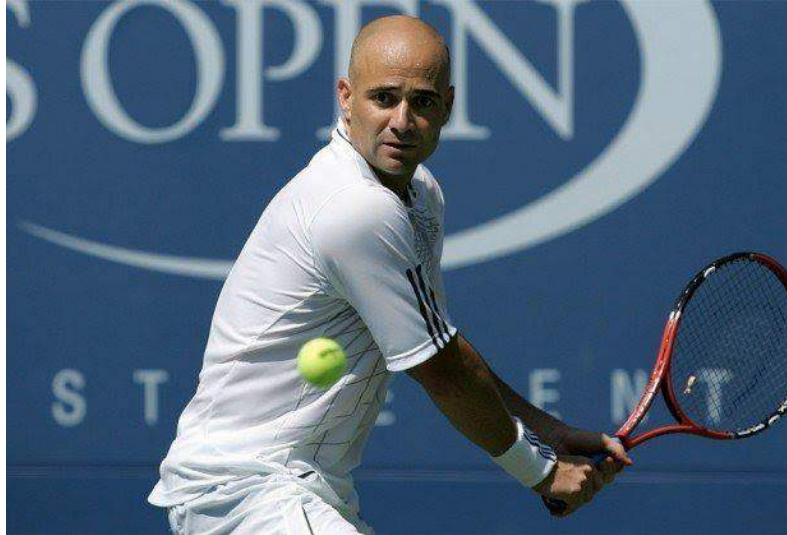
Grip

Your grip will greatly influence your two-handed backhand. We recommend using a combination of either:

1. Eastern forehand grip on top hand (left hand for right-handers) and continental grip on the bottom hand or
2. Semi-western on the top hand and strong continental, which is between the true continental and an eastern backhand grip, on the bottom hand

If you use an eastern backhand grip on the bottom hand, it will be very hard for you to flatten out the backhand and truly hit through the shot.

Step One - Unit Turn



As soon as possible, after you recognise the ball is coming to your backhand side, try to turn your upper body sideways to the net. This will be your right shoulder if you're a right handed player. At the same time as you coil the upper body, you'll be changing grips into your backhand one.

By rotating the upper body, you'll help kick start the racket preparation and you'll store energy in your trunk muscles, especially the obliques. If you do nothing with your arms but simply coil your upper body, the racket will go from a 12 o'clock position (facing the net) to a 9 o'clock position (facing the left side of the court).

The best players in the world are able to initiate this coil almost as soon as the ball leaves the opponents strings, way before the ball passes the net. The earlier you can do this, the better. This will allow the coil - uncoil motion to take effect later in the swing.



By turning early and pointing your right shoulder to the net, you'll be able to use normal running or sprinting steps to get to many balls. A common error players do is they move to the ball with side steps which takes too much time and also tires them out.

Side steps can and should be used when recovering, as you want to be facing the net on the way back.

Step Two - The Power Position

Reaching a good power or back position with the racket head higher than the grip level will create good leverage in the racket and arm. This position will look different from player to player but some of the common traits are:

- The racket head higher than the grip level
- Shoulders coiled fully, with right shoulder facing the net
- Chin resting above the right shoulder
- Body weight stored up mainly on the back leg, which will allow you to transfer your weight through the shot if you are using a neutral or closed stance



The idea behind this position is simple, if you were to stop or pause in this position for a second or two, you could still generate good power from this position, from here now you want to feel like the preparation is complete, now all that is left to do is swing forward towards the ball and complete the swing.

Step Three - The Contact Point and Finish

The contact point is the most important part of the stroke. You can do everything perfectly but if you make contact late or with your strings in a bad position, your shot won't work properly.

You should aim to make contact out in front of your body. If you extend out towards your target, you might have bent elbows at contact and then extend both arms out or you might have better stability if you extend your top hand during the contact zone.

During the contact zone, you want the racket to be accelerating and not slowing down, unless you're absorbing power on the shot. For the most part you want the racket travelling through the contact point with good speed and you want to finish using a complete follow through, at the very end of the maximum swing path.



A good finish will help the muscles relax in a natural way and reduce the risk of injury.

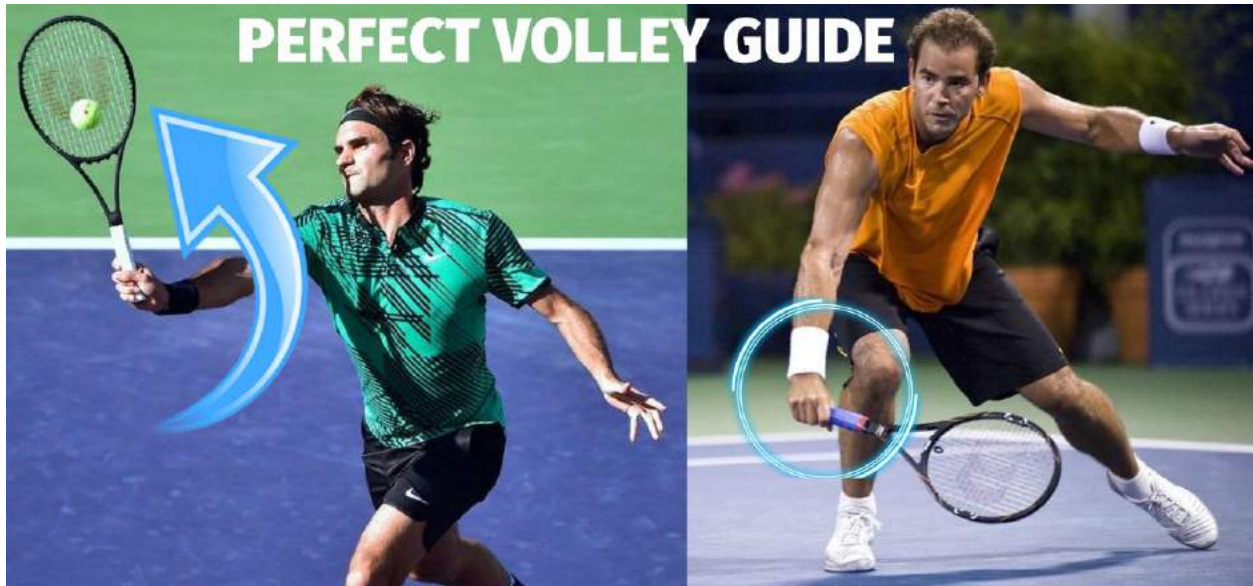
On most backhands, you'll want your racket head to finish over your right shoulder, touching your back. This will ensure you've followed through all the way and help create a low to high swing path which will help you create topspin.

A good guide is to have both elbows finish around shoulder level, this will ensure that the top hand can complete the swing, a common error is players finishing too low with their bottom elbow which blocks the follow through and stops the top hand doing its job.

Notice Djokovic's elbows in the image above.

[Next Lesson - Volleys](#)

How To Hit Perfect Tennis Volleys In 3 Steps



Three Ways To Improve Your Volleys In Tennis:

1. Ready Position
2. Swing
3. Footwork

Ready Position:

Your ready position is the foundation of being a solid net player. All good volleyers have three things in common when they're waiting at the net:

1. Grip - use a continental grip, which will allow you to hit the forehand volley, backhand volley and the smash, without having to change grips. Perfect at the net, since you have much less time.
2. A wide, athletic base. The split-step and ready position should be slightly wider than when on the baseline, your centre of gravity (COG) should be lower, this will allow you to push off more explosively and reach wider balls.

- 3. Racket position - the racket should be in front of your upper body, between waist and chest height. The racket should be in the middle of either your forehand or backhand volley. The racket head should be above the grip, this will create an L shape.



Tennis Volley Swing

Your swing will determine a lot at the net. It all starts with your “L” shape, this is the shape you create between the arm and racket which will give you stability on your volleys and leverage over the ball.

There are three main volley swings in tennis:

1. Block volley
2. Power volley
3. Standard volley

It's important to know how to hit each style of volley and when to use each one. If you try to generate power on a fast ball, you'll hit the ball late and most likely, miss that volley.



With all three types of volleys, it's important to keep the racket head higher than the grip level when preparing for the volley.

This will ensure you have stability at contact with the L shape in the racket and arm.

Block Volley

The block volley is where you block the ball, redirecting the volley using the power that is already on the opponent's shot.

The swing will be minimal, you're simply getting the racket to the contact point and blocking the ball. Imagine you were catching a ball, you wouldn't swing your hand backwards before reaching out in front to catch it, you would simply place your hand at the catching point.

By simply placing the racket at the point of contact, you'll be sure of making contact out in front of your body.



Power Volley

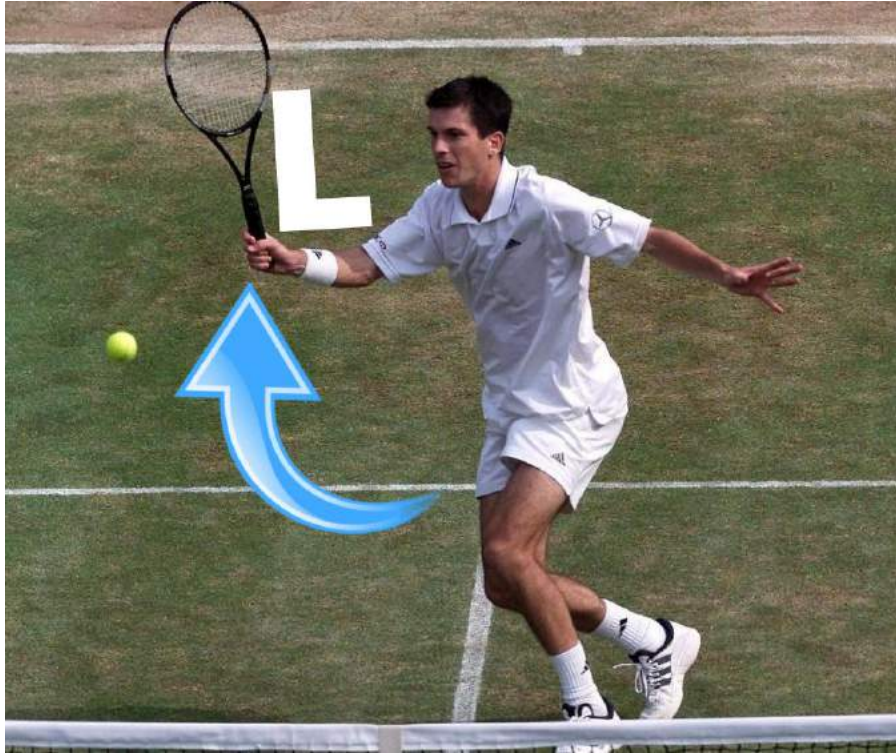
The power volley should be used when you have time, on many slower, floating balls that tend to be around shoulder or head height.

This is when you can use more of a swing on your volleys.

The key here is to use your body to generate much of the swing, by coiling the upper body.

When you turn your shoulders on either side, you'll create a good amount of backswing, and then as you open up to make contact, that will produce racket head speed through the point of contact.

Try to keep the L shape in the racket and arm, which will give you leverage (force) over the ball.



Standard Volley

On average, around 60% of your tennis volleys will be a “standard” one. This is where you’ll have some time, not as much as a power volley, but more than a block volley. The backswing will be small, normally just a unit turn with the racket stopping on the side of the body.



The key to many of these volleys will be using underspin (slice) on the ball. By imparting underspin, you'll be able to control the ball easier, especially if your opponent has hit with lots of topspin, and you'll be able to keep the ball low after the bounce.

A flat volley will sit up, giving your opponent the chance to hit the ball at around waist height, which is much easier than a low ball that's around knee height or even lower.

To create the underspin, simply open the strings towards the sky as you make contact, this will help you to hit under the ball and create the slice.

Volley Footwork

Using the correct footwork patterns will allow you to get more power on your volleys but also reach wider balls, making you a tougher player to beat at the net.

When the ball is close to you, it's easy and convenient to use one step to reach the ball.

Forehand volley - if you're a right handed player, when the ball comes close to you on your forehand volley, you'll step into the contact point with your left leg.

Imagine doing a half lunge when hitting the volley, this action will help you stay balanced.

This will help you transfer your body weight into the volley, making it more powerful and stable at the contact point.



Backhand volley - for right-handed players on the backhand volley, try to step into the contact with your right leg. Once again, this step forward will help you get the body weight behind the volley.



Wider Balls?

In order to cover wider balls or close down on the net, you'll need to work on and master the two-step volley footwork pattern.

This all starts with the outside leg, so on the forehand volley, the right leg would take the initial step outwards or forwards to then allow you to step into the volley with the left leg as the last step.

On the backhand volley, the first step would be with the left leg to then allow you to step into the volley with your right leg as you make contact.

This two-step footwork pattern is the key to reaching wider balls.

Forehand volley - right then left

Backhand volley - left then right

If you've enjoyed this volley guide, make sure to check out our volley lessons on the Top Tennis Training YouTube channel and our volley course on Top-Tennis-Training.com

If you got this far, well done, you're a true student of the game!
Thank you for reading and we hope you have picked up a few tips to use in your own game.



[Next Lesson - Serve Power](#)

How To Get More Power On Your Tennis Serve



Three Ways To Increase Power On Your Tennis Serve:

1. Power Sources
2. Timing
3. Relaxation

Power Sources:

There are many different power sources available on the tennis serve. The three main sources of power include -

1. Ground Force
2. Rotational Power
3. The Swing

Power Source #1 - Ground Force

Ground force is the amount of push you can generate from the ground up. This all starts with your stance. There are three main stances, the platform stance, the pinpoint stance and the hybrid stance.



Platform Stance

In this stance, you keep your feet apart throughout the motion, until you drive up and off the court. Typically the feet will be around shoulder width apart. Federer and Djokovic use this stance.

Pinpoint Stance

In this stance, you start off with your feet apart but during the motion, the back foot lifts off the ground and joins the front foot in the pinpoint position.

Nadal and Murray use this stance.

Hybrid Stance

Also known as the wide pinpoint or narrow platform stance, this is where you have both feet close together but not touching as in the pinpoint. The feet are normally around 3-4 inches apart.

Roddick and Monfils use this stance.

Whichever stance you use, you'll want to maximise the ground force you can generate using an explosive down and up action on your leg drive.

The faster you can make the down-up motion, the more explosive power you'll generate on your serve plus you'll make contact at the highest possible point.



Power Source #2 - Rotational Power

At the start of the serve, most pros will coil their upper body.

This can range from a little rotation, someone who keeps their upper body facing the side of the court, to a lot, someone who turns their back towards the net.

Once you reach the trophy position, you'll want to uncoil the body.

This all starts with the tossing hand pulling down and away from the contact point, initiating the uncoiling of the shoulders and trunk. The faster you pull away, the faster you'll uncoil the body and the more rotational power you'll get.

Pete Sampras had the greatest rotational power of any server, in the history of the sport.



Power Source #3 - The Swing

The more racket head speed you generate throughout the motion, the more power you'll get. Building racket head speed is much easier if you don't break the swing at any point. If you pause for instance, in the trophy position, or in the racket drop position, any momentum you created up to that point is lost.

Most of the biggest servers throughout history have used a continuous motion that builds momentum throughout the swing to generate the racket head speed in a relaxed way.

Timing

You could have the best service motion in the world, however, if you don't have good timing, you'll struggle to generate power on your serve.

Good timing starts with your ball toss. The higher you toss the ball, the slower your motion will have to be in order to time the contact point.

The lower your ball toss, the easier it will be to hit the ball close to the apex. Once you release the ball, it travels up, hits the peak, then starts to drop. The higher you toss it, the faster the ball will be travelling when you try to make contact.

Most pro players will toss the ball no higher than 6 inches above the contact point. However, when you look at the biggest servers, players like Nick Kyrgios, Andy Roddick, Sam Groth, Goran Ivanisevic and many others, they toss the ball quite low.

Many of these players make contact directly below the apex, Kyrgios sometimes hits the ball at the apex.



Another major advantage that these players get, is that in order for them to make contact at their ideal height, using a low toss forces them to speed up their motion. The timing between the start of the motion and the contact point tends to be around 1.5-2.0 seconds for the majority of tennis players. Club and pro level.

But many of the biggest servers are much quicker, typically around one second.

Roscoe Tanner, who was the biggest server of his generation and someone who used a fast motion, would typically get around 0.8-0.9 from the start of his motion until the contact point.

Kyrgios is similar in numbers these days.



Whatever your serve is like, to get the most amount of power from your body, you'll want to build momentum throughout the action by having a continuous motion with no breaks in the kinetic chain.

Relaxation

Being relaxed will help you get more power on any stroke.

If you've ever tried to swing your racket as fast as you can, with stiff and tight muscles, you'll know it doesn't get you far.

When the body is relaxed, the muscles can fire properly. A loose muscle can generate much more elastic energy than a tight one.

If you want to serve with more power, on a consistent basis, without getting injured, being relaxed is key!

There are a few ways you can help the body stay relaxed when serving.

- Breathing
- Grip pressure
- Muscle activation/relaxation

Breathing

When you hold your breath, on any stroke, the body will end up getting tight during the contact zone. To be as relaxed as possible when hitting a stroke, you want to be exhaling during the contact point. This means that the exhale has to start prior to making contact with the ball.

On the serve, the easiest way to time this is to start your exhale when you reach the trophy position. Once you get into the trophy position (not holding that position, simply passing through it) you'll then want to explode up, into the ball.

This is also when you are most likely to tense up, because you want to create power, the body can sometimes stiffen up and actually ruin your chances of getting more power.

By breathing out during this phase, you'll help the body relax, even though you are going at full speed here.



You may have to play around with the timing of your exhale, some players benefit from starting the exhale just before they make contact.

Test out the timing to see what works best for your game.

Grip Pressure

When you hold your racket, you can apply a lot of pressure or you could hold it very loosely. Good players know when to grip harder, for instance when dealing with a powerful shot at the net, and when to hold loose, for instance when hitting a touch shot like a drop shot or drop volley.

When you serve, you don't want to hold the grip too tight as this will tense up the muscles and restrict your movements.

You want to hold it as loose as possible, without losing control of the racket.

A simple trick that Pete Sampras would use to relax his fingers, was to release a few of them during the lifting phase of his serve.



Sampras would release his pinky, ring and middle finger during the lift into the trophy position and this ensured that his grip pressure was relaxed, allowing his muscles to be loose. You don't need to release your own fingers but you can squeeze the grip prior to the start of your motion and then relax them, this squeeze and release will help you to feel that relaxation in the hand before you start your service action.

Muscle Activation

Another way to help your body relax is to use muscle activation-relaxation in between points. This can be done when going to pick up a ball, when going to your towel or when waiting for your opponent to serve.

You can use this technique on any muscle group but let's focus on the forearm muscles for now, as they play such a major role in pronation during the serve.

Activate your forearm muscles as much as you can by squeezing them as hard as you can, as if you wanted to show off your muscles to someone. Then totally relax them.

By activating them fully for a second, then relaxing them, you'll feel that relaxation that you want to maintain heading into the next point.

You won't want to use this method too much, only when you start feeling tight. Once every few games would do the trick!



[Next Lesson - Singles Strategy](#)

How To Win Singles Matches



Five Tactics To Win More Matches:

1. The Golden Tactic
2. Bread and Butter
3. Coast to Coast
4. Controlling Time
5. Superpowers

Tactic One - The Golden Tactic

If your opponent makes five balls in a point and you make six, you win the point. It's very simple. The golden tactic is less strategy but more a mindset. Any tactic you try to use will only work if you can do it within tactic one - be more consistent than your opponent.

Too often, players will do too much and beat themselves in the match. They'll overhit, go for big second serves and play low percentage tennis.

Very often, all that is needed to win matches at all levels of the game is to simply be more consistent than your opponent. Out-rally them!

Find your opponents threshold, in the first few games of the match, get yourself into a few long rallies and see when your opponent breaks down. Is there a pattern?

Maybe they break down around six shots in, maybe ten shots in. Most players will break down at a certain level and you'll know that it takes an "X" amount of shots to break them down!

The entire match, whenever you need to win a point and don't want to force play too much, you can always fall back on being more consistent than them. Don't feel like you have to do more than that, simply out rally the opponent by being the more consistent player!

Rafa Nadal has used this tactic throughout his career with great results. Out-rallying his opponents and forcing them to break down first.



Tactic Two - Bread and Butter

The second most important tactic is to find your opponent's weakness and exploit it. Your bread and butter strategy to winning tennis points - at all levels!

This is where you'll have to do some research.

In the warm-up, test out the opponent's backhand - do they drive it? Do they slice it?

What sort of grip do they use for both strokes?

An extreme grip on either side will give you some ideas about what they might not like. Give them high balls on both sides, give them low balls, move them around a bit.

How do they deal with all of these different shots?

You'll start to build an image in your mind of what they like and more importantly, what they don't like! Once the match starts, carry this on. Test out as many options as possible in the first few games and you should find something you can exploit. Remember - you don't need to use it on every point, you might want to save it for the big points in the match, break points, deuce points etc. Andy Murray is a master of working out opponents and exploiting their weaknesses!



Tactic Three - Coast to Coast

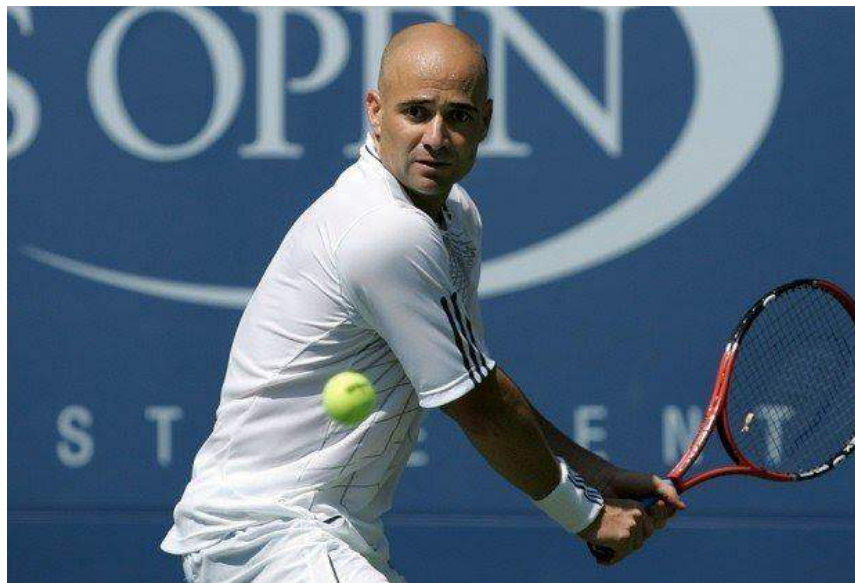
This tactic was the go-to strategy for Andre Agassi and nowadays is used extensively by Novak Djokovic. You move your opponent and force them into breaking down.

Coast to coast represents the two singles sidelines, hit one shot into one side of the court and then the following shot into the open space on the other side.

However, you can also move your opponents around the court with drop shots and lobs, you could hit back behind them and exploit them when they're recovering, you could hit deep, high balls that push them way off the court and then exploit the space near the net. There are many ways to make your opponent run but the key will be to do so in a consistent way. Many players struggle to hit on the run and you might find that it only takes two or three shots in a row to break them down.

Remember, you might not reap the rewards right away, some players will be able to handle you moving them around for a while but slowly they'll start to tire and fatigue will make them break down more often and miss shots they wouldn't normally miss.

Agassi, when playing in slams would often expect a very tight first set and then run away with the next few sets because he wore his opponent down by making them run so much in that first set. He would often have a clear space for an easy winner but would choose to hit a shot he knew his opponent could reach just so the opponent spends more energy chasing down yet another ball. Cruel strategy but highly effective.



Tactic Four - Controlling Time

Time on the tennis court is a precious commodity. Think about it, when you have time, you can set up well for your shots and you can think about what you want to do with the ball. On the flipside, when you don't have time, you feel rushed and hit the ball late, often being forced into errors.

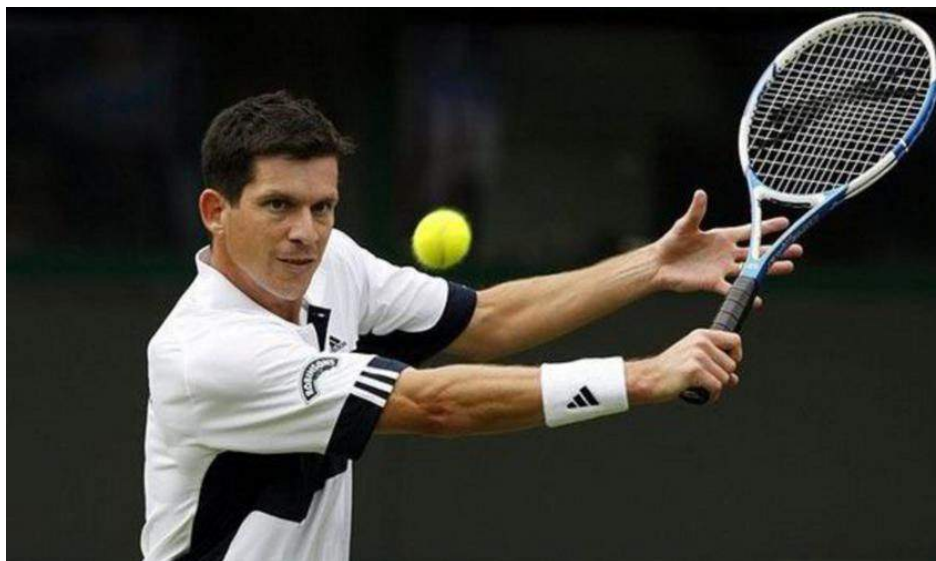
Controlling time is a very effective tactic. There are a few ways you can really take time away from your opponent but we'll focus on one of the most effective - attacking the net.

By approaching the net, you greatly reduce the time your opponent has to set up and execute their shot. You also reduce the space they have to hit into, this combination is often enough to break them down.

When someone comes in against you, think about how you feel?
You see less court and feel like you're being attacked.

To use this tactic effectively, you want to come in on the right balls. This could be when the ball has landed inside the service boxes, off a short second serve, when you're serving or when you have a slower ball. You could also ghost in, when you see your opponent in trouble on the run and they are tracking the ball, often they'll lose track of you in their peripheral vision and you can sneak in to finish the point at the net.

Tim Henman was a master at finishing points off at the net! He even used this strategy to reach the semi-finals of the 2004 French Open.



Tactic Five - Superpowers

We all have unique skills on the tennis court. Some players can generate massive power while other players know how to construct points really well.

This strategy is all about using our strengths, things we do well on the court, to force our opponents into breaking down or giving us easy balls we can put away.

It's important to develop your weapons, this might be your serve or forehand. It could also be your return of serve or backhand slice.

Whatever it is you do well, you need to find a way to use it in matches.

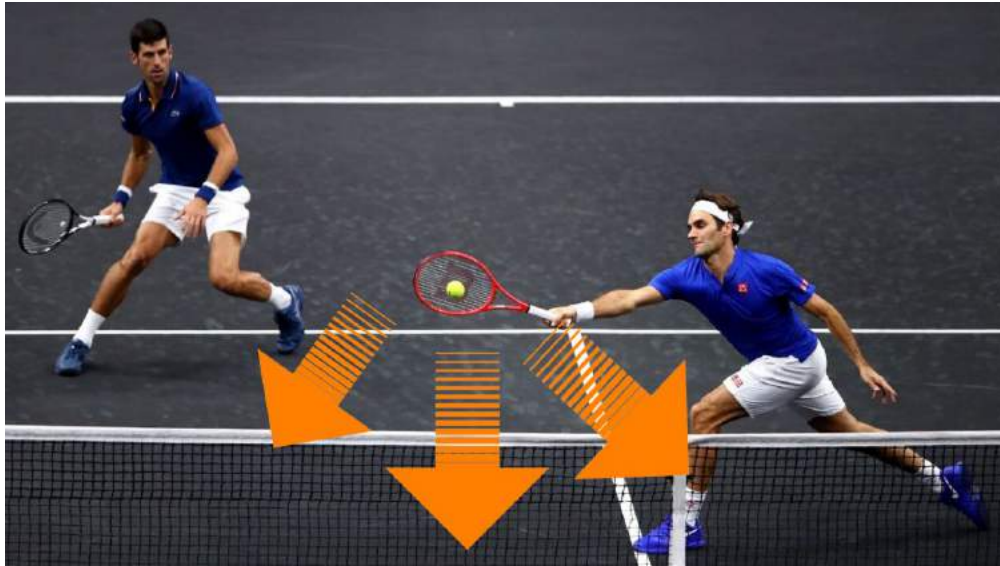
If your forehand down the line is a great shot, you might set it up by hitting short crosscourt shots to create space down the line. You might serve out wide on the deuce side and then look to hit down the line with your first strike.

If you can match up your strength against your opponents weakness, then you'll really be able to exploit them!



Next Lesson - Doubles Strategy

How To Become A Better Doubles Player



Five Ways To Become A Better Doubles Player:

1. Using The Court
2. Controlling The Net
3. How To Pass
4. Serve and Volley
5. Communication

Using The Court

Doubles is a very different game to singles. When we're playing singles, we try to maintain good length and we aim for the baseline. Maintaining good depth allows us to make sure that our opponent cannot attack us. If we hit short balls in singles, we often end up getting punished for it. In doubles, however, we want to use the width of the court and that means aiming towards the tramlines. If we hit the deep in doubles often this will allow the net player to poach and attack with the volley. So instead of thinking about having good depth, in doubles we want to focus on using the angles. By hitting wide, you always keep the ball away from the net player, reducing the chances of them

intercepting and attacking at the net. Using angles also opens up the middle of the court for your team and allows you to exploit that space if you set up the point well.

Controlling The Net

The second thing you should work on and improve to become a better doubles player is to look for those chance balls, this means shorter balls, balls that are floating or balls you feel like you can really put your body weight behind and get into the net. Remember the team who controls the net often wins in doubles and if you're staying on the baseline and grinding, trying to out-rally the other team, it becomes a very hard thing for you and your partner to win!



Often a short or weak second serve will be the perfect chance for you to attack and come to the net. Don't feel like you have to hit your return and stay on the baseline, you could come forward and finish the point with just that return plus the volley.

How To Pass

The next step to becoming a better doubles player is how you deal with the opponents when they're at the net. Too often, singles players will try to overpower the net players

by going for aggressive shots using big swings. This tends to end up creating many errors for the baseliners or balls that good doubles players simply knock off at the net. There are three main ways that you can defeat the net player, the first one is to pass them down the middle. If both of your opponents are at the net, if you hit your shot into the middle of the court, often the opponents will get confused and either leave that ball, or react late and end up rushing the volley. Even if they make it, both players lunging towards the middle ends up opening up space on the side.

By hitting down the middle, you also give yourself the most amount of margin, so going down the middle is your first option when trying to pass. The next option is to hit it into the tramlines but this is a riskier option and it requires a lot of practice to be precise with this passing shot.

The third option is the lob. If both players are at the net and they like to close down, a well executed topspin lob can win you many points in doubles.



You also have the option of setting up the passing shot by hitting the ball into the opponents feet, this means your first shot can go into the players feet, they then have to volley up to make that ball and then you can pass them on the next shot.

So this is the two-step passing shot, you're aiming the first shot into the feet, the opponents then have to volley up and then you have options. You can go into the middle, you can go into the tramlines on either side or you can hit the lob but that first shot has to be a ball that is dipping into the opponents feet and this is normally done with aggressive topspin.

Serve and Volley

The next step to becoming a better doubles player is holding your own service games. This means that you have to calculate where are you serve, with what type of spin and how fast you serve. Very often, singles players will play their normal service games in doubles which often doesn't work. In doubles, it's all about reducing the angles that your opponents have to pass you with, it's also about taking control of the net as early as possible and this means serving and volleying even on the second serve sometimes.

By serving and coming straight into the net, you reduce the amount of court that the returner has, but also you're applying pressure. If your partner is at the net already and then you run in behind your serve, the returner now has two obstacles that they have to pass in order to have a chance to win the point. This is a lot of pressure and by constantly applying the pressure hopefully you'll be able to win many points on your serve just by using the serve and volley.



In general you want to serve either into the body or down the T, this is to reduce the angles that the returner has to play with, if you do serve out wide, remember to tell your partner, if you don't tell your partner, they have a big space down the tramlines to cover so the returner has a lot more chance to pass the net player with those wide serves compared to the T or body ones. If your partner knows you're serving out wide, they can cover the trams and anticipate a down the line return. That is why in general, going down the T or going into the body works best in doubles. Of course, you'll still want to use a wide serve every now and then to keep your opponents guessing and keep them honest on their return games.

Communication

The fifth thing that you can do to become a better doubles player is to communicate well with your partner. This means that if you or your partner plays a bad point, don't get negative and get down on yourself or them but encourage each other and make sure you have a lot of positive feedback even when things are going bad.



By staying positive and energetic, you'll hopefully inspire your partner to do the same. It's hard to be motivated when you see your partner is down or frustrated, but if you look over and see your partner bouncing on their feet, making sure that they give you a high-five or a fist bump after every point, it can uplift you, so you want to do the exact same to them!

By Coach Simon
Top Tennis Training