Learn to Rally and Play

A Coaches' Guide

UNITED STATES TENNIS ASSOCIATION

White Plains, NY Flushing, NY Key Biscayne, FL

Contents

Preface v

Chapter 1: A Game-Based Approach to the Rally 1

Chapter 2: Team Practices 4

Quick Guide for Coaches: Eight Practices at a Glance 7

Practice 1: Introduction to Racquet Handling and Important Tennis Concepts 8

Practice 2: The Forehand 14

Practice 3: The Backhand 21

Practice 4: Random Forehands and Backhands 24

Practice 5: The Serve 26

Practice 6: The Return of Serve 29

Practice 7: The Volley 32

Practice 8: The Lob and Overhead Smash 35

Chapter 3: Developing Team Spirit and Making It Fun 37

Chapter 4: Ralleyball 40

Chapter 5: USA Team Tennis (Youth) 46

Chapter 6: Playing the Game of Tennis 51

Chapter 7: Developmental Stages and Their Impact on Learning Tennis 56

APPENDIX

Flexibility Exercises 65

Resources 66

Preface

What makes tennis fun for most kids is being able to rally a ball back and forth over a net with a partner. The sooner youngsters can rally, the sooner they can actually play the game and participate on a team. This book is designed to give coaches the necessary tools to get children playing the game at their first practice—tools such as simple lead-up activities and ways to modify the court, net, and balls. Just imagine, by using a Game-Based Approach to learning how to play tennis, children can learn to rally in the first hour of their very first practice session as outlined in Chapter 2.

Learn to Rally and Play: A Coaches' Guide takes a different approach from traditional tennis teaching manuals. Traditionally, tennis skills such as the forehand were taught and some level of competency was required before kids were allowed to play tennis. Skill development was typically taught by coaches feeding balls to students in a line. In the Game-Based Approach, children learn basic racquet-handling skills and play games that require them to use the five controls (height, direction, speed, depth, spin) that allow them to effectively receive balls that come to them and send them back over the net—that is, to effectively rally. Since rallying is much more fun than standing in line, children will want to continue to learn the game and develop the skills necessary to play with their friends on a team.

The book provides ample exercises and games for children to do with a partner. This keeps all youngsters active throughout the practice sessions, which is very important with young children, while allowing the coach to rotate from child to child to give one-on-one guidance. Once basic rallying skills are mastered with the forehand, the backhand ground stroke and other skills are introduced.

Primarily intended for children from 6- to 14-years-old, *Learn to Rally and Play* also provides suggestions for pre-tennis activities for younger children in Chapter 7. After only one or two sessions using this book, your kids will be able to participate on a USA Team Tennis 12 and Under Division team. And upon successfully completing the games and exercises in this manual, they will be ready to play on 14 and Under Division or 18 and Under Division teams of USA Team Tennis.

So enjoy and let's start rallying!

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Chapter 1: A Game-Based Approach to the Rally

When most people think of "playing tennis," they picture two people rallying a ball back and forth across the net. Even when the score isn't kept, most onlookers would say that the two players rallying the ball are "playing the game." We believe that young children can learn to "play" tennis best by learning to "rally" the ball during practice and then within the context of the game of **Ralleyball**.

The Game-Based Approach described and recommended in the following section ensures the **fun** of playing tennis is retained by creating game-like situations or lead-up games that suit the skill level of players. One way to create these situations is to use the playing situations that typically occur in a match:

Singles	Doubles
Serving	Serving Team
Receiving	Receiving Team
Rallying (neutral)	Rallying, one player up, one back
Offense	Offense, both players at net
Defense	Defense, both players at baseline

It might seem logical to introduce kids to tennis by teaching the basic skills of the sport before they are introduced to strategy or tactics. However, the risk with teaching skills first is that it can be so boring and repetitive that young players may drop out. If they do stick with the sport, they may learn to execute the skills with little or no idea of when to apply them within the game.

We believe that the Game-Based Approach will help kids learn faster, have more fun, and understand more clearly how to apply their skills to the game. Keep in mind, skill development is not ignored with this approach. Rather, kids start by playing the game, then learning strategy before concentrating on the tennis technique. Using "play" as a first step helps kids understand the game and identify what skills they think they will need to be successful. The motivation to learn these skills is built in from the outset, so little persuasion from you is needed.

In the traditional approach to teaching sports, players do this:

Learn the skill>Learn the strategy and tactics> Play the game

In the Game-Based Approach, players do this:

Play the game>Learn the strategy and tactics> Learn the skill> Play the game

Guided-Discovery Learning

One of the key characteristics of Game-Based coaching is that kids discover how to succeed during play through their experience in playing—not by you telling them what to do. You create the situation; they play the game and then try to figure out

how to problem-solve. Here's the four-step process for Game-Based coaching:

1. Play a modified match or game (such as Ralleyball).
2. Help players discover what they need to do.
3. Teach the skills.
4. Practice the skills in another match or game.

After your players have played awhile, you need to stop the action and ask some questions. *Ask them what they were trying to accomplish, if they feel they succeeded, and what they might want to do better.* This is the time to encourage their desire to improve technical skills, and your next step is to set up a situation for them to practice a skill such as the forehand.

Learning Strategy Before Skills

In Game-Based learning, players are introduced to the strategy and tactics as they play a game. Once they understand the objective based on strategy, they need to test their skills to see if they can actually execute the chosen strategy. If not, it becomes clear to them that they need to spend time improving their skills. This is the best time for the coach to teach them the necessary skills—that is, when the young player is highly motivated.

The fundamentals of strategy for the singles and doubles games are:

Singles: Keep the ball in play
Hit to the open court (side to side or behind opponent)
Hit to the open court (up and back)
Hit to opponent's weaknesses
Play to your strengths

Doubles: Keep the ball in play
Hit to the middle
Angle shots away
Attack opponents' weaknesses or the weaker player
Play to your strengths

For the purposes of this manual, which is designed to help you work with beginning players, the relevant strategy for both singles and doubles is "keeping the ball in play." As players develop and gain some playing experience, they may also want to focus in singles play on "hitting to the open court" and in doubles on "hitting to the middle." The additional strategies listed above will become more important as your players move into higher levels of play.

Let's Play Ralleyball!

The following four steps outline how easy it is to learn how to rally and ultimately to play tennis using the Game-Based Approach.

Step One - Arrange your players on teams according to the Ralleyball format, which is described in Chapter 4. Have them play one set and keep score. One set should last for about ten minutes.

Step Two - Next, stop the action and call your players together. Ask them to evaluate their play and comment on what they could do better. Also, ask them to

describe what seemed to help them succeed in scoring points for their team. Most important, emphasize that the basic strategy for success in Ralleyball is to "Keep the ball in play!" Let your players help choose the skills they would like to improve and perhaps even suggest how they might do this.

Step Three - At this point, your players should be eager to improve their rallying skills so they can do better the next time they play Ralleyball. Using the steps outlined in the series of practices in the following chapter, you can help them improve their rallying skills on both forehand and backhand sides.

Step Four - As they compete in team matches each week, their improving skills should be evident to everyone. The reward will be more exciting competitive matches marked by longer rallies and perhaps some intentional use of strategy.

Summary

The Game-Based Approach to coaching is suggested, because it helps get your players involved in the process right from the start. As a result, they will understand how to play the game more quickly and be more highly motivated to improve their rallying skills.

The four steps outlined above provide a framework for planning each group or team practice. Now it's time to move to Chapter 2 to see the progressive steps you can use to help beginning players learn to rally and play.

Chapter 2: Team Practices

This chapter contains eight suggested team practices designed for the coach who is starting the season with new or inexperienced players. Practices should last a minimum of 45 minutes, but no longer than 90 minutes. The emphasis of the first four practices is to prepare players for Ralleyball matches. The final four practices give the players more options by adding new skills—the serve, volleys, lobs, and overheads. Coaches of younger players might want to continue the emphasis on ground strokes for all eight practices to better prepare the players for Ralleyball.

Each practice includes a review of what was covered in the previous session and then introduces a new skill followed by drills that reinforce the skill and a group game in which the skill is used at the end of the practice. Pairs of players perform most drills, while all players participate in the game at the end of the practice. Finally, each practice has cool down activities, stretching, review of the practice, and announcements.

As a general rule, this sequence of team practices will work with most youngsters ages 6 and over, provided you use slower balls, shorter racquets, and scaled-down courts. For children under 6-years-old, who have not usually developed throwing, tracking, and catching skills, refer to Chapter 7. This chapter reviews the common developmental characteristics of children in the 5-and-under, 6-to-7, and 8-to-11 age ranges and discusses the impact of these characteristics on learning to rally and play tennis.

Matching Equipment and Courts to the Young Player

Traditionally, tennis was taught on a regulation-sized court with adult-sized racquets and regulation tennis balls. For many children, this made the game very complex and difficult to master. Problems associated with using these traditional methods included the following:

- The court is large and very difficult to cover.
- The net is very high in relation to the height of a child. Balls going over a regulation-height net tend to bounce above a child's shoulder or even the head. To return a ball at that height requires extreme grips and awkward stroke patterns.
- The racquets are too big and heavy.
- The balls are too fast and heavy.

Research has shown that the reaction time of a child is ten times slower than that of an adult. This would explain why children have difficulty judging the trajectory of the ball. Even if they accurately and quickly judge the flight and bounce of the ball, the equipment makes it difficult to execute an acceptable stroke.

Since it is difficult to teach a rally using adult-sized equipment and courts, the traditional teaching model focused on teaching skills first before children could play the game. This model made learning the game a long and frustrating process because it was difficult and boring. Keeping kids interested and motivated was a problem. In fact, recent research indicates that approximately only one out of every twelve children is retained when children begin learning how to play tennis in a traditional lesson program.

The answer to many of the problems associated with the traditional approach is to adapt the court, racquets, and balls to the children (rather than the other way around) by using lighter and shorter racquets, smaller courts, and lighter and slower balls. There are several advantages to scaling down the equipment and court to the size of the child. If children are in an environment suitable to their size and physical capabilities, they will be more successful, and early success builds self-confidence. Most important, they will have more fun, because they can actually play tennis.

Equipment made specifically for children is readily available (see Resources in the Appendix). You will find how easy it is to teach children to rally effectively when you use equipment adapted to their size.

Racquets

Junior racquets are shorter, lighter, and have smaller grip sizes that are ideally suited for children. Adult racquets are generally 27 inches long, while junior racquets are available in 21- , 23- , and 25-inch lengths.

Balls

There are several types of lighter, slower balls available. You should select the type of ball that is best for your court size and the ability of your children. Balls are also available in different sizes, from tennis ball to softball size. Tail balls (i.e., tennis balls with paper streamers attached) are the slowest moving flight balls and travel the least distance, so they can be hit hard with full strokes and still stay in play.

Softer, lighter versions of regular tennis balls are available and are excellent "transition" balls between foam balls and regular balls. These balls are non-pressurized and are perfect for play at "three quarters" court. Most of these balls are colorful or two-toned, so it is easier to see the rotation of the ball and pick up spin with them.

The following list of transition balls begins with the slowest and lightest balls and goes up to a regulation tennis ball.

- Tail ball
- Large foam ball
- Small foam ball
- Non-pressurized "transition" balls
- Regulation tennis ball

Mini-Courts/Portable Nets

Children experience more immediate success when hitting over a lower net, because the lower flight and bounce of the ball make it much easier for them to play

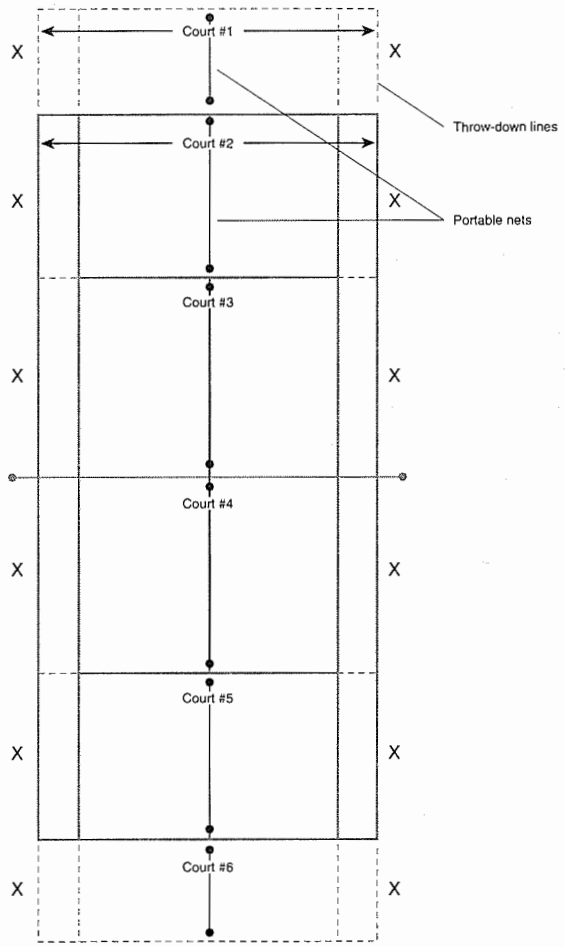
the ball at waist level. Coaches can also place these nets so mini-tennis courts can be erected across the width of the court. This configuration allows you to set up several mini-courts on one full-sized court. These nets are generally 2 feet high and 10 to 18 feet in length.

Modified Courts

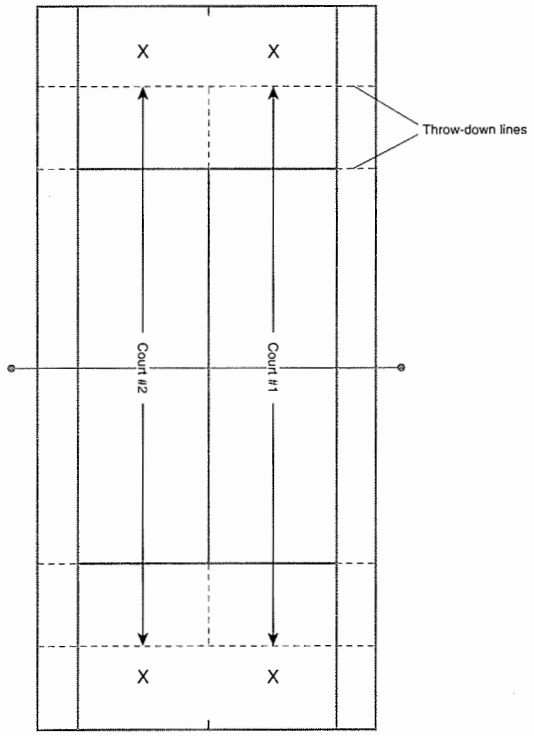
Modifying courts is relatively simple. They can be set up on almost any flat surface such as the floor of a gymnasium or activity room or in a playground or parking lot or on a tennis court. The boundaries can be marked with a series of flat, non-slip, throw-down lines (i.e., flat pieces of rubber). By using these temporary lines, coaches can change the dimensions of the court to match the skill level and strength of the kids and the type of ball being used.

The speed and bounce of the balls are key factors in determining appropriate court size. Generally, when using foam balls, courts can be arranged on a regulation court using doubles sidelines as the baselines. Using this configuration with portable nets, six individual courts can be set up on one regulation court. These courts will measure 36 feet in length and about 18 feet in width.

When soft, non-pressurized balls are used, courts can be set up on a regulation court positioning the baselines midway across the backcourt, between the service line and baseline. Using this configuration, two courts 60 feet in length and 18 feet in width can be set up on one regulation-sized court.



Six-Court Modified Court



Two-Court Modified Court

Quick Guide for Coaches: Eight Practices at a Glance

This one-page guide outlines the eight practice sessions that follow. It serves as a handy reference for coaches of what is covered in depth in each practice.

Practice 1
Racquet handling
Beginning rallying skills
Receiving skills: Tracking and movement skills
Balance when hitting the ball
Ralleyball

Practice 2
Review
Forehand Skills
Five Controls: Height, direction, depth, spin, speed
Ralleyball

Practice 3
Review
Introduction of backhand
Ralleyball

Practice 4
Review
Random forehands and backhands
Ralleyball

Practice 5
Review
Introduction of Serve
Ralleyball

Practice 6
Review
Return of Serve
Ralleyball

Practice 7
Review
Introduction of Volley
Ralleyball

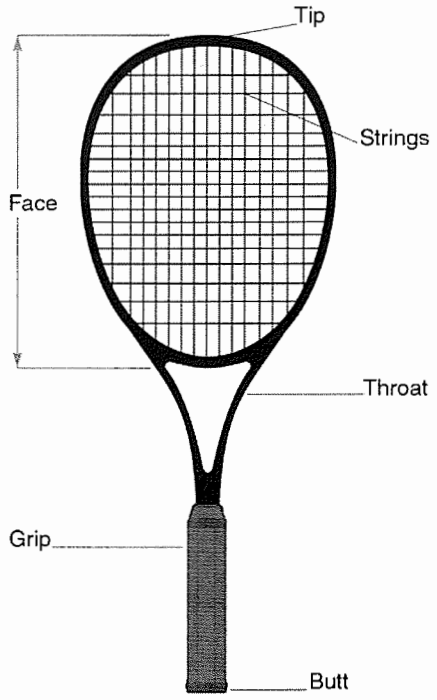
Practice 8
Review
Introduction of lob
Introduction of overhead smash
Ralleyball

Practice 1: Introduction to Racquet Handling and Important Tennis Concepts

The objective of this practice is to give you all the tools you need to get kids rallying by the end of your very first session with them. Children enjoy being able to receive and send the ball back and forth with a partner. Learning to rally is the foundation for playing the game of tennis.

New Skill—Racquet Handling

It's important to start with a few racquet-handling skills so that participants get a feel for the racquet and the ball hitting the strings. It gives the players an idea of how much swing is necessary to hit the ball only a few feet, while beginning to establish the relationship between the eye, hand, and racquet. You can choose from a number of activities depending on the age, coordination, and attention span of your players. All of them are a great way to start your first session in that everyone is hitting.



Make sure everyone has a racquet and tennis ball. Briefly review the parts of the tennis racquet. Then have the participants find a spot where they have enough space so that they won't interfere with others as they go through these activities. Explain that if their ball gets away from them, they should retrieve it, return to their space, and continue the activity. If possible, play some active music during this portion of the session.

- Ball tap-downs – Have participants bounce a ball down continuously with the racquet at waist level. Don't worry about grips. Some people might even need two hands or might choke up on the handle. Just get them to continuously dribble the ball with the racquet. Demonstrate first and have them try for 30 seconds.

- Ball tap-ups – Have participants tap up the ball continuously, trying to keep the racquet above the waist and the ball about a foot from the strings. Demonstrate and have them try for 30 seconds.

- Ball tap-downs with the edge of the racquet – This activity is the same as ball tap-downs, but participants must use the edge of the racquet. Demonstrate and have them try for 30 seconds.

- Ball tap-ups on alternate sides of the racquet – Have participants tap up the ball using alternate sides of the racquet. They may have to adjust the grip so that they can use both sides of the racquet. Demonstrate and let them try for 30 seconds. This activity is, by far, the most difficult of the racquet-handling skills. Have everyone try for a short period of time and suggest that the kids practice all of these racquet-handling skills as homework activities. Challenge them to see who can come up with the most creative racquet-handling activity for the next practice.

- Ball tap-ups with a bounce – While standing in one place, tap the ball up, let it bounce, and tap it up again. Everyone should be able to do this with no problem if they have tried all of the above racquet-handling drills. This is the first step in learning how to hit the ball up and over the net.

- Ball tap-ups with a partner – Each person should have a partner positioned no more than 3 feet away. Repeat the tap-up with a bounce drill, but alternate hits between partners using one ball.

- Ball tap-ups with a partner and target ball – With a partner, alternate the tap-up and attempt, on the bounce, to hit a target ball that has been placed between them on the court. After a 30-second practice session, hold a contest for one minute. Each pair attempts to hit the target ball as many times as they can by tapping up alternately and trying to hit the target ball on the bounce.

  For this activity, be sure to explain a few simple rules: All balls must be tapped up at least 3 feet (the height of the net) and then hit by the partner after one bounce unless the ball hits the target ball on the bounce. It is all right for players to move to go after the hit ball. All shots must be hit up – no spiking (i.e, hitting down). Only target hits on the first bounce count.

Skill Reinforcement Drills

Alley Rally

Participants actually begin a simple rally with this activity. With a partner, place one ball on the singles sideline and a second ball on the doubles sideline directly across from each other (i.e., 4½ feet apart). The area between the singles and doubles sidelines is called the *alley*. Partners stand one step behind and to the side of each of the balls and hit a third ball back and forth, trying to hit the partner's ball on the first bounce. They continue to hit the ball back and forth across the alley. Players should hit the ball up at least 3 feet high, using a forehand bump up. Bumping up the ball toward a target is the beginning of using a forehand in a rally. Make sure partners play all shots after one bounce. After a warm-up period, time players for one minute to see which team can get the most target hits. Note: Left-handers should be in back of and on the same side of the ball as the right-handers, so everyone will be hitting a forehand.

Short Rally over the Net

This activity is very similar to Alley Rally, but this time the partners are on each side of the net. Target balls should be placed on the court beginning at 5 feet away from the net. Players drop the ball and bump the ball back and forth over the net using the forehand side of the racquet, while trying to hit their partner's ball. At this point, you could substitute other targets on the court. It will be safer for the participants and rallies will last longer if they can continue after hitting a flat target. Non-slip donuts or poly spots are ideal for this activity.

New Skills—Important Tennis Concepts and Skills

To effectively rally, young players need to understand the following important tennis concepts and the skills they involve:

- Receiving skills

- Balance when hitting the ball

Receiving Skills

In order to be capable of rallying a tennis ball, players must acquire "receiving skills," which allow them to receive a ball from a player on the other side of the net. Once a ball is successfully received, players then try to "send" the ball back over the net. Receiving skills include:

- Tracking a ball in flight
- Judging the bounce of the ball
- Moving into position to strike the ball

Tracking Ball Flight and Judging the Ball Bounce. To be able to rally, players must be able to track and catch a moving ball. This involves correctly judging the flight of the ball in the air and after it bounces. The faster a ball travels, the harder it is to track. Also, balls traveling at very high or very low trajectories are difficult to track. Beginning players must learn that a ball traveling over the net with a high trajectory will bounce and travel deeper in the court compared to a ball with a low trajectory. Tracking also involves getting ready to hit a ball in a comfortable position. All of the skills necessary to track the ball and prepare for the hit would be considered receiving skills.

Sending skills are those a player uses to direct a ball back over the net. Traditionally coaches have emphasized stroke production and technique. But today more coaches realize that it's relatively easy to teach players new to the game how to execute accurate strokes, whereas moving into the correct position to make the stroke and playing the ball in an ideal contact zone are more difficult skills to master. Because correct positioning and playing the ball in the strike zone are critical to successful rallying, coaches should spend more time teaching these skills today.

Moving into Position to Strike the Ball. The factor in tennis that most limits a player's success is movement. According to Jack Groppel, Ph.D., Executive Vice President, Loehr-Groppel/Saddlebrook Sport Science Center, about 70 percent of errors by skilled players are not due to stroke mechanics, but to movement. Players must be able to quickly move into a position that allows them to hit the ball in a comfortable strike zone. To do this, the first thing a player must recognize and react to are the various types of balls their opponents will hit. Balls can be hit:

- High or low
- Left or right
- Short or deep

Once players recognize what type of ball has been hit (by judging the speed, spin, and trajectory of the ball), they need to move so they will be in position and on balance to make contact with the ball when it is in the strike zone (i.e., between the shoulders and knees). Getting to the ball and preparing to hit it is just as important as hitting.

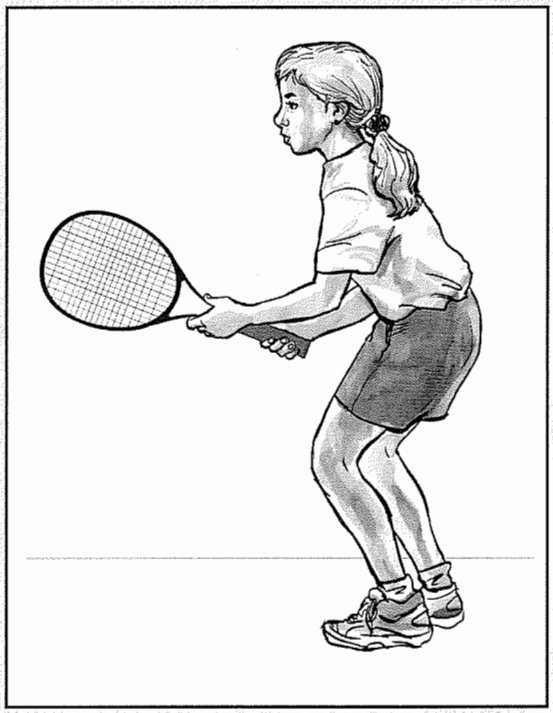
Balance When Hitting the Ball

As children begin to rally, they should make every effort to be on balance while making the swing. Moving to the ball and setting up so they can swing at a ball in the strike zone makes balance much easier. Children should not be lunging or falling backward during the hit.

Have children concentrate on keeping their head steady (like balancing a book on their head) by taking short steps and being prepared early before making a stroke.

Let's summarize the three steps every player must go through to get ready to successfully hit the ball:

- **Ready position:** Feet face directly at the opponent, both hands on the racquet, weight slightly forward, knees slightly flexed, and eyes on the ball when opponent makes contact with it.
- **Move into position:** If the ball is close, the player should shuffle into position with quick, short lateral steps. If the ball is further away, the player should turn and run to the ball. The player's stride length will increase to cover as much court as possible.
- **Set up for the shot:** As players near the setup point, they must decelerate by shortening their stride length. These short or stutter steps allow players to decelerate, make any last second adjustments to the ball, gain control, and stay on balance so they can plant or set up on the back foot in preparation for the hit.



Ready Position

Skill Reinforcement Drills

Tracking Drills

The following drill is for use in practicing tracking skills. To begin with, it's best to use softer, slower-moving balls.

Toss and Catch. With partners positioned about 10 to 12 feet apart, they toss the ball underhanded to each other, letting it bounce once before the catch:

- With two hands
- With the left hand
- With the right hand

There are a number of other means of "catching" the ball that will add interest to the drill. These include catching with:

- Velcro paddles and balls.
- A catching racquet made by attaching a fish net to a racquet without strings.
- Lightweight cones.

Another option would be for the children to catch the ball by trapping it against the strings with their non-dominant hand. This takes some skill and practice. Begin with soft balls and have the kids choke up on the racquet handle.

Movement Drills

The next two drills are for practicing movement skills.

Roll and Catch. Working in pairs, partners stand 10 to 12 feet apart. One player rolls balls to the right and left of her partner. The opposite partner quickly shuffles to the right or left so she can field the ball in front of her body. After fielding or "catching" it, she tosses the ball back to the partner, who rolls the ball to the other side. Change rollers and catchers after ten catches.

Side-by-Side Toss and Catch. Do this drill in the same way as the Roll and Catch, but the tosser tosses an underhand ball to the partner, who attempts to catch the ball in the air. You could begin by having the catcher catch the ball after one bounce, or even two bounces.

Game

Review the game of Ralleyball with your players, explaining how Ralleyball is played, how players rotate, and how score is kept (see Chapter 4). Practice several rotations so players are comfortable with the game of Ralleyball.

Cool Down, Stretching, Review, and Announcements

Cool Down

Leave time at the end of each practice for players to cool down. Use quieter and slower activities. This allows the body temperature to return to a more normal level. While the body is still warm and the muscles pliable, this is the perfect time to stretch and review the day's activities. You can reinforce important points, give homework assignments, and explain follow-up activities.

Stretching

Do some of the Flexibility Exercises in the Appendix.

Review and Announcements

Review receiving skills and the short rally over the net. Encourage your players to practice with a partner by hitting balls from close to the net. For the next practice, ask each player to come in with a unique racquet-handling activity.

Practice 2: The Forehand

Warm-Up and Review

Statues Drill (Tracking drill)

Line up everyone at the baseline. Toss or hit balls one at a time to each player. The kids must move and attempt to catch the ball in the strike zone. After the catch, they hold the ball and freeze in the catching position so you can check where they caught the ball. You can have everyone freeze until all players catch a ball.

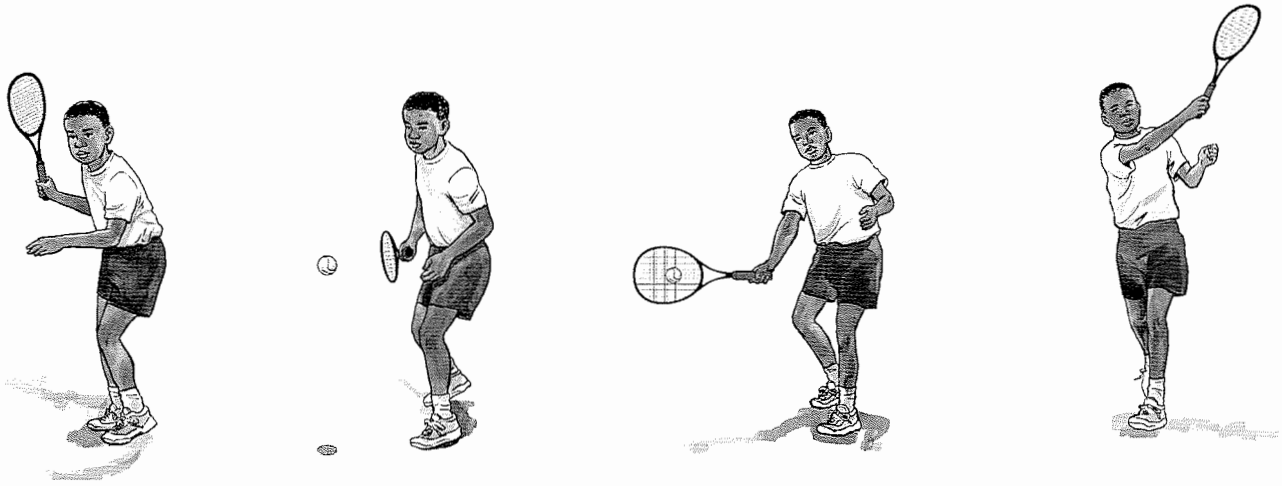
Racquet Handling

Begin with a review of tap-ups with a partner. Take a few minutes to let the kids demonstrate the most creative racquet-handling skill they invented as part of their homework.

Short Rally over the Net (See Practice 1)

New Skill—The Forehand

Demonstrate a simplified *forehand*. Start with a sideways stance. Using a short, compact backswing, move the racquet forward from low to high. The racquet face should be perpendicular to the court at contact with the ball and then just lift the ball over the net. In finishing the swing, the racquet is pointed high and toward the net. Help your players to integrate this skill into the following games and activities.



The Forehand

All of the following drills should be done with a partner. At all times, kids should be coached on the importance of correct timing, contacting the ball in the strike zone, and swinging in a low to high pattern.

Hitting the Ball in the Strike Zone

All players have an ideal contact point. For most players, this contact point is even with the front foot, waist-level high, with the arm away from the body, and with

a slight bend at the elbow. In most cases, playing every shot at this ideal contact point is impractical, but making contact in a "strike zone" should be a goal of every player. As in baseball, the strike zone is between the knees and shoulder, even with the front foot, and with the arm a comfortable distance away from the body.

Children should recognize that they will be able to play their best shots when they contact the ball in this strike zone. To help children recognize this zone, have them say "in" or "out" during a rally, depending on whether the ball is inside or outside the strike zone.

Low-to-High Swing

To effectively rally, the ball must be hit up and over the net. This is a critical stroke pattern that kids should model. Youngsters will develop consistent results if their racquets travel forward from a foot below the contact point, through the contact, and to a point about head level high. This low-to-high swing makes it much easier to hit the ball with the necessary elevation and arc to get the ball over the net. It will also impart topspin, which will drop the ball into the court.

Skill Reinforcement Drills

In Practice 1, we gave you some racquet-handling techniques to help your students become comfortable with the feel of the racquet and of the ball hitting the strings. The following drills provide more fun ways to teach rallying skills. Choose the ones that match your players' ages and abilities. The forehand ground stroke is used in all of them. (A *ground stroke* is a stroke made after the ball has bounced.) Your players will not only enjoy these drills, but once they've mastered them, they'll be ready to learn other tennis skills that will have them playing the game in short order.

Player Self-Feed – Drop and Hit

The majority of activities leading up to rally skills are best suited to working in pairs. This means that players must learn how to put the ball in play without the assistance of a coach feeding the ball to each player. Initially, this might be awkward for beginning players, but with a little practice, youngsters can learn to drop and hit a ball to a partner to begin a drill. The coaching advantages are that if kids can learn to self-feed, the coach will be free to move around the court to work with each child in the group at a much closer and more personal distance. In addition, children receiving a drop-hit will learn to adjust to the position of the ball, rather than come to expect a perfect feed in the ideal contact zone from the coach. Learning how to track the ball and move to the correct hitting position is essential to learning how to rally and playing the game of tennis.

When a child learns how to drop and hit to a partner over the net, they actually have the opportunity to practice the perfect swing at the ideal contact point. Players should be in a position about 4 feet away from the net. A target or cone could be placed on the court about 5 feet away from the net on the opposite side of the net. The partner will be behind the target so they can catch the ball after the hit and return it to their partner with their own drop-hit.

The player begins sideways to the net with the racquet in the backswing position and holds the ball in a palm-up position in the non-racquet hand. The child should lift or toss the ball up so it lands about even with the front foot, a racquet's length away from the body, and bounces up waist-level high. The racquet will swing from below the contact point, through the ball, and follow through at head-level height.

Use simple targets on the court to help children know where the ball should land on the court. Tape or chalk marks work well, as do flat, non-slip donuts and poly spots. If the ball goes too far, have the child shorten the backswing. Demonstrate the drop and hit with little or no backswing to show that with very little swing, it is easy to hit the ball a distance of 8 feet. Make sure the racquet face is slightly open at contact point, so the ball goes up and over the net.

Zip-Zip-Zip

This activity will get the entire group moving and give them a chance to hit with different partners. It uses the same skills as the Short Rally over the Net, but now the players will be moving. Form two lines in the backcourt, with one line beginning at the baseline on the doubles sideline and one beginning at the baseline on the singles sideline. The first player in each line bumps the ball back and forth to each other across the doubles alley while moving toward the net. When the pair reaches the net, and without stopping the hit-bounce-hit sequence, the person on the doubles sideline runs around the net post, and the pair continues alternating hits but this time over the net, all the while moving from one net post to the other. When the pair reaches the end of the net, the opposite person runs around the net post and the pair continues alternating hits along the opposite doubles alley to the baseline.

Rules are simple. All shots must be of the bounce-hit-bounce-hit sequence. Anything else, such as volleys, double bounces, or a ball in the net, is an error. After an error, the pair will pick up the ball and run to the end of the line for another try. If a pair is successful from one baseline to the net to the opposite baseline, they also pick up the ball and run to the end of the line. Make sure that players have a different partner every time they begin the sequence.

This activity will force the players to move into a position where they can play the ball in a comfortable contact area. Take a moment to define the ideal contact point, but also show them the corrections necessary when the ball is played outside a comfortable hitting zone.

Bounce – Hit

Learning to rally requires a correct swing pattern, a consistent contact point, and correct timing of the swing. The Bounce – Hit drill can be used to work on the timing and rhythm of the stroke. Using the Short Rally over the Net, have each player say "Bounce" when the ball lands on the court and "Hit" when they strike the ball. Once players use this "Bounce" and "Hit" sequence and their bounces and hits actually are coordinated and accurate, they will have established the rhythm and timing for the ground strokes.

Step Back Forehand

Using the forehand, a pair of players hit the ball back and forth over a net to a target placed on the court directly ahead of them. Players should be able to keep the ball in play for ten consecutive hits. When they are successful, players can move the targets back one step at a time, and try again for ten consecutive hits. Players can continue playing and moving back one step after each series of ten consecutive hits.

New Skill—The Five Controls

Once players get a feel for hitting the ball on the strings, they need to understand and learn five controls that will help them to manipulate the racquet and adjust their strokes to achieve success. These five controls are:

- Height
- Direction
- Distance or Depth
- Spin
- Speed

For the purposes of this book, we will concentrate on the first three controls, but let's take a look at all five controls now.

Height

The height of the ball is determined by the angle of the racquet face at the point of contact. Hitting with an open racquet face (i. e., racquet angled toward the sky) will cause the ball to go up at a high trajectory, while hitting with a closed racquet face (i. e., racquet angled toward the ground) will cause the ball to go down. If the racquet face is parallel with the net (perpendicular to the court), the ball will go straightforward.

Direction

Right and left direction is determined by the direction the racquet face points when it makes contact with the ball. If the racquet faces left, the ball will travel left, or crosscourt for a right-handed forehand. Conversely, if the racquet faces right, the ball goes to the right, or down the line. When contact is made directly behind the ball, it will go straight ahead.

Distance or Depth

Depth is controlled by a combination of height and speed. If the speed of the swing is constant, depth can be varied by the height of the ball's flight. The higher the flight of the ball, the further the ball will travel. If the trajectory remains constant, additional racquet speed will cause the ball to travel further.

Spin

Spin results when the racquet face (strings) brush up (topspin) or down (backspin) the ball. Simply put, if the racquet begins below the contact point and swings up so the finish is higher than the contact point and the face of the racquet is flat or slightly open, the ball will have topspin. This forward rotation of the ball will allow the child to hit with greater net clearance, because the ball will drop or curve down into the court. A ball hit without topspin will tend to fly, since gravity is the primary force bringing the ball into the court.

Speed

The speed of the ball is determined by the speed of the racquet at the contact point. As a general rule, a longer swing will allow the player to generate more racquet head speed than a short swing. A longer forward swing has the potential to generate more racquet speed.

Children should learn to hit the ball softly (by shortening the backswing) or hard (by using a longer backswing, which gives the player more time to generate racquet head speed), depending on where they are on the court, the position of the ball at the contact point, and the speed of the incoming ball. Also, they should "soften their hands" (i.e., relax their grip) to reduce the pace of the ball.

Skill Reinforcement Drills

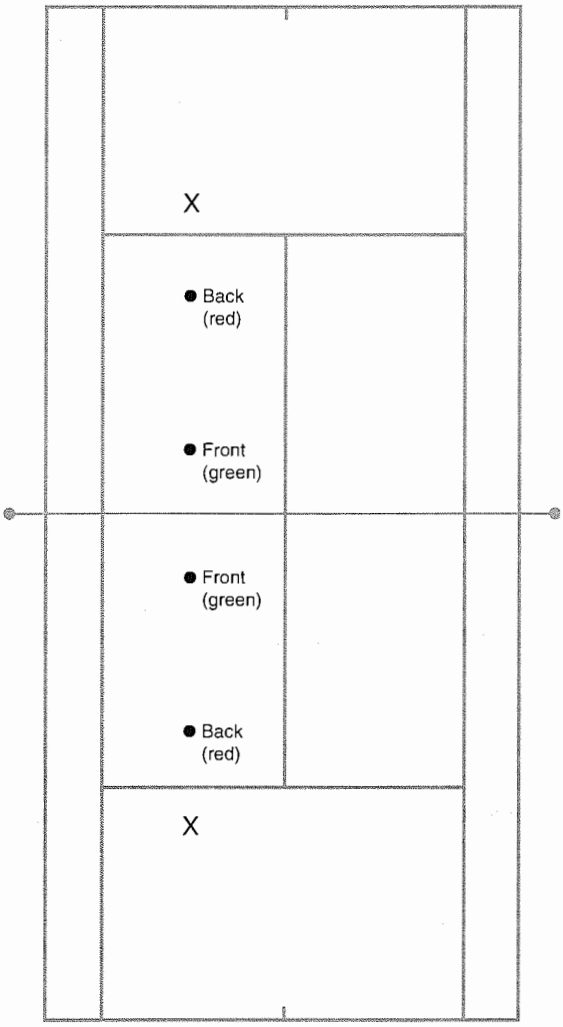
Learning to rally is easiest when the child is introduced to the forehand first. In the previous drills and game, the goal was just to get kids rallying the ball back and forth using the forehand with some consistency. In the following drills and game, the goal is to have them begin to incorporate the use of two controls—depth and direction—into their play. These drills require players to begin to understand how the direction of the ball's flight is determined by the direction of the racquet face when it contacts the ball and how depth or the distance the ball travels is determined by a combination of the height and speed of the ball. If the speed of the player's swing is constant, hitting the ball higher will increase the distance the ball will travel. If the trajectory is constant, additional racquet speed will cause the ball to travel further.

Bounce – Front or Back (Depth Control)

An important dimension in learning how to rally is hitting and returning balls that are hit deep and short. To hit the ball with greater depth, the stroke should be longer and the ball should be hit higher. Conversely, to hit the ball shorter, shorten the stroke and hit the ball with less net clearance.

Players can practice hitting and receiving both short and deep balls with the following drill. Place two targets on the court, one short and one deep in the short court position. As players rally back and forth, they will call out "Front" or "Back" depending on where the ball lands on the court. When they say "Front" they move forward with the racquet prepared in front of the body, and call out "Hit" when they strike the ball. If the ball lands on the deep target, they move back and call out "Back" while taking their racquet back so they can use a full swing. Using the full swing, they call out "Hit" upon contact.

Another way to teach variation of depth is to place different color targets on the court. From the Short Rally over the Net position, place targets 5 feet apart, one approximately 8 feet from the net and the other directly behind the first, 12 feet away from the net. Have players say "Bounce" and then the color of the target instead of "Hit." As players are rallying, make sure all balls are hit on the forehand side only. Keep the targets no more than 5 feet apart so each player can move and still return the shots using a forehand ground stroke.



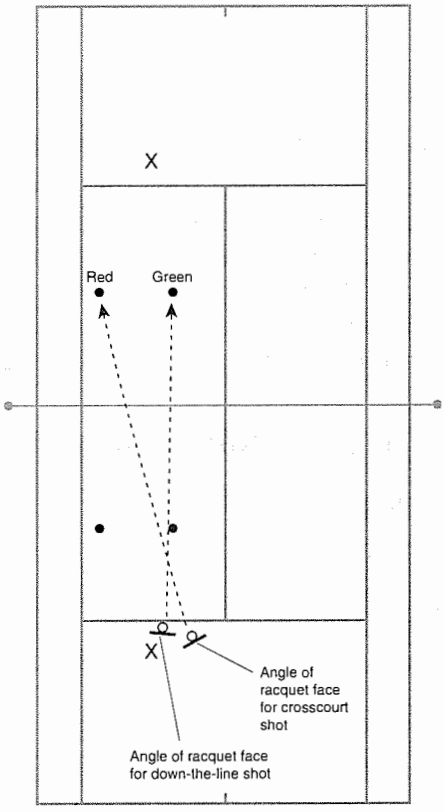
Front-Back (Depth Control) Drill

Bounce – Crosscourt or Down the Line (Direction Control)

The next step in learning how to rally would be to hit the ball from side to side. At this point you should explain that if the racquet makes contact directly in back of the ball, it would go back in a straight line. However, when players want to change directions, they must aim the racquet face in the direction they want the ball to go. If the racquet face points left, the ball will be directed left, and if it faces right, the ball will go right.

Players can get a feel for hitting the ball from side to side by having them say "Crosscourt" or "Down the line" before they make contact. This sequence is played much like the "Bounce – Hit" sequence. This time have players say "Bounce" when the ball lands on the court and either "Crosscourt" or "Down the line" to direct the ball either right or left.

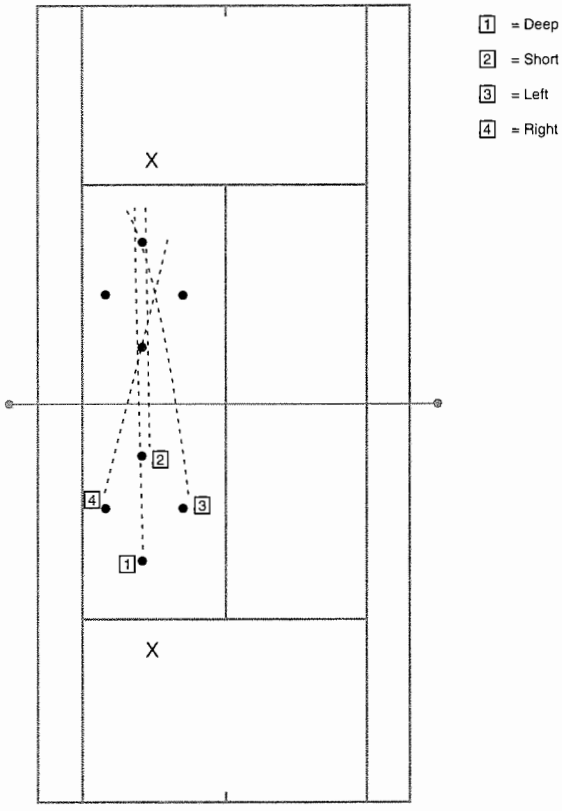
Another way to teach direction would be to place different color targets on the court. From the Short Rally over the Net position, place targets 4 feet apart. Have players say "Bounce" and then the color of the target instead of "Hit." As players are rallying, make sure all balls are hit on the forehand side only. Keep the targets no more than 4 feet apart so each player can move and still return the shots using a forehand ground stroke.



Crosscourt or Down-the-Line (Direction Control) Drill

Deep-Short, Left-Right Drill (Depth and Direction Controls)

This drill pulls everything together and requires players to use both depth and direction controls. During each rally, kids try to hit one of four target areas. Before each hit, they must call out the intended target they are hitting toward. Using four different colors is ideal, but if this isn't possible, they can simply call out right, left, short, or deep. Begin with both players at the service line on opposite sides of the net and move players back when each player has successfully made four hits.



Deep-Short, Left-Right(Depth and Direction Controls) Drill

Game

Ralleyball (See game from Practice 1)

Around the World (Optional game)

Divide your players into two groups and position each team in a single file line behind opposite baselines. The first person in the longest line puts the ball in play with a drop-hit and runs around the net to the end of the line on the opposite side of the court. This continues until an error is made. The player who makes the error sits out. The winner is the last remaining player. To extend the activity, you may give them more than one error before they need to sit out.

Cool Down, Stretching, Review, and Announcements

Cool Down

See Practice 1.

Stretching

Do some of the Flexibility Exercises in the Appendix.

Review and Announcements

Review the forehand swing pattern, depth and direction controls, and the strike zone. Encourage your players to attempt to play every shot in the strike zone when they are practicing on their own, either with a partner or with a backboard.

Practice 3: The Backhand

Warm-Up and Review

Bounce – Hit Drill (See Practice 2)

Step Back Forehands (See Practice 2)

Toss and Catch (Movement drill; see Practice 1)

Side-to-Side Toss and Catch (Movement drill; see Practice 1)

New Skill—The Backhand

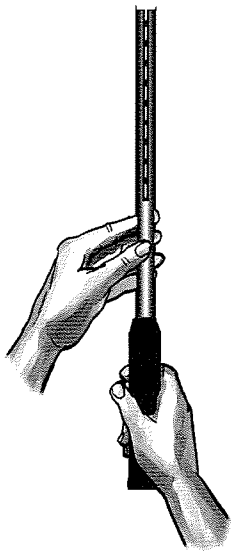
Introduce the one-handed and two-handed backhand ground stroke. Explain two key differences between the forehand and the backhand: the grip and where the racquet is at the point of contact.

Grip

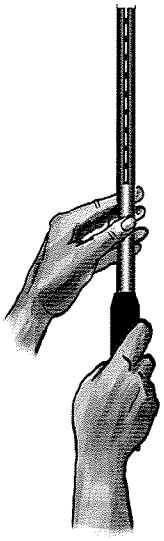
Forehand: The dominant hand (i.e., the hand that is preferred; a right-handed person typically prefers to hold the racquet in the right hand) is in the same plane as the racquet face.

One-Handed Backhand: The dominant hand is on top of the racquet handle.

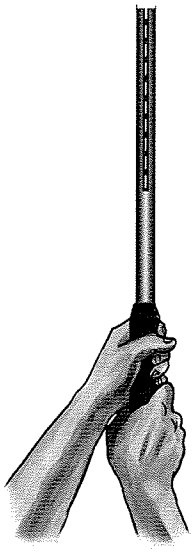
Two-Handed Backhand: The dominant hand is in the same plane as the racquet face, and the non-dominant hand is in the same plane or more toward the top of the handle, but each hand is on opposite sides of the handle.



Forehand Grip



One-Handed Backhand Grip



Two-Handed Backhand Grip

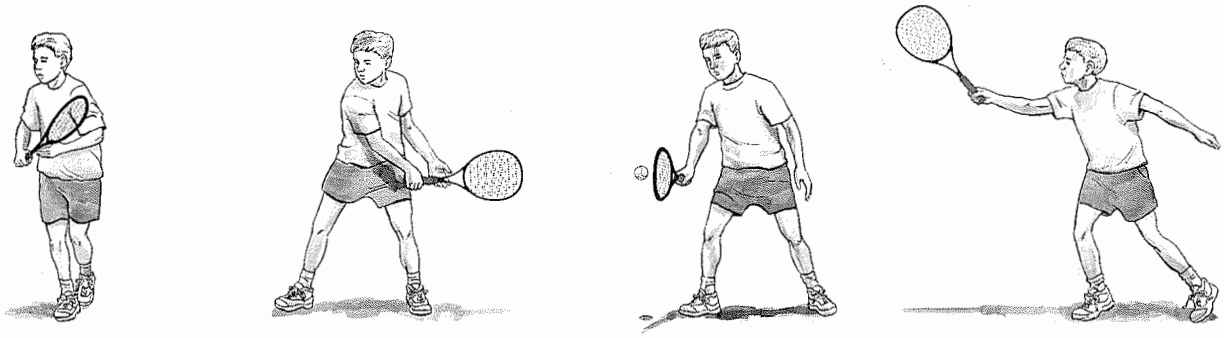
Contact Point

Forehand: The racquet is even with the front hip.

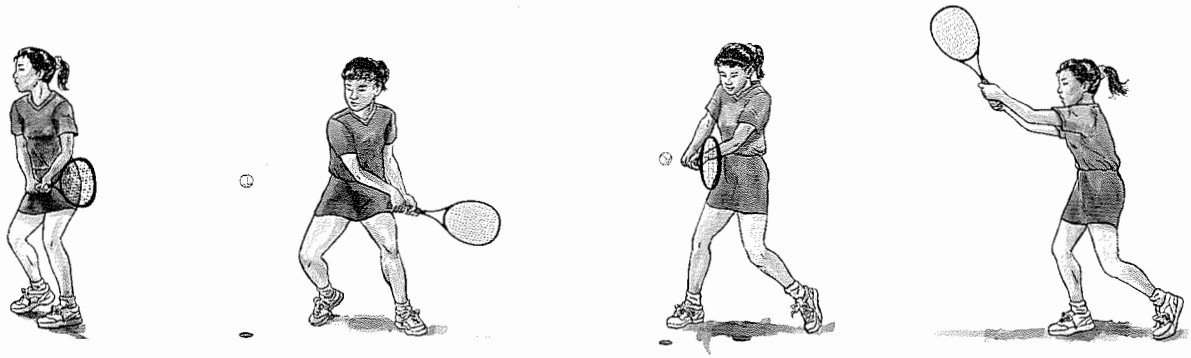
One-Handed Backhand: The racquet is in front of the front hip.

Two-Handed Backhand: The racquet is even with the front hip.

Demonstrate a simplified *backhand* ground stroke. Start with a two-handed backhand grip and sideways stance. Using little or no backswing, lift the ball over the net. Demonstrate the same using a one-handed backhand grip.



One-Handed Backhand



Two-Handed Backhand

Skill Reinforcement Drills

Do all the following drills using backhands only.

Bump up with Target

While standing in one place, tap the ball up using the backhand side of the racquet. See if your players can land the ball on a target placed on the court in front of each player.

Bump up with Partner

With a partner, alternate the tap-up and attempt, on the bounce, to hit a target ball that has been placed between them on the court. After a 30-second practice session, hold a contest for one minute. Each pair attempts to hit the target as many times as they can by tapping up alternately and trying to hit the target on the bounce.

Alley Rally

With a partner, place one ball on the singles sideline and a second ball on the doubles sideline directly across from each other (i.e., 4½ feet apart). Partners stand one step behind and to the side of each of the balls and hit a third ball back and forth, trying to hit the partner's ball on the first bounce. All balls are hit at least 3 feet high using the backhand ground stroke. Make sure partners play all shots after one bounce.

Short Rally over the Net

This activity is very similar to Alley Rally, but this time the partners are on each side of the net. Target balls should be placed on the court beginning at 5 feet away from the net. Partners hit short backhand ground strokes back and forth over the net, beginning with a drop and hit, while trying to hit their partner's ball. It will be safer for the participants and the rallies will last longer if you use non-slip donuts or poly spots as targets for this activity.

Zip-Zip-Zip

This activity is described in Practice 1. Players hit balls using only the backhand while moving from the baseline to the net, across the net, and back to the opposite baseline.

Game

Ralleyball (See game from Practice 1)

Team Singles (Optional game)

This game is played much like Around the World, but instead of hitting and moving to the end of the opposite side of the court, the player hits and goes to the end of the line on the same side of the court. The two groups of players will stay together as teams for the entire game. Always have the longest line begin with a drop and hit to put the ball in play. The same rules apply. Players that miss have to sit out. The team with the last remaining player wins.

Cool Down, Stretching, Review, and Announcements

Cool Down

See Practice 1.

Stretching

Do some of the Flexibility Exercises in the Appendix.

Review and Announcements

Review both the one- and two-handed backhand, and demonstrate the differences in the grip and contact point for each.

Practice 4: Random Forehands and Backhands

Warm-Up and Review

Combination Roll/Toss and Catch (Movement drill)

With partners standing 10 to 12 feet apart, one player either rolls or tosses the ball to the right or left of her partner, who quickly shuffles from left to right so that she can field or catch the ball in front of her body. After fielding or catching it, she tosses the ball back to the partner, who rolls or tosses the ball to the opposite side. Change rollers/tossers and catchers after ten catches.

Bounce – Hit Drill (See Practice 2)

Do using only backhands.

Step Back Backhands

Do the same as Step Back Forehands (see Practice 2), but use backhands instead.

New Skill—Random Forehands and Backhands

Once children have been introduced to the forehand and backhand, it is time to work both strokes in a random pattern.

Skill Reinforcement Drills

Hit Down the Middle

Partners hit all balls down the middle of the court to a target straight ahead in the Bounce – Hit sequence, alternating between forehands and backhands. One partner hits a forehand and the receiving partner returns the ball with a forehand; in the next exchange of balls, both partners hit a backhand, and so on alternating forehands and backhands.

Short and Deep

Alternating hits with both the forehand and backhand, hit one ball short and the second ball deep. Use poly spots or flat donuts as targets.

Crosscourt and Down-the-Line Forehands and Backhands

Working with a partner, child one plays alternating forehands and backhands and hits all balls crosscourt. The second child also hits alternating forehands and backhands, but direct them all down the line.

Step Back

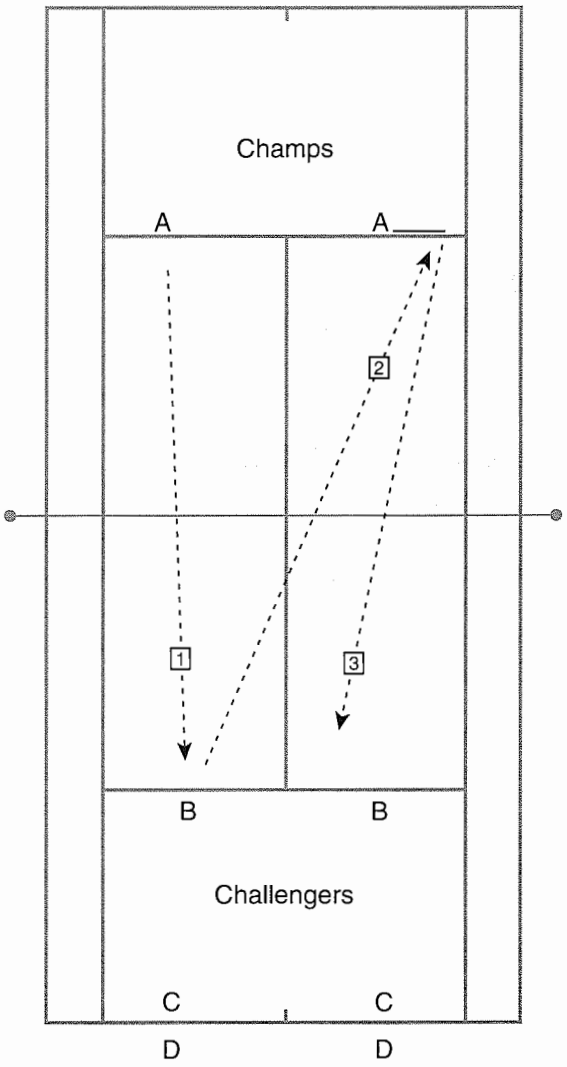
In all of the above activities, have partners begin close to the net and then have them move back one step after keeping the ball in play for ten consecutive hits.

Game

Ralleyball (See game from Practice 1)

Champs of the Court (Optional game)

Two players assume service line positions on one side of the court. Other players (i.e., the challengers) wait at the back of the opposite side of the court. The first two challengers assume service line positions. The champs drop-hit a ball to the challengers, and a point is played using the service court boundaries. The first team to earn two out of three possible points wins and becomes the new champs. The winning team always starts from the champs' side. Repeat until time is up.



Champs of the Court

Cool Down, Stretching, Review, and Announcements

Cool Down

See Practice 1.

Stretching

Do some of the Flexibility Exercises in the Appendix.

Review and Announcements

Review swing patterns for both the forehand and backhand, beginning with the ready position. Show how they both have a low backswing and a high follow through. Reinforce with your players that if they consistently use a low to high swing on both forehand and backhand sides and if the balls are played in the strike zone, they will become very successful ralliers.

Practice 5: The Serve

Warm-Up and Review

Hit Down the Middle

Both players hit balls straight ahead from service line to service line, alternating hitting on both forehand and backhand sides.

Step Back Forehands and Backhands

Both players begin at the service line as in the last drill and alternate hitting forehands and backhands. After every consecutive hit, both players move back one giant step and repeat. If either player misses, they both move forward one step.

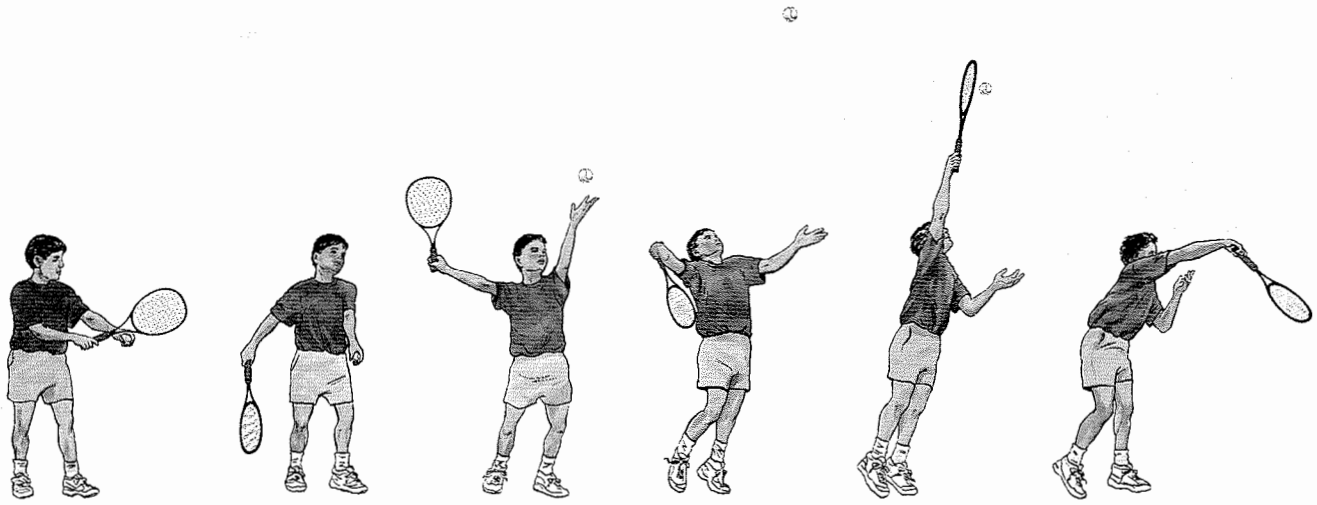
Hit and Catch (Tracking drill)

This drill is done in the same way as in the Toss and Catch Drill (see Practice 1), but this time the kids must judge the direction and speed of the ball from the racquet. The hits can be from a drop-hit, or you can have players work with partners. If working with a partner, the tosser uses an easy underhanded toss so that the ball bounces on the court, and the hitter hits the ball back to the tosser who catches it with either two hands, the left hand, or the right hand.

Note: If children are very young or inexperienced, they should stay with the practices that concentrate on forehand and backhand ground strokes. Older children are ready to learn the serve, volley, lob, and overhead. We begin with the serve, because this is one of the first modifications used in Ralleyball. Rather than beginning a point with a toss, the point can begin with a serve.

New Skill—The Serve

Demonstrate a full *serve* in slow motion from the baseline into the service court.



The Serve

Skill Reinforcement Drills

The following drills break down the serve into its components. Each drill will be done with a partner on the other side of the net.

Throw over Net to Partner

Since the serve is like an overhand throwing motion, have kids throw a ball over the net to their partner, who will catch it after one bounce and throw the ball back. Both players should start at the service line and move back to the baseline after a series of successful throws and catches.

Toss, Touch, and Freeze

Position players a step away from the net. Have them stand at a 45-degree angle to the net with their racquet back and the arm bent at the elbow like a quarterback prepared to throw. Have the kids toss the ball up with the non-dominant hand, reach up to full extension, and freeze at the contact point. The racquet face should be directed at the service court. Several players can be positioned along the net.

Note: Make sure that kids freeze at the point of contact so they can see the contact point and make any necessary corrections. To prevent them from overswinging, see if they can get four bounces in the service court before the ball goes over the service line (i.e., the ball should hit the "frozen" racquet face and bounce into the service court).

Toss, Touch, and Follow Through to Target

Position players two steps away from the net and repeat the above activity, except this time, instead of freezing, have the kids follow through across their bodies. As the kids reach up with their racquets, the heel of the back foot lifts off the ground so the body can rotate toward the net. Kids should work on an accurate toss, consistent contact point, and good balance throughout the swing.

Add a Step Serves

Begin all players two steps from the net. Have players toss, hit, and follow through to the service court. When they hit three balls in a row, they can move back a step. Have them keep going until they get all the way back to the baseline.

Note: As soon as kids begin to move back behind the service line, don't let them serve at the same time as those only a few steps from the net. This will keep the players closer to the net safe from being hit by someone serving behind them.

Add a Step with Partner

Kids can also work in pairs on Add a Step serves. Have them serve into the diagonal service court to a partner. The partner catches the ball after one bounce and serves it back. They move back as a pair after one partner successfully serves the ball into the service court and the other partner catches the ball after one bounce.

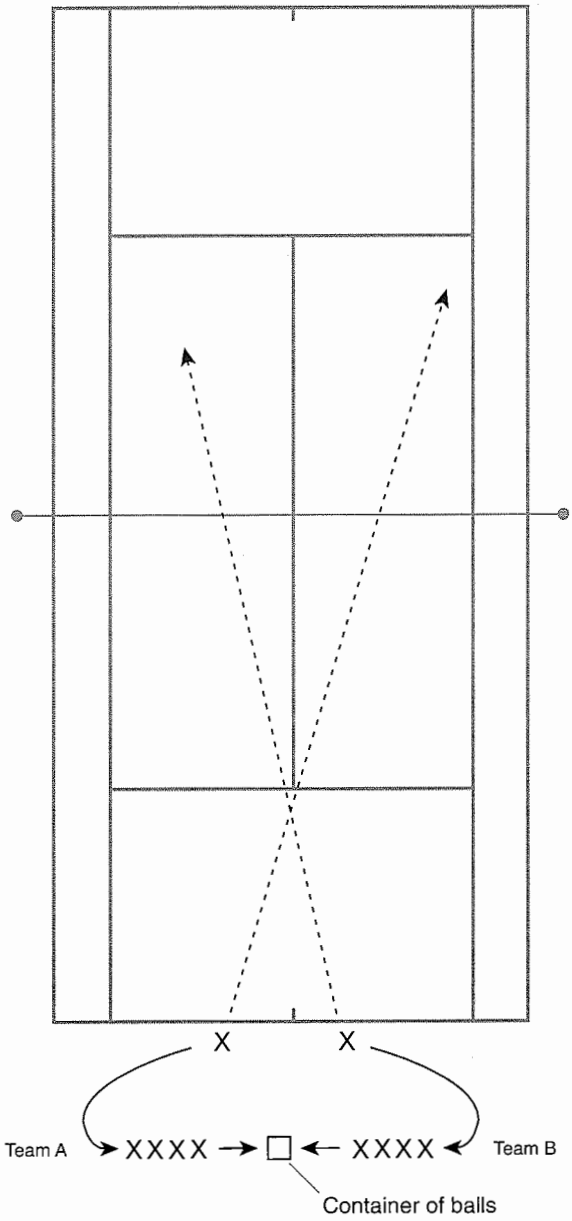
Game

Ralleyball (See game from Practice 1)

Begin each point with a serve rather than a tossed ball from the coach. The second serve could be a drop and hit.

Serve Relay (Optional game)

Divide players into two teams. Each player serves from either three quarters court or full court, depending on the skill level of the group. Both teams are in a line in back of the baseline along the fence. The first player in line moves from the fence to the baseline (or three quarters court) and serves one ball. If the ball lands in the service court, the server goes to the end of the line and the next person becomes the server. If the serve is a fault, the server retrieves a ball from the basket placed between the lines, 10 feet in back of the baseline, and tries again. The server gets a maximum of three faults before the next person becomes the server. Continue the game until one team hits ten successful serves.



Serve Relay

Cool Down, Stretching, Review, and Announcements

Cool Down

See Practice 1.

Stretching

Do some of the Flexibility Exercises in the Appendix.

Review and Announcements

Review the full serving motion, along with the correct contact point. Encourage players to practice lifting the ball to the perfect contact point.

Practice 6: The Return of Serve

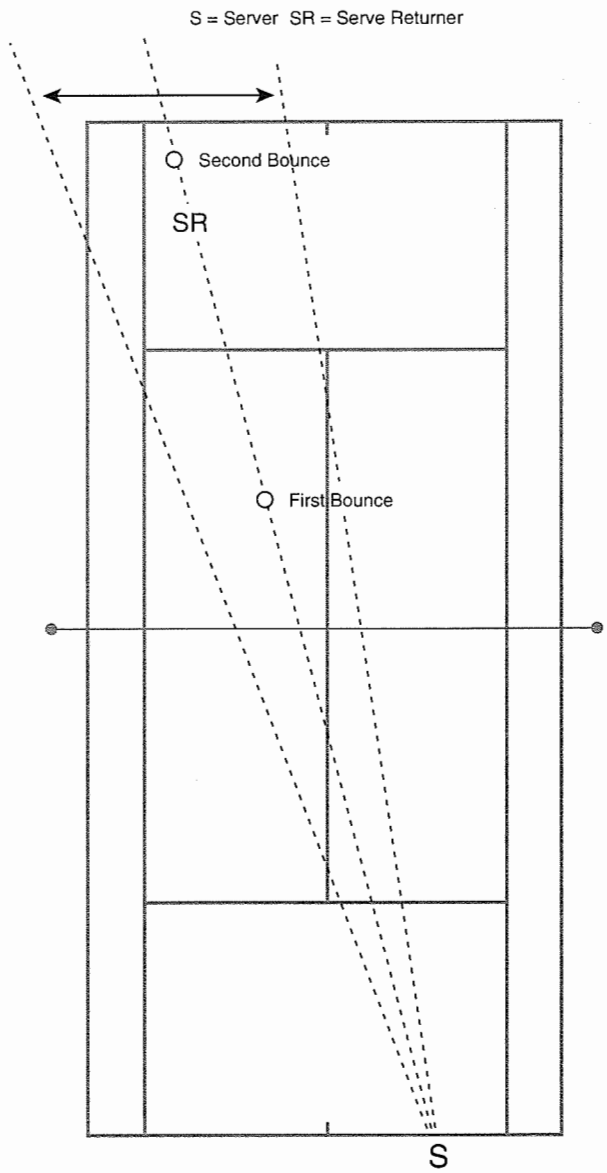
Warm-Up and Review

Start the practice with the Toss, Touch, and Follow Through to Target drill with partners serving to each other from service line to service line. Have them concentrate on full extension at the contact point and only hitting the ball when it is in the right contact area.

Continue the same drill but have both players move back to between the service line and the baseline. One player serves and the other player catches the ball and serves it back to his partner.

Back to the Tosser—React and Catch (Movement drill)

Players work in pairs. The tosser tosses a high ball to the partner, who is 10 to 12 feet away with his back to the tosser. When the ball makes contact with the court, the tosser calls out his partner's name. The partner turns quickly, locates the ball, and moves quickly to catch the ball after one bounce.



Return of Serve

New Skill—The Return of Serve

The return of serve is one of the most important skills in tennis. There are two major components to successfully returning serve: the position of the receiver and the length of the backswing in returning the serve.

Position

The left-to-right position of the receiver depends on the position of the server when serving. The receiver should be in the center of the angle made from the server's position to the outer edges of the service box the serve must go into. The depth of the receiver's position is determined by the velocity and depth of the serve. The receiver needs to be in front of the spot where the ball would bounce a second time. This means the receiver needs to stand closer in for shallow serves and further back for deep serves.

Backswing

The harder the ball is served, the shorter the backswing of the receiver should be. A long backswing puts more

power on the ball. On a hard serve, the server applies a lot of power; therefore, a long backswing on the part of the receiver will send the ball out of the court. In addition, since you do not have the time to make a big backswing when the ball comes fast, the ball will often get past you before you can hit it. On a softer serve, the receiver has time to lengthen the backswing, which will provide the necessary power for the return.

Skill Reinforcement Drills

Serve and Catch Drill

Begin with one player serving from between the service line and the baseline. The receiver should position herself according to where the server is standing and the speed of the serve. After each successful serve, the returner moves quickly and catches each serve in the "strike zone." Begin with catching with two hands. After the catch, the receiver throws the ball back to the server who serves it back.

As soon as the receiver can catch the ball consistently with two hands, have her catch the ball in the strike zone with one hand. Make sure you alternate servers and receivers every few minutes.

Serve, Return, and Catch Drill

In keeping with our rally theme, have the serving kids work with a partner. Begin with one youngster serving from the service line into the diagonal service court. The partner will return the serve back to the server so the server can catch the return. Each time they successfully complete the serve and return sequence, they both move back a step until the server is at the baseline. Change serving and receiving position every two minutes.

Game

Ralleyball (See game from Practice 1)

Tag Team Tennis (Optional game)

Divide your group into two teams. Each team is in a line along the back fence on opposite sides of the court. One person from each team play a singles point beginning with a serve. The winner of the point stays and adds a second person to her side of the court. The player who loses the point goes to the end of the line, and the next person becomes the player who will serve the ball to two people on the opposite side.

Example: A1 plays B1 – A1 wins the point. B1 goes to the end of the "B" line while A2 joins A1 on the court. B2 becomes the new player and must put the ball in play with a serve. Team "A" must play into the singles court; B2 can use the doubles court. If Team "A" wins, A3 is added to the court to play against the new player B3. B3 will serve to begin the next point. If she wins, she adds B4 to her court and plays A4 only. A1-3 return to the end of the line. Play continues until all of one team is on the court and wins the next point.

Cool Down, Stretching, Review, and Announcements

Cool Down

See Practice 1.

Stretching

Do some of the Flexibility Exercises in the Appendix.

Review and Announcements

Talk to your players about the starting position and swing for the service return. Remind them that they will begin to play against players who serve the ball with more pace. As the speed of the serve increases, the length of the backswing decreases. Explain to players that the most important thing to remember about returning serve is to get the ball back into the court, not to try to win the point on the return.

Practice 7: The Volley

Warm-Up and Review

Double Toss Drill (Tracking drill)

Players work in pairs with one player tossing two balls at the same time to his partner. The partner has to track and catch both balls.

Crosscourt and Down-the-Line Alternating Forehands and Backhands

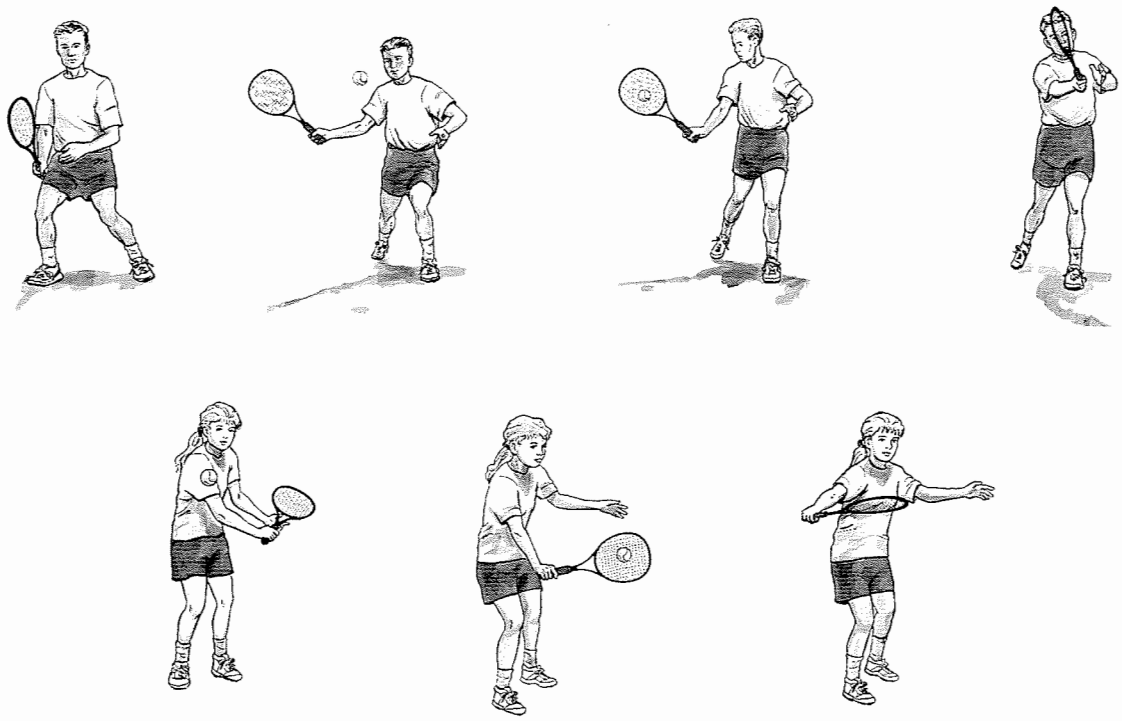
Player one plays alternating forehands and backhands and hits balls with a partner all crosscourt. The second player will hit alternating forehands and backhands all down the line. Begin this drill with both players at the service line.

Serve, Return, and Catch

Begin with one youngster serving from the service line into the diagonal service court. The partner will return the ball back to the server so the server can catch the return. Each time they successfully complete the serve and return sequence, they both move back a step until the server is between the service line and the baseline. Change serving and receiving positions every two minutes.

New Skill—The Volley

Describe and demonstrate the forehand and backhand *volleys*, emphasizing that the ball is hit before it touches the ground and there is no backswing.



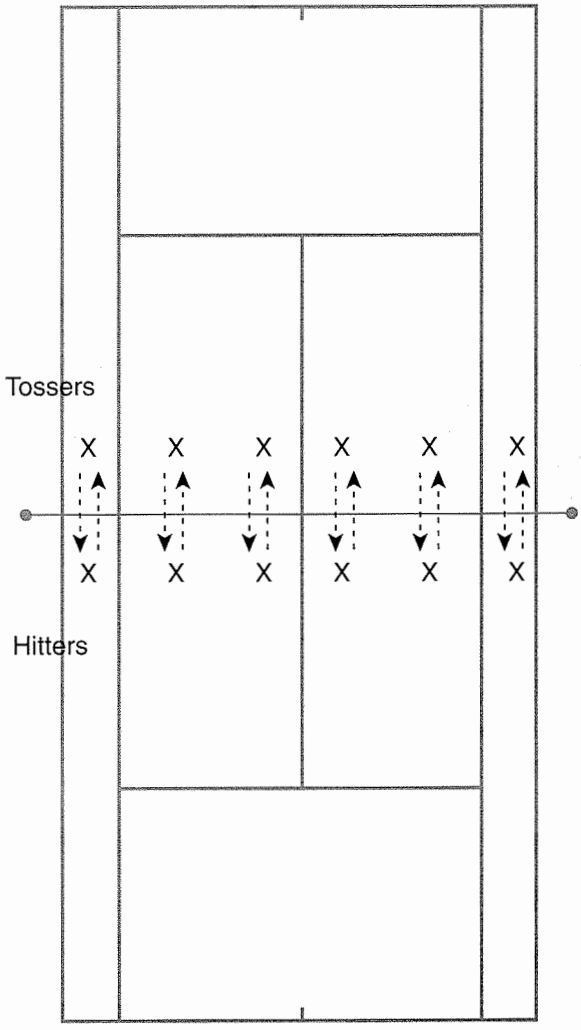
The Volley

Skill Reinforcement Drills

Volley Progression with a Partner

Position children 6 feet apart in pairs on either side of the net. Kids will take turns tossing underhand or hitting a forehand volley through the following sequence.

- Hold the racquet at the throat and bump the ball back to the tosser. Move the hand and racquet together so the stroke is not "wristy." The hitters hold the racquet as if they were signaling; "Stop" and gently volley balls back to the tossers. Switch tossers and hitters after five trials.
- Move hand halfway down the handle and volley the ball back to the tossers so they can catch the ball in the air. Switch after five volleys.
- Hold the racquet at the handle and gently volley the ball back to the tossers. Switch after five hits.
- Have volleyers turn so they are facing in the opposite direction and repeat the sequence with a backhand volley. Change tossers and hitters after five volleys.



Volley Progression

Ground Stroke – Volley Combination

Position one child at the net and the partner at the opposite service line. From the service line, one player will drop-hit a forehand ground stroke feed to a partner at the net. The child at the net volleys the ball back to the partner at the service line. Have the "feeder" catch the ball so they can set up and repeat the ground stroke feed and volley return. Change positions after five hits each. This activity is much easier if you use large foam balls or tail balls.

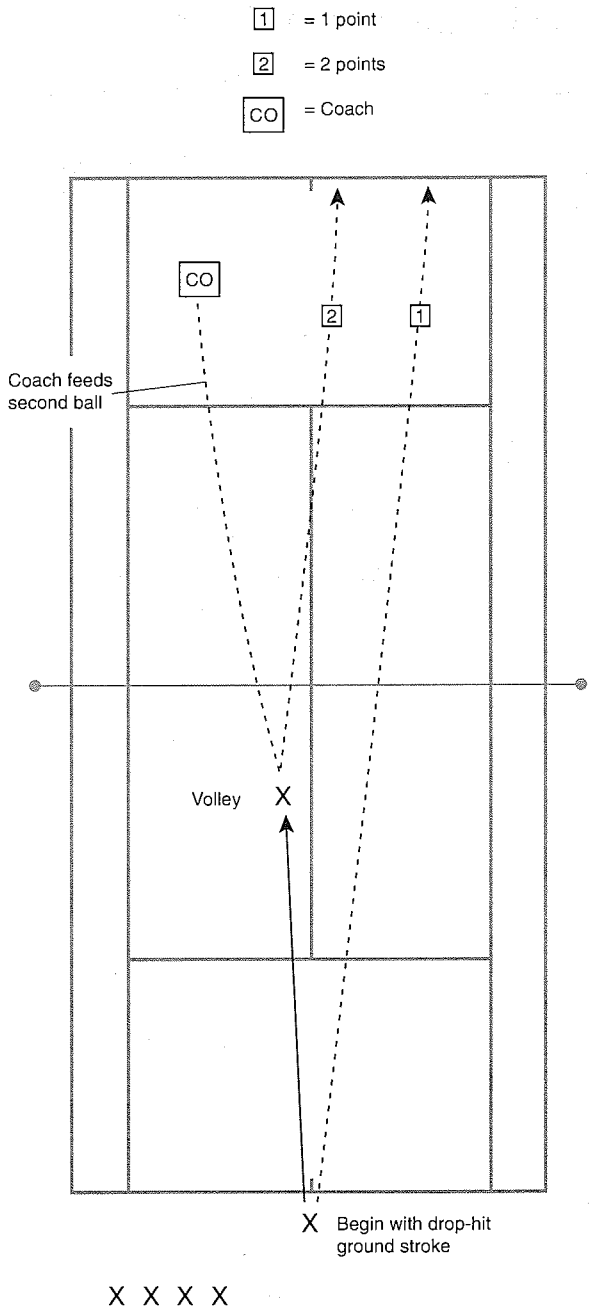
Game

Ralleyball (See game from Practice 1)

21 (Optional game)

Divide your group into two teams and position both teams in single file lines behind the baseline. One team will be on the left side of the court and the other on the right. The first person in line hits a drop-hit forehand and moves to the net to play a volley that they will hit from the coach's feed (either a toss or racquet feed). After two shots, that player goes to the end of the line and the next player moves to the baseline for his drop-hit and volley.

Teams score one point for every successful ground stroke and two points for every successful volley. Have both teams go at the same time until one team gets exactly 21.



21 Game

Cool Down, Stretching, Review, and Announcements

Cool Down

See Practice 1.

Stretching

Do some of the Flexibility Exercises in the Appendix.

Review and Announcements

Review the volley and demonstrate that it is more like blocking the ball in the court. Not only is there less time to take a swing, it is also unnecessary if the ball can be directed away from the opponent.

Practice 8: The Lob and Overhead Smash

Warm-Up and Review

Alternate Forehands and Backhands from Service Line

Players rally balls with their partners from service line to service line, but they must alternate hitting both forehands and backhands. They must move quickly to play each shot in the correct strike zone and recover to a good ready position after hitting.

Serve, Return, and Catch

This is one more opportunity for two players to review and practice both the serve and the return. Begin with one youngster serving from the service line into the diagonal service court. The partner returns the ball to the server. The server catches the return, moves back one step, and serves again. Change positions every few minutes.

Bucket Head (Tracking drill)

This is a fun drill that is great for judging balls with a high trajectory, like a lob. It is a perfect drill for preparing kids to get into position for an overhead. One player (or the coach) hits a lob high over the net. The players on the opposite side of the net hold buckets (waste baskets, boxes, etc.) and try to catch the lobs in their buckets. This can be done in pairs or as a team. Count the number of balls in the bucket for each team after one minute.

New Skill—The Lob and Overhead Smash

Lob

The *lob* is a ground stroke that is hit high over the net. It is used when a player is out of position as a way of giving a player more time to get back into position before the opponent can play the next shot. It is also used when the opponent is at the net. The objective is to lob the ball over the player at the net so they have to retreat to the backcourt to play the next shot.

Hitting the lob is just like hitting a normal ground stroke. The swing follows a low to high pattern, but to hit the lob, the racquet face is more open to give the ball a higher trajectory. To practice this shot, position partners between the service line and the baseline and have them rally, but with a higher trajectory than a normal ground stroke. Since the ball has a higher bounce, the kids will have to position themselves further back behind the bounce to be able to play the ball in the strike zone.

Begin with forehand rallies using the lob, then change to all backhands. As soon as they can control the lob, move both players back to the baseline.

Overhead Smash

The *overhead smash* is the shot that is played to return the lob. Players must move into the correct position so they can contact the ball at the same contact point as the serve. They must also time their swing so they can hit the descending ball at full reach and racquet extension.

Skill Reinforcement Drills

There is a simple progression that will get players hitting lobs and overheads quickly. Position one player at the net in the normal volley position and the other player between the service line and the baseline. The deep person will drop-hit a lob to the net person who will move under and catch the ball with their hand.

After success with this step, give the net person a racquet. After the lob feed, the net person will move into position, reach up, and freeze at the contact point. The racquet should face forward into the court and the arm and racquet should be at full extension.

The third step is to have the net person move into position, reach up, touch the ball, and follow through across their body while directing the overhead smash back to the feeder. Have the feeder catch the overhead and have both players return to a good starting position. After they have mastered this first step, see if the kids can keep one ball going with lobs and overhead smashes.

Game

Ralleyball (See game from Practice 1)

Triples (Optional game)

This game is similar to doubles but with three players on each side of the net. The serving team has one player back and two players up, while the receiving team has one player up and two players back. The server plays four points, alternating sides of the serve. Rotate players so each person plays all positions. Keep track of the total number of points won for each team.

Cool Down, Stretching, Review, and Announcements

Cool Down

See Practice 1.

Stretching

Do some of the Flexibility Exercises in the Appendix.

Review and Announcements

Review the overhead smash. Demonstrate that the stroke is like a serve.

Remind players to use the lob when they are forced out of the court so they will have time to get into a better position.

Chapter 3: Developing Team Spirit and Making It Fun

USA Team Tennis is a series of tennis programs offered by the United States Tennis Association for children, where the emphasis is on fun, fitness, and friends (more about USA Team Tennis in Chapter 5). Coaching USA Team Tennis can be a terrific experience, and how you approach the coaching role will affect this experience for you and your players. As you plan practice and structure the season, it's helpful to understand and take into account the thoughts and feelings of kids who play sports.

A study on kids' feelings about sports, which was sponsored by the Athletic Footwear Association, offered some interesting insights into kids' motivations for participating in sports. According to this study, which included 10,000 students, the ten most important reasons kids play sports (in order of importance) are the following:

1. To have fun
2. To improve skills
3. To stay in shape
4. To do something they're good at
5. To experience the excitement of competition
6. To get exercise
7. To play as part of a team
8. To experience the challenge of competition
9. To learn new skills
10. To win

Making It Fun

The atmosphere for team practices and matches starts with the coach! Are you a coach who plays music during warm-up, smiles often, praises easily, and looks like you really enjoy being on the court? Do players clamor to be on your court? Can you guarantee that every player will smile at least once in the first five minutes of practice?

We know that kids find it more fun to be active in tennis than to stand and listen or pick up balls. They enjoy getting excited and sharing that enthusiasm with teammates.

However, whereas players can be busy, happy, and amused, they still need an incentive to keep them coming back for more team tennis. Many players want a chance to succeed independently, to improve personal skills, or to challenge themselves. Other players may value making new friends and tennis partners. Some love being part of a team and working together. Teenagers especially often choose activities based solely on who else is participating in them.

Lots of players love the thrill of competing, first against their own prior performances and later against others. Kids like to keep score and earn points for everything they do, from picking up balls to answering questions correctly or keeping a rally going for twenty-five hits.

Sport psychologist Steven Danish suggests that "people tend to believe that activities are fun when challenge is in balance with their skill." If the challenge is too great, anxiety sets in. If the challenge is too easy, boredom results. If you coach a team that is facing a season of all losses, adjust the schedule somehow to even out the competition. For most kids, it would be better to experience a dose of winning and losing rather than a steady diet of one or the other.

Sometimes it's just hard to understand what "fun" is. Clearly it is different things to different people. We all know what fun feels like—a positive mood or good feeling. It may be silly, frivolous fun or a more serious, long-lasting fun.

What we're really after in USA Team Tennis is "fun" in the short term and "enjoyment" in the long term. We want players to return season after season to play team tennis. Short-term fun can be like extrinsic rewards; it works for a while but is never as powerful as the joy that results from personal achievement in a sport of skill.

Use the following checklist to rate yourself on how well you help players have fun:

- Can players tell you are having fun?
- Does every player smile once in the first five minutes of practice?
- Do players get lots of trials and plenty of activity?
- Does every player hear frequent positive comments from you?
- Are players grouped with their friends? Do you change the groupings so they gain new friends and tennis partners?
- Do the tennis games and activities promote success—even for the slower learners?
- Is there excitement, enthusiasm, and energy on the court?
- Do you use competition as an incentive? Does everyone get a chance to win at some time during practice?
- Do you change activities frequently for variety?
- Do players sometimes get to choose their favorite games or activities during the season?
- Do players ever stay after practice just because they are having so much fun?

Building Team Spirit

Building team spirit is an important factor when coaching USA Team Tennis. We have come up with the following suggestions that will help you build team spirit:

- Let the players choose a team name and team cheer or motto. Keep it simple, but let it be a reflection of the kids on the team.
- Provide USA Team Tennis T-shirts for uniforms. Team identity is key, and the team uniforms help kids feel like part of the group. The T-shirts are also free advertisement for USA Team Tennis when kids wear them around town.
- Expect player support for teammates. When you have a team match, have players watch each other and support their teammates' play. Even when matches have been decided, team players deserve the respect of their coach and the encouragement of their teammates pulling for them to do their best.
- Establish a team ritual for before and after matches. Watch other athletic teams and notice their rituals. Team stretching and warm-up, a team cheer, or gathering just before the match is common. Shaking hands or exchanging high fives with members of the opposing teams at the end of a match is a mark of good sportsmanship.
- Have fun off the court, too! Schedule a pasta dinner the night before a match, take a trip together, see a professional tournament or college match as a team, or work on a project together to raise money. You'll see each other in a different atmosphere and learn to appreciate each other for more than tennis skills.

Chapter 4: Ralleyball

While learning basic tennis skills, your players will be anxious to test their skills in competition. The Ralleyball format is a team competition that USA Team Tennis uses in the 12 and Under Division. It is designed to encourage and reward consistency of play by awarding a point every time a player hits the ball over the net and into the court. Ralleyball will help your players get a feel for playing a game rather than just learning isolated skills. The fun and excitement that come from competition will spice up your tennis program and whet players' appetites for more.

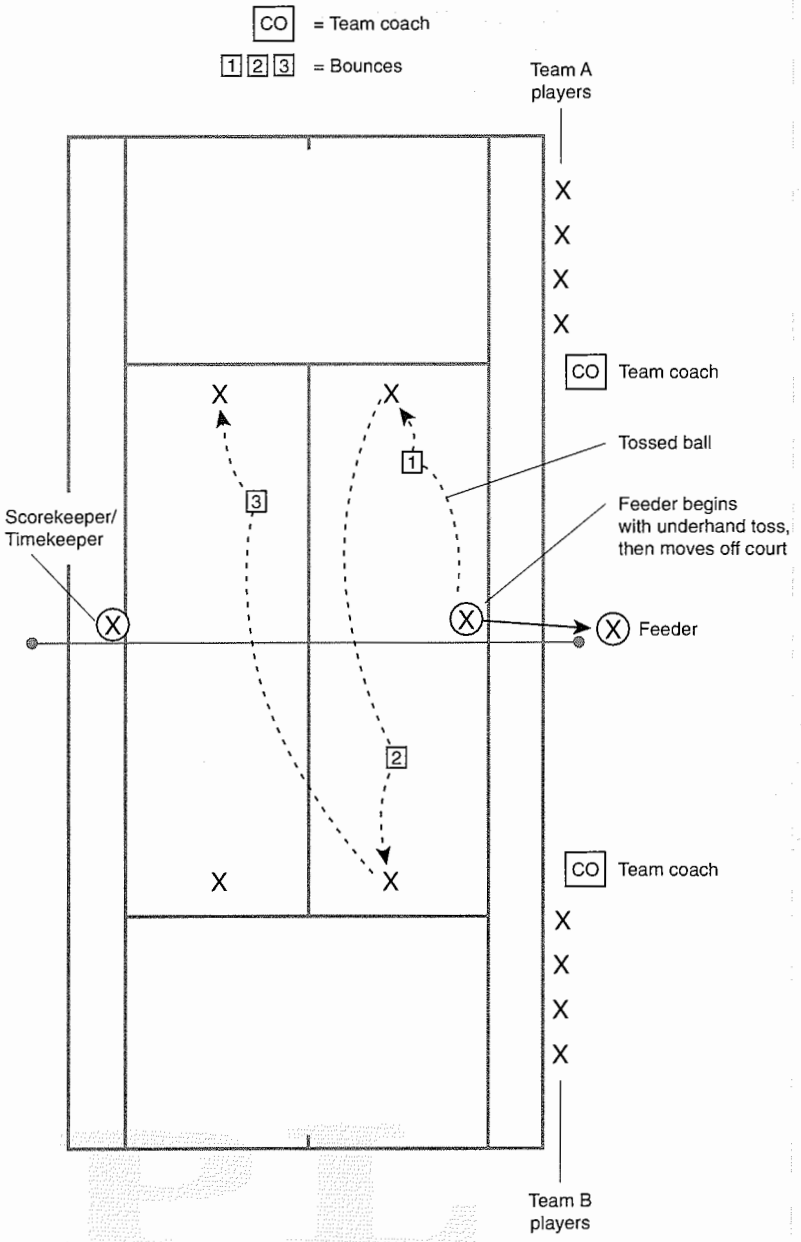
How to Play Ralleyball

In Ralleyball, players are placed on teams of six players each. All players on a team should be from a similar age division. Teams have a one-hour practice and a one-hour match each week during the season. The coach or a volunteer starts a match by calling the two teams that are to compete and directing them (single file) to an assigned court. Family members of the players are invited to watch the match.

Before play begins, the players should warm-up and stretch.

1. A Ralleyball match begins by determining who will receive the ball first.

    a. The "coach" (i.e., a volunteer) spins the racquet handle, and one of the team members calls out whether the racquet will land "up" or "down."



Ralleyball

b. The winner of the spin gets the first toss in the first and third sets.

2. Play is doubles.

   a. The first two players for each team take the court and line up parallel to each other, one on the deuce side (i.e., the right court) and one on the ad side (i.e., the left court).

      (i) Players in each age division will tend to (but are not required to) position themselves at a different location on the court based on their ability, confidence, and strength. First- and second-grade students will generally start play at or around the service lines. Third- through sixth-grade students will generally start play on the baseline. In any case, players will gradually move to the baseline as they gain skills and confidence. Some will even eventually play at the net and hit volleys.

   b. The remaining players line up on either sideline, with the coach between them, positioned at the net post.

   c. The doubles lines serve as the boundaries.

3. Typically, there is no serve in Ralleyball (although the serve may be introduced gradually and encouraged in the latter part of the season).

   a. The coach feeds the ball to one of the teams to begin each point.

      (i) The feed is either by hand from the center of net (to young children) or by racquet from the net post.

   b. The first feed is to the player in the deuce court of the team that won the spin.

   c. The ball is fed a second time to the first player if he or she misses or nets the ball (in effect, it is a second serve).

   d. The toss is alternated among teams and players on every point (after the first feed has gone to one deuce court, the second feed goes to the opposite deuce court).

4. Players begin to rally the ball.

   a. A point is awarded to the team that receives the feed if it returns the feed to the opposing team (even if the opposing team hits a ball in the air or a ball that was obviously going out of bounds).

   b. Every time the ball lands in, the team that hit it is awarded one (1) point.

   c. The points are tallied by the coach.

5. The rally continues and points accumulate until a player hits the ball into the net or out of bounds.

6. When either player on a team misses a shot, both players leave the court and are replaced by the next two players on the team (players need to be in pairs and be ready to take the court at all times). This procedure continues throughout the match.

7. When there is an odd number of players on a team during a match, players are replaced one at a time. The player on the deuce court leaves the court, the ad-court player moves over to the deuce court, and the new player takes the ad court.

8. The sets are timed.

    a. There are three 10-minute sets in each match.

    b. The coach keeps the time.

    c. The time is kept running during the set.

    d. Between sets, the players should be instructed to pick up balls.

    e. When play resumes, the first toss goes to the team that did not receive the first toss of the previous set. Teams should switch sides after each set.

9. The team that scores the most points wins the match.

    a. Points for all three sets are combined to determine each team's point total.

    b. For first- and second-grade students, it is recommended to add skill contests each week at the conclusion of the regular sets. This will give each player more of an opportunity to hit the ball and add points to his or her team's score.

        (i) Have serve contests to promote and practice the skill. Award two points to every player who can get a serve into the service box.

        (ii) Have relays involving balance and concentration. Have the students work as a team and carry the ball on their racquet up and down the doubles alley one at a time, in relay fashion. Award 10 points to the winning team and 5 points to the runners-up.

10. In the event of a tie score, there will be a one-rally tie-break.

    a. A spin will determine who receives the toss.

    b. Points are tallied in the rally until a team misses. The team with more points in the rally wins the tie-break.

Variations

Mini-Courts/Portable Nets. Children experience more immediate success when hitting over a lower net, because the lower flight and bounce of the ball make it much easier for them to play the ball at waist level. Coaches can also place these nets so mini-tennis courts can be erected across the width of the court. This configuration allows you to set up several mini-courts on one full-sized court. These nets are generally 2 feet high and 10 to 18 feet in length.

Modified Courts. Modifying courts is relatively simple. They can be set up on almost any flat surface such as the floor of a gymnasium or activity room or in a playground or parking lot or on a tennis court. The boundaries can be marked with a series of flat, non-slip, throw-down lines (i.e., flat pieces of rubber). By using these temporary lines, coaches can change the dimensions of the court to match the skill

level and strength of the kids and the type of ball being used. (See Chapter 2 for modified court diagrams.)

Racquets. Junior racquets are shorter, lighter, and have smaller grip sizes that are ideally suited for children. Adult racquets are generally 27 inches long, while junior racquets are available in 21- , 23- , and 25-inch lengths.

Balls. Use slower-moving and lower-bouncing balls to simplify the task for beginning players. The Wilson Tail and 90 mm Lizard Skinned ball, OnCourt OffCourt Spinners and Champs Slow Bouncers, Pro Penn Star ball, and Dunlop Speedball are all good choices.

Number of Bounces. Young beginning players may be permitted an unlimited number of bounces as long as the ball is still moving. As their skill improves, they can move to a two-bounce rule and then to one bounce.

Beginning the Point. With very young novices, the best chance for success is to begin with a ball dropped from shoulder height just in front of the hitter. After some practice, players should be able to begin with a self-drop. The next level is to feed an underhand tossed ball from a position at the net directly in front of the hitter. During practice sessions, an experienced coach should teach players the overhand serve progression starting close to the net.

Scoring. Begin by awarding one point to the team every time the ball crosses the net. You might then want to move to table tennis scoring, in which a point is awarded to the team that wins the rally. Finally, have players try traditional tennis scoring, including serving into the correct service box to begin the point.

Requirements for Conducting a USA Team Tennis Ralleyball Season

Ralleyball is the format of play used by the United States Tennis Association's USA Team Tennis 12 and Under Division teams. The requirements for running a ralleyball season at your facility are listed below. Any expenses resulting from the requirements should be tallied and considered when setting student registration fees (if any). As you scan the program steps, you will note areas of flexibility in setting up your program, including staffing, facilities, and equipment. For help in organizing a ralleyball season, please see the usateamtennis.usta.com Web site or call the USTA National Office at (914) 696-7000.

Team Composition

- Boys and girls ages 6 to 12; beginning-level skills (JNTRP rating 1.0 to 2.5). Players are separated into three divisions according to age level. In a season during the school year, students can be further categorized by grade. The divisions are:

  8 and under (grades 1 and 2)

  10 and under (grades 3 and 4)

  12 and under (grades 5 and 6)

- Teams consist of six players.

Team Practice/Play

- Team competition is within each age division.
- Teams have a one-hour practice and a one-hour match each week during the season. Practices and matches can be scheduled on the same day or on separate days.
- Two teams will share a court.
- A team's season lasts a minimum of six weeks.
- Team uniforms (USA Team Tennis T-shirts) are worn during match play. They are delivered prior to the season.

Staffing

- **Facility Coordinator.** Liaisons with USA Team Tennis Section Coordinators to initiate the season.
- **Administration Coordinator (Ralleyball Coordinator).** Completes all the necessary paperwork and monitors the season. May be the same person as the Facility Coordinator.
- **Practice Staff.** Run weekly, hour-long practices for student teams at a 12:1 ratio. Ideally the program should use teaching professionals but is flexible if necessary. The number of practice staff depends on the number of students registered (and prior commitments of staff).
- **Match Staff.** Run weekly, hour-long matches for student teams. We suggest using assistant pros, top-level juniors, or volunteers. The number of people needed depends on the number of teams and match scheduling.

Facilities

For a Ralleyball season, you will need facilities that will provide one hour of court time for practice each week of the season for every two teams registered, and one hour each week for the match for every two teams. (Practice and matches may be scheduled together or on different days.) Different possibilities for court facilities include outdoor courts in public parks or at schools, private facilities, or even a parking lot or a blocked off street; or indoor courts at schools, YMCAs, Boys' or Girls' Clubs, or private clubs. You can shorten courts to meet the needs of younger children with chalk on blacktop or with tape, throw-down lines, or mini-nets on gymnasium floors.

You may want to explore a partnership with a tennis facility if court space is a challenge. They will need to charge court fees, but you can set the registration fee for the season at a level that will cover these expenses. These facilities are often very receptive to opening their doors for new business and may even provide teaching staff and/or administrative assistance. Any additional fees for these services can be worked out before reaching a final registration cost for each student participant.

Equipment

The equipment you will need for your season includes racquets, balls, ball hoppers, stopwatches, clipboards, highlighters, pens, and paper. The quantity of each item depends on the enrollment size of the program. For every twelve students, you will need twelve racquets, twenty-four balls, a stopwatch, and a clipboard with score sheet and a pen.

The USTA can help you obtain equipment and provide you with information on how to run your program. Check the usateamtennis.usta.com Web site or call the USTA National Office at (914) 696-7000 for information about these contacts and resources.

Chapter 5: USA Team Tennis (Youth)

Many children and young people want to play tennis on teams. They love the opportunities team play offers for camaraderie, fitness, and friendly competition. USA Team Tennis provides just such opportunities. Offered by the United States Tennis Association, in cooperation with World TeamTennis, USA Team Tennis emphasizes fun, fitness, and friends for players of all ages and skill levels.

Whereas the bulk of this book is on Ralleyball, which is the format of play used in the 12 and Under Division, one of the team divisions of USA Team Tennis, this chapter will give you an overview of the entire program and how it is organized. Many of you may presently be coaching USA Team Tennis. Hopefully, others of you who have not yet coached one of these teams will enjoy doing so in the near future.

What Is USA Team Tennis (Youth)?

USA Team Tennis is a 6- to 8-week program of team practice and match play for boys and girls, ages 6 to 18, who want to play tennis on teams. Teams are comprised of players of similar age and skill, and they compete against other teams from the same geographic region in one of three league divisions:12 and Under, 14 and Under, or 18 and Under. (Ralleyball is the format used in the 12 and Under Division.) USA Team Tennis uses the Junior National Tennis Rating Program (JNTRP) to match players of similar ability. (The rating program is outlined later in this chapter.)

The USA Team Tennis program is easy to organize. Only four teams are needed to start a league. Local parks, schools, clubs, or neighborhoods can sponsor one or several teams. Participants have an opportunity to advance to district and sectional competitions, while 14 and Under and 18 and Under Intermediate Division teams can compete in regional competitions, and 14 and Under and 18 and Under Advanced Division teams can compete in national competitions. Only USA Team Tennis players qualify to compete in the USA Team Tennis Regional or National Championships.

Team Placement by Age and Skill Level

USA Team Tennis consists of three divisions that are organized by age and skill level. The 12 and Under Division is for beginning players between the ages of 6 and 12. The 14 and Under Division is for players between the ages of 10 and 14, and the 18 and Under Division is for players between the ages of 13 and 18. Within each division, players are further divided into two levels—Intermediate and Advanced—with Advanced denoting a higher skill level.

Parents and coaches are asked to help place players in the appropriate level of play using the JNTRP levels. Players can always choose to move up to a higher age or skill level if they need the challenge.

12 and Under Division

- Target ages: 6-12.
- JNTRP: 1.0-2.5.
- Recommended format is Ralleyball for team match play.
- Players are assigned to teams of six, and they can represent their school, park, or club.
- Teams should be set up in a league consisting of a minimum of four teams.
- During the season (6 to 8 weeks is recommended), there should be a weekly practice so that coaches can work with their teams to help players develop basic tennis skills to prepare for weekly match play.
- Using the Ralleyball Format described in Chapter 4, beginning players can enjoy the thrill of team competition. They use basic rallying skills, and points are scored each time the ball is hit over the net.

14 and Under Division

- Target ages: 10-14.
- JNTRP: 2.5 to 4.5.
- This division is designed for players who are older and at a higher skill level than players in the 12 and Under Division.
- Teams include boys and girls who compete using a modified World TeamTennis format, which is:
    - Boys' and Girls' Singles
    - Boys' and Girls' Doubles and Mixed Doubles
- Typically, the divisions of play are divided into two levels of play:
    - Intermediate for players at an JNTRP of 3.0 and below
    - Advanced for players at an JNTRP of 3.5 and above
- Players should be assigned to teams with a minimum of six players, and they can represent their school, park, or club.
- Teams should be set up in a league consisting of a minimum of four teams.
- During the season (6 to 8 weeks is recommended), there should be a weekly practice so that coaches can work with their teams to help players develop basic tennis skills to prepare for weekly match play.
- Players and teams from the 14 and Under Division have the opportunity to advance from the local league to the district, sectional, and regional championships for the intermediate level, while the advanced level has the opportunity to advance to the national championships.

18 and Under Division

- Target ages: 13-18.
- JNTRP: 1.0-5.0.
- This division is designed for teenagers.
- Coed teams are encouraged wherever possible.
- Teams include boys and girls who compete using a modified World TeamTennis format, which is:
    - Boys' and Girls' Singles
    - Boys' and Girls' Doubles and Mixed Doubles
- Typically, the divisions of play are divided into two levels of play:
    - Intermediate for players at an JNTRP of 3.0 and below
    - Advanced for players at an JNTRP of 3.5 and above
- Players should be assigned to teams with a minimum of six players, and they can represent their school, park, or club.
- Teams should be set up in a league consisting of a minimum of four teams.
- During the season (6 to 8 weeks is recommended), there should be a weekly practice so that coaches can work with their teams to help players develop basic tennis skills to prepare for weekly match play.
- Players and teams from the 18 and Under Division have the opportunity to advance from the local league to the district, sectional, and regional championships for the intermediate level, while the advanced level has the opportunity to advance to the national championships.

Regional and National Championships

USA Team Tennis (Youth) hosts four regional championships for the 14 and Under and the 18 and Under intermediate Divisions, usually in the early fall. The four regions are Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, and West. Each region hosts a maximum of four teams—two from the 14 and Under intermediate Division (JNTRP 3.0 and below) and two from the 18 and Under, intermediate Division (JNTRP 3.5 and above)—from each USTA section. Each team must have a minimum of three boys and three girls and will participate in a non-elimination round-robin format.

USA Team Tennis (Youth) also hosts the National Championships for the 14 and Under and 18 and Under Divisions, a maximum of two teams from the advanced division (JNTRP 3.5 and above)—from each USTA section. Each team must have a minimum of three boys and three girls and will participate in a non-elimination round-robin format.

The Regional and National Championships allow us to introduce young players to competition in such a way that competitive stress is minimized and competitive learning opportunities are maximized. The fun aspect of tennis and team spirit are always emphasized. The championships are also designed to:

- Provide a competitive opportunity for maximizing each player's physical and emotional development,
- Promote the spirit of competition and camaraderie in such a way that the self-esteem of each player is enhanced and strengthened.
- Provide a national competitive climate that focuses more on personal development and less on competitive outcomes.

In summary, the goal of the competitions is to build a strong foundation for both athletic success and personal achievement in later years.

The Junior National Tennis Rating Program

As mentioned above, players are placed on USA Team Tennis teams based on their age and skill level as determined by the Junior National Tennis Rating Program (JNTRP). You may use the following JNTRP chart to help you place your players on teams once they are place in the appropriate age category: 12 and Under, 14 and Under or 18 and Under.

General Characteristics of Various Playing Levels

1.0 Player is just starting to play tennis and is learning the basic skills of serving, forehands, backhands, and volleys.

1.5 Player is only slightly more advanced than a 1.0 player. Player needs to coordinate moving when hitting the ball. In fact, player is still concentrating on getting the ball over the net from a stationary position. Player is learning to serve and keep score.

2.0 Player is now beginning to coordinate footwork when contacting the ball but is not consistent in hitting the ball over the net. Player can serve to some degree but double faults frequently. Player understands scoring as well as correct positions for serving and receiving. Player has limited success with volley but has knowledge of court positioning in both singles and doubles.

2.5 Player is able to judge where the ball is going. Player can sustain a slow-paced rally of several shots with someone of the same ability using both forehand and backhand sides and can volley with moderate success. Player can keep score unassisted, can call own lines, can serve overhand from the baseline, and has an understanding of the basic rules.

3.0 Player is getting better at moving to the ball and is improving court coverage, can sustain a rally with consistency on slow- to moderate-paced shots. Player serves with fair consistency with few double faults. On ground strokes, player needs to improve control of height, depth, direction, and speed. Player attempts to move opponent from side to side and hit to the opponent's weakness.

3.5 Player can sustain a rally and is beginning to develop directional control and depth of ground strokes. Player is starting to recognize opportunities to attack short balls by coming to the net. Player is developing more spin and power on the serve and seldom double faults. Player is becoming more aggressive, is applying basic strategy in singles, and is using teamwork in doubles.

4.0 Player has dependable strokes, including directional control and depth on higher-paced shots and has good court coverage. Player has added variety in shot selection by using lobs, overheads, volleys, and approach shots with some success. Player is developing a game plan, is serving with good consistency, and is forcing some errors with power and/or spin. Player demonstrates good teamwork in doubles.

4.5 Player has a very dependable game and executes most shots consistently on higher-paced shots. Player's court coverage and footwork are sound and the player has begun to master the use of power and spins. Player can vary depth of shots and game plan according to his or her opponent's play. Player's first serve may produce some winners and second serves are hit with good spin and placement. Player can be aggressive in both singles and doubles and covers weaknesses well. Player is developing an offensive weapon.

5.0 Player has good shot anticipation and frequently has an outstanding shot or weapon around which a game may be structured. Player can regularly hit winners or force errors on short balls and is capable of all shots. Player's first serve is an offensive weapon and often allows rushing the net after the first or second serve. Volleys and overhead smashes are typically winning shots. Player is matchwise and uses shots that have a high percentage of success in both singles and doubles.

Chapter 6: Playing the Game of Tennis

Once your players have had success with the game of Ralleyball and have developed some proficiency with the basic strokes and movement and tracking skills of tennis, you may want to get them started playing an actual game of tennis. This chapter introduces you to the basic rules of tennis, including scoring and how to start a game, and provides a guide for proper conduct on court as well as some sportsmanship tips. It will give you a basic understanding of the rules you'll need when working with players who are 6- to 14-years-old.

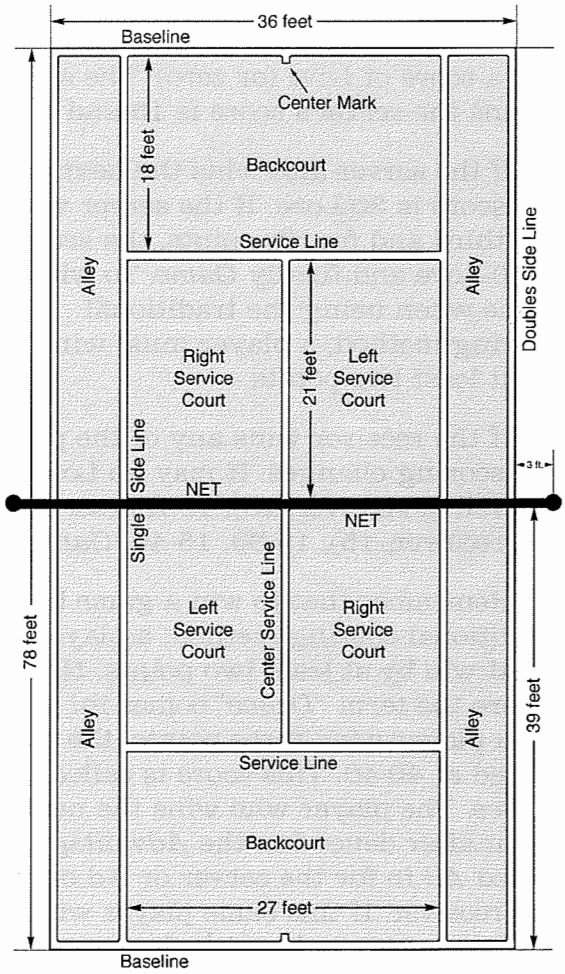
For more specific information on rules and scoring, please check out the *Illustrated Introduction to the Rules of Tennis*, Second Edition, 2001, and *Friend at Court*, which is updated annually. You can get a copy of either publication by contacting the USTA Bookstore at (888) 832-8291.

Starting the Game

In singles play, there is one player on either side of the net, and they use the area of the tennis court within the baselines and the singles sidelines. In doubles, a team of two players on either side of the net uses the full court between the baselines and the doubles sidelines.

When starting a match, players should:

- Introduce themselves to their opponent or opponents (doubles).
- Limit the warm-up before a match to approximately five (5) minutes. Players should hit the ball back and forth with their opponent or opponents. Then each player(s) should take practice serves before play begins.
- To see who or what team serves first one player spins a racquet or tosses a coin. The player or team that wins the coin toss or racquet spin may: (1) choose to serve or receive first, (2) choose which end of the court to start playing on, or (3) require the opponent(s) to choose first.



Tennis Court

- To put the ball in play for each point, one player serves the ball from behind the baseline. That player is called the *Server*; the player who receives the serve is called the *Receiver*.

- When playing doubles, the *Server's Partner* will start at the net and the *Receiver's Partner* will start at the service line.

- In doubles, either player on the team that serves first may begin the match by serving the ball. Either person on the opposing team may receive the first ball in the right (or deuce) court. When it is time for the team that served first to receive the ball, either partner may receive the first ball. After this, players must keep the same order of serving and the same sides for receiving for the whole set.

Scoring: Game, Set, Match

When players are ready to begin playing a game, they'll need to know how to score. The first thing they need to know is that tennis players play a *Match*, which consists of *Sets*, which in turn consist of *Games*. So we'll start by explaining scoring for a Game.

Scoring a Game by the Traditional Scoring Method

Two terms players need to know up front are *Love* and *All*. In tennis, *Love* means zero and *All* means the score is tied. An example of how scoring works is as follows: the first player to win a point has a score of 15; the other player who has no points has a score of Love (or zero). The server's score is always said first. So 15-Love means the server's score is 15 and the receiver's score is 0.

If the server also wins the next point, the score is 30-Love. If the server wins the third and fourth points, the score is 40-Love and finally *Game*. To win a game when using the traditional scoring method, a player must win by at least two points.

If the receiver wins any of the points, the scoring changes. It may go Love-15 (server, 0; receiver, 15), 15-All (server, 15; receiver, 15), 15-30, 15-40, *Game*.

Remember that to win a game by the traditional scoring method, a player must win by at least two points. Here's where the term *"Deuce"* comes in. If each player wins three points, the score is tied at 40-40. This score is called *Deuce*. The player who wins the next point after deuce has the *Advantage*, called *Ad in* for the server or *Ad out* for the receiver. If this same player wins the following point, she wins the game; if not, the score goes back to Deuce. The first player to score two points in a row after a deuce score wins the game.

Scoring Terms

Love:	Zero
All:	Tied score except when Deuce
Deuce:	A score of 40-40
Ad in:	Server needs one more point to win
Ad out:	Receiver needs one more point to win

Scoring a Game

Points	Score
0	Love
1	15
2	30
3	40
4	Game

Alternative System for Scoring a Game: No-Ad Scoring

In No-Ad Scoring, everything is the same up to Deuce (a score of 40-40). At this point, the receiver decides whether she wishes to receive the serve from the right half or the left half of the court. In *Doubles*, the receivers will decide which player will receive the serve, the player on the right half or the player on the left half of the court. The player(s) who wins the next point after deuce wins the game. Note: Score-calling in No-Ad Scoring may be either in conventional terms (Zero, 15, 30, 40, Game) or in simple numbers (Zero, 1, 2, 3, Game).

No-Ad Scoring is the recommended scoring system for USA Team Tennis. It is the Scoring System used at the USA Team Tennis Regional and National Championships.

Scoring a Set and the Match

The first player or team to win six games and to be ahead by at least two games wins a *Set*. If the score reaches six games all, you may play a *Tie-break*. In a tie-break, the first player or team to reach seven points with a margin of two points wins the game. Whoever wins the tie-break wins the set. The first player or team to win two sets in the best of three wins the *Match*.

This is the most common method of scoring a set and match. Alternative methods are sometimes used in high school or college matches, indoor tennis matches, USA Team Tennis matches, and other situations when time is a factor.

Tie-Break System of Scoring

The tie-break system of scoring may be adopted as an alternative to traditional scoring, provided the decision is announced in advance of the match.

Set Tie-Break

The Set Tie-Break shall operate when the score reaches 6-all in a set (i.e., each player or team has won six games).

Singles: In a Set Tie-Break, the player who first wins 7 points shall win the game and the set, provided he leads by a margin of 2 points. If the score reaches 6 points-all, the game shall be extended until this margin has been achieved. Consecutive numerical scoring (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) shall be used throughout the tie-break game.

The player whose turn it is to serve shall be the server for the first point. His opponent shall be the server for the second and third points. Thereafter, each player shall serve alternately for two consecutive points until the winner of the game and set has been decided.

From the first point, each service shall be delivered alternately from the right and left service courts, beginning with the right court. Players change ends of the court after every 6 points and at the conclusion of the tie-break game.

Doubles: The same procedures for singles shall apply to doubles play. The player whose turn it is to serve shall be the server for the first point. Thereafter, each player shall serve in rotation for two points, in the same order followed previously in that set.

Match Tie-Break

The Match Tie-Break is similar to the Set Tie-Break except that the winner is the first to reach 10 points by a margin of 2 points. It may be used in lieu of a third or final set to determine the winner of the match. The player or team whose turn it would have been to serve first if a full game or set were played starts serving the match tie-break. Either partner on a doubles team may serve first for their team. A doubles team may change receiving positions at the start of the match tie-break.

Change of Ends

Players change ends at the start of the tie-break only if an odd-game changeover is due. During the tie-break, players change ends after 6 points.

Rest Periods

There are no rest periods permitted during the tie-break except that if an odd-game changeover is due, players may take the normal 90 seconds on the changeover.

USA Team Tennis Scoring

USA Team Tennis – 12 and Under Division (Ages 6-12)

The recommended format of play for USA Team Tennis 12 and Under Division teams is Ralleyball. Please refer to Chapter 4 for format of play and scoring system for Ralleyball.

USA Team Tennis - 14 and Under Division (Ages 10-14)

At the local level, 14 and Under Division teams have the option of choosing the format of play and scoring system. However, the recommended format of play and scoring system for teams is as follows:

Scoring

- A match will consist of two out of three four-game sets, with no-ad scoring.
- A 12-point set tie-break will be played if the set score is three games all.
- In the event that the score is one set all, a match tie-break will be played in lieu of the third set.

Format of Play

- The USA Team Tennis program uses the WTT format of play during normal league, district, sectional, regional, and national championship play. A winner of an individual match is determined by the total games won by that player. And the overall winner of the team match is determined by the total games won by the entire team.
- In the USA Team Tennis program, five matches are played: Boys' and Girls' Singles, Boys' and Girls' Doubles, and a Mixed Doubles. If a league so desires, a second Mixed Doubles match may be played.

USA Team Tennis – 18 and Under Division (Ages 13-18)

Scoring for the 18 and Under Division is not covered in this manual.

Sportsmanship and Court Conduct

Court Conduct

- Talk quietly when standing near tennis courts that are in use.
- Don't walk across the back of another court until the players have finished playing a point.
- If people are using your court, don't disturb them until their time is up.
- Store all your gear and items that you may have out of everyone's way.
- If your ball goes into the next court, wait until the players on that court finish the point before you ask for the ball. If a ball comes onto your court, return it as soon as play has stopped on both courts.

Sportsmanship

- Keep a positive outlook throughout the match. Remember, you're playing for fun.
- Keep the game moving. Don't stall and waste time between points. Accept all calls made by your opponent without arguing or sulking.
- Don't distract your opponent on purpose by unnecessary movements or talking.
- If there is a disagreement on the score, go back to the last score that you both agree on, or spin a racquet. Both players must accept the score put forward by the person who wins the racquet spin.
- Before serving, be sure that the receiver is ready to play.
- When receiving a serve, if it is out, don't return it unless you can't avoid doing so. Just tap it gently into the net or let it go behind you.
- If the ball touches any part of the line, it is good. Call the ball out only if you clearly see a space between where the ball hits and the line.
- You should make calls for balls hit to your end of the court. Out calls should be made immediately.
- If you can't see that a ball is definitely out, you should continue playing the point.
- If a ball goes past you and you can't see where it lands, you must give the point to your opponent.
- In doubles, you should help your partner with line calls. If you think a ball your partner called out actually hit the line, you must call it good.
- After the last point, come to the net quickly and shake hands. Let your opponent know that you appreciated the match, no matter what the outcome.

Chapter 7: Developmental Stages and Their Impact on Learning Tennis

In teaching young children how to rally and play tennis, parents and coaches must keep in mind that children are not miniature adults and that they cannot be taught in the same way that adults are. Children have developing cognitive, emotional, and social structures that need to be taken into account in any coaching program. These developmental structures are different at different ages. Further, there can be developmental differences even within an age range. This chapter reviews the common developmental characteristics of children in the following age ranges: 5 and under, 6- to 7-year-olds, and 8- to 11-year-olds. Before reviewing the characteristics of these age divisions, let's look at some information that is common to children in all three of these age ranges and that parents and coaches need to understand.

The Young Child

Parents usually have high expectations for their young players and often expect to see them rallying and playing points before they are developmentally capable of doing so. Before starting any tennis program for young children, it is suggested that you conduct an orientation session for parents to explain what will happen during the activity time period. During this orientation, explain the following principles of child development:

- Children should not be treated as miniature adults. Their challenges are much different than the challenges of adult life and their confidence and skills are in the delicate process of just being formed.
- Consider the "whole child" rather than just a part or even the sum of the parts. Physical characteristics influence social development and both may influence mental or emotional development.
- Although stages of growth and development are age-related, they are not determined by chronological age. Children progress through the stages at their own rate of development.
- Parents and coaches should realize that children view them as role models. Young people copy the behavior they see.

Assistant Coaches

Since young children require special attention, it is the perfect opportunity to include parents, older brothers and sisters, grandparents, or even older children in your youth tennis programs. This can be done with minimal training or previous tennis knowledge if you guide and direct each session.

Safety

Once you have your group on court, you should consider basic guidelines for each class. The safety of each child should be paramount. Young children will be eager to move and will have a relatively low level of spatial awareness. Active, excited children who are not familiar with staying in their own space present the potential for injury. When racquets are used, the children should be taught to *hug or sit on their racquets* when they are not involved at the actual hitting station.

Teaching Aids

Teaching aids are an exciting and fun way to keep interest high. Young people love to explore and to play with various colors and shapes. Toy stores are a great place to start. They are filled with objects that can be carried, balanced, tossed, rolled, and caught. Experiment with beanbags for carrying and balancing and balloons for hitting. Lightweight plastic paddles or racquetball racquets are much easier for young children to hold and maneuver than tennis racquets. Use large, colorful balls for rolling, bouncing, and catching.

Making It Fun for Children

Numerous surveys have been conducted to discover what attracts children to participate in sports. Without exception, the number one reason is "to have fun." Keeping in mind that "fun" is the main reason children participate in sports is crucial to the success of your tennis activities. Remember: You are giving children an opportunity to play the game and learn some fundamental skills—you are not training world-class athletes. As coach, you play a big role in making learning how to rally and play tennis fun. Following are a number of suggestions on how you can do this:

- Be energetic and enthusiastic.
- Encourage a playful but safety-oriented environment.
- Reward effort over achievement in all activities.
- Simplify activities for success benefits over technical perfection.
- Set achievable, measurable goals for the activities.
- Take pressure off individuals by encouraging group efforts, cumulative scoring in activities, and cooperative exercises.
- Use games to foster a healthy and fun attitude toward competition.
- Use creative rewards for motivation.

Success Is Number One!

Young children should be successful in every lesson. If they cannot achieve success 80 percent of the time, they will quickly lose interest in your class and in tennis as a game. Keep things simple, basic, and positive. Demonstrate rather than explain an activity and have the children imitate you. Much of the teaching—and learning—at this age is simply done through imitation. An excellent way to provide instruction is as simple as asking, "Can you do this?" Any descriptions should be brief and specific.

Feedback

Keep feedback brief and positive. Find a way to reward every person doing something right, from sharing and waiting their turn, to good effort and cooperation. Negative feedback should only be used when a child could be in danger of injury to himself or others in the group.

Ages 5 and Under

Teaching children ages 5 and under requires special skills. These children are different not only physically but also socially and emotionally from older children. Children of this age are developing gross motor skills and enjoy running, jumping, crawling, twisting, turning, rolling, chasing, landing, transferring weight, and balancing. Only 5-year-olds should be expected to hop and balance on one foot and to skip. It is the rare child of this age who possesses the throwing and catching skills prerequisite for learning striking skills with a paddle, racquet, bat, or other object. With this in mind, you need to consider pre-school type activities that stress movement and balance. These children are creative and love to explore and imitate.

Social Skills

In many cases, children of this age have not attended school and cannot read or write. This might even be the first time they have been part of a group. They tend to think "me first" and may not be good at sharing or waiting their turn. They don't tend to identify with or cooperate on teams.

Coaching

Parents and coaches should understand that typical on-court activities such as grips, stroke production, and even rallying over a net are too advanced for most children in this age group. The focus of sessions should be on lead-up gross motor skills such as balance, movement and agility, throwing, and catching, and on ball striking skills using stationary or suspended balls or balloons. These activities are less structured and provide ample time for play and exploration, which are very important to the 5 and under child. Coaches should ask parents to continue doing the activities covered in class with their children at home. This is an ideal way to help parents to understand how to get involved with their children's pre-tennis activities.

Fun

Above all, make things fun. These children want to play and are not interested in drilling and skill development. You should be energetic and keep the atmosphere playful. Encourage the children to explore, create, and move. Fun and activity should always take precedence over correct technique and rigid rules or formations. As coach, your goal in every session is to keep the kids excited about the activities and wanting to return for the next session!

Length of Session

The attention span of children ages 5 and under is short, and they can easily lose interest in an activity. Therefore, you should change activities frequently and no one activity should last more than five minutes. A 30-minute time period is optimal for children this age; sessions should definitely not exceed 45 minutes.

Ages 6 to 7

For children ages 6- to 7-years-old, fun continues to be paramount. These children have developed many of the gross motor skills necessary to move around the court. They can run, change directions, hop, skip, and shuffle. Their overhand throwing motion now has more body turn and weight transfer. Children of this age need to be active and to use physical activity as an outlet. Fine motor skills are still awkward and racquet work may be clumsy, especially if done rapidly or in combination with running and changing directions.

Social Skills

Social skills are developed through both thinking and feeling. Children 6- to 7-years-old enjoy working in small groups with plenty of adult attention. They tend to observe adults and copy their behavior. These children have a strong need for adult approval. While they are eager to learn, they are easily discouraged and have difficulty accepting losing. Understanding this, coaches and parents should be generous with praise.

At this age, children enjoy playmates of the same gender. Whereas basic tennis technique can be acquired, the emphasis should be on having fun, keeping active, and playing modified or lead-up games.

Coaching

Children of this age like playing simple games with few rules and games that demand a high level of physical activity. Coaches and parents will be more successful if they demonstrate tasks or skills to be learned, rather than offer extended verbal instructions that children find hard to understand. Too much emphasis on skill refinement would be wasted at this age, since children are not yet capable of the motor control required nor have the intellectual interest in developing precision in skill making.

Scaled-down equipment such as short, lightweight racquets, lower nets, shorter boundary lines, and lightweight balls are perfect for this age group. In addition to liking to run and be active, these children like to hit balls. More emphasis should be placed on striking skills and less on movement and balance. Challenge these children with developing skills.

Length of Session

Suggested time for each session is 1 hour with a short break after 30 minutes.

Ages 8 to 11

Middle childhood is a period of relatively slower growth, with children near the end of this age range showing wide variations in physical maturity. Boys and girls are similar in physical ability and, in fact, girls may outshine boys in some physical skills at this time. During the 8- to-11-age range, the child's self-concept is being formed. Therefore, it is important for children to have positive learning experiences and to feel that they are accomplishing tasks and appear competent to adults and peers. Performing concrete mental operations is characteristic of this period, during which kids like to collect, classify, combine, and operate with things and ideas. Children this age often appear to have endless energy, enthusiasm, and a vast capacity to learn.

Social Skills

Social interactions are influenced by family values, socioeconomic status, and opportunities for a child to act independently. Adults are seen as dispensers of the truth, and kids will typically do what is asked of them. They will make a sincere effort to follow the rules and to win the approval of others.

Kids of this age like to participate in sports with their friends. Even as they grow older, fun still has to be the key ingredient. They are developing team loyalty and enjoy being part of a team. We highly recommend that children in this age group learn to rally so they can be part of a USA Team Tennis 12 and Under Division team.

Coaching

Tennis experiences should be geared toward learning the skills of the game within the context of the sport of tennis. The "game approach," as outlined earlier in this manual, is perfect for this age as children struggle to understand how all the shots fit together within the sport. These youngsters can develop the skills necessary for moving and hitting balls over the net. The overhand serving motion can also be learned. All fundamental skills should be refined and reinforced to provide the sound foundation upon which to build a more complete game.

Length of Session

Suggested time for each session is 1 hour with a short break after 30 minutes.

When Should Children Begin to Play Tennis?

The answer to the question of when children should begin playing tennis is easy: When the child wants to. For the child to be able to rally balls back and forth over a net, she must first be able to catch, track the flight of the ball, and throw. If these motor skills are not yet developed, the game can be modified so that children wanting to play can still achieve success.

Ensuring success for all kids regardless of age level or ability is always challenging for teachers. If children struggle with a particular skill, make the activity easier with the following adjustments:

- Reduce the speed of the ball.
- Reduce the distance that the child must hit the ball.
- Place the child closer to the net or target area.
- Shorten or lighten the racquet.
- Use larger, softer balls.
- Set simple, easily achievable goals.
- Enlarge the target area.

Understanding the table on the next page will help you make decisions regarding how to ensure your youngsters achieve success. Adapt your activities to accommodate your students' levels of developmental readiness by using various balls, feeds, and racquets.

	Easy	Intermediate	Difficult
Ball size	large	medium	small
Ball weight	light	medium	heavy
Ball speed	none	slow	fast
Ball movement	stationary	roll/bounce	in the air
Body side	dominant	non-dominant	midline
Racquet type	hand	paddle/short racquet	long racquet
Racquet weight	light	medium	heavy
Body movement	stationary	slow	fast

The following examples help put this table into practical terms:

- Hitting a ball suspended on a string with one's hand is easier than hitting a bounding foam ball with a short racquet.
- Hitting a large foam ball with a short racquet is easier than hitting a tennis ball with a full-sized racquet.
- Hitting a stationary ball on the forehand (dominant) side is easier than hitting a stationary ball on the backhand (non-dominant) side.
- Hitting a ball while standing still is easier than hitting on the run.
- Hitting large foam balls with short racquets on short courts is easier than hitting regular tennis balls with full-sized racquets on a regulation tennis court.

Tennis Is an "Open Skills" Sport

Tennis is an Open Skills sport. Open skills are those in which the environment is constantly changing, so that the performer cannot plan the entire movement in advance. The skill to be performed must be adapted to every changing situation. Closed skills are skills in which the environment is stable and predictable, and which, therefore, allows the participant to plan the movement in advance.

The difference between Open and Closed skills impacts the decision-making process. Closed Skills involve very little decision making, because the environment does not change. In learning Open Skills, children must constantly make decisions that relate to external conditions, for example, the speed of the ball, height of the bounce, position of the opponent, position of the sun, and direction of the wind.

Some examples of Closed Skills sports include bowling, archery, and weightlifting. Open Skills sports include boxing, hockey, and tennis. In tennis, the participant must adapt to the speed and bounce of the ball, environmental conditions such as sun and wind, the distance the player has to move to get to the ball, and the position of the opponent, just to name a few. The sooner young players learn to make these adaptations, the more success they will have when they begin to play the game. Rallying is an Open Skill, and learning to rally teaches players how to make the necessary adaptations that apply directly to playing the game.

If you teach tennis as a Closed Skill (e.g., when players learn to execute skills from perfect feeds from a coach), it is quite likely your players will fail miserably when they actually play the game, which calls for executing Open Skills. There are times that Closed Skills work is helpful in teaching, such as when isolating a specific skill, but coaches need to be sure to transfer what the child learns in a Closed Skills environment to an Open Skills environment.

Lead-Up Motor Skills Games and Activities

This section was adapted with permission from *ITF School Tennis Initiative: Teacher's Manual.* London, International Tennis Foundation, 1998.

Games and other physical activities help children develop motor skills and other capabilities needed to learn the game of tennis. The younger the player, the simpler the game should be. The following chart provides a thumbnail sketch of the characteristics of simple, moderate, and more complex games that roughly correspond to the levels of developmental readiness of children in the age categories we have been discussing in this manual.

Game/Activity	Characteristics of Game/Activity
Simple (5 & under)	Fun motor activities for coordination Short duration Easy rules Low physical and technical demands Performed for pleasure
Moderate (6- & 7-year-olds)	Fun motor activities Medium duration Slightly more difficult rules Simple physical and technical demands are adapted to the child's abilities
More Complex (8- to 11-year-olds)	Fun motor activities Longer duration More difficult rules Higher physical and technical demands

For the majority of players:

- 83% of learning comes from being shown what to do, that is, through demonstrations.
- 11% of learning comes from the auditory senses, that is, through listening, evaluating verbal information, etc. (explanations).
- 6% of learning comes through other senses, that is, players learn by feel of the movement.

Based on this information, it is important to keep in mind that the demonstration of the game or task, rather than the verbal explanation, should take precedence when teaching children how to rally and play tennis.

Handling Skills Necessary for Playing Tennis

There is a progression of handling skills children need to be able to do in order to play the game of tennis. These skills are listed below, beginning from the most elementary to the most advanced.

Handling – Very young children can hold a ball or beanbag, change hands, or balance an object on a short racquet.

Rolling – Start these skills by rolling playground or beach balls back and forth and gradually progress to using smaller balls. A rule of thumb is "the smaller the child, the larger the ball should be." Young children will trap a rolling ball.

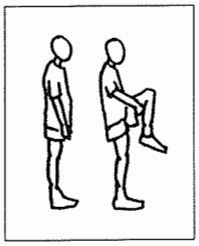
Throwing – Children at ages 5 and 6 can learn to throw, but usually without much rotation or weight transfer.

Catching – This skill usually takes longer to master than throwing, because the child must learn to judge the trajectory, speed, and bounce of the ball. Begin by having the child field a rolling ball and progress to catching a bouncing ball and then a ball in the air.

Striking or Hitting – Skills necessary for throwing and striking are similar, so children should have a solid foundation in throwing and catching a tennis ball before being introduced to hitting with a racquet.

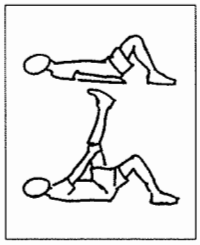
APPENDIX

Flexibility Exercises



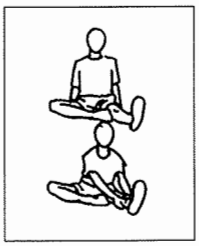
1. KNEE-CHEST FLEX

Bend one leg and grasp the back of the thigh just above the knee. Slowly pull the knee to your chest. Hold this position.



2. HAMSTRING STRETCH

Straighten one leg and raise it toward the trunk. Use your hands to gently increase the stretch. point your toes toward the face to stretch the calf.

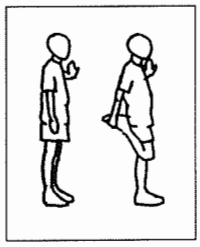


3. FIGURE 4 HAMSTRING STRETCH

Try to bring the chest to the thigh by bending forward from the hips. Keep the back straight. Pull your toes back to point toward your face.

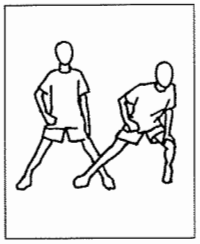
4. SPINAL TWIST

Place the right foot on the outside of the left knee. Bring the left arm around the right knee, resting the elbow above the outside of the right knee. Slowly turn the head and upper body to the right. You'll wind up looking over your right shoulder.



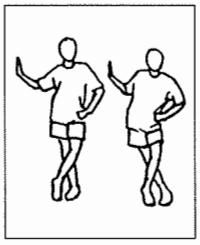
5. QUADRICEPS STORK STRETCH

Stand on one leg. Bend the opposite knee while grasping the ankle. Keeping the back flat and the buttocks tucked under, bring your knee down as far as you can, trying to point it straight down to the floor. Do **not** point the knee out or twist it!



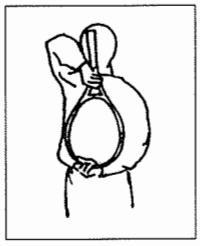
6. GROIN STRETCH

Place one hand above the knee, the other hand on the opposite hip. With toes pointing forward, slowly bend the knee your hand is on until you feel a stretch in the groin area. Roll your weight onto the inside of your foot.



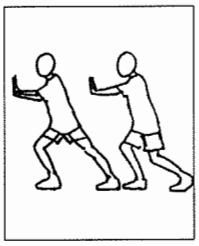
7. HIP STRETCH

Stand with your right hand on the wall, your weight on your right leg, and your left leg crossed in front of it. Gently push the right hip toward the wall. Increase the stretch by standing farther from the wall.



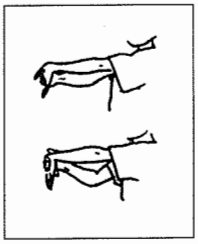
8. SHOULDER STRETCH

With the lower are, slowly pull the racquet down, bringing the upper elbow to your ear and pointing it to the ceiling. Then slowly pull up with the top arm, pointing the lower elbow to the floor.



9. CALF STRETCH

Keep the back knee straight, the heel on the floor, and the foot pointing forward. Bend the forward knee and lean your trunk forward. Do not arch the lower back. Then slightly bend the back leg, raise the heel 2 inches off the floor, and lean into the wall. This time, feel the stretch near the heel.



10. FOREARM STRETCH

With the elbow straight and palm up, use the opposite hand to gently stretch the wrist back (extension). Turn the palm down and gently stretch the wrist downward (flexion).

Resources

Suppliers of Tennis Equipment

The following companies and vendors are suppliers of junior racquets, short courts, teaching aids, transition balls, and entry-level tennis kits.

Cartoon Network Tennis Club
Leading Edge Promotions
3250A Peachtree Corners Circle
Norcross, GA 30092
(770) 441-5554, ext. 61

Dunlop/Slazenger
728 N. Pleasantburg Drive
Greenville, SC 29607
(864) 241-2200

Gamma Racquet Sports
200 Waterfront Drive
Pittsburgh, PA 15222
(800) 635-5042

Head/Penn Racquet Sports
306 S. 45th Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85043
(800) BUY-PENN

Oncourt Offcourt, Inc.
5427 Philip Avenue
Dallas, TX 75223
(800) 752-7673

Prince
One Sportsystem Plaza
Bordentown, NJ 08505
(800) 2-TENNIS

Sportime
One Sportime Way
Atlanta, GA 30340
(800) 448-8867

Wilson Racquet Sports
87 W. Bryn Mawr Avenue
Chicago, IL 60631
(800) 272-6060

Books

American Sport Education Program, **Coaching Youth Tennis, 3rd edition**. Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics, 2002.

United States Professional Tennis Association, **The Complete Guide-USPTA Little Tennis**. USPTA, Houston,1998.

United States Tennis Association, **Friend at Court: The USTA Handbook of Tennis Rules and Regulations, 2004 edition**. USTA, White Plains, NY, 2004.

_____, **Illustrated Introduction to the Rules of Tennis, 2nd edition**. USTA, White Plains, NY, 2001.

Videotapes

Backboard Tennis, United States Tennis Association, White Plains, NY, 1998.

Games Approach to Coaching Tennis, United States Tennis Association, White Plains, NY, 2002.

Teaching Group Tennis, United States Tennis Association, White Plains, NY, 1998.

Organizations

Professional Tennis Registry
P.O. Box 4739
Hilton Head Island, SC 29938
(800) 421-6289

United States Professional Tennis Association
3535 Briarpark Drive
Houston, TX 77042
(800) 877-8248

United States Tennis Association
70 West Red Oak Lane
White Plains, NY 10604
(914) 696-7000

For more information on USA Team Tennis, please see their Web site at usateamtennis.usta.com or call the USTA National Office at 914-696-7000.

- **USA Team Tennis (Youth) Brochure**, United States Tennis Association
- **USA Team Tennis (Youth) Program Kit**, United States Tennis Association

For more information on the Cartoon Network Tennis Club, please contact the Leading Edge Promotions at (770) 441-5554, ext. 61, or see the USTA Website at usateamtennis.usta.com.