

# The inside out stroke in men's tennis: Strategies and tactics

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ITF Coaching and Sport Science Review 2018; 74 (26): 20 - 22

## ABSTRACT

*Understanding the strategy and tactics in tennis will help to make decisions when preparing a match against a certain opponent, depending on the different aspects of tennis performance, on the basis of the indicators of sport performance (efficiency, accuracy, technical command...). In line with the direction and their intention, players will use a certain technical movement for greater effectiveness and to increase the possibilities of success. In tennis, the inside out forehand provides a new possibility in the set of tactical and strategic variables. This article presents some ideas on the strategies and tactics of the inside out forehand, as well as several examples for its on-court training.*

**Key words:** Groundstroke, inside out forehand, training

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Article received: 28 Dec 2017

Article accepted: 15 Mar 2018

## INTRODUCTION

In current tennis, players rely on a certain stroke to help them out in difficult situations (break points, set points...). Of all the possible strokes (service, approach to the net, ...) the forehand is the one that helps to cover the court more easily (Brabenec, 2000); approximately 65% of the space and even 85% of the court, for players of a certain level with greater feet speed.

Moving towards the backhand in order to hit a forehand, automatically reduces the area of the backhand return as an option to the return of the opponent, and increases the possibilities of playing other shots from this position. To simulate the direction of the forehand stroke is easier, but footwork is much more natural in the backhand. The forehand produces more winners and relatively less errors, if compared to the backhand.



Figure 1. Roger Federer.

## THE INSIDE OUT FOREHAND AS AN OBJECT OF TACTICAL ANALYSIS

To consider the inside out forehand from the back of the court as a new challenge for the analysis of the strategies and tactics in tennis is based on the relationship between tactical planning and its consequences. The tactical development of the inside out forehand offers the player a new possibility to hit the ball towards new directions and more open angles. This helps, a priori, to play more offensively.

All along the XXth century, the inside out forehand was already used in the 60's by players like Neale Fraser (1960) and Manuel Santana (1966) who used it mainly to return the service from the advantage side. In the 70's, the inside out forehand was not only used for the return as in the case of Stan Smith (1972), it was also used during rallies. The most notable example is Björn Borg, who, from his beginnings in 1973, already used the inside out forehand in long rallies, although he lacked the offensive intention of the present game (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Björn Borg.

In the 80's the inside out forehand was used as an attack weapons, but its focus was on changing the rhythm of the rally. Ivan Lendl or Boris Becker, should be taken into account as a reference (in the 90's). But the most significant change will occur during the new millennium: those players at the top ATP ranking represent a new model that will adapt better to all the surfaces. Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer or Andy Murray, with wins in all surfaces, confirm that we are facing a more versatile player. They are more polyvalent players, the so called "all court tennis players", who, with a complete playing pattern become a player who can win in any type of surface.

Another change described is the progressive increase in the number of rallies. We now observe players playing more time from the baseline. Players, from their strategic position, at the back of the court, have acquired a new playing pattern that lets them face the stroke offensively, looking for new angles at a greater speed (Takahashi, Wada, Maeda, Kodama, Nishizono & Kurata, 2009).

It is at this point where the inside out forehand entered the tour with more strength during this last decade. More and more tennis players are using this technical tool, a stroke that produces “imbalance” during rallies, as will be seen later.

Players have been incorporating the inside out forehand more frequently to their playing patterns. Nowadays, all players include this technical gesture in their motor toolkit. Modern tennis could not be understood without the inside out forehand in its two versions: down-the-line and cross-court.

### THE STRATEGY OF THE INSIDE OUT FOREHAND

Using the inside out forehand at the strategic level implies a new contribution to space distribution, direction and intention of the inside out forehand from the left side. In order to execute this stroke a quick movement towards the left is mandatory. It is normally hit when the ball lands on the left of the opponent, and lets him add more speed to the ball.

On the other hand, the movement towards the left opens a greater area on the right side, so that if the stroke has no offensive intention (power and placement), the opponent can surprise hitting an open shot to the right.

In this regard, we notice that most ATP players have laterally shifted from the centre of the tennis court, between 90 to 150 cm. towards the left (Kovacs, 2009). Strategically, they are supposed to be able to hit the ball with the forehand, it could be said that there has been a lateral “decentralization” of more than two thirds of the court. This new space “gained” to the court is the right one to execute the movement towards the left side. It is a broader movement, in which the speed of the racquet head increases continuously during all the swing, making the transfer of the ball energy more fluent and faster.

If the player’s forehand is stronger than his backhand, not only will he be using it to “cover” the left side, but also to counterbalance continuous rallies. For example, in matches between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, Federer took a strategic position on his left side, since with Nadal’s topspin cross-court forehand on the backhand (single handed), Federer makes many errors.

### THE TACTICS OF THE INSIDE OUT FOREHAND

Performance analysis is important for the analysis of players’ tactics. Players never play against an “average” player, on an “average” court surface, with “average” balls. These variable factors meet along a tennis match and greatly condition the decisions that will be made. Therefore, it is important for players’ profiles to represent their tactics in the different types of competitive situations

As to the inside out forehand, it is tactically employed when players are making steady backhand rallies, and the inside out forehand lets them hit with their forehand from the backhand zone, providing the technical gesture more power, opening the angles even more in order to surprise their opponents. This action can continue with a change of direction to the right side or else, with a new stroke aiming at the same zone, (wrong foot). (Figure 3).

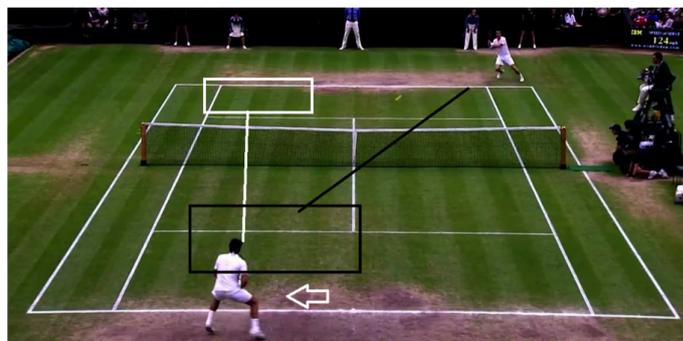


Figure 3. The tactics of the inside out forehand.

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Below are some on-court exercises with tactic objectives which aim at putting in practice the main target of our study, the inside out forehand in men’s tennis.

#### Exercise 1

Purpose: Specific footwork, hitting and aiming the inside out forehand in a semi-open situation.

Place and material: A tennis court, a basket with balls, rackets.

Methodology: Rally with the coach.

Description: The coach is on the other half of the court, in the net area, rallying with the player for him to make the movement towards the ball with the appropriate footwork. The coach volleys a minimum of four balls per series, to different court zones, preferably towards the left. The player will hit all balls inside out towards the coach for him to volley (Figure 4).

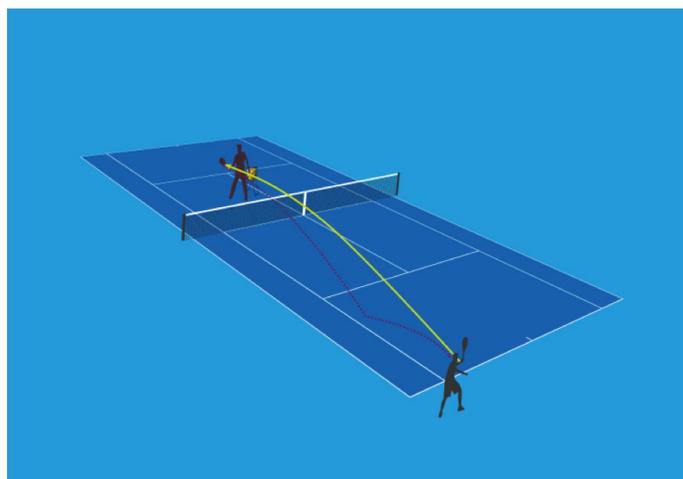


Figure 4. Exercise 1.

#### Exercise 2

Aim: Footwork, hitting and aiming the inside out forehand depending on previous indications.

Place and material: A tennis court, a basket with balls, rackets.

Methodology: The coach feeds from the basket.

Description: The player, at the back of the court, will play an inside out forehand, making the previous gesture according to the indications of the coach, jumping with his feet together, stepping on the sideline..., by means of numbers, words, mathematical calculations, hand gestures....(Figure 5).

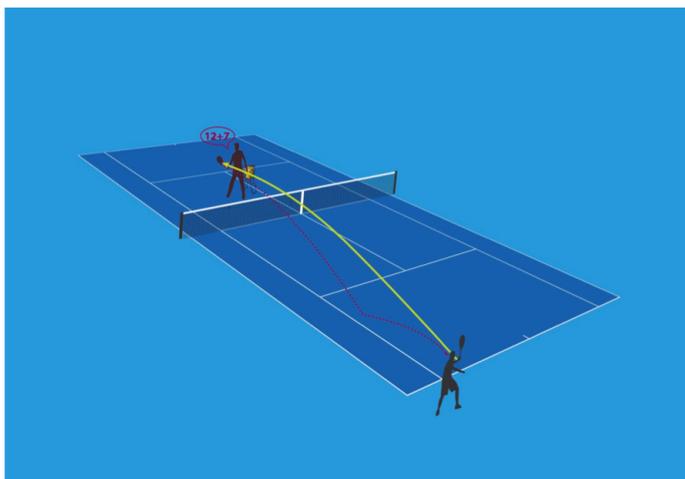


Figure 5. Exercise 2.

### Exercise 3

**Aim:** Footwork, hitting and aiming the inside out forehand depending on the visual stimulus.

**Place and material:** A tennis court, a basket with balls, rackets.

**Methodology:** The coach feeds from the basket.

**Description:** The player will play an inside out forehand depending on the position of the cones on court. Cones of different colours are used, and depending on their colours, the inside out forehand will be played down-the-line or cross-court (Figure 6).

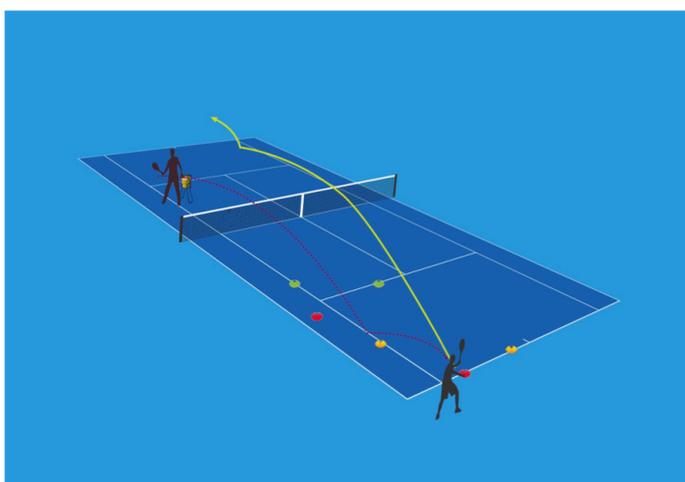


Figure 6. Exercise 3.

### Exercise 4

**Purpose:** Specific footwork, hitting and aiming the inside out forehand in an open situation.

**Place and material:** A tennis court, a basket with balls, rackets.

**Methodology:** Rally between players.

**Description:** The players will be on both sides of the court. The coach will be on one side of the court. The coach starts the rally feeding a ball from the basket towards the left of one of the players. This player has to hit an inside out forehand and so does his opponent. The point is played after 6 balls without making an error (Figure 7).

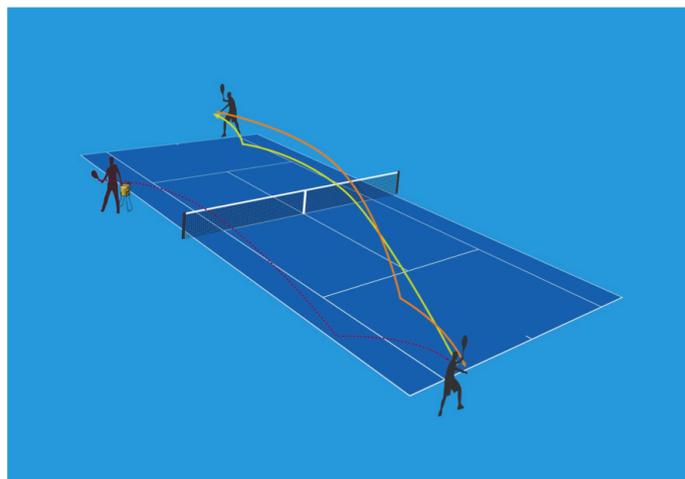


Figure 7. Exercise 4.

The crosscourt inside out forehand rally from the outside of the court is a specific exercise for support, since the player must move laterally positioning his body according to the direction of the ball. As Groppe (1993) indicates, the lateral movement of the tennis player is based on the footwork that determines the hitting position.

### CONCLUSIONS

The only scientific study on the inside out forehand of men's professional tennis has come to the conclusion that most of the inside out forehands are hit in a diagonal direction. However, most winners are played down-the-line. Besides, data demonstrate that those tennis players who hit more inside out forehands are the ones who win the match. Likewise, those players who hit the greatest number of winners with the inside out forehand, win the match (Martín-Lorente, E.; Campos, J.; & Crespo, M., 2017).

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