

July 13, 2011: TENNIS TIP #2: The Backhand Volley

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Photo by Shaun Ondak Photography



The overwhelming majority of tour players today (yes, even the many using the two-hander off the ground) choose the one-hander when volleying. The inherent considerable increase in reach and versatility is a necessity when at the net, or in transition, where reaction time is at a premium.

But do not be misled – it takes two hands to execute a solid one-handed backhand volley. In the ready position, with the racket head

slightly elevated by a cocked wrist just below one's sight line, the left hand of the right-handed player cradles the racket's throat and, in terms of hand tension, is always the dominant hand at this juncture.

Once a backhand volley opportunity is recognized, the *left hand*, already engaged, draws the racket generously back with a slightly elevated elbow in order to fully load the racket. Simultaneously, a shoe-on-court pivot should occur resulting first in both a hip-shoulder turn into the shot, and then an accompanying crossover hitting step.

Much confusion forever reigns over whether or not there is a slight grip change when at the net. Of course there is! However, it's much more of a subtle arm-racket reconfiguration initiated from the forehand position that exists when poised and ready to a very different leveraged alignment for the backhand, an absolute necessity unless you possess the uncanny, funky, one of a kind ball striking mechanics, back then and now, of *the* no-grip-change representation perpetuated in the TV booth by none other than John McEnroe.

Finally, as the racket head moves to the ball, the off-arm simultaneously snaps back to foster both balance and surprising power. This action also eliminates counter productive trunk rotation and maintains a sideways to the net hitting position (see image). Note also that that I've lowered my center of gravity in order to make contact with the ball eye-high, and, as a direct result, well in front where the ball can be clearly tracked.

Remember, it takes two hands to hit a one-handed backhand volley, that is if you're interested in hitting it well.