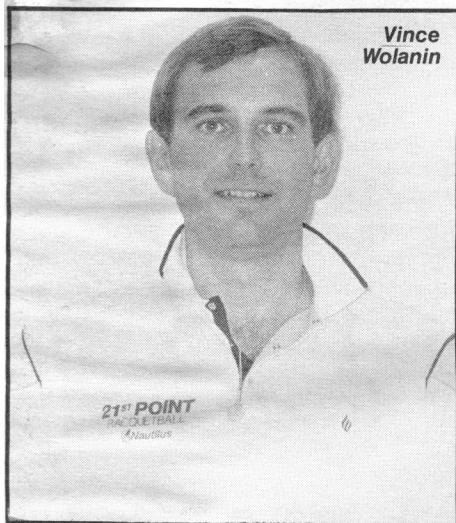


Put The Power Step Into Your Game

by Vince Wolanin



One of the most frequent questions I am asked when giving lessons is, how can a student improve the power portion of his game? A lot of articles have been written concerning the wrist snap and how it can help improve the player's power. This is not, however, the complete answer.

My personal background is extensive in the principles of throwing a baseball, dating back to my American Legion and intercollegiate pitching days. Throwing a baseball at a high rate of speed, which is what a pitcher attempts to do, requires excellent footwork which in turn, transmits the power stored up in the lower body to the transmission device (your arm) which releases the baseball and propels it toward home plate.

The fundamentals which separate a true fastball pitcher of super speed from your normal baseball player is really laid in the footwork used to transmit that power to or through the object. This essential fundamental, if learned properly, can do wonders to increase the power and accuracy of your shots.

The footwork I speak of is known as the power step.

During the normal stroke, many, if not most, racquetball players block their hips from rotating (I call it "clicking") as they strike the ball. This lack of rotation causes them to experience greatly reduced velocity upon impact.

A secondary, but important, result of this improper footwork is that players often find themselves losing their balance when they try to hit with great force. Sometimes they do hit with greater force, but almost always (there is luck) it is complemented with partial or full loss of control because balance is lost at impact.

Additionally, this causes a slower than normal recovery rate from the stroke (you have to regain your balance before you can begin to retrieve your opponent's shot) meaning that this player will not be able to cover shots as well as he might.

The key is in the hips. And the hips are directly connected to your footwork. In *Figure 1* you see the "normal" racquetball stance with the player facing the side wall, stepping toward the front wall as the ball approaches, front foot still perpendicular to the side wall.

In baseball, this would be equivalent to a batter hitting the ball with a closed stance. However, the baseball hitter opens his hips as he steps toward the pitcher allowing for full weight transfer to take place from back to front foot. It is the weight transfer that holds much of the power, not only in baseball hitting, but racquetball hitting as well.

When you see a big, strong guy on the court unable to generate the power of that pipsqueak opponent of his, it's usually because by taking this "normal" stroke, the hips are unable to fully rotate, thus they are blocked. Instead of a booming shot, the behemoth gets an off-balance, out-of-control hit.

Some players have further complicated this situation by learning how to come out of this mis-hit position. But careful analysis on video points out time after time that these players are actually making their bad situation worse, since the "remedy" in this case usually forces the player to move his head too quickly at or just prior to impact. Thus, more control is lost.

In *Figure 2* Bruce Christensen gives me

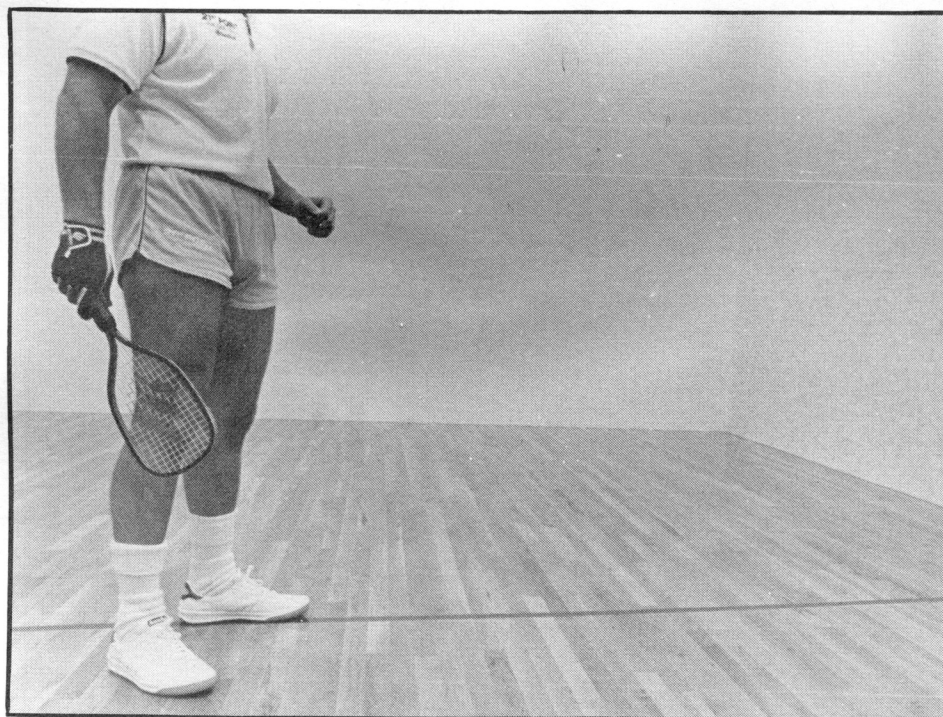


Figure 1. The "normal" forehand stance.

Figure 2. A slight push causes a stumbling player using a closed stance.

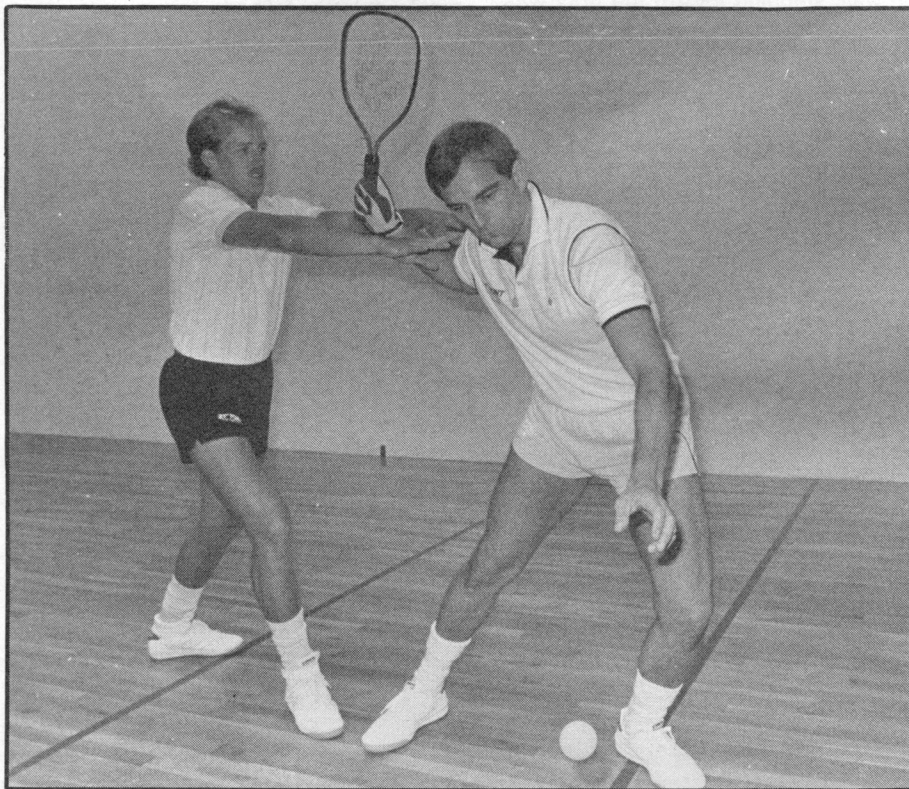
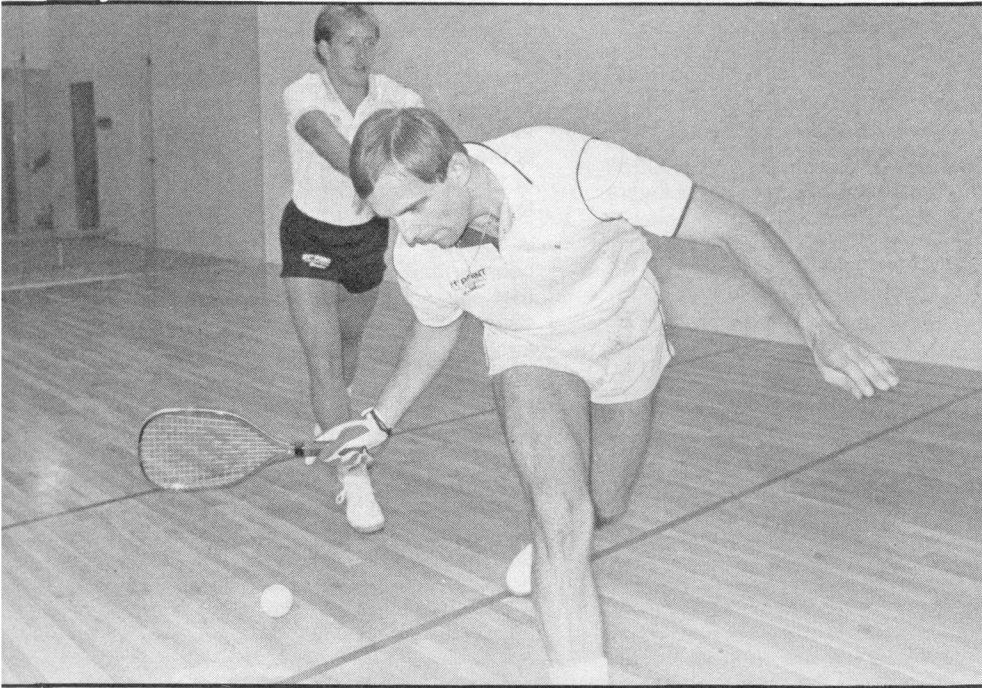


Figure 3. The same push has no effect on a player with a more solid, open stance.

a slight push, and because of my footwork positioning, I easily lose my balance. In *Figure 3*, having now taken a more open stance, Bruce's push does not cause me to stumble awkwardly, rather, my head is able to remain concentrated on the hitting zone.

The critical element is the open stance. With my front foot pointing more toward the front wall (rather than the side wall) and my head on the ball, I am able to use my lower body to rotate my hips to generate additional power. The racquet stays square at the point of impact because I am now able to hit down and through (*Figure 4*) the ball for a straighter shot.

Also note how my rear knee is almost touching the floor as I stroke into and through the ball. This bent knee is characteristic of a powerful and solid stroke established with the open stance.

Once again, move your feet into the open stance, transfer your weight while slightly rotating your hips toward the front wall, and snap your wrist at impact.

For practice, stand about five feet from your forehand side wall with your front foot in the open position (*Figure 5*) and

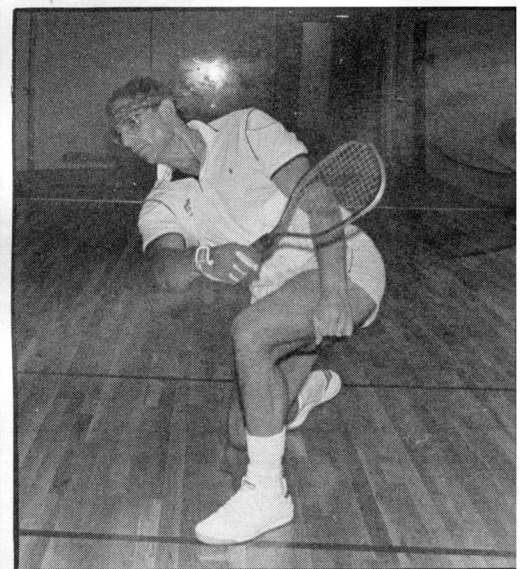
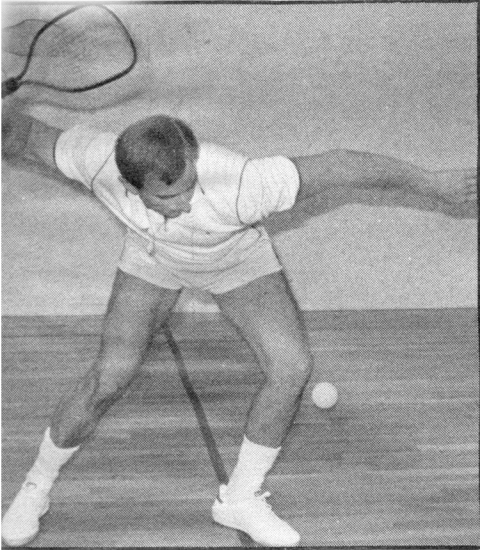


Figure 4. Following through on the power stroke.

Figure 5. Power stroke, side view.



hit a variety of shots: kills into the right corner, pinches, and cross court kills and passes until you can do it automatically (this will take more than one session).

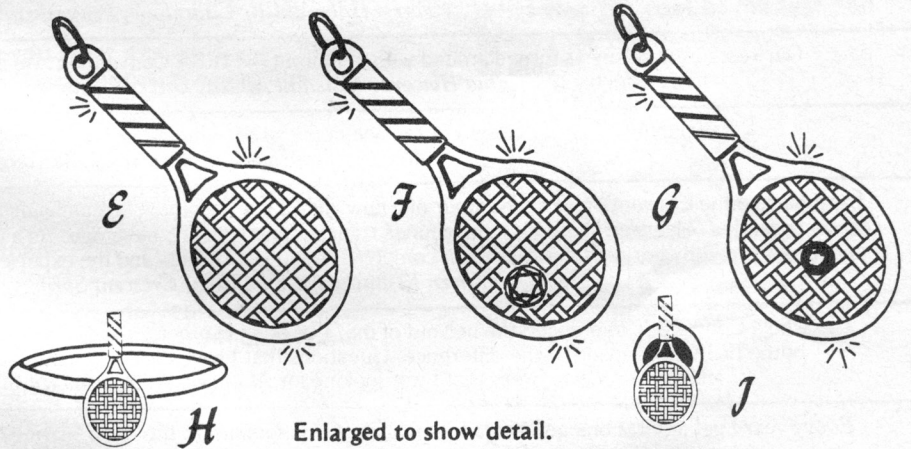
Keep in mind that during practice, you can exaggerate the actual motion of open stance footwork, knowing that in real match play you probably won't have enough time to open up quite this much. However, for purposes of practice, a little exaggeration in the beginning is fine. The real proof comes when you shots are coming off the racquet face straight as an arrow without deviation as though on a string to the front wall.

If you learn to properly use the open stance in practice, I guarantee you will no longer fall towards the front wall or lose your balance as you attempt to hit

with greater power. Instead, you will generate that additional power, along with better control (and thus, more victories) naturally with the open stance. ●

Vince Wolanin is president of the 21st Point Club, Albany, NY and also a member of the Ektelon and Asahi Professional Advisory Staffs.

14 KT Gold Racquetball Jewelry



E	14 KT Gold Racquetball Racquet Charm. Available in White Gold. \$48
F	14 KT Gold Racquetball Racquet Charm with 5 pt. Diamond or Emerald. \$79.95
G	14 KT Gold Racquetball Racquet Charm with 14KT Gold Ball in Center. \$69.95
H	Ladies' Ring with 14 KT Gold Racquetball Racquet. \$72.00 Include pinky size
I	Men's Tie Tack with 14 KT Gold Racquetball Racquet. \$46.50

WE ACCEPT VISA OR MASTERCARD

Prices subject to change (based on \$500 gold.)

We can set the stone of your choice. Prices upon request.

FRJ Designs, P.O. Box 11657
Jacksonville, FL 32239
(904) 721-3660.