

The Tennis Serve

“The Magic Moves”

by Brent Abel



The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

Presented by Brent Abel

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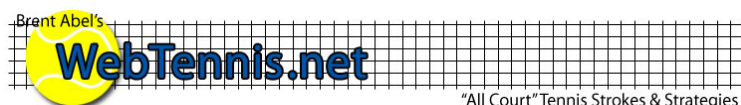
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"All Court" Tennis Strokes & Strategies

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

Presented by Brent Abel

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"All Court" Tennis Strokes & Strategies

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

Presented by Brent Abel

“The 3 Magic Moves” of the Tennis Serve

Master these 3 simple elements of the serve, and you’ll naturally get more spin and power on both your 1st and 2nd serves.

The “3 Magic Moves” of the tennis serve are the following...

Magic Move #1: The spin and power you create for your serve is based on pure racket speed. Strong players don’t necessarily generate much racket speed.

So, the hands must be relaxed throughout the entire service motion. You’re trying to generate racket speed just prior to contact, and any tension or strength applied to the racket handle absolutely kills your ability to produce that racket speed.

Be aware during the videos how I am constantly reminding you keep a relaxed hand on the racket handle throughout your service motion.

Magic Move #2: The tossing motion, especially where you complete the motion, is crucial for your ability to generate racket speed. The tossing motion does two things for you. Obviously, a good tossing motion will consistently place the ball where you want, but as important if not more, a correct tossing motion puts you into an ideal “set-up” position to maximize your ability to produce racket speed.

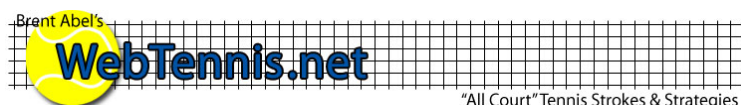
An abbreviated tossing motion will create huge problems with your power and spin. Pay very close attention to the video dedicated to the tossing motion. Practice this move over and over until you really develop a smooth and confident tossing motion that has tempo that you can control.

The tossing motion does not focus solely on your tossing arm, but also on your racket arm. Not only are you placing your tossing arm into a specific position when the tossing motion is completed, but you are also placing your racket into a specific position at the completion of the tossing motion.

Magic Move #3: The swing shape you put your racket through just prior to contact is the real moment of truth for your serve. Assuming you’ve got Magic Move #2 mastered, what you do with your racket now is simple, yet vital.

There is a specific swing shape, a small circle, which starts after the completion of your tossing motion, and continues up to contact.

If you have tension on your racket handle during this part of the serve, the small swing shape circle will not happen, and consequently, you’ll produce hardly any racket speed.



“All Court” Tennis Strokes & Strategies

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

The Basics

Position 1 The Start



Continental Grip.

Loose hands.

Posture.

Arms hanging.

Weight evenly distributed.

Racket head pointed to center of intended service box.

Commitment to target.

2 deep breaths.

Position 2 The Toss



Both hands drop.

Tossing arm straightens at front thigh.

Racket swings back and up to 'L' position.

Tossing arm is straight throughout entire tossing motion.

Tossing arm finishes straight up to sky.

Toss placement is slightly to the right (right handed player) and slightly out in front.

Toss height is slightly higher than eventual contact point

Position 3 The Setup



Relaxed hand.

If there is a pause, do it in this position, not 'racket down the back.

Tossing arm stays up until the very last moment Do not drop the tossing arm down too early.

Position 4 Contact



Relaxed hand.

From the Setup, the racket head swings in a circle forward, down behind your head / shoulders, and then back up to contact.

Contact is slightly is comfortably at the top of your reach, to the right, and slightly in front.

Release the racket head from your wrist, no locked wrist at contact, and allow the top of the racket to come down first, then your arm

Position 5 The Finish



There you have it...!

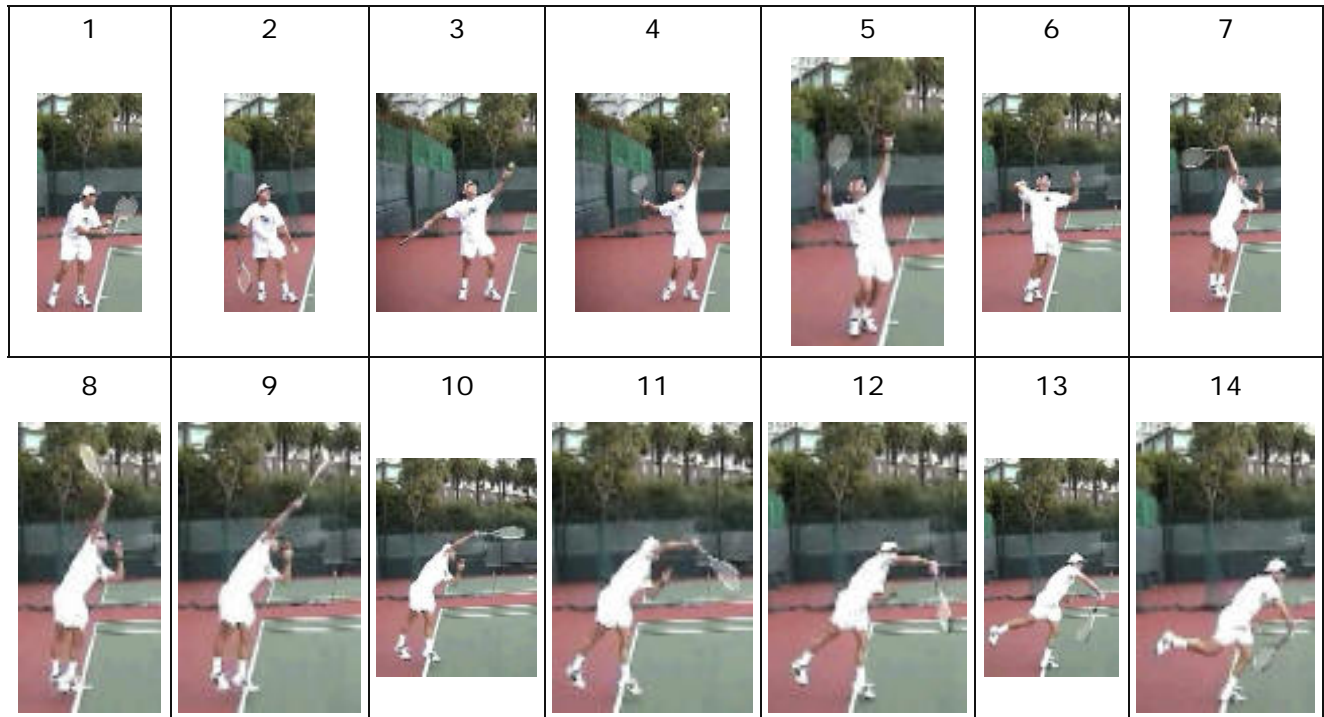
Easy and relaxed throughout.

Allow your racket shoulder to rotate forward.

Finish with the racket handle pointing back towards your target.

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

The Details



In General...

Look, be real about the serve. First and foremost, continue to develop a motion that is fluid and effortless. The strategy of the serve is to think about it as an approach shot, that simple. This lesson is on the basic fundamentals needed for any type of serve. Clearly, there are minor adjustments for the different kinds of serves (flat, spin, etc.). But without these fundamentals, well, we've got a problem...!

Initially the serve won't be a major weapon that you spend endless hours trying to develop where you can stand up to the baseline and become Pete Sampras...

Too many players try to initially develop their serve as a weapon, as opposed to an effective approach shot or a way to start to the point without putting yourself in trouble right from the start of the point. Learn how spin is your pal with the serve. Without the proper swing mechanics, spin won't happen. Develop that first, and then you'll have the fundamentals to increase swing speed and the rest... Then we'll get that weapon going where we're not sure if it's you or Pete...!

If you have too much *grip tension*, you're heading for trouble with either your shoulder or your elbow. Repeat that, out loud...

When we throw a ball, we do not squeeze the ball, we simply place it in our throwing hand and allow the natural body rotation to generate arm speed to eventually release the ball at a certain point in time...

So, no matter what, ***relaxing the hand on the grip is incredibly important*** to #1 developing good serve mechanics, but #2, to eventually using those good mechanics to generate effective racket speed. Hitting a serve with speed (pace) is all about racket speed at the moment of contact. The stronger you are on the grip at contact, the slower racket speed you'll have... so, lighten up!

The serve grip is really important, because that's how you would hold a ball to throw it naturally. An Eastern Forehand grip is not a natural throwing grip. You can serve with that grip, but in the long run, the risk is too great for potential injury. The injury risk here is due to not being able to *naturally release the racket wrist at contact* which means you'll have to really work hard to get some decent racket speed.

The Continental or Modified Continental grips can feel awkward at first, but these grips do require that you relax your hands at contact to allow the natural release to take place which turns the racket to the correct angle at contact.

That may sound a bit confusing, but if you you've got the right grip and release the wrist at contact (pronate), you'll be fine. It takes time to develop the timing of the release, but you can eventually get it, and then a whole new world will open up to you...!

And, the ball tossing motion with your non racket arm is as important to developing a really good serve as any other element in the entire service motion. Without the proper ball tossing motion, you'll never get into a good "hitting position" and your toss placements will not be accurate and consistent.

I'll be very demanding on this point throughout this lesson, because without the right tossing motion, well, it'll be nearly impossible to make any improvement...

Keep all of this stuff simple... we're not reinventing the wheel here. These fundamentals are natural human body mechanics. Don't try to force the big serve into your game plan without the proper swing mechanics. First, develop the fluidity of the motion using the proper relaxed hand position on the racket, and then learn how to generate more racket speed at contact to either produce more ball speed and/or spin for control.

A couple words of caution here... the cliché "racket down the back" can be confused and lead to poor serve mechanics... we'll get into that later in this lesson...

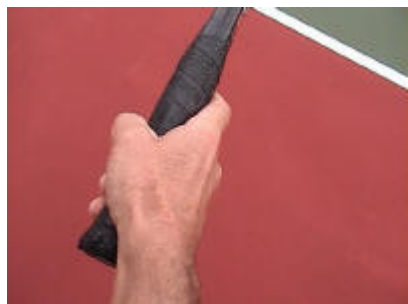
Glad you're here, let's go have some fun with the serve..!

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

The Grip

The Modified Continental, the Continental, or the Eastern Backhand are all acceptable.

Modified Continental



Continental



Eastern Backhand



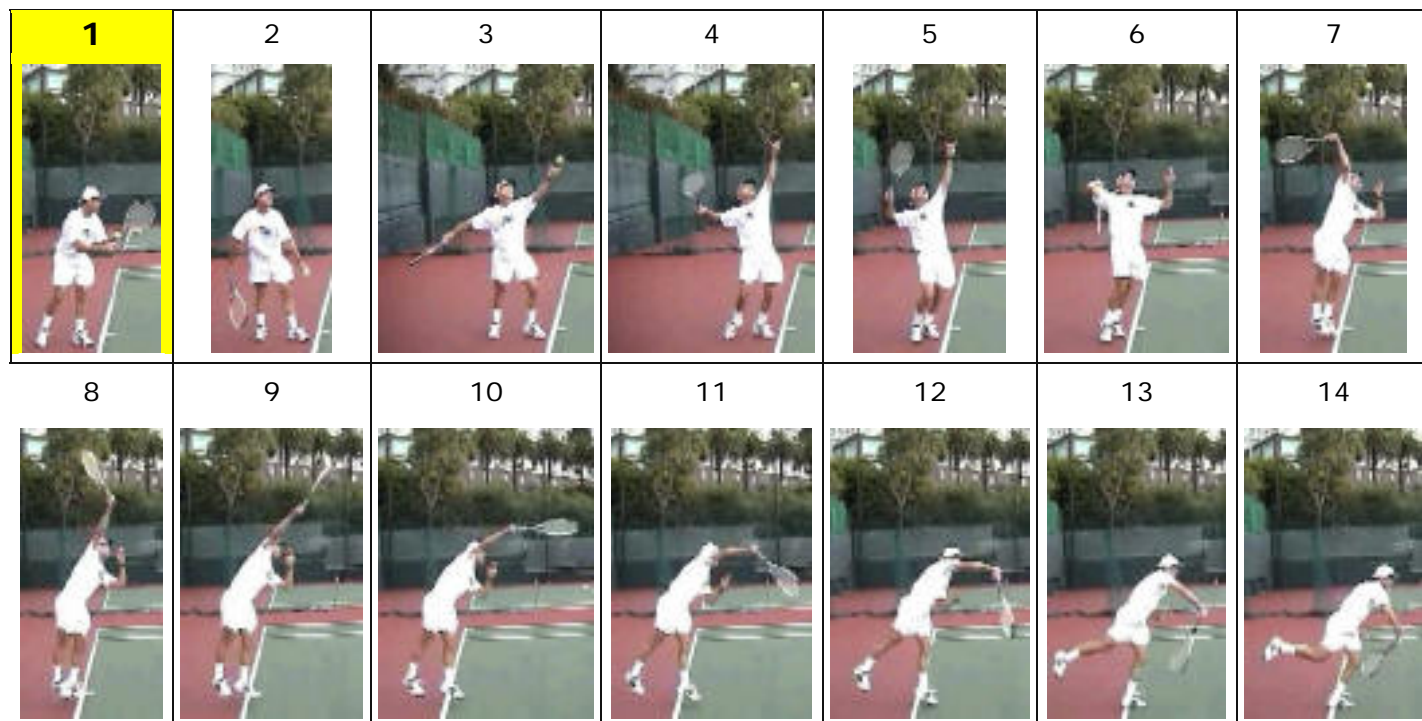
The Eastern Forehand grip, where the palm is directly behind the handle, simply makes it too difficult to get any natural pronation (wrist release through the contact area).

I know it's sometimes hard to get the right "feel" with these proper serving grips, but just start slowly, starting with the Modified Continental and then moving your hand a bit more on top of the handle.

I serve with a Continental, but most really good servers use the full Eastern Backhand grip. The Continental for me just feels a bit more natural, more like the way I'd hold a ball to throw. Baseball players naturally set up the ball in their hands to throw with either a Continental or Eastern Backhand grip. It's real tough to throw a ball with an Eastern Forehand grip...!

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

The Starting Position



1. A very relaxed position with your hands just lightly holding the racket. Absolutely NO tension..!
 - The shoulders are lined up towards the middle of the service you're about to serve to...
 - The feet are about shoulder width apart...
 - The racket head is slightly above your hands and pointing towards the middle of your intended service box...
 - Look at the photos and observe how and when the shoulders turn forward

2. Holding the ball... I was taught by Tom Stow to hold the ball between my thumb and index finger. The ball is not placed against the palm, but is held only with those two fingers. The throat of the racket is placed between your index and middle fingers.

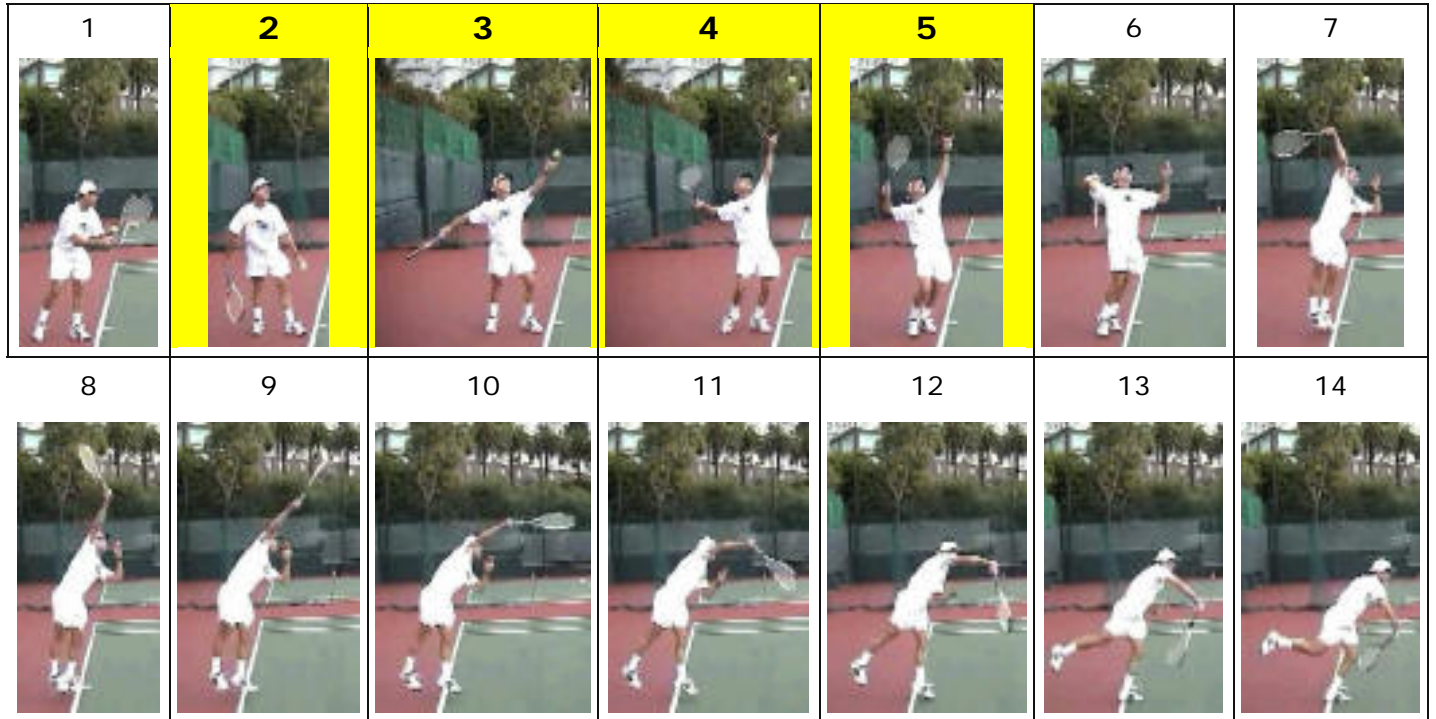
I like this tossing hand setup position in the Ready position because my tossing hand is now in a perfect position where I'll never have to change the position of my hand in relation to my tossing arm. The ball can release naturally from my hand during at just the right moment. More consistent toss placements...

3. Your weight is either on your front foot, on the rear foot, or evenly balanced. I prefer to start with the weight on my front foot and then shift to the rear foot to help start the rhythm and "feel" for the start of the motion. The hands stay relaxed...

4. I take a deep breath or two to release any tension in the body...
5. I check to make sure that my opponent is ready to play, but I then look down towards the service box (not necessarily right at my target) so the last image I have as I start my motion is NOT my opponent...
6. I decide where the exact target is for this upcoming serve...
7. I visualize two things... the serve actually going there (hey, its very easy to start praying at this point that you don't miss...!) and then I get a good picture in my mind where my toss will be when I look up after my tossing motion is completed...
8. And away we go...! I know it seems like quite a check list to go through before each serve, but if you get yourself into a **positive** routine just prior to the start of every one of your serves, well, the chances go way up that you'll be successful...
9. Second Serves: You've just missed your first serve so it's very easy to be in some kind of a negative state of mind. Take your time between first and second serves, gather whatever thoughts you may have, focus again on steps 3 - 6. Get into that positive routine for your second serve. You'll need to practice this diligently to improve...

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

The Tossing Motion



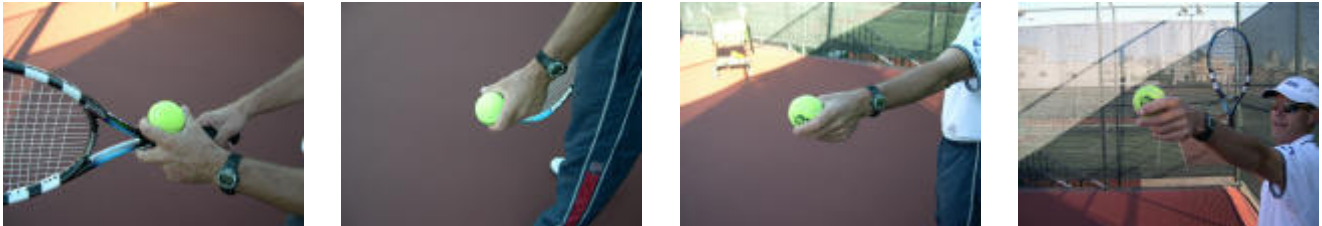
1. Both arms drop down to start the motion from the Ready Position as your hands stay relaxed...
2. As the racket passes down by your feet, your tossing arm has straightened and stops its downward motion by your left thigh...
3. **VERY IMPORTANT...!** The tossing arm remains straight as you move both arms back up.
 1. The only joint on the tossing the arm that hinges is at the shoulder.
 2. The elbow, the wrist, and the fingers should not bend in an effort to toss the ball.
 3. Really important...! The ball releases from your hand only because the weight of your tossing arm is moving up at a certain speed. There is no flick the wrist or the fingers to push the ball up and away from your hand. The ball comes out of your tossing hand at the same speed that your tossing is moving upwards.
 4. After the release of the ball (which is NOT the end of your tossing motion), keep your tossing arm moving upward at the same tempo as when you were holding the ball. Your arm remains in a straight position throughout the entire tossing motion.
 5. **Toss Placement...** When a right-handed person throws a ball, we let go of the ball in front of us and slightly to our right. So, our toss placement needs to be in a similar place which is slightly out to our right and in front of us. If you were to allow your toss to drop onto the court, it should land in an area that is about 18 inches in front of us and slightly to our right (about a 45 degree angle away from us). The ball should land

inside the baseline...

4. The racket arm continues in an arc where you allow the weight of the racket to create the arc behind you (the racket arm can straighten out behind you pointing to the back fence). Keep this slow and natural, there's absolutely no value in rushing this part of the service motion. You're in essence building up some rhythm and inertia and any speeding up or rushing the swing will throw off your timing.
5. As your tossing arm releases the ball and eventually ends up straight and pointing at the toss, your racket arm has bent at the elbow in about a 90 degree angle at about the height of your shoulder with the racket head pointing up (NOT down your back).

It's critical that you don't drop the racket head down your back prematurely. You'll get there, but you don't want to get there too early and have to pause with the racket pointed down your back. You'll lose your ability to hit with any significant power.

How to Hold the Ball



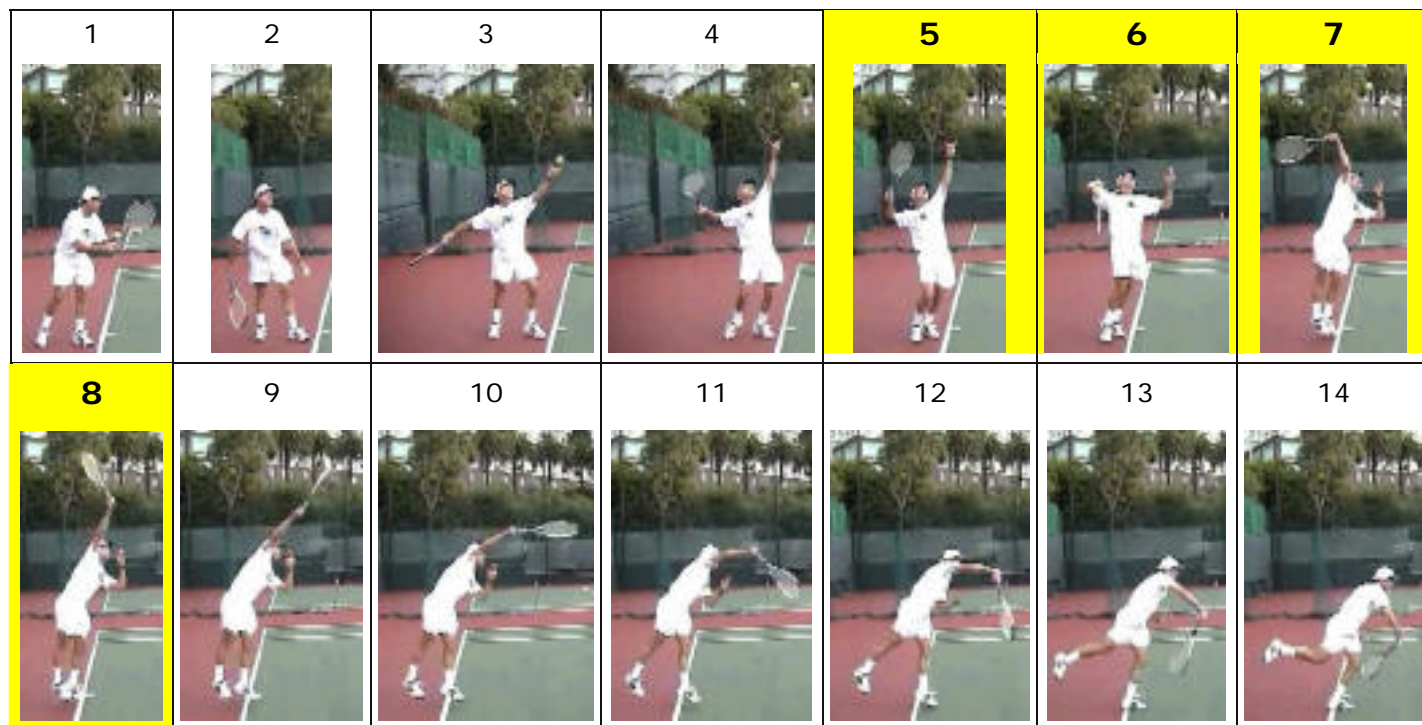
Place the ball in between your thumb and index finger. Place the racket between your index and third fingers.

I'll admit, this is not a natural position for most players. However, the tossing motion works best, and the resulting set up position is better if your arm goes up through the tossing motion with your hand in this position.

Practice this endlessly and you'll feel comfortable with it...

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

The Swing Shape to the Contact Position

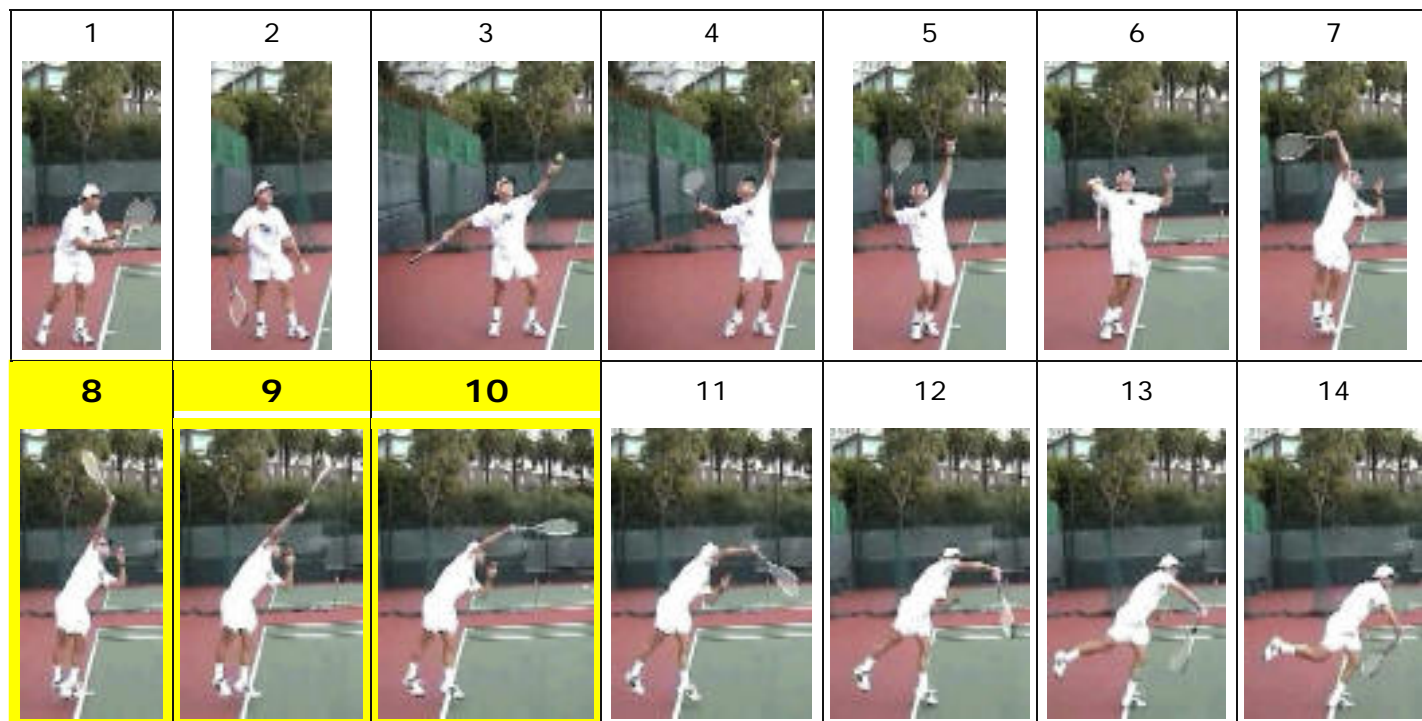


1. OK, from your Set position (the racket head pointed UP at the ball, not down your back), this is where the racket can pause for just a moment. Or not, it's not that important. What is important is that the swing shape from your Set position to the Contact Point has a specific shape to it
2. As you start the swing shape from here, allow the racket head to drop in a slight circular arc behind your head and slightly down your back (not straight down and then directly back up). Your elbow will remain at relatively the same position throughout the arc. As you look at the photos directly above, the racket head arcs in a clockwise manner, starting with the racket head in photo #5, and actually dropping down in a slight arc from 12:00 (photo #5) to 6:00 (photo #6).
3. The swing shape continues in a clockwise direction from 6:00 (photo #6) to 9:00 (photo #7) and then upwards to back to almost the contact point (photo #8).
4. The purpose of this swing shape is to build up racket speed just prior to making contact. The tension on your racket handle must remain relaxed to allow this swing shape to occur. If you tense up too much, the racket speed will be too slow, and you'll end up pushing the ball, rather than releasing the racket head with your wrist just prior to contact.

5. Be careful to not rotate your shoulders "open" too early, meaning that at contact you want to still be slightly sideways, not completely facing your target. Some players "open up" too soon, and from that position at contact it's almost impossible to hit anything but a totally flat serve.

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

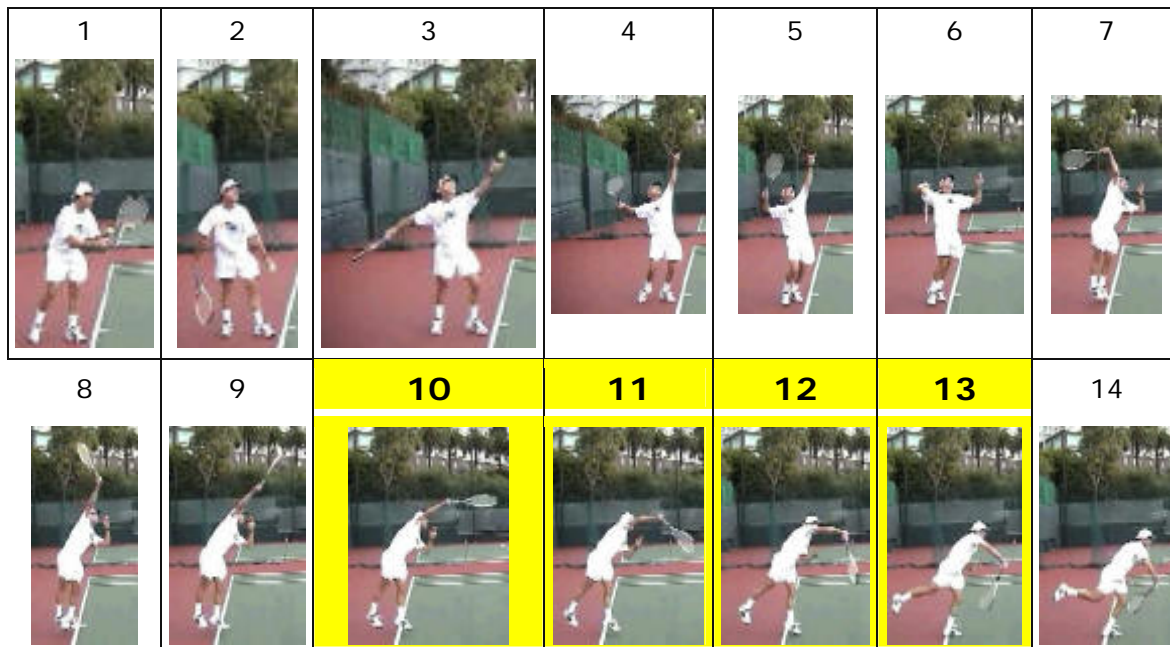
The Contact Position



1. Ah, the moment of truth has arrived....! Seriously, this is where you must allow all of the inertia and rhythm that you've built up prior to contact to keep on going. As we've talked about before, the contact point is NOT a major event. Any tightening or forcing here will slow down your swing speed and keep your arm from pronating (rolling over to where your palm faces out away to your racket side after contact).
2. Allow the racket head to "release" through contact so that prior to contact the racket is slightly behind your racket hand (photo #8), at contact the racket is aligned with your racket arm (photo #9), and immediately after contact the racket head begins to dip down in front of the hand (photo #10).
3. Photo #10 is where I see lots of players clench the grip and the racket head doesn't get a full "release" from the wrist. Often I see the racket head still aligned with the arm as it should be at contact (photo #9) after contact in photo #s 10 & 11. The top of the racket head should be the first thing coming down after contact (photo #s 10 & 11).

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

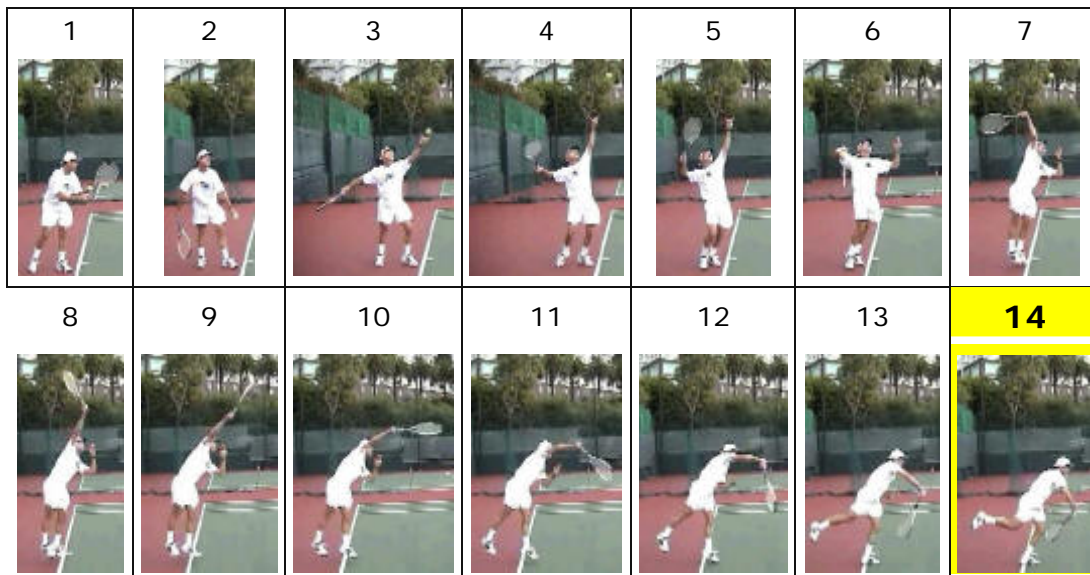
The Swing Shape to the Finish Position



1. For right-handed players, the racket head continues to lead the arm down and across to your left side. Practice making sure that you can feel the release of any tension in your racket hand as you pass through the ball and down towards your finish...
2. Allow your shoulders to rotate naturally forward until you're finally facing your target.

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

The Finish Position



1. On balance, facing your target, and ready to either move forward or stop your forward momentum and take a step or two back.
2. Allow your body weight to carry you into the court even if you're not going to follow your serve into net. There will be enough time to halt your momentum, jump back a step or so, and the reality is, none of your opponents will ever be hitting their returns of serve consistently a foot or so from inside your baseline. So, no worries...!

The Core Fundamentals of the Serve

Practice Tips and Drills

BE PATIENT...! Don't try to force a bunch of changes into your service motion in one or two practice sessions. The serve is a series of moving parts that have to be linked up just right. Develop a smooth and fluid motion first. Racket speed and its associated power will come in time... OK, you got that?...!

The mirror shows all...! No kidding, get in front of a mirror, and go through the different parts of the serve as described above without a ball. See if you can copy each segment of the motion and then practice connecting the segments together into a fluid, effortless swing. Look at your self from a straight on angle and then from the side.

Tossing motion - start with the racket in the same position as photo #5. Practice your straight arm tossing motion with the racket pointing UP and NOT pointing down your back. You should develop a nice slow tempo in the tossing arm speed. Allow the ball to come out of your naturally. Allow the ball to drop onto the court while you pose in the position shown in photo #5.

One of the big mistakes players make on the serve is to drop their tossing arm back down to their side way too early. Keep the tossing arm up and once you begin the swing shape up towards contact, your tossing arm will naturally begin to drop away.

When you practice your serve with balls on a court, don't hit more than 40 - 50 serves per practice session. Seriously, you can get really excited about improving your serve, go out there and hit a ton of balls, and the next day it's a problem...! Be patient. Don't overdo it... I wouldn't recommend that hit more than 150 serves per week, say three sessions of no more than 50 serves.

This stuff takes time, so get organized with carving out some small chunks of time to start with your mirror training (no ball). Three to five minutes a day of mirror training and you'll be absolutely amazed at how quickly you'll feel some changes to your serve.

Now, when you go out to play a match as you're in your learning stages of making changes to your serve, you'll most likely revert back to old habits for awhile. That's natural and to be expected. Don't try to manufacture your new serve in matches. Simply, allow whatever practice has become instinctive, and just allow it to come out on its own. Whatever practice you've put in, well, some of that may or may not appear in your serve when you're playing a match. Be patient, it'll start to show up in your matches all by itself.

And mostly, come on, enjoy this time you're putting in to making some changes to your game. Some of your tennis pals will say you're crazy, and at times you'll think they're maybe right, but stay with it, and in the end, you'll get that great feeling we get when we feel true improvement... go get 'em...!

Brent