

Footwork - The Bailey Method

Part 1 - Offensive Contact Moves

This is the first in a three part series of articles that will explain the correct contact move by listing the relevant approaching ball, footwork selection, hitting stance, contact move and corresponding balance move.

Without a doubt, tennis is an extremely athletic sport. In 2006, Roger Federer said, "My game is all about footwork. If I move well, I play well."

When analyzing movement and to move well, there are five areas to address - what I call the **5 R's**.

1. Getting **Ready** by being up on your toes and then creating a strong foundation with your legs when the opponent strikes the ball
2. **Reading** the opponent's approaching ball into a specific footwork zone on the court
3. **Reacting** out to this ball with Out steps and setting up the feet into a hitting stance
4. **Responding** with a contact move and its corresponding balance move and finally
5. **Recovering** ideally to the mid point recovery position of your opponent's next shot

When you put the 5 R's together, you get a *Completing of the Circle* with your footwork, and this should happen time and time again with the hitting of every ball.

Many footwork articles concentrate on the importance of first step quickness, split stepping and moving to and from the ball, but very few target the missing link, i.e., *the athletic movement and balance needed when making contact with the ball* - the **Contact Move**.

Across the tennis community a *common language* has not been addressed in this crucial area of the game, where a common communication method needs to be used for consistent education, learning and recognition.

My research shows that there are only six athletic skills needed to master tennis groundstrokes, and only 15 pure, easily identified contact moves that exist. These contact moves can be divided into three categories:

- Offensive
- Rallying
- Defensive

The athletic skills needed and their relations to the contact move are:

1. **Pivoting the hips** - 4 contact moves that involves pivoting off one or both feet
2. **Spinning the hips** - 3 contact moves that involve spinning the hips
3. **Transferring the weight** - 2 contact moves that involve transferring the weight in a elevated movement from the back foot to the front foot
4. **Multi-directional hopping** - 4 contact moves that uses a hop in a forward, sideward or backward direction
5. **Shifting the weight** - 1 contact move that concerns shifting of the hips
6. **Lunging sideways** - 1 contact move that requires a lunging (preferably at an angle) movement

In summary, that is six athletic skills that encompass 15 contact moves.

I find the best way to understand the contact moves is to *feel* them. Life is about *experiencing* not exhibiting. I am a huge fan of **shadow tennis**, which is where you practice all your moves *without the ball*, with or without the racquet, and on or off a tennis court. I believe it's essential to learn the contact moves in this way before you go on court using balls.

by David Bailey

David is a footwork and tennis trainer and creator of The Bailey Method, a revolutionary way of learning footwork. He spent 15 years studying and researching the steps and movements of the top pros, and developed a language and a method that is cutting edge in one of the most complex and misunderstood aspects of the game - footwork and court movement. David has worked with world class players and coaches at the top academies, and has presented at coaching seminars around the world, including PTR International Tennis Symposium. The Bailey Method has become a regular part of the coaching curriculum at Bollettieri Tennis Academy. It is a system with a common language for tennis movement and footwork that is becoming universal and is now being taught around the world. To find out more about The Bailey Method, visit www.thebaileymethod.com

Focus on the stance, the balance, and the use of the legs and hips. Once you have mastered shadowing, have someone feed the appropriate ball that matches the contact move. Focus just on your feet, balance and what your legs and lower body are doing, and once you feel comfortable with this, introduce a live ball and go from hitting to point, match then tournament play.

Being able to shadow well enables you to compare and contrast the feeling of correctness, so *Feel the Feel and Learn the Look*.

You can't feel the feel if you haven't first learned the look. There are nine common and distinctly different contact moves to learn through three articles of progressive photographs, graphics and explanations.

1. **Three Offensive Contact Moves** where you attack the ball with your feet and have an aggressive *do something* attitude.
2. **Three Rallying Contact Moves** where you keep your position on the baseline and have a neutral "stay in it" attitude.
3. **Three Defensive Contact Moves** where you are pushed wide or back from the baseline and have a defensive "in trouble" move.

The Contact Move is an athletic move that you make when you make contact with the ball. As stated previously, my research shows that there are 15 different ways you make contact with the ball, so use what works for you!

Part 1 of this article series is on the three common Offensive Contact Moves; the moves are for both forehand and backhand side. When deciding which contact move to select, you must first:

1. Read an Approaching Ball
2. Decide what Footwork Steps you are going to use to reach the ball
3. Set up your feet into a Hitting Stance
4. Respond with a Contact Move
5. Control your center of gravity with a Balance Move
6. Recover and Get Ready for your opponent's next shot

Even though there are 15 contact moves, the articles in this series will introduce only nine contact moves. The nine moves are chosen because they are simple, commonly used and have distinctly different characteristics.

Sequential Progression Contact Moves

Each article will explain with Sequential Progression the chosen contact move by listing the relevant approaching ball, footwork selection, hitting stance, contact move and corresponding balance move. The important aspects that distinguish each contact move from the next is the fact that each contact move has a -

- Distinctive approaching ball - be it fast, mid court, floating, deep or wide
- Certain footwork selection - be it offensive, defensive or rallying
- Particular hitting stance - be it open, closed, neutral, semi-open, running or a back foot stance
- Athletic contact move - be it lunging, spinning, hopping, shifting, transferring or pivoting the hips
- Relevant balance move - using the non-dominant leg to counterbalance with a side kick, a kick back, leg curl, knee drop or inside knee drop

Offensive Contact Moves

Offensive Contact Moves, which tend to be on mid court or opportunity balls, use offensive footwork patterns where you attack the ball with your feet. Examples of offensive contact moves are the Step Down Pivot Move, the Front Foot Hop Move and the Forward Transfer Move.

The Step Down Pivot Move

The Step Down Pivot is an offensive contact move where the ball is hit off the front foot. The front foot stays on the ground during and after the hit.

Approaching ball lands mid court

The mid court approaching ball is one that lands mid court just past the service line.

REACT with footwork selection . . . Offensive footwork

Offensive or Creating or Forcing Footwork (your choice) is footwork where you attack the ball with your feet and take the ball early, thus cutting down your opponent's reaction time. I also like to call this "do something" footwork!



Ready 1

Ready 2

Ready split

Step out

SET UP with a hitting stance . . . Neutral Stance

The out steps are then followed by a neutral stance where the weight goes from the back foot to the front foot and you step *before you swing!* Keep the front foot pointing toward the net post. Note: A player with a one handed backhand will naturally close off the stance a little more than the two handed backhand when pivoting off the front foot!



Left: Step down on a mid court ball
Right: Finish shot using a knee drop balance move

RESPOND with a contact move . . . Step Down Pivot Move

The Step Down Pivot is an offensive contact move where the ball is hit off the front foot. The front foot stays on the ground during and after the hit. Keep the angles in the leg through contact and finish looking under the net tape, watching the ball bounce on the other side of the net. Finish the swing before bringing the trail leg around for balance. Bring the leg around to 2 o'clock on the right side and 10 o'clock on the left side. When this leg comes around, it should be like a push to the next ball not a brake. It is like swimming - you must finish the tumble turn before you push off the wall.

and a balance move . . . Back Knee Drop

The balance move of the Step Down Pivot depends on the height of the ball. If the ball is low, then like a skateboarder who has hit a bump on the road, drop the back knee for balance. This will keep alignment with the body and help generate racquet head speed and enable topspin to be generated. If the ball is higher and you step down, then kick the leg back for balance. The kick back will help you extend through your swing and prevent you from opening up too early and losing your balance. By kicking the leg back or dropping the knee down, you have also gained control of your back leg so you can use it effectively to push you toward your intended recovery position. This position on the court will depend on the success and direction of your last shot.

Footwork - The Bailey Method Part 1 - Offensive Contact Moves



Bring leg through

Front cross for longer distance recovery; side skip for shorter recovery

Drop step inside foot

Finish split

Front Foot Hop Move

The Front Foot Hop is an offensive contact move where the ball is hit off the front foot. The player takes off and lands on the same foot in a forward position to the take off point. You can use the front foot hop as a way to approach the net or to hit an aggressive on the rise groundstroke and move back to the baseline.

Approaching ball is short opportunity ball

The short opportunity approaching ball is one that lands short and bounces just before the service line. It is short enough that you should take the opportunity and approach the net. However, you can very easily hit a front foot hop and retreat back to the baseline.

REACT with footwork selection . . . Offensive Footwork

Offensive or **Creating** or **Forcing Footwork** (your choice) is footwork where you attack the ball with your feet and take the ball early, thus cutting down your opponent's reaction time. I also like to call this "do something" footwork!

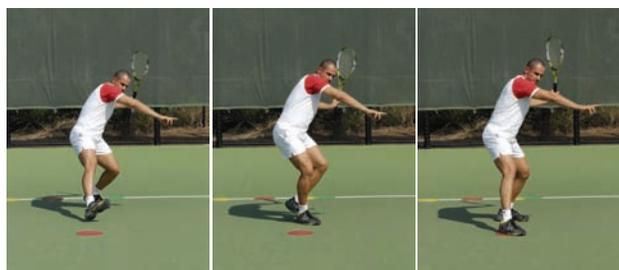


Ready 1

Ready 2

Ready split

Step out



Shuffle forward 1

Shuffle forward 2

Neutral stance

SET UP with a hitting stance . . . Neutral Stance

The out steps are then followed by a Neutral Stance where the weight goes from the back foot to the front foot and you step *before you swing!* Keep the front foot pointing toward the net post.



Left:
Make contact first on an opportunity ball

Right:
Front foot hop with a leg curl balance move

RESPOND with a contact move . . . Front Foot Hop

The Front Foot Hop is an offensive contact move where the ball is hit off the front foot. The front foot stays on contact, but then hops forward after the hit. Keep the angles in the leg through contact and use the wrist to impart spin not the legs. It is important to hit through the ball and not to jump up on contact or look up (lift the head) too early.

and a balance move . . . Kick Back

The balance move of the front foot hop is a Kick Back where the trail leg kicks in behind, and sole of the shoe points to the side fence. The Kick Back will help you extend through your swing and prevent you from opening up too early and losing your balance. By kicking the leg back, you can then use it effectively to push you toward your intended recovery position. This position on the court will depend on if you want to go into the net or move back to the baseline.



Land on front foot

Start split

Finish split

Forward Transfer Move

The Forward Transfer Move is an offensive contact move where the ball is hit off a semi open stance and the weight is transferred from the back foot to the front foot. The body becomes elevated just before contact as the hips square up to face the net. With the Forward Transfer, the weight goes out toward the target with a leg curl balance move. The front foot always finishes pointing in the direction of the hit.

Approaching ball is a floating mid court ball

The floating mid court ball is one that lands short and bounces high with little spin just before the service line. Because this ball is easy to reach, many players will run around and hit a forehand instead of a backhand though this shot is a common two handed backhand shot, especially on the return of serve.

REACT with footwork selection . . . Offensive Footwork

Offensive or **Creating** or **Forcing Footwork** (your choice) is footwork where you attack the ball with your feet and take the ball early, thus cutting down your opponent's reaction time. I also like to call this "do something" footwork!



Ready 1

Ready 2

Ready split

Shuffle in C shape



Balance on front foot

Step back into semi open stance

Let ball drop into strike zone

SET UP with a hitting stance . . . Semi Open Stance

The out steps are then followed by a Semi Open Stance. This is the stance where the player loads most of his weight on the outer leg. The player's body is semi open, while trying to maintain a wide base, bent knees and a well aligned body.



Left:
Forward transfer on leg curl on a short floating ball

Right:
Toe points in shot direction

RESPOND with a contact move . . . Forward Transfer

The Forward Transfer is an offensive contact move where the ball is high and floating so a really aggressive move is made at the ball. The weight is transferred from the back foot to the front foot in an elevated manner, but the angles keep in line with the legs through the entire hit. The body becomes elevated just before contact as the hips square up to face the net. The front foot always finishes pointing in the direction of the hit. It is important to hit through the ball and not to jump up on contact or look up (lift the head) too early.

and a balance move . . . Leg Curl

The balance move of the forward transfer is the Leg Curl. This is where the back leg bends toward the buttocks. The Leg Curl will enable the player to stay balanced by keeping the body aligned with the chest up, yet also enable the player to hit the ball flat and hard, imparting very little spin. The Leg Curl will help you extend through your swing and prevent you from opening up too early and losing your balance. By curling the leg back, you can then use it effectively to push you toward your intended recovery position. This position on the court will depend on if you want to go into the net or move back to the baseline.



Bring leg through for balance

Recovery push



With ready steps recover to the baseline

Split finish

Part 2 of this article series will appear in the next issue of *TennisPro* and cover Rallying Contact Moves. It will be followed by Part 3 on Defensive Contact Moves.

VOTE PTR Board of Directors Ballot

The following people have been selected by PTR's Nominating Committee to serve a 3 year term on PTR's Board of Directors. You may nominate a candidate to be added to the ballot. Nominees must receive *65 votes to be added to the ballot. The election will take place at PTR's Annual Meeting, February 17, 2008. All current members may vote. You must be present or provide proxy to vote.

- Luciano Botti
- David Dinkins

Existing Board Members and terms:

2005-2008 - Luciano Botti, David Dinkins

2006-2009 - Dennis Van der Meer, Jean Mills

2007-2010 - Lewis "Skip" Hartman

Write-in Nominee

Write-in Nominee

Ballot must be returned by February 1, 2008

Send to PTR, PO Box 4739, Hilton Head Island, SC 29938 USA
or fax it to 843-686-2033

*(.05% of membership)