



Junior Development Workshop (UK)

Study Guide

This study guide is an essential part of PTR's Junior Development Workshop. It provides information on the why, how, what and when of coaching players of different age groups, although it concentrates on 10 and under players.

It is essential that you read and understand the material so that you are fully prepared for the Workshop. You will need to invest at least four hours of preparation. This assures the tutor that you are very familiar with the contents of this study guide.

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2012, the ITF rules of tennis for 10 and under competition changed.

The new rule is significant in many respects. For the first time, and as in other sports, young children were able to compete on courts and with equipment that is appropriate to their stage of development. This will help them enjoy the game and become better tennis players. As a direct result of the rule change, the methods of coaching 10 and under players will change. In the UK coaches have been familiar with Mini Tennis while in the US coaches have been adjusting slowly for a few years with PTR's introduction of PTR Kids and USTA's QuickStart.

Knowledgeable coaches will realise that using modified equipment and smaller court areas offers them different ways of coaching young players. For example, lines of players waiting to hit balls fed by a coach are slowly disappearing and competitive formats are becoming more age appropriate. The focus is on playing to learn instead of learning to play.

Good coaches are essential to introducing children to sport. They need organisation and communication skills that match children's ages, but they also need experience and knowledge of the sport itself to demonstrate, explain and develop the skills and the game. There is research that indicates children are more likely to drop out of a sport when they are coached by people who are unable to perform the skills themselves.

In 2007, PTR recognised that a possible ITF rule change meant coaches would need to be trained to coach in the new environment. Thanks to the PTR Education Committee and subsequent approval by the PTR Board, PTR's new educational and certification pathway is now a reality. I have had the distinct pleasure of taking Dan's vision and developing the syllabi, course content and tests for different parts of the pathway. As a coach and player educator, this was fun to do; and the work will continue until all of the components of the pathway are completed.

This study guide is for the Junior Development Workshop and, for those coaches who wish to take it, the Certification. I must acknowledge the editing and assistance from PTR's Steve Keller and Tennis LMS' Sasha Frljanic. Some of the activities included in the Appendix to this study guide were originally developed by Mike Barrell for the PTR Kids course in the US. PTR recognises the excellent start Mike gave to this important programme. This guide develops and progresses PTR Kids, while introducing new coaching, player development and research information. Please be aware too that this workshop and certification have Level 1 accreditation in the US from NCACE (the National Council for the Accreditation of Coach Education in the US) and is therefore endorsed by the US Olympic Committee..

PTR also recognises the foresight of PTR Founder and Chairman Emeritus, Dennis Van der Meer, in introducing the Graduated Length Method, use of caution tape to modify nets, and the use of the foam Speedball® (red ball). With his Instant Tennis concept, Dennis was perhaps the first person to understand the importance of a player being able to control the racket to hit and rally the ball.

The Junior Development workshop will train and certify coaches who work with juniors, specifically those ages 10 and under. The course is therefore part of the new coach education pathway. PTR also has three Master of Tennis programmes of which MOT Junior Development is one, for those coaches who wish to increase their knowledge and skills in working with junior players, after taking the Certification.

While the 10 and under age group is clearly the one most affected by the ITF rule change, there will be a ripple effect when these players move up to the 11-13 year old age group. 10 year olds do inevitably become 11 year olds! Therefore, coaches will need improved coaching skills and understanding to work with players from 10 and under tennis, because they will have a higher skill level. This PTR is therefore currently developing a new workshop and certification for coaching 11-17 years olds. This will be available from February 2013 in the US and then worldwide.

The ITF rule change and changes by national tennis federations is important for junior tennis. PTR predicts that tennis will see a big rise in the number of kids playing the game, especially in those countries where Mini Tennis has been slow to take root. The key question is will these kids stay in the game? The answer to that question is up to you and the thousands of other tennis teaching professionals and coaches who teach junior tennis. I hope you enjoy your educational journey, so you can continue to Make a World of Difference.

Anne Pankhurst

PTR Educational Consultant

UNDERSTANDING 10 and UNDER PLAYERS

UNDERSTANDING 10 and UNDER PLAYERS

10 and under players are, first and foremost, children who are growing and moving first toward puberty and then adulthood. Between 5 and 10 years of age, the actual physical process of growth is steady - just two or three inches a year. This age is therefore a great time to teach the basic skills of hitting the ball and learning to play the game, because the kids are changing quite slowly.

The well-known mantra that children are not mini adults is true, but as coaches, we need to understand what this actually means. Obviously children eventually become adults, but only after a lengthy developmental process. That development takes place throughout childhood and adolescence. In comparison to adults or even teenagers, children ages 10 and under have specific physical, mental, emotional and social abilities that need to be developed by skilled, knowledgeable and understanding coaches. The level of ability impacts the progress the child can make, because sport requires technical and tactical competence. The ability to develop tennis skills is highly dependent on physical development. Learning to play the game depends on having cognitive, mental and emotional skills. Enjoying the game and wanting to keep playing depends on developing motivation and having success in a supportive and positive environment.

Successfully teaching technical and playing skills to kids requires the coach to know, understand and apply the level of physical and mental and emotional development of the age group. Helping children love the game and want to play means recognizing how kids are motivated and knowing how to help them succeed.

The process of learning varies for different children, so coaches must be able to use appropriate teaching methods to set environments that meet each child's needs.

There are differences even within the 10 and under age group. For example, almost everything is new to 5 or 6 year olds, who find it hard to concentrate, need security from their parents, and struggle to cooperate with other children. The 10 year old, on the other hand, is gaining experience, confidence and social skills, and is quite happy without their parents around.

Finally, even children of the same age are not the same! Boys and girls are different and the rate of growth and development between children of the same age can be different, which has a significant effect on what the child can do. Chronological age is not necessarily the same as developmental age!

While coaches must therefore understand the 10 and under age group as a whole, the specific issues that impact different age groups within it are even more important. The first section of the study guide will discuss the characteristics of the different age groups and how these impact coaching practice.

4-6 Year Olds

Mentally, emotionally and socially, children of this age:

- are highly active, cannot concentrate for very long and are curious about new things, **therefore** they need many varied and new activities to keep them interested. Keeping them in lines with the coach feeding the ball is boring, not productive, or even necessary, with the right equipment and good coaching.
- have favorite things and great imaginations, **therefore** giving every activity a name and repeating the favorites makes tennis fun.
- need to have fun, **therefore** coaches and helpers must take part in different activities to increase their enjoyment.
- need to develop confidence; **therefore** a positive and encouraging environment is essential.
- are learning basic physical skills, **therefore** skills like running, jumping and skipping must be done in every lesson to help them.
- find big movements (gross motor skills) much easier than small ones, **therefore** they should be shown big actions to copy and not have skills broken down into parts.
- Lack experience and take longer to react, track and anticipate a ball, **therefore** they need to play with large, Slow foam or red balls, or even balloons.
- tend to be self-centred and find it difficult to cooperate and share with other kids, **therefore** they should be kept in small groups with a helper to assist them to relate to other children.
- find listening to and following instructions very difficult, **therefore** any instructions must be very short and clear.
- get bored easily; **therefore** every activity must challenge their abilities at just the right level.
- get tired quickly; **therefore** they need frequent breaks and changes of activity.
- learn by imitating and copying, **therefore** simple demonstrations, repeated several times, will show them what to do and what to copy.
- cannot make decisions and do not understand concepts, **therefore** scoring and winning and losing are difficult for them to understand and need to be incorporated into lessons very slowly.

Physically, children of this age:

- Have very different levels of skill from older children or adults. Coaches need to adapt activities and develop them in a fun way.
- The key skills that need to be developed are:
 - agility, static balance, simple coordination and speed
 - running, jumping and skipping
 - twisting, turning and sliding

- throwing and catching with both hand, hitting and kicking
 - handling different types of equipment
 - reaction and tracking skills
- Young children are small, have short arms and legs (relative to adults), less strength, and a high centre of gravity. All affect their ability to cover distance, control a racket, and keep their balance. Coaches should concentrate on the basic physical skills, because this is the crucial age for children to learn them.



6-8 Year Olds

Mentally, emotionally and socially, children of this age:

- need to have fun and be active; **therefore** many different activities must achieve the same objective. The activities should be changed frequently and be simple and basic. Standing in lines is unnecessary, boring and inappropriate for children. Working in pairs or small groups achieves faster progress. Setting up circuits of activities keeps their interest and increases the opportunity for success.
- are increasing in confidence, **therefore** developing a positive and encouraging environment is vital.
- are better able to concentrate and focus on a task, but only for short spans of time, **therefore** coaching them in pairs or small groups increases their concentration.
- are able to listen and follow quick simple instructions, **therefore** give them brief instructions and positive feedback. Tell them what they have done well and get excited at what they do!
- learn best by copying (visual learning), **therefore** show them (demonstrate) what they need to do and challenge them to try. Set activities where, in succeeding, the children are doing it right.
- are learning to make simple decisions (making a choice between two things), **therefore** encourage them by setting simple problems and praising when they make a good choice.
- need and seek adult approval frequently, **therefore** parents and helpers must show them what to do, how to do it, and then praise and encourage their efforts.
- are slowly understanding the concept of competition, together with winning and losing, **therefore** provide many simple opportunities to score points without pressure.
- are happy if their parents are nearby, **therefore** set the parameters with parents - nearby, quiet and visible. If they are helping, make sure they do not work with their own child. (see Working with Parents p. 35)
- can share with and help others in a group, **therefore** give them simple 'teaching' tasks with a partner.
- can understand simple rules and fairness, **therefore** introduce them to simple games with a few basic rules.
- often prefer to be with their own gender, **therefore** keep them with their friends at first, then mix the groups later in the lesson.
- enjoy taking responsibility for simple tasks and requests, **therefore** give them specific tasks to do before, during and after the lesson and praise them.
- can accept coach and official decisions; **therefore** praise them when they do so.

Physically, children of this age:

- Are developing many of the gross motor skills. Throwing, for example, now has more body turn and weight transfer for boys, but still needs to be developed in girls.
- Should be taking part in many different physical activities. This is very important because skills can be transferred between different sports and activities.

- Have slower reactions and many find tracking and contacting a ball quite difficult, although they improve rapidly with help and practice.
- Have very different levels of skill from older children or adults, so adapt and develop different activities in a fun way.
- The key skills that need to be developed are:
 - agility, static and dynamic balance, simple and more complex coordination and speed
 - strength using their own bodies
 - flexibility
 - running forward and backward, jumping and skipping
 - twisting, turning and sliding
 - throwing, overhand, catching with both hands, hitting and kicking
 - handling different types of equipment
 - reaction and tracking skills



8-10 Year Olds

Mentally, emotionally and socially, children of this age:

- enjoy activity and having fun, **therefore**
keep interest levels high by moving children between different activities (for example, in a circuit).
- learn visually, **therefore**
demonstrate what they should do, then challenge them to do what they have seen. Teach and develop technical skills (serve and rally) within the game in order to improve their ability to play.
- are able to concentrate for longer periods of time, **therefore**
they can practice the same and more difficult tasks for longer.
- are interested and inspired by people they like, **therefore**
coaches need to be enthusiastic and energetic, as well as positive and encouraging.
- are more self-reliant and able to solve problems, **therefore**
they can be given responsibility and solve simple problems, perhaps in a game or drill.
- are able to understand the concepts of winning and losing, even if they need help learning how to cope with them, **therefore**
provide plenty of competitive opportunities, in different formats and with increasing pressure.
- are able to share and help others, **therefore**
working in different groups and teaching other players will develop their confidence.
- enjoy being in teams, especially girls, **therefore**
team competitions are a good way of teaching the skills of winning and losing, as well as making tennis fun.
- can learn simple goal setting, **therefore**
set a specific task for the lesson or the next few lessons.
- need to feel successful, **therefore**
set tasks that enable them to improve and feel competent in a specific skill.
- find it hard to distinguish between ability and effort, **therefore**
the coaching environment should be positive and encouraging with effort praised as much as ability.
- can increasingly make choices and decisions, **therefore**
set tasks and challenges that require decision making, especially in the game.
- are aware of who they like and dislike, **therefore**
keep friends together at first and find different ways of mixing groups for short periods.
- are happier working with their own gender, **therefore**
keep players in gender groups and teams at first, before mixing them up.
- are appreciative of adult opinions, **therefore**
give them frequent feedback related to the task.
- are able to verbalize opinions and thoughts and explain well, **therefore**
ask them to evaluate their performance and contribute to the evaluation of the lesson.

Physically, children of this age:

- Are more able to show fluent and well developed skills.
- The key skills that need to be developed are:
 - agility, static and dynamic balance, simple and more complex coordination and speed
 - strength using their own bodies, flexibility
 - running forward and backward, jumping and skipping
 - throwing overhand, catching with one or both hands, and hitting
 - core strength
 - reaction and tracking skills



The Coaching Environment

Using modified equipment and appropriate playing areas for 10 and under tennis gives coaches the opportunity to create a child-centred coaching environment that is key to maintaining children's interest in tennis. Young children learn more quickly when they are taught in an environment that suits their abilities and needs. They need to feel confident and be with friends and adults (coaches) they like. Children respond to coaches who are enthusiastic, motivating and who make lessons and learning a fun and positive experience.

Children in the 10 and under age group gain confidence from feeling safe, being encouraged, having success and being in small groups where they are given attention and support. Confidence also comes from being able and encouraged to learn and perform new skills without negative feedback. The coach's job is to create a nonthreatening environment where the fear of failure does not exist. Children respond well when they are told how to do something better, and like adults, lose confidence when they are continually told what they are doing is wrong. Research into motor skill learning (tennis is a series of motor skills) indicates that people learn from what they do right, not from what they do wrong. This makes sense, because building on what is working well leads to progress. Coaches therefore need to ignore what players do incorrectly and change negative comments into positive ones. This will require a major change in behaviour for many who are used to the principle of finding and correcting errors, rather than being positive and building on what it going well. In doing the latter, they are establishing a positive environment in which children can learn and develop.

A positive environment not only helps children learn, have fun and develop confidence, it makes them want to come back. Children quickly decide the coach they want to be with, if the coach is interested in them, is fair with everyone and behaves consistently from lesson to lesson.

There are some important characteristics of a positive coaching environment:

- Learning in pairs and small groups means that children get more individual help and more opportunities to learn. Being treated as an individual is important for everyone, including small children.
- In the past, using regular tennis balls and large rackets, children stood in lines and were fed a ball to hit, one child at a time. This approach, while perhaps necessary, was of limited use and made tennis boring. With the availability of modified equipment and smaller playing areas, there is no need for children to stand in lines. Tennis can now be a positive experience.
- Learning different activities and playing a variety of games in a lesson, increases the interest and concentration levels of the children and makes it more likely they will achieve success. They enjoy the experience and want more.
- Learning in an interesting way increases enjoyment and progress. Children 10 and under learn by watching and copying, not by listening. Coaches who recognise this have more activity. They demonstrate both the process and the outcome of any skill, and challenge and encourage the children to copy what they have seen. These coaches also teach whole skills, rather than breaking them down and practicing each part. Learning the parts is rarely necessary if coaches understand how young children learn, are patient, and help children solve any coordination issues.
- Giving opportunities for children to play and experiment in tasks that require them to try out their own ideas, increases interest and confidence.
- Helping children teach each other in a positive and supportive environment is a proven method of learning and something that young children enjoy doing.

How 10 and Under Tennis links to the Coaching Environment

This study guide has already identified that 10 and under players have specific skills, abilities and needs (pp. 3-9).

They:

- are full of activity and are excited to learn new skills
- enjoy having fun, although that means different things to different children
- are great copiers, learning from what they see and trying to do the same
- don't know anything is difficult, unless someone suggests that it is
- will try anything once, but need to succeed
- make rapid progress in things that are at the right level for them
- can teach each other
- are sponges in how much they can learn and do
- learn big movements more easily than fine ones
- find competition a challenge

Coaches who teach tennis to young players must ensure the experience is both positive and enjoyable, and takes the characteristics of the age group into account. This will require some changes in how coaches currently teach tennis to young children.

The chart on the next page takes a number of coaching factors and links them to the changes in coaching practice that should be in place when coaching 10 and under players.

COACHING FACTOR	POSSIBLE COACHING PRACTICE	10 AND UNDER COACHING PRACTICE
Organisation	Players in queues, coach as static feeder	High level of player and coach activity, often with players as feeders
Type of feedback	Negative, based on correcting errors	Positive, based on development and what is done well
Coaching environment	Uninspiring, even boring, because of queues of players	Positive, fun and motivating
Technical development	Not researched, based on personal preference	Biomechanically sound and age appropriate
Skill teaching	Fine motor skill first, part skill teaching first	Gross motor skill first, whole skill teaching first
Teachers and coaches	Parents and beginner coaches with limited training and tennis experience	Players who become educated and certified coaches trained to specific competencies
Teaching style	Verbal instruction, few role models	Demonstration and copying of quality role models
Motor skill development	Deliberate practice too early and little use of sound Principles of Practice	Rally and play based. Understanding of motor skill learning and use of sound Principles of Practice
Tactical development	Inappropriate mental, emotional and social competitive base for age and stage of player	Age appropriate application of mental, emotional and social skills in the competitive base
Progression	Unstructured and random	Structured, cooperative to competitive plus open to closed to semi-closed to open
Role of the coach	Feeder and commentator	Proactive enabler
Focus	Coach centred - slow learning rate	Player centred - rapid learning rate

Communication Skills

Successful coaches have many skills. One of them is excellent communication. This includes a number of formal and informal skills that must be adapted when teaching 10 and under players.

1. Verbal skills (WHAT is said) are important, but there are 'rules' that apply when teaching young children:

- Language must be appropriate for young children to understand
- Explanations should be very brief
- Words should be specific, clear, and spoken in an adult voice
- The children must understand what has been said
- Players' names should be used often and at the beginning of the sentence, so the child is listening

2. Paralanguage (HOW something is said) is often more important with children than verbal information:

- The intonation, volume and speed must be appropriate
- The volume for the group and the individual should be appropriate, without shouting
- The tone should be interesting

3. Nonverbal skills are key, because the majority of children learn from what they see, not what they hear:

- Enthusiasm, excitement and energy, involvement and interest in each child is essential
- Body language is almost as important as words
- Remember that children copy what they see, so be professional at all times
- Cell phones should not be used during a lesson. They communicate disinterest and that other people are more important
- Demonstration is an important nonverbal skill. Children copy what they see by modeling actions. Quality demonstrations show children what an action looks like and what they need to do. For example, how to move to and how to hit the ball.

The 'rules' for demonstrations are:

- Repeat the demonstration several times and ensure it shows what the children should see. When showing a stroke, make sure the whole action is shown and not parts of it. Young children need gross, not fine, movements to copy
- Make sure the demonstration is simple and basic so the children feel confident to try
- Explain what they need to watch, and then ask, "Can you do that?"
- Make sure every child is able to see and hear. Some children learn more easily if they also have space to move as they watch.
- Send them to practice very quickly so that they don't forget what to do

4.1 Informal communication

- Children subconsciously observe and learn from many different role models (it could be a tennis player on TV, players on another court, or the coach in front of them). This means they constantly see good and bad images of actions and behaviours. Coaches should use this method of informal communication by making sure young players see good images to copy. They will learn without the coach saying anything, so coaches must be aware and mindful of what and how they work!

5. Feedback and Motivation

Feedback is very important for coaches and players alike, but obviously for different reasons. Feedback during a 10 and under session should:

- Be immediate and related to what has just happened
- Be positive and focus either on what the child has done well or the effort made
- Give positive suggestions for improvement
- Be visual (body language) and verbal
- Be related to the performance, not to the child
- Show the coach's interest and 'excitement' at the child's success

Motivating young players is often necessary because they often do not what to expect, nor are they able to measure success. Coaches need to:

- create appropriate 'reward' structures that relate to effort as well as ability
- set simple, attainable goals with the player to give confidence and competence



Organisation

An essential coaching skill is being able to organise the programme, time, children, activities, the helpers and equipment quickly, safely and efficiently, before and during the lesson.

Organising the Programme means advertising and recruiting young players, developing and managing within the club and working with other coaches, club officials and parents. Coaches and parents working together on issues such as the objectives of the programme, goals for different sessions, medical records and emergency procedures need to be developed through regular meetings.

Before the lesson starts coaches should:

- Have a written lesson plan that includes the goals, teaching points, activities and breaks for hydration and rest
- Know the plan for a change in environmental conditions (e.g. thunderstorms)
- Know the number of players, have a list of their names, and know of any medical conditions
- Know how to contact parents if they are not staying for the lesson
- Know how much and what equipment is available and needed
- Know who the helpers are and brief them on the lesson

During the lesson, coaches must be able to organise:

- Time: so that each part of the lesson (warm up, skill development, game development and cool down) has the right amount of time to achieve the goals.
- Children: so that, for each activity, they know:
 - where to go
 - what to do
 - how to do it
 - when to do it
- Activities: for each part of the lesson so that children learn and improve
- Helpers: so that they know what to do, and when, throughout the lesson
- Equipment: so that it is right for the age group, available, in good condition, and is picked up and stored at the end of the lesson.

Courts, Equipment, Scoring and Competition

The ITF rule change for 10 and under tennis mandates a number of changes to playing areas and equipment for young players. The chart below illustrates the outcomes of the rule change to be implemented by national federations.

FACTOR	PREVIOUS PRACTICE	PRACTICE FOR COMPETITION	PRACTICE FOR TEACHING
Racket size	Various sizes, usually full size	Specific size for age and court size	Specific size for age
Ball speed	Yellow ball	Specific speed for age (red for 8 and under, orange for ages 9-10, green for 9-12)	Appropriate speed for player
Net height	Full height net	Specific height for age	Specific height for age
Court size	Full size court	Specific size for age	Appropriate size for training objective

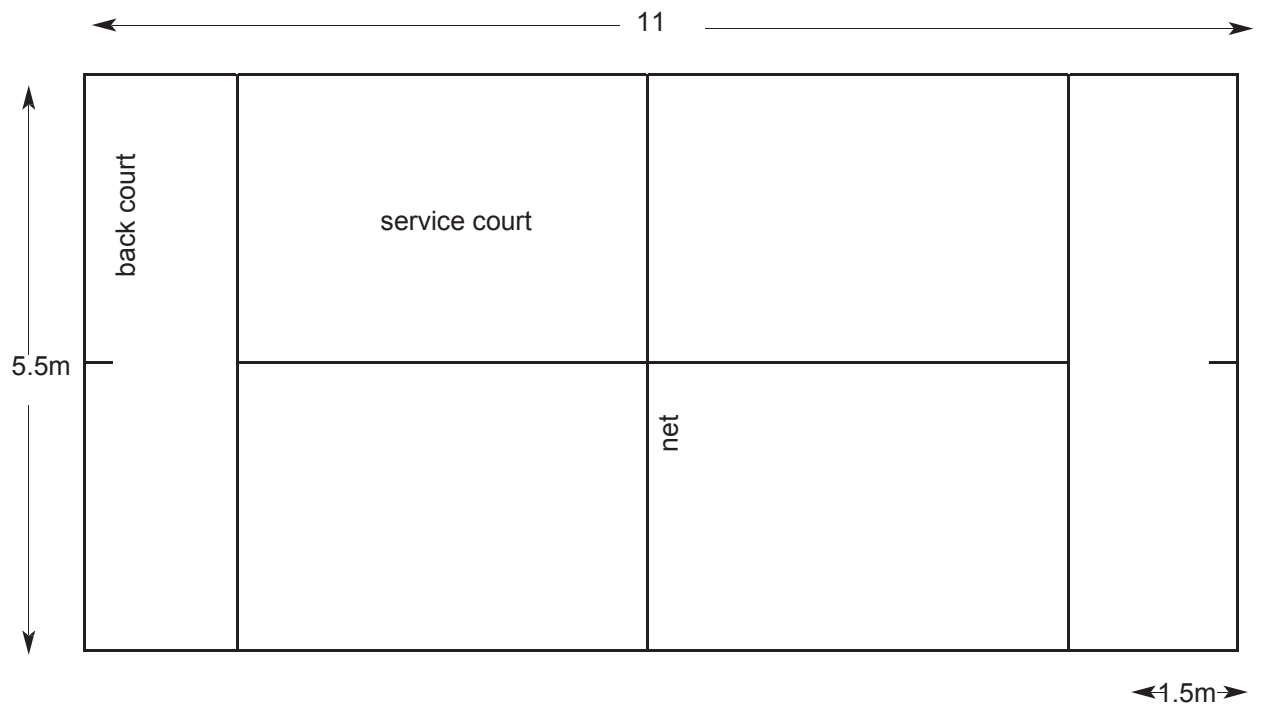
Children aged 10 and under need to play and compete on court areas that match their physical stature and abilities. The full size court is out of proportion to their size and they have to adapt how they play.

Two dimensions of the court area need to be changed for young children: the length to make the court shorter and the width to make the court narrower.

Red and Orange courts are in proportion to the stride and arm length of small children and mean that the distances they cover and the energy they expend is in relation to their size. As a result, they will develop appropriate technical skills and movement patterns for their physical size.

Courts

For children ages 8 and under, the court is 11m long and 5.5m wide.



The Red court and net

There are many different layouts of red courts. However, it is possible to fit 4 red courts on the area taken up by one full size court and the surrounds.

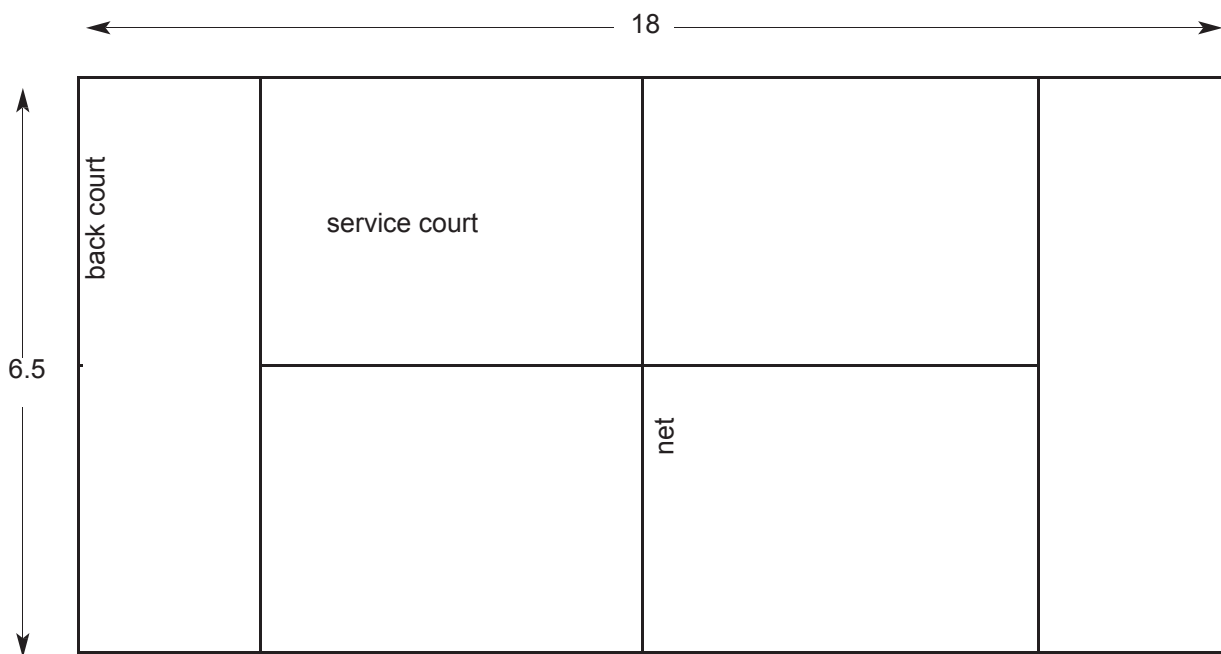
A portable net or tape is then placed across the court. The lines including centre service line and the serve nicks can be made with throw down lines or masking tape.

The red court service areas are larger than the back court - making it easier for young players to serve and get the ball in play. For children under 5, the court length can be shortened even more by playing just in the service boxes or in even smaller areas.

The red court dimensions are the same for doubles.

The height of the net must relate to the height of the child. On a red court, the net height is reduced to 80cm. This height can be reduced further to help very young players.

For children 8-10 years old, the court is 18m long and 6.5m wide.



The Orange court and net

Young players between the ages of 8 and 10 are usually taller and stronger, so they need a larger court.

The 18m court can be marked on the full size court, using either throw down lines or masking tape. The orange court baseline is placed halfway between the full size court baseline and the service line to make the orange court baseline.

The orange court sidelines are placed inside each full size court singles sideline, to make the orange court 6.5 m wide. .

The tennis net should be lowered to 80cm in height.

Red and Orange courts can be adapted to a number of different shapes for practice and training, depending on the objective for the lesson. For example, to practice hitting long and deep balls, throw down lines could make the court long and thin; to hit wide balls, it could be short and fat; to hit balls cross court, just the service courts could be used.

It is also possible not to use the red or orange courts at all, but to mark out a small area, especially with very young players or with beginners for whom the net can be an obstacle to success.

It is important to mark the court area so children can get used to playing within specific lines.

For taller and stronger players 9-10 years old, the full size court could be used with the green ball.

Equipment

Many coaches use short rackets with young children, with low compression or foam balls, and have not combined these with the appropriate court size and net height. As a result, the success rate for the players has increased.

The rule changes for 10 and under tennis include the use of appropriate rackets and balls for each age group.

Racket Length, Weight and Grip Size

The child needs to be able to control the racket at a distance away from the body. Specifically, this means controlling the length of the lever well enough to hit the ball. Children under 10 have much lower levels of strength: therefore full size rackets challenge them for three reasons:

1. The length of the lever is out of proportion to their arm length
2. The weight is at the farthest point from their body when their arm is extended and is difficult to control
3. The grip is too big for their hand size

In the past, children have made adaptations to their technique to cope with the long and heavy racket:

- Shortened their grip (moved their hands up the handle) to bring the lever closer to their body to control it
- Brought the racket closer to their body by bending their arm
- Held the racket with both hands
- Tried to control the racket by 'strangling' their grip as the racket twisted in their hands

For success, and to develop sound basic technique, young players need the right length and weight of racket, with a grip size that fits their smaller hand. Children ages 10 and under do vary in height so junior rackets with weight and grip size proportionate to the racket length are essential

Measuring the racket length for the child

In order to give a young player the correct size racket, ensure the child is standing straight, holding the racket in the dominant hand by their side with the racket head down to the ground. The tip of the racket head should just touch the ground when the child's arm is straight, the shoulders are level, and both legs are straight. If the arm is bent at the elbow, the racket is too long. If the racket tip does not touch the ground, it is too small for the player.

Balls

The ball must also fit the player's ability, as well as their height. Young players have relatively slower reactions and less experience, so their ability to anticipate is much reduced. They need more time to determine where the ball will land and get to it.

The yellow regulation ball causes problems for 10 and under players because:

- It moves too fast and too far for their tracking skills (the flight speed of the regulation ball relates to adults playing on a full size court)
- The ball bounces too high in relation to the height of the child, who then adapts the grip to make contact (often above the shoulder)
- 'Moon' balls become the norm as the players try to make time
- The yellow regulation ball is too heavy for the child to control, especially with a smaller racket

Ball type for different ages

For children under 8, red foam balls or red (very low compression) felt balls are appropriate, because they are slower, lighter, have a lower bounce, and do not travel very far. (The density and construction of the foam ball is important and care needs to be taken when selecting them, because some are more suitable for adults, because of their high bounce height.)

For children between 8 and 10, orange (low compression) balls move a little faster through the air than the red ball, but have a lower bounce height than the green ball. The ball can be hit within the confines of the 60' court, so the player can rally, serve and volley with great success.

For children between 10 and 12, green (low compression) balls are faster, but have a lower bounce height than the yellow regulation ball. The green ball can be hit within the confines of the full size court, so the player can rally, serve and volley with great success.



Scoring and Competition

The scoring and competitive system for both red and orange tennis must take account of the mental, emotional and social abilities of children. In tennis, the best of three principle - first player to two - is a basic concept. Young children can learn and accept this principle from the start, provided coaches use it frequently in different rallying, serving and other drills.

We also know young children cannot concentrate for very long, need frequent changes of activity, and struggle with the concept of winning and losing. Physically, they get tired far more quickly than adults, and many become emotionally stressed by competition. Playing a full three set match at 7, 8 or 9 year olds is not a good idea.

A different scoring and competitive system is needed in 10 and under tennis.

10 and Under Scoring

5-8 year olds can play a Tie break to 7, with 2 clear points or sudden death OR an Extended tie break to 11, with 2 clear points or sudden death

8-10 year olds can either play a Tie break to 7, an Extended tie break to 11, 2 tie breaks (can produce a draw) or play the best of 3 tie breaks

Players should compete first in small teams in round robin format, where the actual points (not wins or losses) from their matches count as points for their team. When the children become familiar with the competitive process, then wins and losses for the team can be counted.

Any singles tournaments should be for more experienced players, and be round robin, compass draw or similar format, to enable as many children as possible to play as many matches as possible.

With the scoring systems outlined, the length of a match can be determined. This will enable organisers to plan specific periods of time for a competition and parents can be given a start and finish time.)

Lesson Structure

Each lesson should be prepared in advance with the objectives, teaching points and activities planned. Every helper should either have a copy of the plan or know what the objectives and different activities will be.

The structure of the lesson should always be the same, but the time frames for each section will change at different ages. The Junior Development Workshop will follow the basic structure of the lesson plan below.

Lesson Plan for 5-10 year olds		
Date	Time and lesson duration (maximum 45 minutes)	
Number of children	Age of the group	
Equipment needed (appropriate court areas, rackets and balls)		
Objective (linked to previous lesson)		
Time	Content	Organization / Safety
20%	Warm up activities (physical skills) and teaching points <i>Coaching role: observe and analyze performance in an open situation</i>	
40%	Skill development and teaching points <i>Coaching role: teach skills in a closed situation</i>	
30%	Games development and teaching points <i>Coaching role: develop and evaluate skills in a game in a progressively more open situations until a final open game</i>	
10%	Cool down activities and homework task <i>Coaching role: evaluate performance</i>	
Evaluation of lesson		

Lesson Content

Warm up • 20% of the lesson

The warm up is the starting point for every lesson, although for 10 and under players it serves a different purpose to a warm up for older juniors or adult players. **The coaching role is primarily to observe and analyze, but also to improve physical / athletic skills where possible.**

It should:

- Be dynamic, well structured, and progress through different physical activities that have been planned in advance
- Increase the focus of the children for the lesson
- Enable the players to have fun
- Help develop the specific physical skills for the age group
- Concentrate on quality so the children improve
- Be a group activity following the coach to hold concentration
- Begin with running forward, sideways and backward, and/or skipping or jumping, to warm large muscle groups and increase heart rate. When the players are thoroughly warm, but not tired, the activity should be speed development, followed by coordination skills, such as throwing and catching, stability and balance. Finally, there should be simple and appropriate strength based activities, followed by a quick water break.
- For young players, 4-8 years old, there should be five or six different fun exercises, and for 8-10 year olds, seven, eight or nine exercises should be included. (Several ideas for warm up can be found in the Appendix.)

Skill Development • 40% of the lesson,

A major part of any lesson must be to teach children different skills so they can play. In this part of the lesson, the skills that children should learn are explained, so that coaches can select the appropriate skills to teach in any single lesson. **The coaching role is to develop skills**

Children can learn skills only when they are ready to do so. Many tennis skills, such as grips, basic groundstrokes and rallying over a net, are often too advanced for 5-6 year olds, but can be learned by age 7-8.

Equipment for children 10 and under helps them learn to serve, rally and play more quickly, but it is important to link what is being taught and the physical, mental and emotional skill abilities of the age group. (See pp. 3-9)

Coaches need to teach the basic skills and techniques of tennis. There is evidence that children drop out of sport when they are not taught the skills they need to improve. In the past, tennis lessons often concentrated on technical skills without linking them to the game, and made learning boring and repetitive for young players.

Young children can learn different skills when these are hidden in fun activities that are structured in such a way that the child develops skills without even knowing. For example:

- Hitting a ball along the ground is easy for any child. It needs a swinging action similar to hitting a ball at the side of the body. This is the precursor to hitting the ball at the side after one bounce. In addition, children can rally by hitting the ball along the ground, while learning to count the score
- Feeding the ball underhand to a partner helps the child develop the arm swing and follow through of a basic forehand
- Swinging the racket to hit a ball with a space between the body and the ball encourages the semi-western grip.

Many coaches teach the way they were taught themselves. The advent of 10 and under equipment and playing areas means teaching can now develop the basic skills needed to serve, rally and score; that is, to play the game almost from the start. Coaches can now be very innovative and make tennis appeal to more children.

Every young player needs three basic skills to play tennis.

1. Track and receive the ball as it comes towards them
2. Handle the racket
3. Hit the ball, both after the bounce and without a bounce

Coaches and parents often concentrate on hitting skills before they help young players with essential skills of tracking and receiving the ball and handling the racket.

1. Tracking and receiving the ball

To hit the ball coming toward them, the player must be able to judge what the ball is doing in the air and determine where it will land. For example, the ball could be coming to the right or left of the player, straight at them, in front of or behind them. It could be traveling slowly or quickly and it could be spinning. The earlier children can learn to identify these characteristics of the ball, the easier it will be for them to move to the right place to receive it and hit it.

The challenge for coaches of most 5-6 year olds (and even older players and adults) is to develop their ability to track and receive the ball so they can learn other skills. The central issue is that young children - because they are young, have very little experience of tracking moving objects, so they cannot anticipate where an object - the tennis ball will land. Their reaction speed is also slow, but improving.

The objective for the coach must be to increase the amount of experience, and consequently the ability of the children to track, anticipate and move to the ball. Standing in lines will not help. Neither will receiving the same ball fed by the coach at the same speed over and over. Coaches often think that children should have the same easy balls. That is fine if they stand still, but not what happens in reality. Playing other ball sports, playing with parents and learning to catch and feed balls to other players in tennis will increase the experience base and help children learn to track and anticipate. The use of slower foam and red low compression balls also helps.

2. Handling the racket

Some young children will be used to playing with baseball bats, other sports equipment or even tennis rackets. To play a sport like tennis, the player has to be able to hold and control the racket. Some learn this skill very quickly, especially when they have a racket of the correct length. Again, experience is essential.

3. Hitting the ball, both after the bounce and without a bounce

We know that hitting the ball depends on the player being able to track the ball, handle the racket and coordinate specific movement. Hitting is very difficult if the previous two skills are not in place, therefore hitting is the last skill young children should learn, not the first! Some young children find it easier to hit a ball after the bounce and

others before the bounce. While they need to do both, giving them confidence by succeeding in one of the two is important.

In addition, tennis requires the ball to be hit in a specific direction, over the net and into a specific area. It follows, therefore, that the height of the net and the size of the playing area both affect the likelihood of success for young children. Again, 10 and under tennis makes learning much easier for young children, since both the net height and playing area is modified to make them child friendly.

The issue for the coach working with young children is to teach hitting skills without giving large amounts of technical information that children won't understand anyway. The coach must have a feel for the level of understanding of the children and be able to put them in situations where they learn and improve without knowing the details of what they are doing.

Children learn best by just having fun! Coaches know there are three ways to hit a tennis ball and children will be more or less successful at any or all of them, but they will improve rapidly when teaching allows them to play and learn as they do so.

Rallying: TheGroundstrokes

The objective for 10 and under tennis (and for the ITF Play and Stay programme) is to help children serve, rally and play as quickly as possible. This objective for early success is that when children are learning to play at a young age, they should also develop the basics of the basic strokes. The rally skills - the groundstrokes - are learned first, because they are easier and because then children can play tennis.

Rallying can be achieved at different levels. For two beginners, rallying could be hitting the ball along the ground under the net to each other, it could be one child hitting to one feeding and then catching, or it could be both children hitting the ball over the net, or any variation. (See Differentiation p. 31)

Right from the start the coach should help children do things well. It is much easier to build the correct skill base than change grips and actions as young players develop.

Instead of concentrating on the grip as has happened in the past, good coaches show young players the basic shape of the racket action away from their body and to the side, and get them to copy it. Making a space between the body and the racket, and using shorter rackets with low compression balls, means young players adopt a sound and comfortable grip that will be very close to the right one, without knowing they have done so.

The basic racket action for the groundstroke is to:

- Take the racket back above the hand in a shallow loop
- Swing it forward through the contact point - to the side and in front of the body
- Follow through on the opposite side of the body between the waist and shoulder

The most suitable grips are:

- Between a semi-western and eastern grip for the forehand
- A two handed backhand grip with the bottom hand in a continental and the top hand close to an eastern grip

- An eastern grip for single handed backhand

The coach can adjust the grips over time for those young players who need some help, although often, as the players improve, the grip adjusts itself. Many times, young children just need time to practice. Often coaches make tennis boring by concentrating on grips, rather than putting children in situations where they hold the racket correctly anyway.

A few young children may also hold the racket with both hands, and change hands for the forehand and backhand. This really does not matter when they are very young, but it helps when the coach sets up different activities where the child has to use the right grip to progress.

The Serve

To play the game, children need to learn the basics of the serve. Again, the maxim for coaches should be to teach the whole action through demonstration from the outset.

To serve, young children must be able to throw a ball overhand, high up in the air (a fly ball) from a sideways position. Throwing the ball high increases the arm extension and results in the correct use of the wrist and, therefore, gives the right grip when learning the serve. Throwing can be practiced in the warm up, at home or in the first few lessons.



Teaching young players the underhand serve first, means they can quickly learn to serve and get the ball in play for the rally. When they are confident, better coordinated and more able, the overhand serve can be introduced.

The underhand serve is a very simple action, but good coaches will incorporate some basics of the overhand serve.

The basic underhand serve should:

- Start with the racket and ball held together out in front of the body (as they are for the overhand serve). In this position, the grip is approximately correct
- Children stand behind the baseline, turned sideways, with feet and about shoulder width apart to help their balance
- The racket and ball arms then move in opposite directions (as they do for the overhand serve). The racket is taken back with one hand and the ball is tossed a short distance up in the air with the other to drop onto the racket as it swings forward
- After contact, the racket swings forward to finish in front of the body

The overhand serve also depends on the child's ability to coordinate the movement of both arms in a rhythmical action.

The basic overarm serve should:

- Start with the player holding the racket and ball held together out in front of the body
- The player stands sideways to the baseline, with feet about shoulder width apart for balance
- The racket arm and ball arm split and simultaneously and move in opposite directions (this is a complex coordination movement that some children find difficult, but simply needs help and patience from the coach)
- The ball arm moves up to release the ball above and in front of the head, as the racket arm swings behind the body and quickly up and forward to contact the ball
- The arm should be extended, and the racket contacts the ball slightly in front and to the side of the body
- The racket arm then moves across the body and follows through on the opposite side

The children should be shown the WHOLE serve action several times and then asked to copy it. The serve should NOT be broken into different parts. The practice of breaking the overhand serve action down into parts should be avoided for the vast majority of children who are quite capable of copying the whole action.

With practice, many children can and will produce a rough version of the serve that can then be improved over time. Young children learn large movements, copy well, and just need encouragement and time to refine the action.

While they develop the overhand serve, children can use their underhand serve.

Many coaches concentrate on developing aspects of the serve that are real challenges for young children. For example:

- An accurate ball toss is difficult for young children. Their centre of gravity is very high and with their arm extended above their head, their balance is compromised, so the ball toss cannot be accurate on a consistent basis, regardless of how much it is practiced.
- The balance issue also impacts the position of the feet on the serve. 10 and under players can maintain their balance better with their feet apart throughout the action.
- Young children should not be taught to bend their knees on the serve, since their lower leg strength is not yet sufficient to contribute to the serve action, and neither is their ability to use coordination (kinetic chain).
- Teaching young players to rotate the hips and shoulders is of no real value given their stage of physical development.

Young players need success. Teaching the basics of the overhand serve to identify what that they can and cannot do is important. Both red and orange courts have large service courts, so young players have a high success rate with the serve.

The volley

Young children can be taught to volley from the beginning, because of the slower speed of the low compression ball, and because hitting the ball before it bounces is another skill to learn. Using it in the game is, however, difficult younger players with slower reactions.

Again, the method of teaching should be demonstration and asking the children if they can copy what they have seen. When they are encouraged to contact the ball in front and to the side of the body, they are more likely to hold the racket in an efficient and comfortable grip.

The basic volley action should encourage the children to:

- Hold the racket head up and above the hand with their elbows away from their body and out in front, so that they punch the racket head forward at the ball
- Keep the action very short with the wrist firm
- Finish the stroke with the racket in front, the opposite foot to the racket hand forward so they maintain their balance

Game Development • 30% of the lesson

The coaching role is to develop the skills learned into the game and evaluate what the children are able to do.

The objective of both PTR Kids Tennis and the ITF Serve, Rally and Play programme is that children 10 and under can play the game as soon as possible. In a lesson, game development is very important and should be well planned so that the skills learned can be put into the game situation. The skills of serving, rallying and even volleying should therefore always be taught with the objective of helping children play the game better. Scoring should be introduced early. With young children, visual scoring (balls on cones, balls collected in a bucket, etc.) is very useful.

The first way to develop the game is to help young players to get the ball over the net (to rally) as often as possible - to be consistent. Young players often do not understand that if they hit the ball over the net just once more than their opponent, then the point is won. Coaches can set up many cooperative and competitive drills and games that help young players understand and develop consistency.

The second way to develop the game is to teach young players to hit the ball accurately to different places on the court. The opponent will find it harder to get the ball back if s/he has to move to reach the ball. As soon as young players are able to get the ball over the net, they should be challenged with different games and drills to hit the ball crosscourt or down the line. Then, by setting up different court sizes and shapes, young children can learn very quickly to hit balls wide or long, high or low, fast or slow, to make returning the ball difficult for the opponent. Games that develop accuracy can progress from cooperative to competitive as young players improve.

The third way for young players to improve is to learn good positioning to hit the next ball more easily. They need to learn to get ready to hit the next ball as soon as they hit the first one. This means serving and being ready to rally the return, returning and being ready for the next ball. The coach needs to organise different games and drills to help young players prepare for the next ball.

Playing the game itself, learning the rules, and learning how to score, should be important and fun parts of every lesson. Coaches can set up different games that encourage young players to learn the essentials of tennis.

By the age of 8 or 9, players are able to cooperate with each other, so the basics of doubles can be taught. Learning how to communicate with a partner and understanding the basic court positions are the first skills to learn.

Cool Down and Homework • 10% of lesson

At the end of the lesson, players should have a cool down routine. This should consist of a gentle jog, followed by a few different static stretches. For children younger than 7, this should be replaced by a calming activity that slows the children down before they leave.

The coach then needs to give the group a homework task that enables the children to improve a skill with their parents. This could be learning or improving their jump rope, learning to throw high over a barrier, or catching with one hand.

Evaluation

It is important for the coach to always self- evaluate the lesson in terms of goals achieved, what went well and what could be improved, as well as the coach and player performance. In addition, if several coaches are working together, they should take time to discuss and evaluate the lesson and their own coaching as a group. The theme and objectives for the next lesson can then be planned.

Differentiation

In any group of children there will be different abilities. This is because children:

- Come with different levels of experience and skill
- Learn at different speeds, at different times and in different situations

Coaches must make sure that every child in every lesson makes progress with a task that challenges them, but is not so difficult for them that they lose confidence. This means coaches need to be able to differentiate tasks and set up different levels of practice for the same activity.

For example, in learning to rally:

- Some children could be rallying the ball over the net using rackets
- Others could have one child throwing the ball for another to hit, for a hit and catch rally between them
- Others could have two children throwing and catching to each other for a rally from a position close to the net
- Others could be rallying the ball between each other along the ground
- Others could be close together without a net, tapping the ball onto markers on the ground

All of these different levels of rally could be scored in the same way.

Differentiation means that while every player has the same task, in this case rallying, the parameters have been changed:

- The playing areas
- Having a net or not
- Having a racket or not
- It would also be possible to change to a faster or slower ball

In addition, with different abilities in the group, it is possible to vary the:

- Rules of the task
- Court areas children use
- Balls used

When and Why to Move Children to the Next Level

Parents and coaches will often ask when a young player should move to a longer racket and a faster ball. While this is not the primary goal in 10 and under tennis, it is important that children feel they are improving and progressing.

The need to provide optimal challenge to keep confidence and competence in the child is essential. Moving to a longer racket, faster ball, or bigger court, will challenge the existing skills and the child can lose confidence. However, there will be some children who make very rapid progress and it is clear they could handle a bigger challenge. 10 and under tennis coaching must always link the development of children's physical skills with their mental and emotional abilities.

Several examples are given to illustrate when and why a child should progress to the next level of equipment and court:

- The physical size of the child may mean s/he should move to a bigger court. The court size (width and length) and net height always need to fit the physical stature of the player. Height and leg and arm length, are all linked and in proportion for most 10 and under children, so a taller player can play on a larger court.
- The more skilled child may need a longer racket and faster ball in order to stay challenged and improve.
- Some young players may be able to play more often. Their ability to play the game at a higher level than other children, rather than just perform the technical skills, is an important consideration in deciding when to move up the child.
- It is important to provide a positive social environment for each child. Young children, especially girls, want to be with their friends, so moving them to another level and group of players could prove counterproductive.

Moving children to larger rackets and faster balls will affect technical development. There is real evidence that what we thought before is correct. When the child is too small for the court length and width, they change their technique to cope, especially on the serve and groundstrokes. They also find it difficult to transition well to the net.

When the child is small, dealing with wide balls and developing spin is also compromised by the width of the court. The service action has to change when the child is too small for the length of the court and the height of the net.

The child's balance, especially on the serve, is affected by playing with a racket that is too long, too heavy and with too large a grip.

The child's reaction speed, perception and anticipation impacts the ability to cope with the speed of the incoming ball. Reaction speed and perception improve with growth and maturation. Anticipation develops with relevant experience.

The coach could consider increasing the challenge if the child is:

- Playing the game well (is tactically sound, able to move the ball and the opponent around, can serve overhand consistently to both sides and different areas of the service court, and can vary the depth of the ball deliberately)
- Able to score without adult help

If the child meets the challenge and (after a short plateau) moves forward again, the decision was a good one.

Finally, a few 9 - 10 year old players and some 10 - 11 year olds are ready for a full size court, but not the normal ball. They should play with a longer racket (depending on their height) and a green ball when they start on the full size court.



Competition

The objective of 10 and under tennis is to enable children to serve, rally and score as soon as possible, so they can play the game. When this has been achieved, they can learn to compete.

Just as coaches teach children to play in a way that meets their needs, teaching them to compete must also do so. For 10 and under children, the format and structure of competition must be appropriate. For adults, competition in tennis is one player against another in a tournament with one losing and one winning. For a 5 year old, such a format is inappropriate, but fun activity days are very suitable. Small team events are fine for 9 year olds, and individual competition is a possibility for some. Team competition is more fun, and by 11 years of age, individual competition is relatively easy.

Understanding appropriate competitive formats for 10 and under means understanding the mental, emotional and social abilities of children and what they can do. Teaching competitive skills to children without this understanding is unlikely to be successful. As previously noted, these abilities (pp. 3-9), but some are repeated here in order to emphasize the important role of coaches in developing competitive skills.

- 5 and 6 year olds do not understand the concept of winning and losing or scoring points, but 9 year olds understand both.
- 5 year olds do not understand how to cooperate with another child. (Watch the swarm effect in a game like soccer.) By the age of 8, children can work with another child, so doubles is possible.
- Concentration issues mean that playing points for 20 minutes is tough at age 6, but easy for a 9 year old.
- Making quick decisions about in and out is difficult for a 7 year old, but much easier for a 10 year old.
- Understanding rules takes time at any age, but especially at age 5.
- Even at the age of 10 or 12, individual competition (being out there on my own) is stressful and often made worse by adults putting grown up expectations on the performance. Team play is a very good way for children to learn how to compete.
- Learning to be a competitor is a process best taught in a fun and enjoyable way.

These points emphasize that 10 and under children are changing and developing. This means competitive opportunities should be very different for 5 year olds and 10 year olds. Formal tournaments should start around age 9 or 10, not at 5 years old. They are an adult concept that is inappropriate for young children.

Several stages of appropriate and progressive competitive learning in the lesson and the club should come before formal tournaments.

Coaches need to approach the development of competitive skills of young children in the same way as they do the skills to learning to serve, rally and score - gradually. The developmental process is crucial - moving too fast or leaving steps out will make children leave the sport.



photos courtesy ITF

Working with Parents

Parents are an important element of coaching 10 and under players, because of their importance in the lives of their children.

The predominant attitude of coaches is that parents are a problem. However, the majority of parents simply want their child to enjoy the sport and make progress. Research shows that spending time establishing a working relationship with parents, explaining the coaching philosophy of 10 and under tennis, as well as the objectives of lessons, are productive and necessary.

The coach needs also to understand the consequences of the child's relationship with their parents and make sure the parents are present, when necessary, for the child. Inevitably both the relationships and the roles change as children develop and mature.

4-6 year olds want their parents close by. The parent is a strong and visible support to them. The parents should remain outside the court (unless they are helpers) and should not offer comments to the child during the lesson.

Parents have an important role in helping the child develop basic movement skills and in organising sport opportunities. They can be asked to help with homework tasks that continue the activities covered in lessons. Parents then develop a better understanding of what their children are able to do and where to develop. If parents are actually helping with the lesson, they should not work with their own child.

For 6-8 year olds, parents still need to be in close proximity during lessons as visible support. They can help at home to develop basic throwing and catching skills and provide other sport challenges that help develop basic skills.

8-10 year olds are becoming more self-reliant and, although some still need the visible emotional support, most are quite happy without their parents nearby.

Parents have a role in supporting coaches and in teaching fair play and respect for the game and its rules, other players, coaches and officials.

Regular parent meetings are a good idea, so the coach can explain the importance of the rally and play philosophy, why young children find certain skills more difficult, and how parents can help. They are also a good forum to establish the philosophy and rationale of the 10 and under programme and to explain health and safety policies (including medical issues and procedures) to parents.

Safety, Injury and Player Welfare

Safety

Safety is an important consideration for any tennis programme, but especially when working with young children 10 and under who have very little idea of safety and need very firm guidelines and physical 'indicators' (throw down lines, spots etc.) to show them where they should be.

The issues for coaches to consider are:

1. Facilities and surfaces: Slippery surfaces, especially indoors or after rain, debris on the court, netting, net winders and posts are all potential hazards. Red courts are usually positioned on the full size court and creating spaces between them is important. If clay courts are used, the nailed lines should be checked.
2. Equipment. Balls: ball hoppers, rackets, racket bags and other equipment left on court are all potential safety hazards for players.
3. Environmental conditions: Rain, lightening, heat and humidity are all conditions that can affect practice and play. The coach and the facility should have policies and procedures in place to determine when sessions should be cut short or not take place.
4. Children and space: The coach needs to constantly vigilant about creating space between the players because they will not necessarily have the self-awareness to do so. Young children need to be given guidelines about, for example, when to collect balls and when to stop any activity.

Injury and accidents

The coach needs to be aware of the types of injury and accidents that can occur with young tennis players. Accidental injuries such as rackets and balls hitting players, cuts and bruises or falling over on court occur easily. The coach must have sufficient first aid knowledge (or be able to call on another coach or parent) to help the player quickly and keep the other children calm. The agreed procedures for the facility must be followed.

At least one member of the coaching team should hold a first aid certificate and be able to administer CPR. First aid equipment should be readily available.

The facility itself should have agreed and written procedures that take account of the severity of accidents or injuries on court to young players. A reporting and recording process should also be followed.

Player Welfare

Young players should be given regular breaks for hydration and nutrition. Parents should be asked to provide adequate drinks for their children.

At certain times of the year, heat and humidity or cold are real issues and the coach must be vigilant in monitoring the effects on young players.

The coach should also be concerned with the well-being of young players and be able to help and support them with their social development. Learning to cooperate with other children, learning simple skills of sportsmanship, learning to respect other people, saying thank you after sessions and beginning to cope with winning and losing are all skills 10 and under players can learn to develop through tennis.

Evaluation and Monitoring

An important task for any coach is to constantly evaluate and monitor the performance, not just of their players, but also of themselves.

Goal setting is a necessary tool for coaches and players to help 10 and under players reach levels of competency that fit their age of stage of development. Making progress inspires even young players! Goals should obviously be in time frames that fit such young players: 6-10 year old players will need shorter time frames than 10 to 13 year olds. Coaches should have physical, technical, tactical and mental/emotional process goal for each player. Competitive goals should be of minor importance for young players.

Evaluating and monitoring of players

Coaches and parents obviously are interested in the progress players make. However, assessment of players must be objective, set against realistic goals and competencies and take many different factors into account. These should include:

- The age and stage of development of the player
- School and family pressures
- Progress in tennis

Evaluating and monitoring coaching performance

Self-evaluation of their coaching by coaches of themselves is of major importance. Many coaches review each session they coach and modify the next session on the basis of player reactions and feedback. The coach should undertake regular and on-going training to ensure the quality of his/her coaching practice is maintained.

The coach should also make sure that all insurances and professional memberships are kept up to date. Regular and on-going training should be automatically undertaken. Parents and managers can also contribute to coach evaluation and monitoring on a regular basis.

In a programme where several coaches work together, there is also an invaluable opportunity for coaches to help and evaluate each other on a regular basis.

APPENDIX

ACTIVITIES AND DRILLS FOR 10 AND UNDER PLAYERS

Warm Up

The warm up should help young children develop the appropriate physical skills for the age, but especially the basic ones of balance, agility and coordination. It is important that coaches watch each child and help them develop quality movement. The games and activities that follow provide useful ideas.

There should first be a quick general warm up. It helps to have the players in a line so they can move as a group across the court in some of the following ways. Make sure each activity is repeated at least twice.

- Side skips, pushing off the outside leg
- Running forward jog and then backward
- Side skips, swinging arms to the side or overhead and turn every three steps
- Crossover steps to the right and left
- Skipping forward with and without arms with low knees and then high knees
- Jog wiggling the elbows
- Walk rotating the hips over the front leg

Developing a variety of physical skills during the warm up

Balance - static or dynamic. The head should be still, the eyes forward and the shoulders level.

1. Balancing

Stand on one leg and move arms around.

Stand on one leg with eyes closed and move arms around.

2. Swamp Crossing

Place throw down lines randomly on the court. Split players into two groups on either side of the court. Players cross the court on the throw down lines, balancing on one foot on each line for a count of five. If they do not, they go back to the previous line. Only one player at a time can stand on the same throw down line.

3. Statues

Children spread out around the court. When coach says, "Go", the children move in any direction with large steps. When the coach says, "Stop", they have to stand on one leg like a statue and balance until told to stop.

4. Stealer

Every player starts with a ball balanced on the racket. The objective is to try to steal the ball from other players' rackets and to collect the most balls.

5. Grandmother's Footsteps

Players start on the baseline with a ball and a racket. The coach stands at the net facing them. When the coach faces the other way, the players must try to reach the coach while balancing the ball on the racket. When the coach turns around, the players must stand still. If the ball falls off or if they are still moving, they go back to the baseline.

6. Cone Walks

Walk with a cone balanced on the head with hands behind back.

Walk with a cone balanced on the head and one on each arm - walk slowly at first, then faster.

7. Wind Up

Players stand back to back and pass a ball to each other. They start by passing it around by the feet, then by the waist, and then by the shoulders. After each set of three passes, players take one step away from each other, so they must stretch to pass the ball, keeping their feet still, and eventually throw it. They can only step away if they complete the whole set of three passes.

A variation is to use rackets and pass a ball from string bed to string bed.

8. Rolling Racers

Players are in pairs. The coach starts at the net and rolls a hoop toward the baseline.

Players have to chase the hoop and link their hands through the hoop while it is moving.

They must count how many seconds they keep their hands together before the hoop stops rolling or they knock it over.

9. Chuck 'n Chase

Players line up on either side of the court (at least two on each side). Using two hands, the first player throws a large soccer ball or mini basketball from the forehand side, across the court (it must bounce inside the boundaries specified by the coach). Then they run across the court after it and join the line on the other side. The player who caught the ball throws it from the backhand side and also crosses the court. Rotations continue with players throwing then running. The throw should be a groundstroke swinging action. The movement across the court can change as specified by the coach.

Agility (moving quickly in different directions while being able to control the body)

1. Cone Ladders

Place a series of saucer cones on the court. Players run between them in different footwork patterns (e.g., running forward and backward, hopping and skipping). To increase the difficulty, move the cones closer together or set them at different angles to each other.

2. Cone Code

A number of different coloured cones are placed around the court. Each colour represents a different movement (red = run around, yellow = split step, blue = shuffle steps forward and back, green = two foot jump). Players have to remember the appropriate activity for each cone colour.

3. Cuckoo

Players are in two small teams. Each team has a ball and is given a colour that matches one of the cones on the court. When the coach says, "Go", the players must take their ball and put it on any cone that is NOT their team colour. They move any balls off that the other team has placed. They may not go back to any cone twice in a row and must pick up and put down by standing with their back to the cone, twisting around to place the ball down with two hands.

4. Follow the Ball

The coach stands in front of the players, who are in the ready position and spaced out on the court. The coach has a ball in one hand that s/he moves in different directions. Players must move in the direction of the ball □ left, right, forward and backward. At any time, the coach can shout out the name of a player. As s/he does, players toss the ball in the air. If the named player can get to it and catch it before it bounces twice, s/he becomes the coach.

5. Totem Poles

Each player stands on the court with a partner. One player responds to either “Change” or “Switch” commands, while their partner stands still (totem pole). Players must always face the coach. “Change” = player changes direction running around the partner, “Switch” = players switch places with the partner. The moving player must hold both arms with elbows bent at right angles in the same position as the coach, either with palms down and forward at shoulder level or palms up, thumbs level with ears, or palms facing back, elbows level with shoulders.

6. Mirrors

Players face each other and move sideways with frequent changes of direction across the width of the court. One player must mirror all the movements of the other. As a variation, the players pass one or two balls in different ways back and forth as they move, or players can clap different rhythms.

7. Battak

Players face each other and move in the same direction. One player is the signal. Players start with their hands behind their back and at any time can put their hand out with the palm facing the partner. The reacting partner must reach across and touch the palm quickly with, for example, right hand touching right hand.

8. Masters of the Sky

Players spread out on the court. The coach shows different arm movements using both arms together.

1. Eagle: arms outstretched gliding around
2. Hummingbird: arms move as fast as possible
3. Sparrow: arms move up and down at a medium pace
4. Albatross: arms move in big circles as in the serve.

The coach calls out which bird the players must be and then jog around without touching anyone.

Running (making sure players can run with good action and coordinate both arms and legs)

1. without arms and then with arms (the arms dictate speed of legs)
2. with hands behind back, running slowly
3. with high knees
4. with arms straight and then with arms bent - (the hands should not go higher than the shoulder)

Throwing

In pairs, throw a large ball:

1. overhead with two hands
2. as a chest pass with two hands
3. overhead backward with two hands
4. with one hand, and alternate hands
5. after a turn

Jumping

1. hopping on one leg and then on the other leg
2. jumping over very low bars in lines and squares - forward, sideways, one foot, both feet, in a variety of combinations
3. jumps with turns
4. in and out of hoops with one foot and both feet
5. frog jumps
6. hop, skip and jump
7. clock jumps

Jump rope (develops rhythm, coordination, balance and footwork)

Ensure the length of the rope is correct for the player (top of handles to chest)

Develop the following progressions:

1. running action through the rope while staying in place
2. hopping over the rope
3. sideways
4. backward
5. high knees

Reaction speed (responding quickly to a stimulus)

1. in pairs, players try a variety of exercises, hands together, touching other hands, dropping a ball
2. throw a ball against wall and catch it, then move in one step closer for each catch

Strength (without weights)

1. with a large ball in both hands, swing it from side to side, then from low to high
2. with big steps move forward, backward and sideways
3. walk with hip twists, forward and backward
4. split jumps sideways and forward

Coordination (combining parts of the body and doing movements with different parts of the body)

1. in pairs, throw a ball to partner, changing the ball to the other hand before throwing
2. catch with two hands, one hand, on the spot and then moving
3. throw ball above head, let it bounce and catch it, first two hands and then one hand
4. as above, but when ball bounces, players clap before catching
5. as above, encourage players to catch a falling ball, a rising ball, and a ball at the top of the bounce
6. use two balls, throw into air, let bounce, and try to catch both

Skill Development

Handling the racket

1. Walk the dog
roll the ball around cone with the racket, then try to score a goal by hitting ball to a target

tap the ball along the lines. As above, but using both sides of the racket
2. Keep-it-ups
hit ball in air, let it bounce, hit again

bounce ball down with racket

hit ball in air with alternate sides of the racket

hit ball with strings, then side of the racket

hit ball with strings, then handle

hit ball and change racket into the other hand

hit ball with racket behind back

try to keep two balls in the air at once

Rallying

Across the court / over a line (no net)

1. players roll ball back and forth to each other, using hands and then rackets
2. throwing and catching
3. one feeder and one hitter
4. both hitting ball up so it lands on one target between them
5. both hitting to each other's target

Over the net

1. both throwing and catching
2. one feeder and one hitter
3. both hitting over the net with number of bounces appropriate to ability
4. taps up stop ball, get in position and then hit back
5. one touch to control ball and one to hit
6. one bounce

Consistency

Place cones between net and service line. Try to hit ball past the cones by making the swing bigger. Move cones farther back as players improve.

Accuracy

1. To understand the idea of space, players throw the ball over the net away from partner, so partner has to move to catch it
2. One feeder and one hitter. The feeder tosses the ball and the hitter tries to hit the ball back over the net so that the feeder cannot catch the ball after an appropriate number of bounces. Players change roles after a number of turns or a certain number of successful shots
3. One feeder and one hitter. The feeder hits the ball in and the hitter tries to hit ball to a designated space. The feeder tries to hit ball back and then play out the rally.

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