

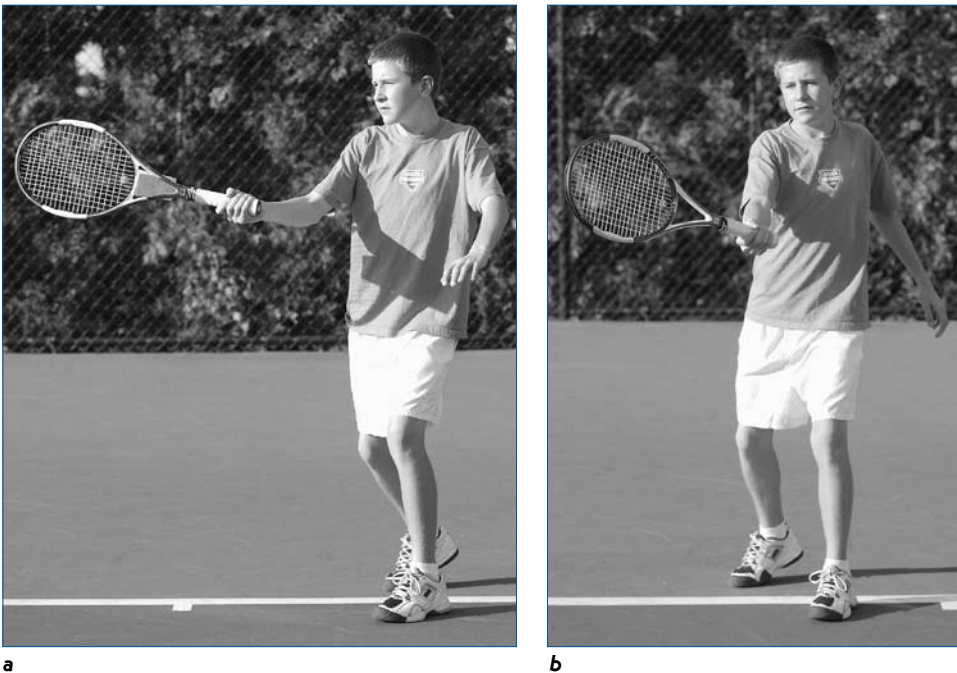
## Controlling the Ball

Players at the youth level need to learn not only how to hit a ball over the net but also how to control the ball with the racket for proper shot placement. The five types of control are as follows:

1. Hitting right and left
2. Hitting high and low
3. Hitting short and deep
4. Hitting with spin
5. Hitting with power

### *Hitting Right and Left*

The angle of the racket face at contact controls the direction of the ball right or left. Teach players how to contact the ball with the racket face pointed to the right (the ball will go right) and to the left (the ball will go left), as shown in figure 7.10. Then they'll be able to keep their opponents on the move. By simply changing the angle of the racket, players learn to direct the ball from one side of the court to the other and how to place the ball in different parts of the court. Have your players think about the advantages of moving their opponents from side to side and playing shots to opponents' weak sides.



**Figure 7.10** Directing a ball (a) to the right and (b) to the left.

### ***Hitting High and Low***

To hit high and low, or control the height of the shot, players turn the racket face; this is called “opening” or “closing” the racket. As we learned previously, the direction of the ball is determined by the direction (right or left) the racket face is pointing at contact. The height of the shot, however, is determined by the direction (up or down) the racket face is angled at contact.

An open racket face, as shown in figure 7.11*a*, points toward the sky and allows a player to get the ball high enough to clear the net. A closed racket face, as shown in figure 7.11*b*, points toward the court and aims the ball directly into the net. Therefore, a closed racket face should not be used upon contact when hitting the ball. Rather, it is used during the backswing for shots such as topspin ground strokes. If a player’s grip is in the proper position for the

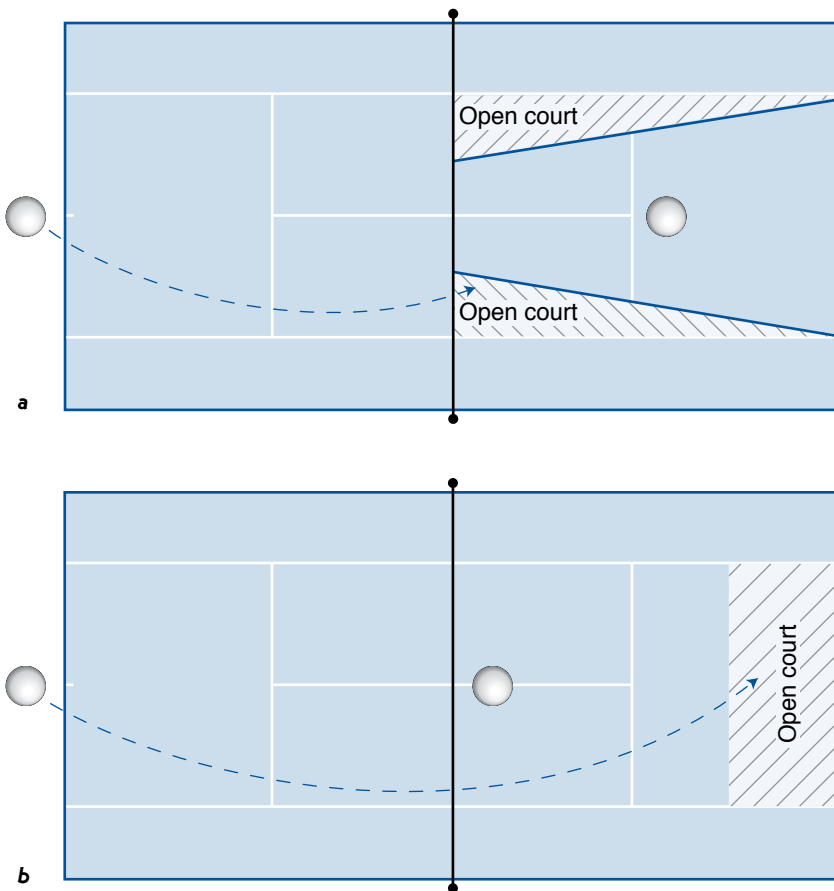
**a****b**

**Figure 7.11** (a) Open and (b) closed racket.

racket face to be perpendicular at contact, the racket face will naturally close slightly on the backswing. However, if the racket face is closed at contact, the ball will lack the upward trajectory for net clearance. Because most errors go into the net, a slightly open racket face will help ensure that the ball goes up and over the net and travels deeper in the court.

### **Hitting Short and Deep**

Hitting short and deep requires a combination of speed, height over the net, and spin. When a ball is hit hard and high, it will travel deep in the court, helping to keep an opponent from attacking, or, in other words, moving toward the net. Players should be aware that there are many openings in the court that will force the opponent to run to get to the ball for the next shot. When the opponent is positioned deep in the court, these openings are on either side of the opponent (see figure 7.12a) or short and in front of the opponent. When the opponent is positioned at the net, the opening is deep in the court (see figure 7.12b).



**Figure 7.12** Openings in the court: (a) at the sides and (b) deep.

## Hitting With Spin

The use of spin on the ball allows players to gain more control of their shots. Spin is a concept that should be introduced to all players, even beginners. By imparting various types of spin, players no longer have to rely solely on gravity to keep shots in the court. The two types of spin that you should introduce to youth players are topspin and backspin.

**Topspin** Topspin on a ball is created when a player brushes up behind the ball with the racket, using a low-to-high swing pattern (see figure 7.13). Topspin allows players to hit the ball harder and higher over the net because the forward rotation of the ball curves the shot down into the court. Topspin should be used for most ground strokes from the baseline because it allows for a safe net clearance, and the spin will pull the ball into the opponent's court.



**Figure 7.13** Creating topspin with a low-to-high swing pattern.

**Backspin** Backspin on a ball is created when a player starts with the racket high and hits in a high-to-level swing pattern with an open racket face at contact (see figure 7.14). If hit hard, the ball will float and fly over the baseline before it bounces on the court. If hit easy and low, the ball will stay low after hitting the court. Backspin is generally used when hitting the ball short such as on drop shots or on approach shots in which players want the ball to stay low after the bounce. Backspin is also used on defensive shots when a player



**Figure 7.14** Creating backspin with a high-to-level swing pattern.

is out of position and needs more trajectory on the shot for net clearance and more time to recover back into the court. The backspin will cause the ball to travel farther back in the court even when not hit hard so the player will have more recovery time.

### ***Hitting With Power***

A shot is more effective if the ball gets to the spot quickly, making it difficult for the opponent to return. The speed at which a ball travels is determined by the speed of the oncoming ball and the length and momentum of the swing used to strike the ball. When a player has ample time, a full swing with the body coiled so that the side of the body is to the net and the racket points to the back wall will impart maximum racket speed to the shot (see figure 7.15a). Swings that have more backswing, as shown in figure 7.15b, take more time and are difficult to control.

Note that the path of the swing also influences how fast the ball leaves the racket. A flat swing pattern that is parallel to the ground will give maximum power, but flat shots are difficult to control because there is no spin on the ball to help pull the ball down. A low-to-high swing pattern will generate topspin for control, but ball speed will be decreased.

### **Coaching Tip**

You will find that some of your young players like to hit the ball hard. They should be aware, however, that as they increase the power of their strokes, they decrease their ability to control their shots. Good players must master the ability to hit with the first four controls (hitting right and left, high and low, short and deep, and with spin) before they attempt power.