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## The Parent's thoughts

# How many Backhands are there?

**Backhand following forehand is the second most frequently applied tennis shot. Its definition is trivial – that is a shot from the left part of the body in case of a right-handed player and on the other way round.**

It is generally weaker than forehand so it is really a defensive tool although down-the-line shot must be winning otherwise we can be exposed to an opponent's forehand counterattack. Generally the opponent keeps hitting to your backhand not to give you the chance for the forehand attack (it does not refer to a left-handed opponent!).

However, the strategy mentioned above requires a few key elements to use:

- Backhand must be deep enough to make the opponent impossible to move forward and attack with down-the-line shot.
- It should be also much angular, throwing for the same reason as mentioned above; a restriction has to be added concerning game with a left-handed player – it is forehand for such a player

and if he/ she manages to strike the ball, he/she uses a more angular counterattack towards our backhand, which ends unsuccessfully

- It has to be fast and flat to make the opponent impossible to exchange for reverse forehand

In order to perform a good backhand hit, you need to stick to a few rules, i.e.

- You need to keep watching the possibly quick position preparation to hit, e.g. with swing
- In case of a low ball, you need to lower the position quickly, stepped towards the ball and swing upward with hitting
- In case of a higher ball or decision to attack with backhand, you need to move forward and use the body, rotate the

trunk and shoulder to place the ball in the opponent's court part.

- You need to maintain spin of the ball through watching a low position of the body, arms, hand palms before hitting and finishing the shooting with two hands from behind the head.

Backhand can be two-handed or one-handed. If one of them is used, the other one is not. Have you ever thought of the reason? Now I know. It looks as if you ate soup with one hand, and then with the other one. It does not make sense. You had better train other techniques.

Our typology of backhand hits is included only a two-handed version. Since the tennis game performed by Pancho Segura, Bjorn Borg, Jimmy Connors and Chris Evert it has become a dominant version in the professional tour.

**1. backhand topspin** – hit with progressing spin, performed best when the ball is dropping with hitting from downwards; the spin can be made larger or smaller and by means of a number of ways; this is the spin trained which is a key to correctness and regularity of his hit; this is the spin which allows for hit acceleration keeping the speed, provides the court still with the ball in the court; in order to play well the spinning has to be trained but the key is to realize that putting spin on the slow, medium, quick and very quick balls belong to totally different hits; the key is to understand that while hitting heavily the contact of the racket tension with the ball is very short and putting the spin becomes more difficult; i.e. as a frequent result of hit acceleration is throwing the ball outside the court – there wasn't the spin!

A ball in the net is another frequent effect of the improper spin through quick hitting; that is also a spin mistake, a hand palm was closed too quickly, the hit was broken and instead of the spin there was the ball in the net.

Backhand spin hit can be performed in the natural closed position or in the more forced defensive position, so-called open; one of the positions taken depends on the time which gives us the ball going towards us; modern tennis does not give us much time, it does shorten it thus you need to focus on hits performed with the open position; it is much easier that such hits are shown off by a current leader Novak Djokovic.

**2. two-handed flat backhand with closing the ball with the shoulder – “walking step”** – this is a hit with higher ball placing within the serve line; it requires to move forward so it does not affect the ball thrown heavily, a tennis player's run must be at least diagonal, not only along the baseline; frankly, this hit is not usually flat; if the ball is hit upward successfully, the position of the racket head must close its track downwards and the shoulder must support the arms well enough to obtain such an effect; if you do not catch the ball in the high position

and it starts to drop you need to perform the hit from downwards and provide the safety with spin hitting; in case of so-called “passing via the ball” existing here, the technique itself is more significant than how quickly hand palms hit; moving towards causes the opponent to have less time to react and energy of the ball is large enough to give an effect and requires controlling rather than excessive dynamics of arms.

**3. backhand “hopping step”** – is the equivalent of the “walking step” mentioned above but with a low ball; it requires to decide on moving forward and “passing via the ball”, in order to increase the spin you need to jump the moment you hit; the jump is started with a front foot and finished with the same foot; it requires a quick-making-decision training;

If statistically, a large number of balls are spin hit, it is difficult to select the ball for such an at-



tack during the game; it requires creativity, bravery and experience; there is also one more reason why I encourage to use this technique, I guess, usually taken into consideration rarely by tennis players coaches – this hit looks nice for spectators; It is said "The match result remains for statistics and historians but people bear game style in their minds".

**4. backhand slice** – a very popular shot, mainly used for:

- rhythm changes in the exchange
- preparations to play close to the net
- as a defensive hit

Backhand slice puts the backspin on the ball. In order to perform it properly, the racket should be held high and its head shouldn't be open in the point of hitting, i.e. it should be more vertically. A horizontal position is more suitable for drop shot.

It is better not to let the opponent know about our bad backhand slice as he/she will exhaust us using this technique. This shot is an excellent tool on the fast surface, like the one covered by grass; the low and flat hit makes the ball difficult to be received.

**5. karaoke** – that is a "passing via the ball" hit with the run forward with crossed steps, this is why it is called karaoke; that is almost the dance; hit against a slow, low ball requires a longer time; if you wish to play this way you need to enjoy playing tennis, be easy-going and have imagination; it is like "freestyle" in skiing.

**6. backhand drop shot** – a surprising hit with slashing the ball and backspin; the racket head is more open; the larger the spin the better effect, otherwise the ball goes out or escape from the court on the opponent's side; both the moment of hitting and its potential long disguise are very important; you can not perform it in the hard surface as the ball bounces too high, however there are no rules; It is recommend playing tennis with this technique against baseliners and players with heavy body-weight to bring them into the zone of anaerobic work.

**7. backhand volley** – the hit used more frequently than forehand volley; backhand protects your body if you are close to the net; similarly to forehand volley it should be aggressive with the blockage of the shoulder, elbow and hand palm and possibly short; you always need to move forward as an attacker; certainly, if the ball drops below the net this hit becomes rather defensive where the hand palm feel is a priority.

**8. backhand stop volley** – shortage of the ball flight when opponent is performing passing shot and his position is further from the net.

**9. backhand drive volley** – hit from the air; it is better to perform this hit instead of letting the ball bounce too high, lose its energy and give time to the opponent to position better; it must be moderately aggressive with a lot of spin.

**10. backhand down the line** – this is more tactics rather than technique as this hit can be performed with a few techniques mentioned above but I pick them out in relation to regular training; this hit means the direction change connected with the rhythm changes; if it is trained wrongly, it will definitely not help the player performing; it shouldn't take place along running of the baseline, it rather requires the run with the vector towards the net; it can be certainly performed with the parallel run towards the net but in this case the hit can be like a lottery; controlling the hit with the shoulders and maintaining the back hit direction towards the run direction is a potential risk and this is why the least trained;

**11. backhand passing shot** – this tactics definitely takes place when the opponent moves towards the net; the hit can be performed with different ways, however, you need to train watching empty corridors and ignoring the opponent; you cannot get into panic but you need to eliminate influence of the opponent's aggression on the hit quality; a general rule says you need to hit the ball low just over the net and not hit it in the direction from which the opponent runs, unless we plan to attack the opponent's body, which is permissible but not elegant.

**12. backhand lob topspin** – typical defensive shot; backhand lob takes place in two situations; the first one when the opponent has moved towards the net far enough, e.g. after our first passing shot defended, and the other situation concerns reception of the deeply lobbed ball and playing back the same; backhand lob is more difficult to play than forehand lob; in both cases spin makes it possible for us to control; you can certainly hit the ball flatly, if it couldn't be spinned or a player couldn't change the racket handle; in such a case the hit feel becomes more important; topspin lob requires calmness and controlling, which is difficult during the drama of the game.

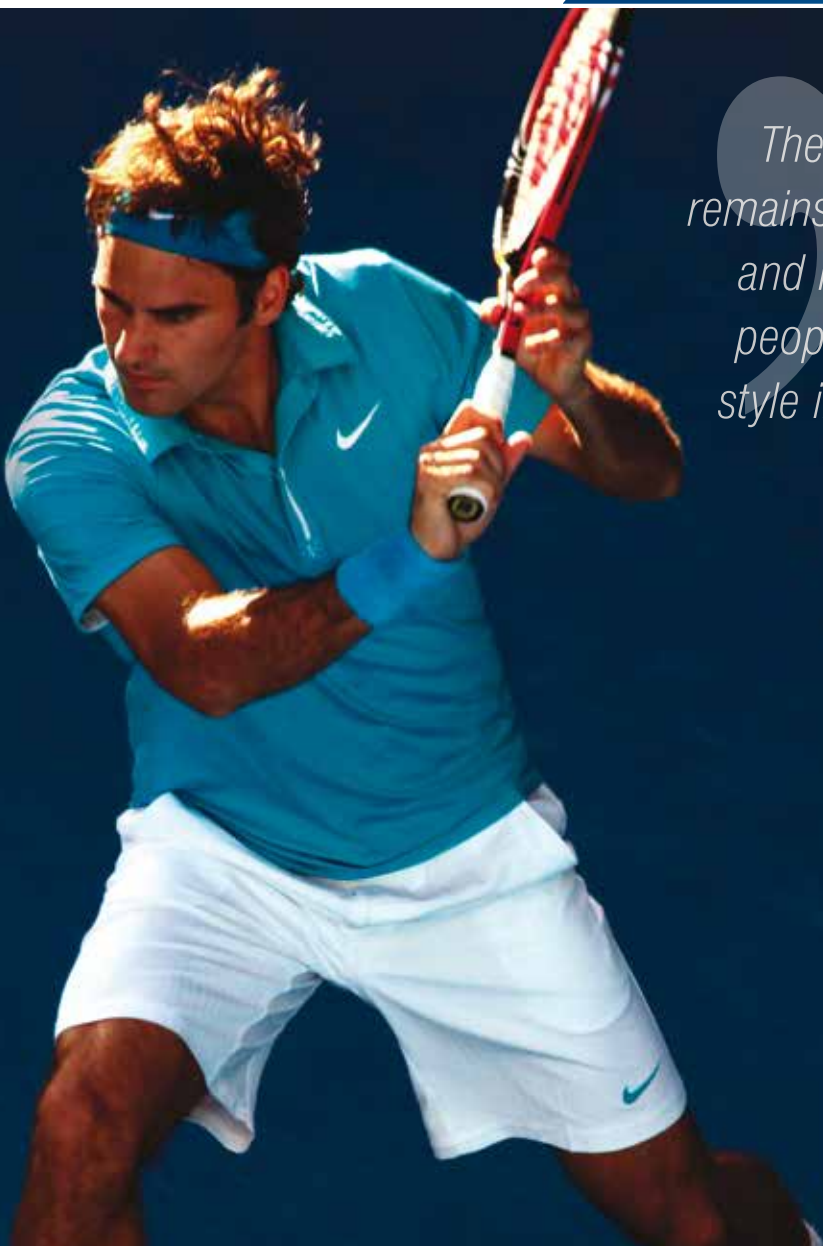
**13. backhand topspin from a shortened low ball** – it can take place after the opponent is hit with slice shot or slight ball pass for rhythm change; here the key to success is to run quickly towards it as well as possibly well balanced position and spin control; the ball must be "twisted" above the net; alternatively, you can perform hopping step but you need to have two techniques trained; it is actually a topspin hit, but considering the nature of the ball placing within the service line and clear share of fast run towards it, they have to be trained separately.

**14. backhand half-volley** – a defensive hit of the ball received close to the feet on the backhand side; only good direction can protect from final placing the ball by the opponent or it can be the "grinder"

**15. "grinder"** is my expression for fast overtaking hit against a point of the ball's bouncing selected intuitively; it requires training and courage; without training of brain-nervous-muscular reaction this hit is infeasible unless uncontrollable, unconditional move.

**16. return slice backhand** – if you are a player returning aggressively the opponent's serve, moving far towards the court field, you can expect attacks towards backhand and also the body; backhand slice is then one of the hits to per-





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form; smashing the ball with the backspin close to the service line with the usage of the ball energy is a master's play; no wonder, only Roger Federer plays like this.

**17. of bounce shot** - aggressive, attacking hit in the point of the ball's bouncing specified intuitively; in reality it is always a hit on the rising ball; contrary to all other hits, a player does not wait for the ball bounce to hit but he/she perform the hit intuitively; you need to train it long and regularly in order to do it effectively; for now there are no volunteers.

That is in short all about techniques as well

as backhand tactics. Similarly as in the case of forehand this typology results from necessity of training them separately.

There are two frequent drawbacks in the usage of backhand technique among young tennis practitioners and poorly trained players.

The first one concerns performing drop shot improperly.

This is a very important and difficult hit as it changes the game rhythm, which is generally recommended. Unfortunately, it is often used in improper time. It is clearly seen that this is the ball not the player decides on performing the hit. Actually, sometimes the ball itself touches the racket so well that you wish to perform drop shot. Unfortunately,

the key is here the play in the proper time in relation to the opponent's position.

The opponent should be forced to move outside the court and expect the attack to gain the surprising effect.

To perform a tactically proper drop shot the ball should be prepared like attacking not as for drop shot to maintain disguise and gain the surprising effect. Masking an attacking hit should take as long as possible.

After all, prolonging masking of the attack improves drop shot quality as it forces later a very fast smash, which gives much required back spin.

Sometimes a player is seen touching his/her head with hands wishing to say "What did I do?".

Actually, then „the ball decided“ about this hit not the tennis player.

The second backhand drawback is so-called "lazy slice backhand". Slice backhand is an excellent, difficult and irreplaceable hit. Similarly to drop shot it has the aim in the form of rhythm change, lowering the ball hit on the opponent's side or it is simply defensive.

When it is performed instead of spin backhand with the low approach towards the feet, it becomes the delayed substitutable hit and instead of the pressure affecting the opponent, he/she is given a chance to attack or at best "resume rally".

This lazy slice backhand can be easily identified by improper time of its performance, inlined position and sticking out his/her hand wishing to reach the ball. Due to the threat of usage of "lazy backhand" instead of spin backhand it is better to train slice and spin separately, not in the same drill sessions.

I have already mentioned that tennis is the art of

choices. I am going further this subject by means of backhand usage.

We classified a number of backhands and almost thirty forehands, however, there could be more classifications of them with regard to hit technique, biomechanics, body position when hitting or runs, spins, etc. I think, I may exaggerate, you can win using only one good technique Or only a few, e.g. serve and good forehand topspin.

I agree with it. That is the matter of possibilities of techniques trained. That is good to have them all but if we cannot manage to train them all and then play under pressure they will bring more losses than benefits. This is another example illustrates the art of choice. What is the conclusion then? It is better for you to look at yourself or the player trained, consider, analyze pre-dispositions and fit training of selected techniques.

Training all the techniques, in relation to necessity of repeatability is impossible. Another comment on training. Preparatory exercises are of vital important,

not only training how to play. Here are some exercises for backhands:

1. increasing the share of the hand which is not dominant, i.e. in case of a right-handed player it is a left hand; left hand playing forehand for some time will strength its share in two-handed backhand
2. increasing the share of the trunk rotation and strong stepping forward will be improved by throwing a medicine ball
3. proper hitting from the lower position will be exercised with slight bouncing the ball passed, with concentration on lifting legs and at the same time on throwing with hands along with moving from the net towards the baseline.

Irreplaceable statistics will help us to assess the extent of training, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

