International Journal of Engineering Applied Science and Management
ISSN (Online): 2582-6948
Vol. 4 Issue 12, December 2023

Exploring Biomechanics: Square Stance vs. Open Stance in Tennis

Sunil Kumar[1], Dr. Arun Kumar Tyagi[2]
Research scholar Professor, Department of Physical Education, Monad University, Pilkhuwa, Uttar Pradesh, India[1]
Professor, Department of Physical Education, Monad University, Pilkhuwa, Uttar Pradesh, India[2]

Abstract: *In the realm of tennis, the backhand stroke stands as a cornerstone, demanding a nuanced blend of power, precision, and command. Within this domain, two prevailing stances, square and open, have risen to prominence, each laden with distinctive biomechanical nuances and repercussions for performance. This exploration undertakes a dynamic deconstruction of the biomechanics inherent in these stances, with the overarching objectives of delineating their respective strengths and weaknesses, unraveling the biomechanical determinants influencing power, accuracy, and consistency in the backhand, and furnishing evidence-based insights for players and coaches to refine their backhand technique. The square stance, characterized by a frontal orientation of the shoulders towards the net, establishes a robust foundation for power generation. However, it introduces heightened ground reaction forces, potentially influencing joint loading and injury susceptibility. Simultaneously, it begets greater hip rotation, a contributing factor to increased ball velocity, albeit at the cost of potentially limiting shoulder range of motion. On the flip side, the open stance, involving a partial rotation of the upper body away from the net, affords increased shoulder flexibility and rotation. This configuration offers benefits such as an extended backswing for potentially greater power, enhanced accuracy through refined timing and direction, and a potential reduction in lower back stress, mitigating injury risks. Several critical biomechanical elements come into play, including stance width, muscle activation patterns, and ball speed, each contributing to the effectiveness of a chosen stance. The wider stance may elevate ball velocity while compromising electromyographic (EMG) activity, whereas a narrower stance may prioritize accuracy and control. Elite players exhibit enhanced power generation efficiency compared to sub-elite counterparts, emphasizing the role of skill level in biomechanical outcomes. Optimizing backhand technique necessitates a nuanced consideration of individual factors, such as skill level, playing style, and performance objectives. Elite players may find favor in the open stance for its potential power and control advantages, while recreational players might lean towards the stability and accuracy offered by the square stance during the foundational phases of stroke development. Looking ahead, the landscape beckons for further research endeavors to encompass diverse demographic parameters, intricate analytical methodologies, and the translation of findings into tangible training paradigms and injury prevention strategies. This biomechanical exploration illuminates the divergence between square and open stances, furnishing players and coaches with discernment to refine their backhand approach. Through this understanding, the potential for heightened performance, enhanced consistency, and a diminished risk of on-court injuries comes to fruition.*

Keywords: Tennis biomechanics, Backhand stroke, Square stance, Open stance, Performance optimization.

1. Introduction

The game of tennis, renowned for its dynamic and demanding nature, requires players to master a combination of technical skill, strategic prowess, and physical fitness. Among the myriad strokes that constitute a player's arsenal, the tennis backhand holds a pivotal position. As a shot executed with the non-dominant hand, the backhand demands a nuanced understanding of biomechanics to achieve a delicate equilibrium between power, accuracy, and control. The choice of stance during a backhand stroke significantly influences the biomechanical dynamics and, consequently, the overall effectiveness of the shot. The square stance and open stance have emerged as two primary positions adopted by players, each offering distinct advantages and presenting unique challenges.

In the square stance, players position themselves with their shoulders facing the net, fostering a stable foundation for generating power. This stance is associated with heightened ground reaction forces, potentially impacting joint loading and injury susceptibility. Conversely, the open stance involves a slight rotation of the upper body away from the net, facilitating increased shoulder flexibility and range of motion. This position is linked to improved accuracy, control, and a reduced risk of lower back stress. This article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the dynamic biomechanical intricacies inherent in the square stance versus open stance debate in tennis backhands. By dissecting the strengths, weaknesses, and influencing factors of each stance, the goal is to provide evidence-based insights for players and coaches. Understanding the biomechanics of these stances is not merely an academic exercise; it serves as a practical guide for players to optimize their backhand technique based on individual skill levels, playing styles, and performance objectives.

As we delve into the biomechanical factors governing square and open stances, we aim to empower tennis enthusiasts with knowledge that transcends the theoretical, facilitating informed decisions on court strategies and techniques. This exploration sets the stage for players to fine-tune their backhand skills, enhance overall performance, and reduce the risk of injuries, ultimately contributing to the ever-evolving landscape of competitive tennis. Beyond the distinct characteristics of square and open stances, several key biomechanical factors intricately shape the efficacy of a tennis backhand. Stance width, a pivotal element, reveals a trade-off between ball velocity and electromyographic (EMG) activity. Wider stances often result in increased ball speed but lower muscle activation, while narrower stances favor accuracy and control. Muscle activation patterns, a hallmark of elite players, exemplify the efficiency with which power is generated and transferred during the backhand stroke. The ability to harness biomechanical efficiency distinguishes elite players from their sub-elite counterparts, contributing to superior performance on the court. Ball speed emerges as a critical metric influenced by both stance width and overall biomechanics. Wider stances and faster ball speeds correlate with heightened trunk rotation and increased shoulder range of motion, further underlining the intricate relationship between biomechanics and stroke performance.

Optimizing backhand technique is contingent on individual factors, necessitating a nuanced approach for players at varying skill levels. Elite players may find advantages in the open stance, leveraging its potential for higher power and control. In contrast, recreational players might derive greater stability and accuracy from the square stance, especially during the foundational stages of developing backhand mechanics. The exploration of biomechanical differences between square and open stances in tennis backhands extends beyond theoretical understanding. It serves as a practical guide for players and coaches, offering actionable insights to tailor training regimens and playing strategies. Moreover, the knowledge derived from this exploration lays the foundation for evidence-based training programs and injury prevention strategies, addressing both the performance and well-being aspects of tennis athletes. As tennis enthusiasts navigate the dynamic realm of biomechanics, this exploration endeavors to bridge the gap between theory and application. By unraveling the complexities of square versus open stances in tennis backhands, players are equipped with the tools to enhance their game, elevate their performance, and navigate the multifaceted challenges presented on the tennis court.

Research on the biomechanics of square and open stances in tennis has yielded valuable insights into how these fundamental positions impact player performance. The square stance, characterized by both feet aligned perpendicular to the baseline, has been extensively studied. Research highlights its advantages, such as enhanced stability and balance, providing a solid foundation for power generation during groundstrokes and serves. The square stance minimizes limitations on hip rotation, allowing players to execute strokes with precision.

However, researchers acknowledge the square stance's drawbacks, particularly in restricting hip rotation and potentially hindering the fluidity of forehand strokes. The impact on agility and side-to-side movement is also noted, indicating that players adopting the square stance might face challenges in swiftly responding to shots during play.

In contrast, the open stance, with the front foot angled towards the net, has been a subject of exploration. Research emphasizes the greater range of motion and flexibility offered by the open stance, contributing to enhanced hip rotation and shoulder turn. This biomechanical advantage translates into more powerful

and fluid strokes, aligning with the dynamic demands of modern tennis. Despite the open stance's benefits, researchers underscore certain challenges. The narrower base of support in the open stance reduces stability and balance, potentially affecting the accuracy and control of shots. Additionally, mastering proper stroke technique becomes more demanding due to the increased range of motion required, indicating that players may need to invest additional effort in refining their skills when adopting this stance.

Table 1: Literature survey

Author(s)	Year	Research Gap	Methodology	Findings
Abernethy, B.	2009	Limited research on the biomechanics of the tennis serve across different levels of play	Reviewed existing literature on the tennis serve	Identified key biomechanical factors influencing serve performance
Aoki, M., Sugimoto, K., & Nakamura, T.	2014	Lack of clarity on the biomechanical differences between closed and open stances for the forehand stroke	Compared kinematics and kinetics of forehands with both stances	Found open stance led to greater shoulder turn and trunk rotation, resulting in higher ball velocity
Bobbert, M. F.	2000	Incomplete understanding of the influence of stance width on human movement	Analyzed the effects of stance width on various movement tasks	Wider stances were found to improve stability while narrower stances enhanced agility
Chow, J. Y., Lim, J. Y., Lim, W. K., & Teo, C. K.	2013	Insufficient data on the impact of stance width on the biomechanics of the tennis forehand	Investigated the kinematics and kinetics of forehands in different stance widths	Wider stance resulted in higher knee flexion and ground reaction forces, but narrower stance produced greater hip and trunk rotation
Cohen, S., & Smith, G. D.	1977	Limited understanding of the biomechanical principles behind the tennis serve	Analyzed the kinematics and kinetics of the serve using high-speed film analysis	Identified key phases of the serve and described the contribution of different muscle groups
Debelak, M., & Bardana, A.	2007	Lack of comparative data on the tennis serve between young and adult players	Analyzed the biomechanics of the serve in both age groups	Young players exhibited less efficient movement patterns than adults, highlighting the need for proper training
Hasegawa, H., Matsuo, T., & Kumagai, M.	2007	Need for further research on the biomechanical effects of different stance widths on the tennis serve	Compared the serve across three stance widths using motion capture and force plate analysis	Wider stance produced higher ball velocity but narrower stance resulted in greater hip rotation and flexibility
Herzog, W., & Read, L. J.	2000	Lack of comparison between elite and sub-elite players in terms of serve biomechanics	Analyzed serve kinematics and kinetics in both groups	Elite players demonstrated greater trunk rotation and arm speed, contributing to higher serve velocity
Hodges, P. W., & Richardson, C. A.	1997	Limited understanding of trunk muscle activity during tennis strokes	Investigated the role of trunk muscles in individuals with low back pain	Found altered activation patterns in the trunk muscles of individuals with pain, suggesting the importance of proper core strength and control
Huijing, P. A.	1999	Need for more research on the role of muscle as a motor and a strain gauge	Reviewed existing literature on muscle function and mechanics	Proposed a model of muscle function that accounts for both its motor and sensory capabilities
Jonhagen, S., Nemeth, G., & Eriksson, B.	1994	Incomplete understanding of the activation patterns of trunk muscles during tennis strokes	Analyzed trunk muscle activity during various tennis strokes	Identified specific muscle groups responsible for different aspects of stroke execution
Kovacs, M. S., & Ellenbecker, T. S.	2010	Lack of research on the effect of stance width on ground reaction force asymmetry during the serve	Analyzed ground reaction forces during serves with different stance widths	Wider stance led to more symmetrical forces, while narrower stance resulted in greater asymmetry, potentially increasing injury risk

2. Conclusion

In tennis, the choice of stance plays a pivotal role in shaping a player's style, stroke execution, and overall performance. Two primary stances, the square stance and the open stance, represent fundamental approaches with distinct advantages and limitations. The square stance, characterized by both feet aligned perpendicular to the baseline, offers enhanced stability and ease of power

generation. However, its potential drawbacks include limited hip rotation and reduced agility. On the other hand, the open stance, featuring the front foot angled toward the net, provides greater range of motion and flexibility, aiding powerful and fluid strokes. Yet, it may compromise stability and demand more technical precision. The square stance's wider base lends itself to beginners seeking stability, while advanced players might leverage the open stance for its agility and power potential. Individual considerations, such as fitness level and injury history, further influence the choice between these stances. Players with robust core muscles may adapt well to either stance, while those with stability concerns might gravitate toward the square stance. Moreover, recognizing the biomechanical nuances of each stance allows players to align their choice with their unique strengths and weaknesses.

As players navigate the dynamic interplay between square and open stances, the understanding of biomechanical disparities serves as a compass for optimizing performance. This knowledge empowers players to tailor their approach based on skill level, fitness attributes, and injury considerations. Furthermore, ongoing research in this domain holds promise for unraveling the intricate relationship between stance and performance, contributing valuable insights for informed decision-making in training and strategic gameplay. Ultimately, the exploration of these foundational stances not only refines individual playing styles but also enriches the collective understanding of the biomechanics that underpin success on the tennis court.

3. Limitations and Future Directions

While existing research provides valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Variability in study designs, participant skill levels, and methodologies across different research efforts can influence findings. Additionally, limited research directly compares the biomechanics of square and open stances, warranting more comprehensive investigations. Future research directions should focus on addressing these limitations and expanding the understanding of biomechanical nuances associated with each stance. Comparative studies could delve deeper into the specific impacts of square and open stances on various strokes, considering different player demographics and skill levels. Moreover, integrating advanced biomechanical analysis techniques, such as motion capture and electromyography, can offer a more nuanced understanding of muscle activation and joint movements associated with each stance.

In conclusion, the critical study underscores the importance of continued research to refine our comprehension of the biomechanics of square and open stances in tennis. As players, coaches, and researchers collaborate, a more comprehensive understanding of these foundational positions emerges, contributing to the ongoing evolution of tennis technique and training methodologies.

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