

TWO-HANDED IS SUPERIOR TO ONE-HANDED BACKHAND By Damir Popadic

A lot of discussion is going on about which backhand is better: one handed or two handed? So far I have never read someone stating that one or the other one is better; they always state disadvantages and advantages of one and the other or their subjective feeling toward one or the other backhand. Why? I really do not see any valid reason for it. If we agree on definition of better (more efficient for tennis competition) it is not hard to see which one is better by comparing its advantages and disadvantages. One more thing; one handed backhand means one handed drive, topspin backhand. Do not confuse it with one handed slice backhand because they are completely different in terms of muscle memory.

INTRODUCTION

There were times when two handed backhand was an exception. Before 70's it would be completely inappropriate to have such a discussion. Nobody even spoke about two handed backhand. It did not appear even in the tennis handbooks. Then a few players came to the stage such as: Jimmy Connors, Chris Evert, and later Bjorn Borg who made such success using two handed backhand that from then on more and more players have used it. In today professional tennis is prevailing; especially in women's tennis. I think that this is valid enough reason to find out which one of the two and why is better. Furthermore this is very important to the coming future stars streaming to make mark in professional tennis because it can save them time to figure it themselves out and put them on the right track right away.

THE COMPARISON OF THE TWO

At first I am going to explain few well known myths about one and the other:

Easier to learn- two handed backhand is easier to learn (children have no such strength of wrist, arm, and shoulder so it is difficult for them to execute one handed backhand), and coordination by one handed backhand is more complicated. These characteristics by itself would not mean much because the point I am trying to prove here is which backhand is better for professional play. If all other characteristics were in favor of one handed backhand this one would not count much.

More reliable – means which one will perform better in crouch situations. By common sense is known that in tight situations players have to use bigger body parts to lessen the impact of muscles tightening. This is again in favor of two handed backhand

More consistent- it means with which one you can hit more or less the same shot over and over again. It is obvious; two handed backhand because two hands on the handle enable more controlled backswing and more stable position of racket at impact

More precise- again two handed backhand because of the things just mentioned, and also because the margin for error for one handed backhand is higher due to more precise positioning in relation to the ball (the ball has to be hit ahead of and bit to the left of front foot: small deviation will cause big repercussions)

More versatile- two hander is much more versatile than one hander. With two hander you can hit drive, different topspins, topspin lob, short topspin cross, half-volley, balls on the rise, high balls with topspin or on the rise, and all these different shots are much more easier to execute on one hand (much higher percentage of success), and with more variation on the other hand than using one handed backhand. Furthermore, players who

use two handed backhand easily transfer this technique to hit drive and topspin (very difficult shots hit with one hand)volleys .One handed backhand is better suited to hit half-volley close to the net

Better disguise- again there is no comparison between the two.Two hander is far out because of the other hand which will help to overcome different points of contact what is not case with one handed backhand.This luxury to commit a bit later is the main point in disguising a shot (keeping the intentions to you till is too late for opponent to react)

More power- power at one handed backhand comes mostly by stepping into the ball;rotation of the body, and backswing are second in line .When hitting two handed backhand power can come also from stepping into the ball (lateral force),but as well as rotating upper body around head (angular force), and to lessen degree from the backswing..So it obvious that two hander has edge over one hander.

Return of serve- it is almost impossible to return fast flat serves on fast surface using one handed backhand drive,topspin because by using one hander you cannot adjust your backswing length and by not adjusting it you are late, and when you are late there is no way to hit one handed backhand (there is not second hand to come around on the ball).Also because of less difficult stroke mechanics player who uses two hander can quicker prepare which is of paramount importance for return of serve

Running backhand- here again two hander is superior to one hander because gives a player bigger margin of error.To hit one handed running backhand you have to position yourself more precisely because you have very narrow effective striking area(ahead of and to the left of front foot).It is true that you have greater reach with one hand in comparison to two hands but to no avail because if your hitting arm is too far away from the body produces ineffective shot.On the other hand,when executing two handed backhand because of the help of the second hand striking zone is larger, and arms to body position more tolerable.Here again if the timing is not perfect there is not comparison between the two.

Transition to the net- two hander is again better than one hander as an approach shot because you can hit it from open stance (the same as forehand) which enables to move through the shot and gets attacker closer to the net (better positioning)

Low balls- to hit topspin on low (slice) balls is difficult by itself (need to turn backwards to forwards rotation of the ball), and if the knee bent is not deep enough the ball will finish in the net.Here again two hander has edge because by executing two hander base of support is wider so the shot itself is more stable

Short , low balls-for this kind of balls neither of the two is well suited .One handed backhand has further reach but without body leverage (only wrist and arm)is impossible to produce satisfactory shot.For two handed backhand this kind of shot is beyond the reach because of two handed backhand mechanics which determine the point of contact (point of contact has to be in the line with body).

Really wide balls-neither one is well suited, The same reasons as in previous case .The only difference is that all what is said for balls ahead of the body now applies for the balls to the side of the body

Balls hit directly at the body-here one hander has advantage because by two hander second hand stops upper body from moving away from incoming ball

THE TRENDS IN MODERN TENNIS

To further value one or the other;it is very important to give a few hints where the game of tennis is heading to:

- newcomers will be physically stronger compared to today's players (faster, more powerful, more agile) which translates into faster ball exchanges overall
- based on this trend more and more balls will be hit from dynamic balance (from movement)
- more and more balls will be hit from the air and on the rise
- more and more balls will be hit (on both wings) from open stance in order to recover as soon as possible for the next ball
- opening of the point will play even greater role (solid return will be must)
- trend of slower playing surfaces will cause the balls to bounce higher

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TWO

One handed backhand:

1. less stable racket at the moment of impact
2. needs more time to prepare
3. less controlled backswing
4. full backswing is almost a must
5. the point of contact has to be ahead and to the left of front foot (otherwise you are in trouble)
6. upper body must be more than perpendicular to the oncoming ball
7. necessary very strong shoulder, arm, and wrist (more injuries)
8. after finish your body is still mostly sideways
9. the most power is generated by stepping into the ball
10. lineal (close) stance is almost a must (less balanced)
(all the others reflect seriously on the efficiency of shot)
11. elbow must be close to the body otherwise the shot is ineffective (narrow striking zone)

Two handed backhand:

1. more stable racket at the moment of impact
2. quicker preparation
3. controlled backswing
4. with variety of backswings is possible to produce quality shot
5. the point of contact is in the line with the body and bit to the left (.if you are late the other hand can help you)
6. upper body must coil but not as much as on one handed backhand
7. because of the two hands impact is more evenly distributed so it is not necessary so strong shoulders, arms, and wrists (less injuries)
8. after finish you body faces the net and you can easily move sideways
9. power is generated by rotating your shoulders around your head and stepping into the ball
10. all stances are possible (more balanced)
11. because of the help of the other hand elbow can be in various position in relationship to the body for the shot to still be effective (larger striking zone)

ONE HANDED BACKHAND SLICE AS MANDATORY

Although it is obvious that the two hander is the stroke of modern tennis as obvious is that one handed backhand slice (in spite of the fact that topspin rotation dominates slice rotation) is must. The game of tennis is more and more attack, and counterattack but one handed backhand slice is needed for defense (really wide balls, block returns), for specialty shots (reaching drop shots, transition to the net on low, short balls), and as

surprise weapon by changing rally's pace and spin .So every aspiring player has to have one.

CONCLUSION

One handed backhand can be very effective stroke but needs that all conditions are met to its fullest(strong wrist,arm, and shoulder,complete shoulder turn,full circular backswing,very precise positioning,stepping into the ball,optimal impact point).If any of the conditions is not fulfilled the stroke losses substantially to its effectiveness.And it is impossible to meet these conditions(very difficult now and evenmore in the future) because of the trends in modern tennis (faster rallies,more balls hit from the air,and on the rise,extreme importance of hitting from dynamic balance,need for fast lateral recovery,high bouncing balls).So in spite of one handed backhand evolution(it used to be that finish is with shoulders sideways to the net and today is that shoulders can turn quite a bit)this is not enough to stop one handed topspin,drive backhand of becoming an obsolete.Where is the answer?At first sight seems difficult to find the answer but actually it is very easy.One just has to look at the forehand side and its evolution(different stances,different impact points,=hitting from dynamic balance).To translate it to backhand side(and in many tennis handbooks I read that these two strokes are mirror picture of each other)reads two-handed backhand.