The Tom Stow

Tennis Teaching System

and

Stroke Developer

Originally Published in 1948



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Reprint Notes from Brent Abel
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Dedication

Legal Stuff

November 2002

Hi and thanks for your interest in Tom's book. Tom wrote this book in 1948 and it was intended more for tennis teachers than for students. Tom was trying to educate tennis professionals as to the best way to teach the game.

When I decided initially to recreate his book into an electronic reproduction, I thought I'd only include Tom's stroke mechanics' instructional sections of the book. I've since reconsidered and decided to simply reproduce the book as it was written.

Part of Tom's teaching system was the development and incorporation of the "Stroke Developer", a teaching aid that enabled students to practice their stroke mechanics by hitting a stationary ball. Tom's theory of using a stationary ball for a better understanding of the "feels" and mechanics of certain strokes is a tremendous teaching tool. I am currently using the PracticeHit™ Stroke Developer in my private and group lessons, and if you currently do not have one, I strongly urge you to consider purchasing this outstanding product. For more information, visit the last page in this book, Recommended Learning Tools

Most of the photos are obviously current, but they are nearly identical poses from his original photos.

And last but not least, back in 1948, that's right, way back then, our society had slightly different opinions of men's and women's athletic abilities. Maybe it wasn't so much the opinion of society but more Tom's... whatever, Tom's references at times to "girls" having a more difficult time to learn certain aspects of the game should not be misunderstood. I believe he was simply telling his audience (tennis professionals) that they may experience different results from boys and girls...! So please, no emails back to me saying Tom Stow was a "so and so"...!

I really hope you enjoy this book. This is not a "quick fix" solution to your ability to learn or improve your tennis. I read this book about 3-4 times a year and I'm always amazed at what I learn each time. Tom really understood the basics of what makes up the different strokes in order for students to enjoy the "all-court" game of tennis.

If you stick with this system, you'll truly have a game for a lifetime. I'd appreciate any feedback and/or questions you may have. Feel free to contact me at brent@webtennis.net or call 925-376-4575.



Dedication...

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Look, I'll be honest up front here… I've been one very lucky person when it comes to having been around the right people at the right people in terms of my opportunity to learn the game from Mr. Stow. After winning the 1984 National 35s Hardcourt Doubles, my first wish was to be able to thank Tom. Unfortunately, Tom had passed away the previous year, and I never got the chance. I'm sure I think of that old codger everyday. He gave me a gift that I'm incredibly thankful for…

Even though I'd known Tom practically all of my life as a kid growing up at the Berkeley Tennis Club, I'd never taken lessons from him until 1979. I literally had to beg the guy to see me. And I'm sure one of the reasons I got in was because of my friendships with **Doug King, John Hubbell, and Steve Stefanki**.

These guys were top Open level players at the time, were seeing Tom on a weekly basis together in Napa, CA, and I guess they took pity on me and let me join their group…!

And how they put up with my whining and complaining during all of those lessons, well, I'll never forever in their debt!

I want to thank one of Tom's former assistant professionals, fellow Berkeley TC member **Bill Crosby**, who allowed me to pick his brain throughout and after my two years of being coached by Tom. Bill was the one who really wrapped the whole thing up for me by simply saying, "you've done a nice job with the strokes, now just go out there and visually find the ball and decide where you want to hit it". And I did, and it worked…! Thanks Bill…

My past and current Associate Professional staff at the California Tennis Club has been just outstanding. Larry, Lindsay, Tim, Christen, Kristin, David, Jasna, and Darrick… you guys are the best and not only am I dang lucky to have you at the club, but the players you've helped will have a sport for a lifetime. Thanks…

I want to express a special thanks to California Tennis Club Professional Larry Axtell who is going to be ticked I'm doing this as I draw attention to him (probably the nicest, most unassuming fellow around), but sorry Larry, you know this Stow stuff better than anyone. Thanks for putting up with my constant flow of questions. You are the master feeder, and I know you've been able to perfect that skill and do it for a million years because of Tom's stroke mechanics. Thanks Larry…

And to all of my pals who have a real passion for and allowed me to talk about this Tom Stow stuff…. Jim MacLennan, Joel Drucker, David McCaig, Jim Irwin, Andy Salonen, Chuck Alloo, Pat Blaskower, David Weber Shapiro, and I know I've forgotten a bunch of you guys and gals here, but I owe all of you one…, thanks.

And finally, my kids… you three inspire the living crud out of me, everyday, I'm serious…

Now clean up those rooms… ! Love you guys…Dad



Legal Stuff... [Back to Table of Contents]

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While every attempt has been made to insure that the information presented here is correct, the contents herein are a reflection of the view of the author, Mr. Tom Stow, and are meant for educational purposes only.

This reprint is not an exact copy of the original book published in 1948. Some text, photos, and illustrations have been omitted, substituted, and/or changed.

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Resell [Back to Table of Contents]

You may not resell this reprint of the Tom Stow Tennis Teaching System and Stroke Developer. However, you may recommend this product to others and shall be paid a commission for any sales directly related to your efforts. Click here to find out how.



About the Author

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This Tennis Teaching System and Stroke Developer is the results of years of practical experience.

Tom D. Stow has had a long and complete record of service in the teaching of tennis.

During his college days he was National Intercollegiate Doubles Champion. At the University of California, he was the Captain of the Varsity Tennis Team in 1927. He became the Professional at the Claremont Country Club in 1931 and held this position until 1942. During this time he was also Tennis Coach at the University of California.

He has been the Head Professional and Manager at the Berkeley Tennis Club in Berkeley, California since 1942.

Among exponents of his coaching are such famous champions as Don Budge, Sarah Palfrey Cooke, Edward Cooke, Margaret Osborne, and Dorothy Head.



Foreword [Back to Table of Contents]

by Donald Budge

I am happy for this opportunity to pay my respects to my coach, Tom Stow, and to tell all those who are interested in the development of tennis what I know about his system of teaching.

Few will question that Tom Stow is the leading teacher of tennis in the world; the number, quality, and success of his pupils attests to this. My own development under his teaching carried me to the top of the tennis world.

When I first went to Tom for instruction, I had already played a good deal of tennis and had developed a fairly advanced game. For four years he was changing and building my game. During that period I had many opportunities to watch his method of teaching beginners as well as advanced pupils, and I was struck by the remarkable results he obtained through with those just starting to play. His simplification of instruction and perfection of the various strokes and footwork and his insistence upon practice of each operation until it becomes automatic gives his pupils a sound foundation in the game.

Tom Stow is manager and head professional at the famous Berkeley Tennis Club, where under his leadership the growth of junior membership has demonstrated the soundness of his system. He and his two associates, Dick Stevens and Bill Crosby, instruct more than four hundred young tennis enthusiasts each week at the club and the various schools and colleges utilizing their services.

The TENNIS STROKE DEVELOPER, which is at the heart of his system, was invented and perfected to assist in explaining and demonstrating each detail of stroke making and footwork. In addition to its use in class work it provides the individual an opportunity for practice and the perfection of his strokes.

This book, unitizing explanations, photographs, and diagrams, is a complete textbook for instructors and players. With the STROKE DEVELOPER and the use of this book, anyone can learn the fundamentals of tennis and by practice learn to play the game with grace, power, and confidence.

Tennis is a great game and one in which participation does not cease when the player leaves school or college. But, like most games, the maximum enjoyment is obtained only when played well. I have traveled over much of the world, playing tennis as an amateur and professional and have been intensely interested in finding out how the game is being developed in various countries. Nowhere in the world have I found a more
complete or better program for teaching tennis than the TOM STOW SYSTEM.



Introduction [Back to Table of Contents]

by Tom D. Stow

While I have written this book primarily for teachers, particularly those instructing class groups, the STROKE DEVELOPER and my TEACHING SYSTEM can be used by individuals, either beginners or advanced pupils, for self-instruction. I have tried to simplify both the system and its application by the use of explanations, pictures, footwork mats, and the STROKE DEVELOPER itself.

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I have tried to simplify both the system and its application by the use of explanations, pictures, footwork mats, and the STROKE DEVELOPER itself. The teacher of tennis need not be himself an outstanding player. This is true, of course, in other sports as well as tennis. My own experience in training dozens of school and college instructors provides ample proof of this fact. I believe that any physical education instructor can teach tennis to beginners and even advanced prayers by following this system and utilizing the TENNIS STROKE DEVELOPER.

It may be helpful in understanding how this system was evolved to give a little historical background of how I developed it. I had played tennis since I was a boy. Although I was not a great player, I enjoyed the game and while in college I won the National Intercollegiate Doubles Championship. I continued to play tennis as a recreational activity after leaving college. When I found that my health was better in an outdoor activity, I realized how fortunate I was to have something I loved to which I could turn.

At the beginning of my professional career I made the same mistake that most others make and tried to teach my early pupils to copy my own game. It soon became apparent, that there was much more to teaching tennis than that and I undertook to study the game of teams as well as other games. This involved not only analyzing and perfecting the footwork and tactics but how best to demonstrate and teach others. In addition to coaching the tennis team at the University of California I was a professional at a famous country club whose activities included golf.

I was impressed by the fact that all golf players, even the dubs understood the basic fundamentals of the game; such things as the pivot, the slow back stroke, holding the left arm straight, keeping the eye on the ball, and the finish or follow-through. I realized that great attention had been given to perfecting golf strokes, and that there were hundreds of competent teachers of golf. Of course, in some respects it is easier to learn a golf stroke because the ball is always stationary and the timing is a matter of the stroke itself and is, made while the player is in a stationary position. I noted too that boxers practice their form and footwork on a heavy stationary bag and football players perfect tackling and blocking on a dummy.



It was to provide a similar opportunity for tennis players that I began experimenting with what ultimately has led to the present TENNIS STROKE DEVELOPER. By using this mechanism, it is now possible to practice strokes and footwork with a stationary ball. This is extremely important as it allows the pupil to practice a given stroke over and over until it is mastered without worrying about timing the ball.



The Tom Stow STROKE DEVELOPER

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The STROKE DEVELOPER (see diagram below) has many advantages in the teaching of tennis. It provides a means of quickly giving the beginner the feel of hitting the ball correctly, and the advanced player a dependable method of developing strokes, footwork and form.

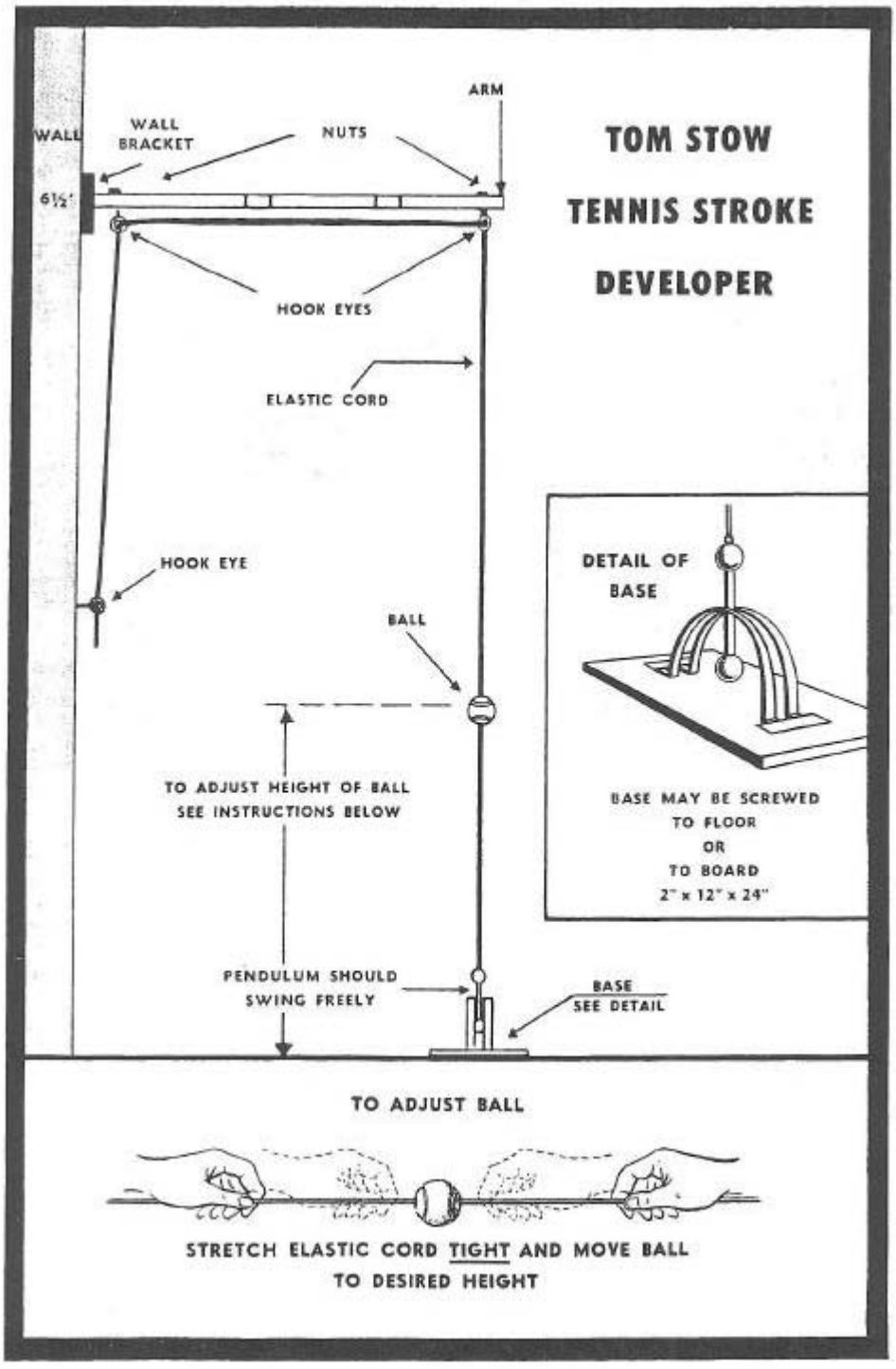
It makes practice and teaching independent of weather conditions and continuous throughout the year. The pupil, of course, learns much faster because the instruction can be precise. And last, and most important, the STROKE DEVELOPER makes possible the handling of groups and classes and allows professionals and physical education instructors to play and carry through long-range and well thought out programs. With it, groups can be taught with ease as the demonstrations of a stroke can be made exactly and in close proximity to a group of pupils.

By using more than one STROKE DEVELOPER, larger classes can be handled by breaking the class up into groups and putting an assistant or an advanced pupil in charge of each STROKE DEVELOPER with the instructor supervising the entire class.

The Footwork Diagrams, which have been a more recent innovation to my Teaching System, I feel will be a great help to teachers for they make the teaching of footwork very easy and very exact. Furthermore, the pupil sees an actual picture of what he is trying to master.

It is my hope, that through this Teaching System, made up of the Book, the STROKE DEVELOPER and the Footwork Diagrams that many more and better tennis players will be developed everywhere.

REPRINT NOTE: A modern version of Tom's STROKE DEVELOPER is the PracticeHit™ Stroke Developer. You may order this product from the Learning Tools page in this book.


TOM STOW
TENNIS STROKE
DEVELOPER
WALL
WALL BRACKET
NUTS
ARM
6½'
HOOK EYES
ELASTIC CORD
HOOK EYE
BALL
TO ADJUST HEIGHT OF BALL
SEE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW
PENDULUM SHOULD
SWING FREELY
BASE
SEE DETAIL
DETAIL OF
BASE
BASE MAY BE SCREWED
TO FLOOR
OR
TO BOARD
2" x 12" x 24"
TO ADJUST BALL
STRETCH ELASTIC CORD TIGHT AND MOVE BALL
TO DESIRED HEIGHT



How to Teach a Class

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Class Instructions

Class instruction is the most important phase in the teaching of tennis. This is true because the great majority of players must learn in this way. On its proper use hinges the future importance of the game for thousands, yes, millions, of children in classes in schools, colleges and those given by professional teachers. If tennis is to grow and gain the place in the world of sports that it so rightly deserves, the pupils must be taught and given a method of learning the fundamentals at the very start of their careers.

Few physical education instructors who teach tennis have had the opportunity or time to learn the game, let alone the fundamentals of tennis; fewer still have had time to study how to *get results* from class instruction. I know this to be true from actual experience, for I taught dozens of elementary, high school and college teachers, who are a most conscientious group of people, but confess that when it comes to teaching tennis classes they feel badly handicapped.

As a matter of fact, most professional teachers have their problems with class instruction. There are several reasons for this. The foremost is the problem of keeping up the interest and enthusiasm of the pupil as it is difficult to give him even the barest fundamentals in class instruction. This has always been hard to solve as even when the teacher gives a clear explanation of what he wants the pupil to do, individual pupils, in attempting it, require so much of the teacher's time that the others are prone to lose interest and feel neglected. With the aid of the STROKE DEVELOPER this major problem can be solved, for corrections and explanations can be made easily and demonstrated with full participation by the class on the spot.

Before discussing the various types of classes there are certain physical conditions that should be considered. As backboards are extremely beneficial in the development of players, they should be provided for whenever possible. Handball courts, fences and gymnasium walls are all good. If these are not available, serious consideration should be given to well built back boards, large enough to handle several pupils at once.

Good courts in sufficient numbers will of course add much to the interest and development of the game. Civic and personal interest in the promotion of new courts can be created by the running of various types of tournaments.

The lack of adequate courts should not interfere or delay an active tennis instruction program; because if sufficient interest in playing is developed the building of courts by local communities invariably follow.



Teaching Beginners [Back to Table of Contents]

The question I am frequently asked is, "How do you start off a class of *absolute* beginners - What do you say and what do you do first?" I feel therefore that special attention should be given this group, for it must be that many teachers feel lost when starting this type of class. The answer to this problem is not difficult if we realize that interest increases the more we learn about a subject.

Therefore in starting off a group of beginners a fairly full explanation should be given at the start of the rules and scoring of tennis. This is necessary as all beginners want to get out and play immediately, and although this preliminary playing does not help in learning the strokes it will create interest and give the player an idea of timing and court position.

How much should be told at this time depends on the age of your group and whether they are boys or girls. Naturally, if the group is composed let us say, of 12-year-old girls, the explanation should be simpler and briefer than if the group is of college age. Then a fuller explanation should be made because an older group can grasp more and should have a better understanding of what they are working for. How much and in what way it should be told is up to the teacher, but careful consideration should be given to this point, for *remember* this is the group's first impression both of the teacher and the game. I suggest that the explanation at this time be limited to the rules and scoring of the game, and that any mention of tactics be left for a later time.

The next step in the lesson is to give a simple demonstration of the strokes and why each stroke is used. This will clear up quickly the names of the strokes and give a more complete picture of the game. For instance, by dropping a ball on his right side, the instructor can demonstrate the forehand drive. The exact method of doing this will be explained in a later paragraph, but for the moment the instructor need be concerned only that the stroke be made slowly, so that each pupil can see plainly.

Explain that the reason a stroke is made to the side instead of in front of the body is that the action of the ball can be controlled and that high and low shots can be easily and correctly played. The pupils should be shown that it is faulty to play the ball in front of the body (and most of them will want to do just that) because controlled speed is lost and low shots are virtually impossible. The backhand should then be demonstrated in the same way. Emphasize that the backhand, although it may be a little harder to learn at first (because whatever the pupil has hit or swung at in the past has been on the other side), can be learned by everyone and can be hit just as hard and just as accurately as the forehand.

After the backhand stroke the service should be demonstrated. In the case of a good many physical education teachers a complete demonstration of the service is impossible, as they have not had time to learn a "finished" serve. However. a simple serve such as holding the racket in a ready position above the shoulder and then tossing the ball, and hitting it in the court will do. If the instructor can show



how to cut or spin the ball and how this action helps to control and curve the ball down into the court, it will help tremendously in giving the pupils a better picture of what to strive for. For those teachers who cannot do this, I recommend that they study the instruction on the service and practice until they can make this demonstration. A teacher who can, should show a finished serve, as this will not only thrill the pupils for they always get a "kick" out of a fast serve but will also show them the ultimate for which they will be aiming.

Before actually letting the pupils try these strokes themselves I think that a short demonstration, of the volley, half volley or pickup, and the smash should be given. In the case of the volley, use only a blocking stroke or no stroke at all in this first lesson. Let the pupils see that by just putting the racket in front of the approaching ball that the ball will bounce back. Explain that accuracy and steadiness rather than speed are the main points of this shot.

For the smash I would suggest a moderately hit shot from a ready position (same position as serve). In other words get under the ball in a ready position, with racket above shoulders and hit the ball slowly enough so that the pupils can see the action. Try always to remember that the beginner has *no conception* of how a ball is hit or how a stroke is made, so *slowness* in a demonstration will be a great help in allowing him to see what is taking place and fix in his mind the correct action. For the half volley I suggest holding the racket slightly in back of where you are going to meet the ball dropping the ball in front of the racket, and stroking it as it starts to rise. This stroke is not important at first other than to show the pupils that a ball may be hit on the rise.

Now that the pupils have seen the action of the ball on the various shots, demonstration on the STROKE DEVELOPER will clearly show how the strokes are made and what must be learned to acquire correct form.

However, let me emphasize again that before the strokes are actually to be taught, the above explanations and demonstrations should be short and to the point, for the pupils are anxious to start "hitting" balls and lengthy preliminaries tend to decrease their interest. *Fifteen to twenty minutes is ample me for this first phase of the lesson.*

I always start teaching the forehand first as it is the more natural stroke and some means of starting the ball must be taught the pupil so that practice and play can begin.

First, the grip for the forehand should be explained. I have found that the quickest and most exact way of teaching the forehand is to have each pupil practice the stroke first on the STROKE DEVELOPER.

As soon as he has the general idea, then let him drop balls and hit them from a stationary position. The method I use is to have the pupil hold the ball in his left hand, arm fully extended and in such a position that the ball will bounce to his side and slightly in front of his left toe. The racket is held back opposite the right hip, the weight on the right foot, and the left foot on the ground directly in front.

The ball is dropped, not thrown, towards the ground or up in the air. The reasons



for this are that it places the ball in the right spot and it does not cause the pupil to lose his balance. After the ball is dropped and just as it starts to rise the pupil shifts his weight to his left foot, without stepping forward, and strokes the ball.

In many cases the pupil cannot time the ball at all. If this happens the quickest remedy is to shorten the stroke in order to simplify the timing. It will save time too if the instructor will reach around the pupil and hold his hand as he makes the stroke and will also help him to get the "feel". Suggesting that at first he try to knock the ball a few feet will put him more at ease and will bring about faster results. A box of old balls should be placed behind the pupils and after each one has tried the stroke he can help himself to the balls. Before the lesson is over the actual stroking of an approaching ball should be tried.

The best method is for the teacher to take the box of balls some fifteen to twenty feet out in front of the pupils and toss the balls underhand to them. The pupils should stand in the same position as they did when bouncing the ball themselves and line up along the base line. The teacher then moves along in front of them, tossing slow and accurate balls to each one in turn.

During the opening lessons too much stress should not be placed on form, as the pupil will be too busy trying "just" to hit the ball. The main thoughts to convey at first (see ABC's of Teaching) are: To wait on the back foot until the ball hits the ground before shifting weight to front foot; to play the ball at the side, approximately opposite the belt buckle; and to be in balance at the finish of the shot.

As the pupils progress, more emphasis should be put on the start and the finish, for if the stroke is started and finished correctly, the middle will usually take care of itself and a sound stroke will be in the making. The mechanics of the stroke should be practiced on the STROKE DEVELOPER at the beginning of each lesson, as this will quickly give the "feel", and individual corrections can be made at once. If during the lesson a pupil loses the idea or cannot get the feel, take him back immediately to the STROKE DEVELOPER. By so doing a great deal of time and effort can be saved.

If more than one pupil is being taught, it is important that the teacher know how to line up a class. This will be discussed more fully later but briefly, using the STROKE DEVELOPER, the class should be lined up one step back of the ball and to the side. Footprints should be used so that the pupil will be in the correct position.

When teaching with "live" balls the first pupil should be six feet behind the base line and the others lined up behind him if just one stroke is being taught.

As the first lesson ends the thought that "anyone can learn" should be force-fully placed in the beginner's mind - and that the pupils who hit the most balls against a wall or rally the most with each other will be the quickest to learn.

The best suggestions for methods of practice for beginners are: First, practice bouncing a ball on the ground and then try keeping a ball in the air using the



correct grip. This will help set the feel of grip and give the beginner "touch".

Second, practice against a wall. To make this interesting, I suggest making a game out of it by having the pupil first tap the ball five times against the wall from six feet away without error, then from ten feet, fifteen feet and so on, until he is some forty feet away. In each position he should make his five shots without error before trying the next distance. When starting from his closest position to the wall, he should use no backstroke. As he moves his position further away, his backstroke should lengthen out.

Third; rally with each other a short distance apart; the service lines being the ideal position. During the practice the pupils should try to turn sideways and play the ball opposite them, trying not to run forward or backward but only sideways. Although the object should be to hit the ball to each other on the first bounce, this will not always be possible and many balls will have to be hit on the fly, on the second or third bounce. In this practice a very short stroke should be used, little more than a tap. By so doing, the pupil will quickly acquire steadiness and the habit of hitting the ball to the side. How soon they should practice from behind the base line is up to the teacher, for naturally some pupils will progress faster than others.

By the second or third lesson the backhand grip (see Grips) and stroke should be shown and practiced. To practice this the pupil holds the racket back, his left hand above his right and opposite his right foot. The ball is tossed straight up a few inches, and as the ball bounces the pupil steps forward and makes the stroke. By tossing the ball up in the air, the pupil will have time to put his left hand back under the racket before the stroke, thus giving him added support and strength.

It should be brought out at this time that only one stroke at a time should be practiced against the wall. For example, if the forehand is being practiced then all shots should be played with this stroke. If the ball comes too far over on the backhand side and cannot be played on the forehand then stop the ball and start again. If the backhand is the stroke being practiced then reverse the instruction. The reason for practicing this way is that it allows the pupil to concentrate on one thing at a time.

If the strokes are practiced in the right way by starting the ball from the beginners' position and as soon as the stroke is finished the pupil immediately returns to a ready position (never facing the wall), he will have much more time and therefore be able to learn exactly and much faster. If both shots are practiced at once the shots will be far too fast and all semblance of form will be gone. As form is the basis of good tennis, and striving for this is the one sure way of keeping up interest, this point should not be overlooked.

The serve should be explained in one of the early lessons as without it the pupil cannot play the game. A simple service, as previously explained, will do for the time being. If the pupils are of college age, an early explanation of the slice service should be made. If they are college men they can ordinarily pick up this stroke quickly. A strong service is not needed in the early stages of the game and, in fact, if it is developed too soon is likely to be a detriment rather than an asset, for the player with a good serve will depend on it too much and his ground strokes will remain undeveloped.



Class Position for Practice and Use of Footwork Patterns

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Putting pupils in the correct position for practice either on the STROKE DEVELOPER or when throwing balls is very important as the correct positions save time and give organization to the class. When using the STROKE DEVELOPER the instructor stands between the ball and the wall and the rest of the class should line up beside the first pupil who stands with his feet on the footprints "facing the net." From this position the entire class can see and hear all that goes on. As soon as pupil No.1 has made the stroke he goes to the end of the line and pupil No.2 steps on the footprints. This procedure of an endless chain goes on until the instructor is satisfied they are ready for actual practice. When instruction is given from positions where the footprints cannot be used the same procedure takes place. With more advanced classes it is sometimes better for the teacher to be out in front, in line of flight of the ball, so that he can see the stroke from a different angle.

The No. 1 position as shown in the Strokes section of the book, should be used until the stroke can be done properly from this position. Then use the No.2 position. After this latter position, that of running to the ball, has been mastered; the teacher can then place the students in any position from the "ground ball" that he thinks beneficial, i.e., directly behind the ball - further to the side - to the side and back eight or ten feet - in front and to the side of the ball. In other words, any position that the pupil will be faced with in actual play.

For the backhand he simply reverses the instruction.

When teaching the serve, the instructor should stand to the side of the pupil. The rest of the class lines up back and to the side of the first pupil.

When throwing balls to the class and teaching just one stroke, the class should be lined up in single file, six to eight feet behind the base line. As soon as the first pupil has made the shot, he goes behind the others to the end of the line and the next pupil steps into position. When teaching both forehand and backhand to a class, two lines should be formed. This is much faster as there is always one pupil in position awaiting his turn. If all pupils are practicing both strokes (2 lines formed) then as soon as one finishes making a stroke he steps to the back of the other line. If they are practicing just the same stroke they simply step to the back of the same line.

In teaching classes it must always be remembered that too much time should not be devoted to each individual pupil because if this is done the others will become uninterested and lose their concentration. Quick and exact instruction given to each pupil as he completes his shot will help tremendously in keeping up the interest and enthusiasm of the entire class.

This brings up the subject of uniform classes. As nearly as possible classes should be composed of children of the same age and advancement in the game. Nothing



will destroy the interest in a class faster than being held back by one pupil who is either slow in learning or behind the class in instruction. Whenever this occurs the instructor should rearrange the classes so that they are as nearly uniform in ability as possible. If this is not possible, the "slow" pupil should be encouraged to do extra practice so that he will catch up with the class.

The psychological aspect of teaching is just as important as the technical knowledge of the subject, for good teaching consists of watching the reactions of all the pupils and encouraging and inspiring each one at the proper time. To me this side of teaching is the most interesting and important, for not only are desire and interest created by it, but the spirit of the game is attained and the sportsmanship of the pupil is developed in direct ratio to the instructor's attitude and understanding.

A-B-C of Teaching Strokes

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Ground Strokes - Forehand and Backhand

There are three main points in teaching these strokes:

1. Ready



2. Step In



3. Finish



Many would add playing the ball to the side, bending the knees, straightening the arm etc., but these are all details which follow almost entirely by themselves if these three counts are done correctly.

For example, if the ball is not played to the side, the finish will not be right. The reverse is also true (I refer to it as teaching in reverse--but it works), that is to say, that by practicing a correct finish, the ball after a few such shots automatically will be played at the side in the right position. And so it is with practically all of the details of the strokes.

Three quarters of all the work is done by these three counts. For those instructors who are teaching championship players it is necessary to know all the detailed corrections and how to get at them, but that is a subject in itself which is reserved for only a few teachers who have made a concentrated study of tennis and had years of experience. Other than a few pertinent suggestions which I will make along this line, it has no place in this book as the main purpose is, as stated before, to present a simple and sure method of learning and teaching fundamentals of tennis.

In teaching point No.1 to beginners, it is somewhat different (but only in degree) from teaching the same to more advanced players. The former are taught to turn and to take the racket back in one motion. This is done by turning the shoulders and body first, followed by the arm and racket which is extended to the back end of the stroke.

This is essential at first as the pupil is immediately put in a position where, with nothing to confuse him, he is able to practice hitting the ball. To insure that the



pupil is in position in time, he should first be taught to step to the ball of the STROKE DEVELOPER, stop and then step in and finish. As he improves, the stop changes to a pause, but it should be a definite pause for some time. When being taught with a "live" ball the toss should be very slow in order to give the pupil plenty of time to pause before stepping in. When first teaching it is a good idea to give the pupil a little head start, that is, let him start just before the ball is thrown.

If the arm is held to the side during the No.1 count as shown in the pictures demonstrating the stroke, the beginner will find the timing difficult and it will tend to confuse him to such an extent that trying anything more than just hitting the ball becomes practically impossible. As the player improves, there should be less emphasis on taking the racket back, for as the speed of play increases this action tends to make the stroke jerky, cut down his speed of foot and cause him to be off balance.

Exaggeration in teaching of this point is similar to the exaggerated action of the fingers when beginning the piano; if a beginner wishes to become a good pianist he must practice in this manner.

Point No.2 is best taught with the use of Footwork Diagrams; as these plainly show the' position 'of the feet. The reason for practicing to step in directly toward the net is to give the pupil the feeling of using his weight in hitting the ball. The advanced player will do so correctly even when he has not time to step in - or when he must cross his front foot more to the side so that it will give him more "court coverage" and better balance.

But to insure good results be sure that the pupil practices "stepping in" exactly as shown on the footprints.

Point No.3, the finish, could also be termed the "all important finish" for this part keeps the stroke "set" and under control. The quickest way of obtaining the "feel" of hitting the stroke correctly is to hold the finish for a count or two. By doing this the pupil can also check his balance. In fact, this is the only sure way of checking balance, which is of utmost importance in control of the shot. If a pupil is having difficulty in finishing correctly or controlling the ball, I very often have him hold his finish for quite some time after completion of the shot.

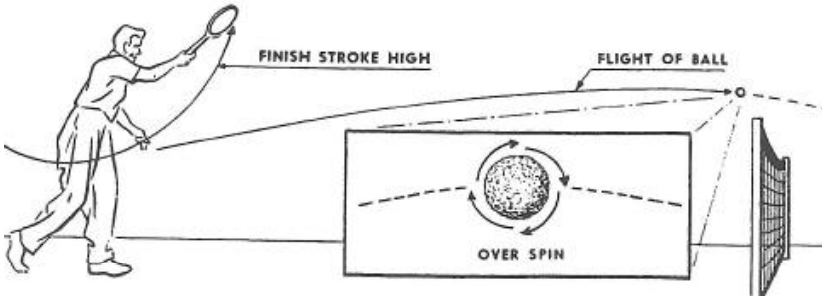
This can be practiced very easily against the wall (35 to 40 feet away) by holding the finish of the shot until the ball strikes the wall. A pupil who will conscientiously practice this way against a wall will be amazed at how quickly he gains accuracy and steadiness and "gets the feel" that the stroke does the work.

Summing up this phase of teaching it is turn, step and finish. Getting ready and waiting for the ball is done to a long count of one, and two and three come almost simultaneously. If the teacher will call out "one. . ." as the ball leaves his hand, and draws it out until the pupil has stepped or run to the right position, then call "two and three" in time with the step and finish, he can give the pupil the rhythm and practically time the shot for him. With these points in mind it must be quite obvious by now how easily a pupil can learn this stroke against a wall practicing one point at a time.



The Action of the Ball and How it Should be Hit

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In teaching or practicing groundstrokes, I have found it advisable to stay with forehand and backhand drives and completely eliminate the slices and chops.

There are many reasons for this method. To start with, the drive is the basic stroke of the game. It is the strongest and most "forcing" of all shots, and yet can be played defensively. By hitting up on the ball and finishing the stroke high, the flight of the ball has more of an arc and because of this arc, is a safer shot. This, of course, allows for steadier play and the player's confidence rises rapidly.

By coming up on the shot the player learns to use his weight for it is impossible to hit up and finish correctly without doing so. This is not true with undercut shots. In first teaching a forehand or backhand it is best to use a slight amount of over-spin. This will help to make a still large arc in the
flight of the ball, as a ball tends to curve the way it spins.

One of the first things that should be taught is the action of a ball. Undercuts, side slices, flat and over spun balls should be explained and demonstrated. It must be remembered that average pupils, especially girls, do not know how or why a ball curves. Demonstrations of an over-spin drive and the topspin serve should be exaggerated if possible so that the pupil will see clearly how the action of the ball affects its flight.

The undercut on a shot should be shown so that the pupil can see the ball travel in a straight line and can readily understand that the margin of safety of this shot when played at high speed is very small and therefore is not the best shot to learn. If all this is explained in the beginning, unnecessary delay and misunderstandings are avoided.

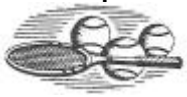
There are two ways of putting over-spin on a ball: One is by rolling the wrist and the other by "coming up" on the ball with a firm wrist which keeps the racket free from turning over. Rolling the face of the racket over the ball is the easiest method of getting topspin but is faulty because the changing position of the racket causes the shot to be erratic.

The correct method is to come up underneath the ball very slightly. The diagram shows clearly this action and should be studied and practiced by each pupil until



he can demonstrate the action to the instructor. In many cases the instructor will find that the pupil must be taught to exaggerate this action before he can clearly feel and see what he is trying to do.

I cannot overemphasize this point for until the pupil fully masters this principle, he will not understand the basic principle of sound tennis. How a racket is held plays a very important part in the matter of coming up under a ball and is fully explained under the heading of grips.



Grips In General

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In the explanation of grips only general descriptions can be given as any type of grip can be changed slightly by spreading the fingers, moving the heel of the hand up or down the handle, or by using a short or long grip.

These small degrees of change make little or no difference and usually the individual should use what feels best to him. A short grip, that of being up the handle an inch or so, adds steadiness to the stroke but tends to cause tensing of the muscles in the arm, while the longer grip, which I recommend for all who can use it, that of holding the racket so that the little finger is on the leather at the butt of the racket, adds more power and helps materially towards more relaxed play.

When in waiting position the racket should be held with the forehand grip with the 1eft hand supporting the racket. It is easier to change from the forehand grip to the backhand than vice versa and players who wait with a backhand grip, invariably have weak and awkward forehands.



By holding the racket perpendicular, both sides of the racket can be used - one for the forehand and the opposite side for the backhand, without changing the angle of the racket. This modern method makes for better strokes and more exact play. The old method of changing the position of the racket, thereby using only one side, causes erratic play and decidedly weakens the backhand.

FOREHAND

If a player has been playing tennis long enough to have a natural grip for this stroke, it is probably wise to stay with it. Although in the case of an extreme Western grip, which is under the handle, or an extreme Continental grip which is on top of the handle, I think it wise to change. If a player is dissatisfied and his grip is causing a definite error, or he is a beginner, I recommend the Eastern grip which is obtained by standing the racket on the side of the frame (short strings perpendicular) and "shaking hands" with it. This grip can also be obtained by laying the racket flat on the ground, first finger pointing slightly up the handle, first knuckle and heel of the hand on the top flat bevel of the handle.

I consider this grip (eastern forehand) to be best for the average pupil as it combines the power of the Western grip with the controls of the Continental and the natural tendency of this grip is to cause the player to come up under the ball.

The Western grip is faulty on low shots, tends to cause too much over-spin and makes changing the grip for the backhand stroke more difficult and less sure. The Continental grip is good because the same grip can be used for all strokes. However, it is quite difficult to learn to use it on the forehand side and the tendency of this grip is to undercut the ball. Although steadiness is usually



acquired the shot is almost always lacking in speed and unless a player has a strong wrist I do not recommend it.

BACKHAND

The backhand grip which I recommend is acquired by turning the hand from an eighth to a quarter turn (depending on the forehand grip) towards the body, so that the hand is on top of the racket. The thumb should not be quite straight up but slightly across the back of the handle. It is not always necessary to keep the thumb on the handle but I recommend it strongly to all beginners as it adds strength and helps to "set the grip." If a pupil has difficulty in coming up and driving this shot and is inclined to undercut the ball, the grip may be changed (temporarily) still further around until the thumb is almost straight up the back. This grip may be used for quite some time as it will help the pupil to get the feel of driving his backhand, and can easily be changed back later on.

When first learning a pupil should practice changing from a forehand grip to a backhand grip without using a ball. When pivoting he should try to be relaxed as he turns the foot and shoulders, letting the arms go with him, and watching to be sure the face of the racket does not move when changing the grip.

SERVICE

The service grip is taught differently from the other grips for the correct grip is too difficult for the average beginner and should not be used until the player is pretty well advanced. As most boys throw better than girls, they may be taught the correct grip sooner because the action of the arm and wrist when serving is similar to that of throwing. I recommend starting beginners with an Eastern forehand grip, and having them stay with the grip until they have a fairly steady serve.

The correct grip for serving is to hold the racket with the backhand grip with the thumb around the racket resting on the third finger. This grip may be modified by moving the heel of the hand toward the forehand grip. The best time to teach this grip to the pupils is best left to the judgment of the instructor but once used, should be used consistently until mastered. A good way to get used to this grip is to serve a ball at a certain spot on a wall until control is gained and the grip feels "natural." This will not take long if the pupil checks his grip between each shot.

VOLLEY
In teaching beginners it is best to use two grips, the backhand grip (Eastern one-handed backhand) for the backhand volley and the Eastern forehand grip for the forehand volley. If a pupil shows particular aptitude for volleying or is advanced, I recommend that a slightly modified Continental grip be used, so that there is no necessity for changing the grip, thus making for faster reactions. By "slightly modified" I mean moving the heel of the hand just slightly towards the Eastern grip.

SMASH
The teaching of the grip for this shot is much like the volley inasmuch as the beginner will first use the Eastern forehand grip and later the Continental. Further explanation of the smash is made under Strokes.

Eastern Forehand



Palm on the side of the handle. "V" formed by thumb & index finger aligns with right bevel of racket handle.

Eastern Backhand



Index finger knuckle on the top of the handle in between the two bevels.

Two Handed Backhand



Left hand is Eastern Forehand, right hand is either Continental, Modified Continental, or Eastern Backhand, but NOT Eastern Forehand

Continental



"V" formed by thumb and index finger aligns with left bevel of racket handle

Modified Continental



"V" formed by thumb and index finger aligns in between left & right bevels of racket handle.

Western Forehand

Palm is placed underneath handle.



Groundstrokes

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Forehand and Backhand

To get the most out of these shots, depth must be learned.

By "depth" is meant hitting the ball deep in the court as close to the base line as possible. The average player does not give enough thought to this part of the game and in fact quite often does not realize that he is hitting short. This is the basis for a "forcing game" which is explained on a later page. The oftener a player hits the ball deep in the court the less often his opponent will be able to run him, force him out of position into an error, or make an outright placement. By keeping his opponent back with deep shots the player will cause him to make weaker shots and will therefore have the advantage of playing easier and shorter shots.

Practice depth in rallying, in play and especially on the return of serve. The return of serve is the hardest shot in the game to master and if a player is trying for the top ranks he should spend a good deal of time on this shot. A good way to practice this other than playing is to have someone serve only to either the backhand or forehand in one particular court so that the player can practice one stroke at a time.

He should practice one particular shot, for example the deep "cross court," until satisfied and then practice one down the line in the same manner. In practicing both groundstrokes the cross-court shot should be learned first as it is the easiest to "come up under", helps the body action, and in the case of the backhand is the basic and most used shot in tennis. The shot down the line, of course, must be learned but as this shot is usually played "flatter" with less body pivot, it should be learned after the cross-court shot.

Short shots (those played up closer to the net) have a very definite place in tennis but as they tend to cause the player to shorten or choke his shots, cut down his speed and in general make for "tricky" play instead of a forceful type, this phase of the game should be used in a very limited way until the player's game is pretty well developed. The main reasons for using short shots are to break up your opponent's rhythm, pull him out of position and worry him into playing in closer, thus making it harder for him to play against your depth.

Practicing deep shots does much to develop correct form, for it automatically causes the player to swing more freely, follow through, step in, and adds much to the rhythm of the shot. This is certainly more easily said than done as it is not only technically hard to acquire depth but it is also mentally hard to resist the temptation of using short shots when an opponent is out of position. Most players do just this and while they win in the early stages, they acquire habits and a mental picture of the game that limits them when they try for the top ranks.

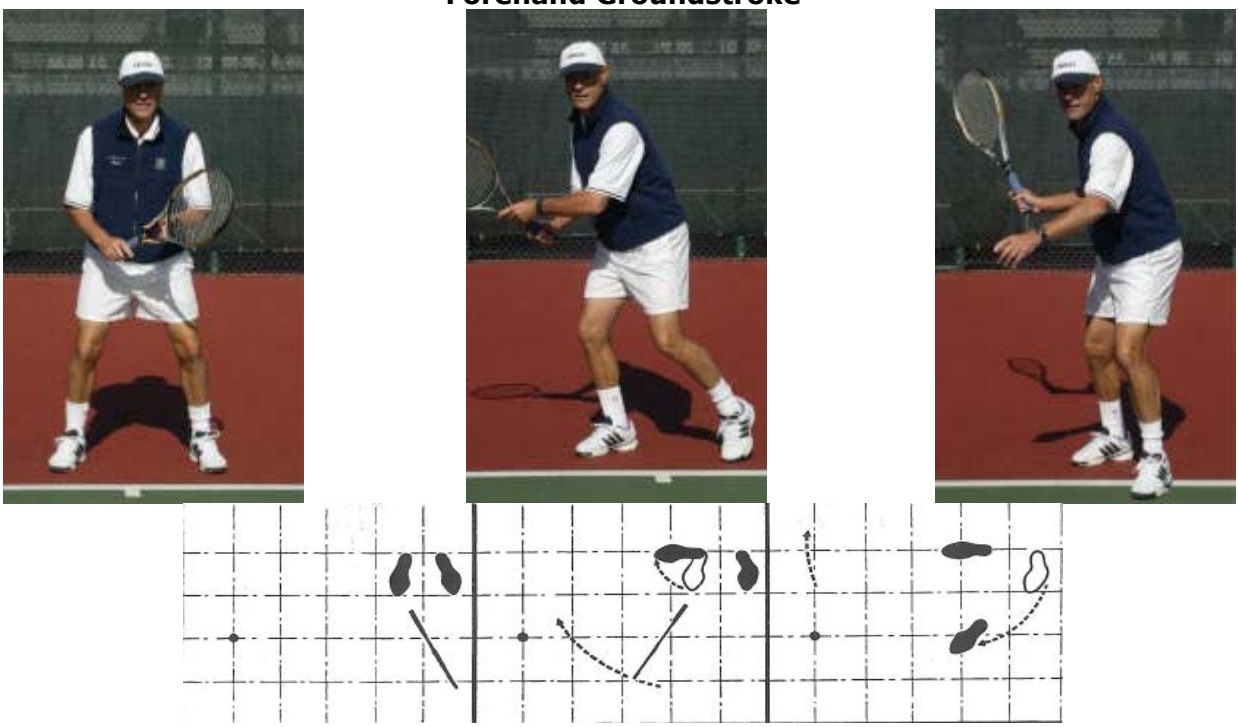
Although I am an all out advocate of the flat or slightly over spun shot, the undercut shot has a definite place in the game. Whether intentional or



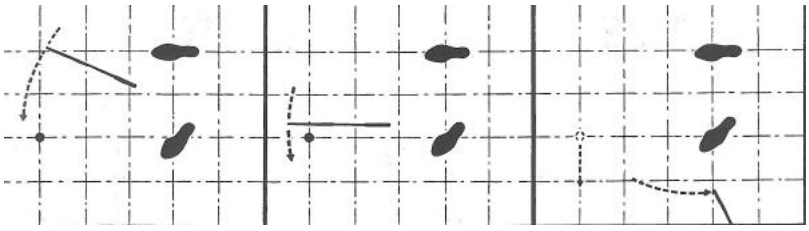
unintentional, all players will undercut the ball at times. There are times on a purely defensive shot that a player has no choice. A fast wide shot that can barely be reached is the best example. Against such a shot the player is just trying to get the ball back so that speed is not a factor, and as undercutting the ball makes for steady play, this is definitely the shot to use.

Because there are such shots, and when playing against a hard hitting opponent there will be many, an undercut ball should be used for defensive purposes and only when necessary as it is too easy to slip into the habit of being a purely defensive player. There are other reasons for undercutting the ball and that is to break up the opponent's game by giving him little or no pace to hit against and by mixing him up with sliced balls. However, in playing against the better players, the spin of the ball has little effect. So if you are trying for the tops advice is to develop your own game so that you will not have to depend on weakening the opposition by such means before you can beat him.

Forehand Groundstroke









FOREHAND FOOTWORK:

Take waiting position approximately three feet away and two feet back of the "practice" ball.

(1) Put weight on right foot as you turn it parallel with base line.

(2) Step forward toward the net with left foot, as you start to stroke the ball.

(3) Ball at impact should be opposite the belt buckle. Feet should be parallel with sidelines. Right knee should be bent so as to allow hip to turn in.

(4) At completion of stroke bring left foot back. Player is now in a ready or waiting position.

(5) After having done this to satisfaction, start approaching the ball from a distance of six to eight feet. Start with right foot and take three quick steps. Player should arrive on right foot ready to step in and hit. Gradually increase the distance until the player can run from any spot and arrive in the correct position.

FOREHAND STROKE:

(1) From waiting position turn shoulders sideways, sliding elbow slightly back. Pause before stroking the ball. Player is now in a position ready to stroke the ball.

(2) In stroking the ball, head of racket is held up on the back swing so that the wrist is in a natural position.

(3) At the farthest point back, on the back stroke, hand and racket should be at least straight behind the player and head of racket as high as his head.

(4) A slight amount of wrist movement is used at the end of the backswing; very little or no wrist for beginners.

(5) When actual contact is made with ball, wrist should be firm and arm straight.

(6) The follow-through is extremely important. At the finish of stroke, hand should be in front of left shoulder. Player's shoulders should be almost parallel with the net, and head of racket above his hand. Arms bend naturally at the finish.

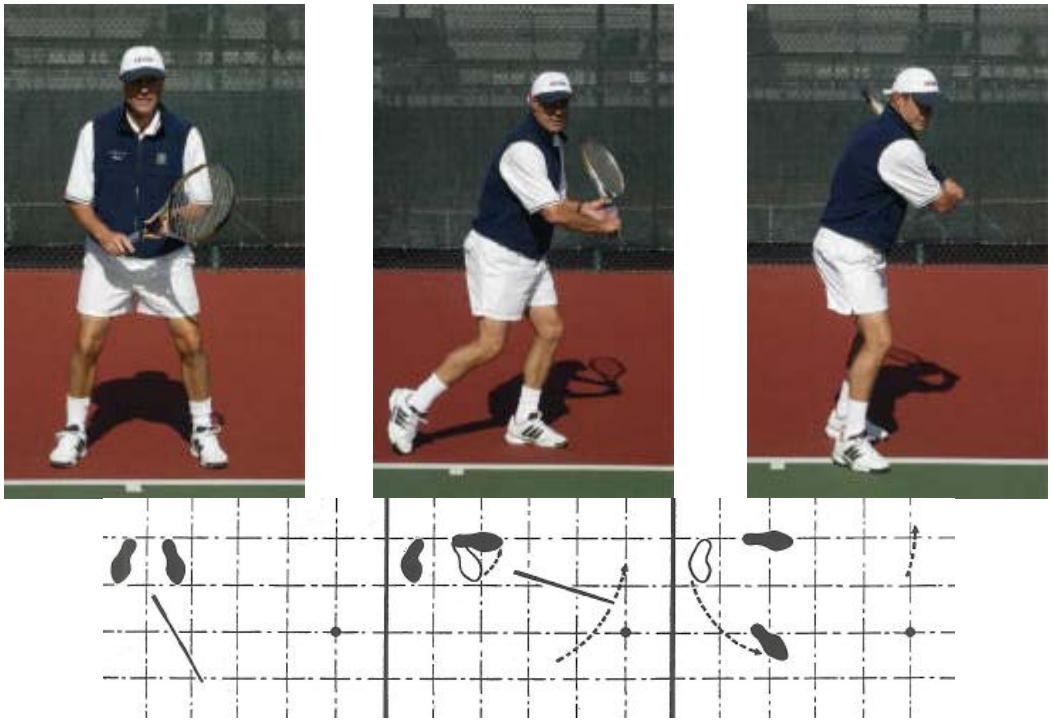
Stepping Away From the Ball for a Forehand Drive:

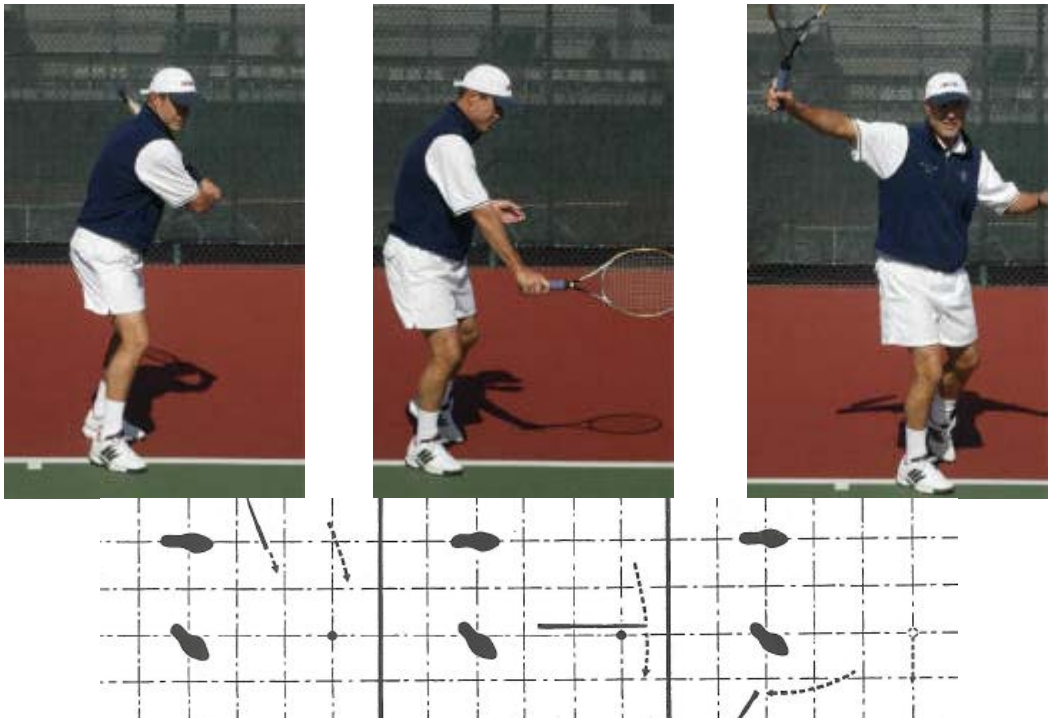
The ready position is exactly the same as shown before except that, in order to get the ball, the right foot crosses in behind the left foot. When practicing this shot, there should be a definite pause after this step is made, so that the pupil can check his balance. Practice stepping straight in, although in actual play, it is perfectly correct to step slightly away from the ball with the left foot.

High Forehand Drive:

Note that, in approaching the ball, the racket and arm are held slightly higher. The ball is hit flat and the finish remains the same. Do not overspin or under - cut the ball. If practiced correctly, this shot can be hit very hard.

Backhand Groundstroke







BACKHAND FOOTWORK:

Take a waiting position approximately three feet away and two feet back of the "practice" ball.

(1) Put weight on left foot, as you turn it parallel to base line.

(2) Step forward towards the net with the right foot, as you start to stroke the ball.

(3) Ball at impact should be opposite or just slightly in front of right hip. Feet should be parallel with sidelines. Left knee should be bent so to allow hip to turn in. As stroke develops, it is perfectly correct to cross right foot towards ball.

(4) At completion of the stroke, bring right foot back. Player is now in a ready or waiting position.

(5) After having done this to satisfaction, start approaching the ball from a distance of six to eight feet. Start with left foot and take three quick steps. Player should arrive on left foot ready to step in and hit. Gradually increase the distance until the player can run from any spot and arrive in the correct position.

BACKHAND STROKE:

(1) From waiting position turn shoulders sideways and slide hands of racket should be behind and as high close together. Do not have hand overlap.

(2) Turn in time to allow for pause before making the stroke. If this is done, stepping in with right foot and finishing stroke is relatively easy, as there is no hurry and one is well balanced.

(3) Keep left hand on racket until end of end of the back stroke. This helps in making the proper amount of turn and adds power and steadiness.

(4) At the end of the back stroke, the head of racket is should be behind and as high as the left shoulder.

(5) Use a slow stroke with limited wrist action; very little or no wrist for beginners. The wrist should be firm at the time of impact with the ball.

(6) At Finish, head of the racket is up, hand slightly to right and at least as high as shoulder. A high finish helps to put top or over-spin on ball.



Service

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In the teaching of the service, I recommend a half topped, half sliced shot. This will cause the ball to curve down and slightly to the side and is the basic service. The player should stay with this type of service until it is steady and accurate, after which he should then practice a fiat or a more severely spun shot. If he tries to learn these shots too early he will very likely end up with an erratic first, and a weak second serve.

When explaining the mechanics of a service, it is best to teach it in two parts; namely, the toss of the ball, and the stroke itself.

The former should be emphasized first, as the execution of the stroke hinges on the exactness of the toss. The ball is tossed above the head with a straight left arm. This is very important as it eliminates jerks and makes for an accurate toss. The ball should be hit at the top of its flight or just as it starts to drop. However, on a highly spun serve the ball may drop six to eight inches as the ball coming down against the strings of the racket adds more spin to the shot.

The stroke itself is much the same action used by a ball player in making an overhead throw. In other words, the racket swings straight down and back and then the head of the racket is thrown into the ball with the wrist. This and the smash are the only two shots in which excessive wrist action is employed. In order to time this shot correctly, the racket should start back and be passing the right leg as the left hand starts up.

In practicing this shot keep both feet on the ground, as this will allow for correct body action. This does not mean to keep the feet flat on the ground but rather to keep them in the same place. The left heel leaves the ground at the start of the service motion and the rise onto the right toe starts the forward motion. Study this action by going through the motions of throwing a ball over-handed.

Turn and let the right arm swing back and watch to see just when you would rise on your right toe and when and how your hips and shoulders would turn in towards the net. This will not only let you see when the action takes place but will also give you the feel of the stroke.

(1) Point racket at court where serve is to be directed with face of racket perpendicular to ground.
The ball is held in the first two fingers and thumb. Point left foot slightly toward net. Put right foot six to twelve inches back of left, and parallel to base line. Weight on right foot.

(2) Wrist and arm relaxed, swing racket down and straight back as shoulder makes quarter turn. On back swing the weight starts shifting onto the left foot, the heel of the left foot leaving the ground.

(3) As racket passes the body, toss ball straight up, with a straight arm. Carry left hand above left shoulder to avoid jerk. The ball should be thrown up above head, high enough so that it can be stroked with the arm fully extended just as the ball starts to drop.

(4) Start forward swing by turning hips and shoulders into the ball. Keep the right toe on the ground. The hips lead as in all other forms of athletics. To find out just when the hips should move forward, go through the motions swinging the racket without tossing the ball up. Arm should be fully extended when hitting the ball.

(5) Finish in front pr on the left side, with right shoulder well in front.

(6) The racket should go up and across the ball.

Do not allow the toe of either foot to leave the ground until the complete stroke is mastered. When practicing the serve with an overhead ball go through all the motions of throwing the ball. Stand so that the balls directly above the left foot.









Volleys

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The first motion to be taught in this shot is to get ready early.

This means to get the racket in line of flight of the ball quickly so as to allow a pause before meeting the ball. From this position the pupil is taught to do little more than let the ball hit the racket. After this is done have him block the ball back into the deep court. Hard or angular volleys are easily learned from this base.

After the volley has become steady the pupil can practice stroking the shot. Volleying, like putting in golf, is built on a short stroke and confidence, the only difference being that in tennis a reflex action must be acquired as the ball is moving, whereas, in golf it is stationary.

Learning to pause before hitting will develop these reflexes. Although a flat shot is often used I recommend a cut volley, that of spinning the ball. By so doing the wrist will be held in a firmer position thereby causing a steadier and more accurate shot. Also a cut ball will bounce down and give the opposing player less time to get to it. To acquire this action the stroke should be made by hitting down and slightly across the ball.

VOLLEY GRIP
If one grip is to be used fur the volley, it should be the same as the service grip. With this grip, it is not necessary to change for forehand and backhand volleys. If two grips are used, use this grip for a backhand and an Eastern forehand grip for a forehand.

VOLLEY FOOTWORK
Be sure to be on balls of feet, knees slightly bent, ready to react quickly. Cross feet when reaching for ball.

VOLLEY STROKE
(1) Hold head of racket up so wrist is in normal position.

(2) Get ready the instant the ball starts, so racket is in line with flight of ball. Pause before starting forward stroke.

(3) Play ball to the side and slightly in front of body.

(4) Keep wrist firm. A sliced volley is best as it adds control and helps to keep the wrist firm.

(5) A short finish is necessary as it adds control.

(6) First practice deep volleys. When volley becomes steady, then practice short and angular shots.

Forehand Volley







Backhand Volley







Half Volleys

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The half volley is played with a short stroke. The ready position is only half way back. The wrist is held firm and the stroke is made by coming up on the ball as it rises. The shot should be played very close to the ground. A short finish will add accuracy to this shot. It is best played defensively at first but as a player improves, he can use it offensively. The ball must drop quickly; therefore it is essential to "come up" on the shot. Never undercut this shot.

Forehand Half Volley






Backhand Half Volley











Smash

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The instant a lob goes up, turn sideways and get under the ball. Hold racket in ready position. Beginners may hold the racket higher, which makes the timing easier. Advanced players may hold the racket lower. This allows for a fuller swing and will add more power.

The action of a Smash is the same as the Service with the possible exception, that a shorter finish is used.

Be sure to get directly under the ball and reach up to hit the ball. Acquire the feeling of reaching up to meet the ball.

Practice hitting the ball hard and flat as half-hitting and slicing the Smash makes the timing very difficult. Speed and accuracy give value to the Smash. Practice smashing balls for placements. This will develop confidence and tend to discourage opponents from lobbing.

The Smash





Lobs [Back to Table of Contents]

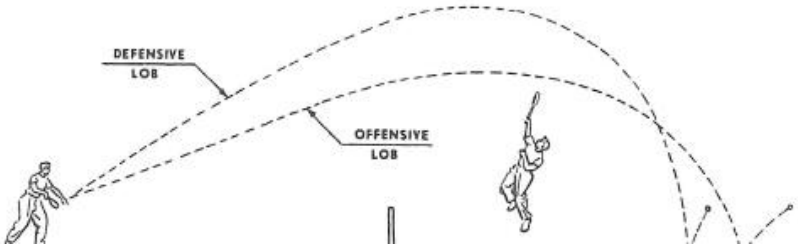
There are two types of lob, an offensive, and a defensive lob.

The offensive lob is used as a passing shot, that is to say it is a low lob designed to go over the opponent's head or at least pull him off balance so as to cause an error or a weak return. This shot is best used over the opponent's backhand side so that if he does get to it he must play it with a backhand smash, which is always weaker than an overhead smash.

If well disguised it is an important shot to possess as it tends to keep the opponent from "crowding" the net and therefore makes him play his volleys from farther back in the court.

The defensive lob is just what the word .implies. It is played when the player is out of court or in an awkward position. The shot should be played quite high so as to allow the player to get back in position and make the timing of this shot more difficult for his opponent.

Although the lob is necessary in winning it does not develop strokes and if used too much will develop a defense attitude and style of play. As, in the case of sliced and chopped shots, I recommend that the pupil develop his forehand and backhand drive, and use the lob sparingly.





Court Positions

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When in the back court, a player should stand from three to eight feet behind the center of the base line. The farther he plays back, the more time he has to make his strokes correctly, therefore a beginner should play from six to eight feet behind the base line.

As a player improves, he can move up closer to the base line. By so doing, he is able to play more balls on the top of the bounce and is also able to get to the net faster.

When following a shot into the net, the player should try to arrive at a point inside the service line, approximately twelve feet from the net for his first volley. For the second volley, he should be a step or two closer to the net. The closer he can be to net, the easier the volley, for the angles are greater and less stroke is required. Because he must be able to defend against a lob, his position cannot be too far in. Just how close he should be to the net depends on how well he has played his approach shot or his first volley. The better the shot, the closer he may play. Experience will teach him his best position; but he should always remember that it is better to be too close than too far back.

When receiving a fairly well hit serve, the beginner should be two to four feet behind the base line. Of course, he will have to play closer if his opponent has a weak serve. As a player improves, he can move in until he is receiving the serve when standing on the base line. It is sometimes advisable to play one step closer when receiving a second serve.

After making or receiving a serve, a player should get into the back court position at once, unless he has followed his shot to the net. He should never, however, take up a position between the base and service line. This is known as "No Man's Land". Here the angles are sharper, the shots harder to play and he will be out of position to play either the net or the back court.

The serving position is back of the base line, and just over the center service line. It is best to form the habit of serving from the same position, for the distance and angles remain constant and because they are constant, help to develop a more consistent and accurate shot.



The Forcing Game

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The forcing game is based on the principle of continuous pressure, It is a game for advanced players who have acquired all the strokes and therefore are able to control the ball from all positions.

It should be called an "All Court Forcing Game" for it is too often confused with just a net game. Coming into the net is definitely a part of the game and should be used as a climax to many rallies or when the opponent hits a short shot, but is only a part of the whole.

A player who can make sound "coming in" shots and can volley accurately will be a constant worry, for his opponent in trying not to hit short balls will tend to make more errors than he would otherwise.

To play the "All Court Forcing Game," it is necessary to have;

(1) A strong first serve and an accurate spin for the second serve. A hard first serve, which will put the opponent on the defensive and cause errors, is of course the best. However, this is not absolutely essential but a serve that will keep the opponent from making a forcing shot is essential;

(2) The groundstrokes, both forehand and backhand must be sound so that
(a) the return of the serve be deep;
(b) the shots from the back court be firm and well placed and;
(c) the coming in shot be hit flat on the top of the bounce.

(3) The volley must be accurate and fast enough to put the ball away. A blocked volley is not enough, a player with only this type of shot cannot win the point when the opening appears.

(4) The smash is a must in this type of play for the opponent of a player with a weak overhead can lob defensively too often. This does not give the forcing player enough percentage off of his approach shots and he will find himself in trouble. Smashes, like volleys, must be put away, not only from the standpoint of winning the point but also the mental effect such shots will have on the opponent.

The player of this "All Court Forcing Game" must always keep in mind the fact that he is playing another human being and that the pressure he is applying has a very definite effect on the mental attitude of his opponent.

It takes nerve, determination and strokes to play this type of game and only the strong will master it. However, from these few will emerge the future great players of the world.



Stories of Former Pupils

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To encourage the beginners and to show them that advanced players too must and can make corrections in their game, I am recounting for their benefit a few of the notable changes that have been made with some of my leading pupils.

I might add also that some of these changes have been "struggles" and that although as black as the outlook has been in many cases, the corrections have been made and sustained, and although absolute perfection was not attained in each individual case, the changes always were successful enough to cause each player to go decidedly up the ranking ladder.

I will start with **Don Budge** who became the world's greatest exponent of the "forcing game" (in my opinion he is the greatest player of all time, but then I might he prejudiced). Although I made many changes in the four years I worked with him, such as changing his forehand from a Western to an Eastern and building up practically from the beginning of a serve, volley and overhead, the footwork on his "coming in" shot on his forehand will always remain with me the high spot of lessons.

For three years we had practiced various strokes and parts of the game and were then trying to put the finishing touch on his game by learning to take the short balls on the top of the bounce. This he could do on his backhand but because of a faulty first step he not only played his forehand badly but was late in getting to the ball which in turn affected his volleying as he was not able to get in close enough to the net.

On the backhand side he normally started by shifting his weight to the left foot, but on his forehand side he did not shift on to his right foot but rather crossed his left foot over his right, which caused him to be off balance. On the shots on which he ran sideways he had learned to start correctly by shifting his weight to the right foot, but could not do it going forward. We struggled for a long time and seemed to be getting nowhere when one day I suggested picking his right foot up (like the German Goose Step) and thereby over-emphasizing the step.

It worked miracles and within a very short time his forehand forcing shot was a great one. I have known the principle for a long time that if a player starts off on the right foot he will end up on the correct foot but I had never before emphasized the action so greatly. The importance of this story is to show how sometimes in order to make a correction a point must be greatly exaggerated.

It was only a year later that he became so much the master of this forcing game that he won the United States, French, Australian and Wimbledon Championships



with comparative ease.

As an anti-climax to the story I might add that up to the time he learned this I had played him many times and bothered him badly with short shots. Some two weeks after he had practiced this new step I played him again. He took those short shots of mine and forced me so badly with his devastating approach shots that after the match I was completely exhausted and announced that I would never again play against him. I never have.

When he returns now and then to our club. we often play doubles together as partners. I find it much safer and better that way.

Changing **Sarah Palfrey Cooke**'s game from a chopping, tricky type of game to a forcing one, gave me a great deal of pleasure for I had the opportunity to prove that not only can strokes be changed but a style of game could be made over.

Sarah when she came to me in 1939 had been playing tournament tennis for fifteen years. She used and undercut forehand and backhand, was very quick and possessed an extremely fine volley. What she lacked was power on her groundstrokes and serve. By standing straight and working on her back stroke she improved her serve to a point where it was at least satisfactory - but her ground strokes gave her trouble for she had never "come up" on the ball and the feeling of a drive was completely foreign to her.

By practicing four to six hours a day for a year she finally gained the necessary confidence to carry her through. By simply staying with a slightly over spun shot in her practice and hitting hard especially on her backhand she acquired a forcing game that carried her through to win the United States Championship in 1941.

Much credit must be given to Elwood her husband (whom I taught the year before) for giving her encouragement and the necessary practice to allow this new game to set. The main point which is to be learned from this anecdote about Sarah is that if you want a thing badly enough and work at it hard enough you can get it.

I have never heard of anyone changing his or her game completely and then winning the championship. She did both.

Elwood Cooke worked with me in the winter of 1938. He had fine ground strokes but no punch in his game. We developed a faster serve and he learned to take advantage of his powerful shots and to come in on the short ones. By just adding more attack to his game he rose from the seventh ranking player to the' finals of Wimbledon and lost to Bobby Riggs in five sets.

He had had such a short time to work on this new type of game that it was a remarkable feat to reach the finals of Wimbledon. He won the first set from Riggs



at 6-2 and in the second was leading 5-2 and point set when a net ball jumped over his racket just as he was about to put a volley away. He lost his nerve momentarily and stayed in the back court and although he went five sets with Riggs he did not regain his forcing game after that shot.

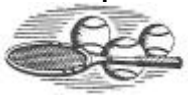
Had he a year more of training in this style of play such a point would not have affected his confidence and he would have kept forcing, which is the only way to beat the style of game Riggs plays.

I believe that in another year or two Elwood would have been the National Champion. But instead he married Sarah and became more interested in her game than in developing his own. This story illustrates that although he had improved tremendously, it takes a long time before a player is confident enough to hold his strokes and game together in crucial matches.

I could go on at some length giving examples of corrections and players I have coached, but I believe enough has been written to show that even the best must make corrections, that corrections can be made, and that it always takes a great deal of practice and determination to set a new stroke or plan.

In recent years I have, with the help of very capable assistants gone in for class teaching that resembles somewhat mass production, for three of us teach some five hundred pupils a week. We teach the same system as I have outlined to you, with, of course. variations for advanced players.

We hope that by doing this we will add many more players to the game, and more pleasure to each individual. If you follow this system of teaching, I am sure you can do the same.



Recommended Learning Tools

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Hi, Brent Abel again and I really hoped you've enjoyed Tom's book. I swear I read his book 3-4 times a year and I'm always amazed at either what I'd missed, or "ah ha", now I get it"! Let me know if you have any questions. I'm always interested in your opinions and feedback on this book and other WebTennis.net products. Thank you for your interest...

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Let me know if you'd like to learn more about developing other sources of income from your passion and love of tennis.



Contact Brent Abel

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