

## Chapter Twelve

# Serves and Returns

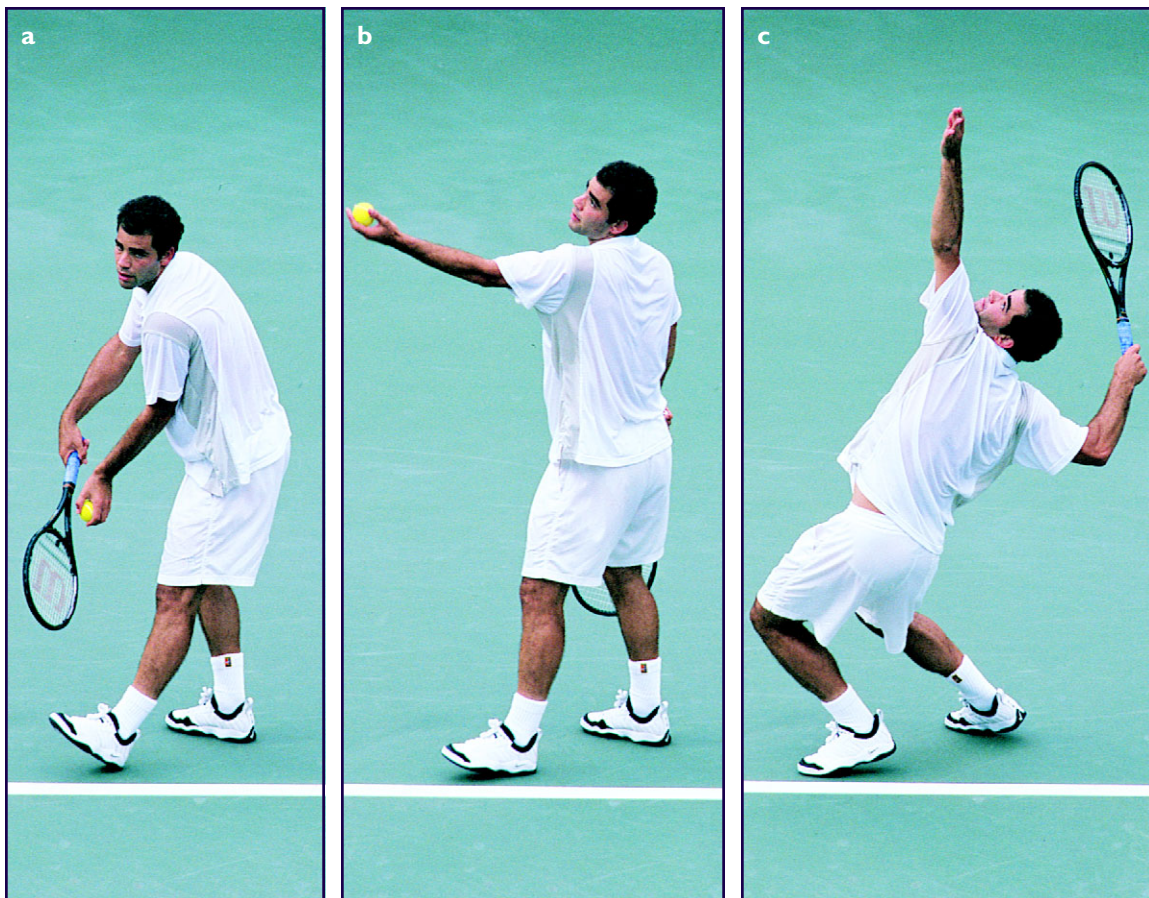
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**T**he serve and the return of serve are the two most important strokes in the game of tennis. The success of players such as Pete Sampras, Richard Krajicek, Mark Philippoussis, Greg Rusedski, Venus Williams, and Lindsay Davenport is at least in part because of their powerful serves. Although court surface plays a role in reducing the effectiveness of these serves, Andre Agassi, Gustavo Kuerten, Martina Hingis, and Monica Seles, just to name a few, have developed the service return such that this stroke now can be considered a “weapon.”

This chapter presents the latest research on both strokes with dramatic photographic sequences used to illustrate the mechanics of the best in the world, so you can apply their techniques to your game.

## Serve

There is no single technique used in the tennis serve, a point that clearly is illustrated by viewing the top professionals. However, there are certain

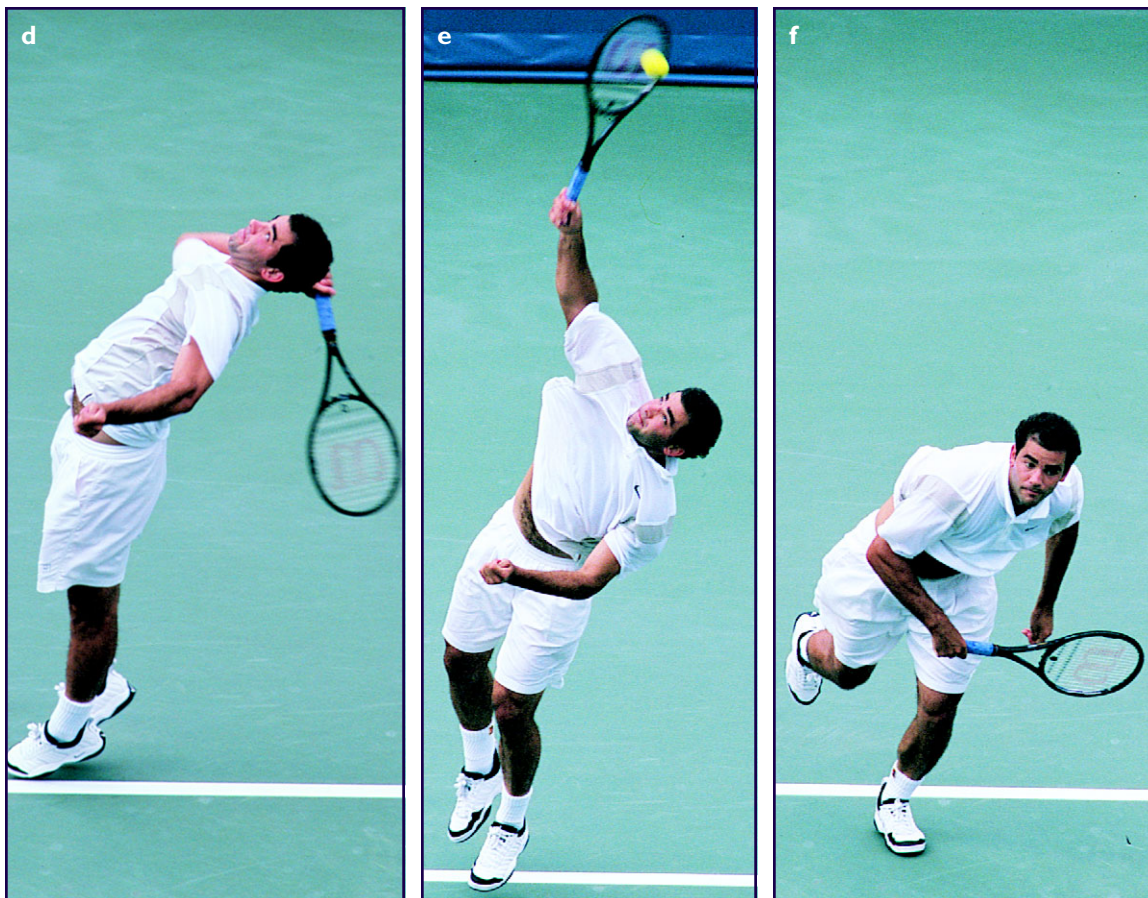


**Figure 12.1** Pete Sampras' serve.

fundamentals in technique that must be incorporated into the action of a powerful serve. Photographic sequences of Pete Sampras are included here to illustrate key features of the service action. Critical mechanical features integral to a successful service action are discussed with reference to these photographic sequences. The general structure used in this discussion may be applied to the power serve along with the slice and kick serves.

### **Preliminary Movements Tips**

1. Sampras is in the starting position just after finishing his pre-serve ritual of bouncing the ball, in figure 12.1a. At this stage he is deciding where to serve and how to set up the point.
  - There is relaxation in the facial muscles, which usually indicates there is relaxation throughout the body. This is important for maintaining good timing and maximizing power and injury prevention.



- The weight is more on the back foot as he starts the tossing action.
- The front toe is pointed at an angle to the baseline to allow the rotation of hips and shoulders. Sampras will turn the toe even more as he begins to rotate. Virtually all of the outstanding servers will start with the toe either pointed to the side or angled to the baseline. They then turn the toe (normally pivoted about the heel of the foot) as they rotate their shoulders and hips. If this does not happen it makes it difficult to get adequate rotation and may place stress on the front knee.

Research has shown that initial weight distribution is an individual characteristic. However, regardless of where the weight initially is positioned, it always will move forward for impact such that it is forward of the front toe, regardless of type of action.

2. Different starting positions are a function of individual style.