

Special Olympics Tennis Quick Start Guide

On-Court Training Activities



Backhand

In the backhand stroke the shoulders and hips are turned so the athlete is standing sideways (racquet is in a volley position with the strings facing the net). Use the key words, "stand sideways with your racquet back and look like a surfer" or "turn your shoulders." The athlete should use the forehand grip in the ready position. It will be necessary to practice the grip change to the backhand. The coach should be observant, making sure this is happening. Use the key words "change your grip."

Grip

- ◆ Athletes perform the backhand grip using the following tips (these tips are used for the dominant hand for the two-handed player).
- ◆ Hold the racquet with the forehand grip.
- ◆ Turn the hand until the first knuckle of the index finger is on top of the grip (1/4 turn).
- ◆ Another way to find this grip is to put the racquet under the left armpit and grab the racquet as if unsheathing a sword.
- ◆ For a two-handed grip, the dominant hand should be in the continental grip (same as the serve) and the non-dominant hand is placed in an eastern forehand grip. For a right-handed player, the non-dominant hand is a forehand grip for a left-handed player and this is reversed in teaching a left-handed dominant player.



Ready Position

- ◆ Athletes face forward with knees slightly flexed, feet shoulder width apart and heels up off the ground.
- ◆ The racquet should be held comfortably at waist level.
- ◆ Use the key words "eyes on the ball" and "relax and be ready."





Backhand Stroke

- ♦ The racquet is taken back and down (pointing at the back fence and down toward the court surface), with a continuous swing. This allows the student to have a loop “C” shaped swing.
- ♦ A few small adjusting steps are taken towards the ball.
- ♦ The coach should demonstrate the contact point position. Freeze at the progression and emphasize that this is where the ball is contacted. Use the key words "hit off your front foot"; "turn, step, hit."



Keep in mind that a one-handed backhand contact point will be out in front of the forward foot, whereas a two-handed backhand contact point will be near the front foot position. Use the key words "hit off your front foot" or "turn, step, hit."

Follow-through

- ♦ The stroke continues with a balanced follow-through with the racquet high and out in front (one-handed).
- ♦ Be careful not to exaggerate the follow-through, as the athlete will put it all together when actually striking a ball.
- ♦ The racquet will finish pointing up and toward the net like “shaking hands with a giant.”
- ♦ The two-handed follow-through will wrap around the opposite shoulder in a full swing pattern.



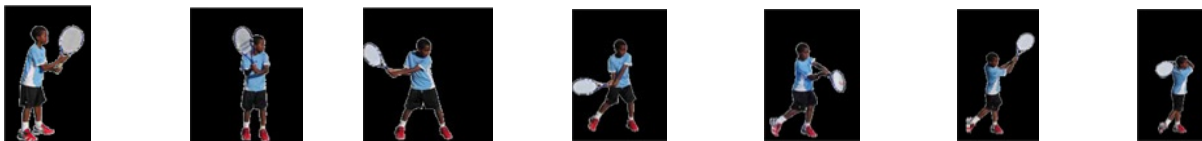
Key Words

- ♦ "Eyes on the ball"
- ♦ "Relax and be ready"
- ♦ "Stand sideways with your racquet back and look like a surfer"
- ♦ "Turn your shoulders"
- ♦ "Change your grip"
- ♦ "Hit off your front foot"
- ♦ "Shaking hands with a giant"



Groundstrokes: Two Handed Backhand

Groundstrokes: Two Handed Backhand “Grips, Preparation and Swing Path” Courtesy of USTA



Preparation Unit Turn Loading Hitting Contact Extension Finish

Pictures for left handed player

Both right and left handed players use their dominate hand to grip and non-dominate shoulder to target on turn.

Grip

The player should use a grip close to Eastern for the top hand and a grip close to Continental on the bottom hand. The non dominant hand on the throat of the racquet is also used to change the grip from the forehand to backhand during play.



Eastern Grip on top Continental on Bottom



Player has taken the right hand off the throat and has both backhand grips set as he begins the unit turn

Preparation

Preparation begins with an athletic ready position with the head and eyes forward, knees slightly flexed and the weight on the forward part of the feet. The racquet is held in front of the body with the dominant hand in a forehand grip and the non-dominant hand supporting the racquet at the throat. During the unit turn the dominant hand moves to an Eastern backhand grip.



Athletic ready position



Preparation with a square stance and racquet head above the hand

Swing Path

The path of the swing is a loop where the racquet moves in a fluid manner above the hands as the body rotates to the side. The racquet head then drops below the ball, the non-dominant hand releases and the racquet accelerates through the point of contact far enough away from the body so that the swing can extend comfortably through the ball and toward the net.



The swing path is a loop starting above the hand, dropping below the ball and rising through the point of contact to extension



Groundstrokes: One Handed Backhand

Backhand Ground Stroke “Grips, Preparation And Swing Path” Courtesy Of USTA



Preparation

Unit Turn

Loading

Hitting

Contact

Extension

Finish

Pictures: For Left Handed Player

Eastern Backhand Grip

Both right and left handed players use their dominate hand to grip and non-dominate shoulder to target on turn.

Grip

The player should use an Eastern backhand grip for a one-handed backhand. The non-dominant hand is used to change the grip from the forehand to the backhand during play.



Player finding the Eastern Backhand grip during the unit-turn using the non-dominant hand at the throat

Preparation

Preparation begins with an athletic ready position with the head and eyes forward, knees slightly flexed and the weight on the forward part of the feet. The racquet is held in front of the body with the dominant hand in a forehand grip and the non-dominant hand supporting the racquet at the throat. During the unit turn the dominant hand moves to an Eastern backhand grip.



Athletic ready position



Preparation with a square stance and racquet head above the hand Right handed players point right shoulder to target

Swing Path

The path of the swing is a loop where the racquet moves in a fluid manner above the hands as the body rotates to the side. The racquet head then drops below the ball, the non-dominant hand releases and the racquet accelerates through the point of contact far enough away from the body so that the swing can extend comfortably through the ball and toward the net.



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Coaching Tips

- ❑ Many Special Olympics tennis players like to hit two forehands, a left-handed and a right-handed one. It is important that coaches have athletes learn the backhand stroke. The backhand requires more strength and control and it is quite acceptable to use two hand