10 & Under Certification Workshop

Study Guide

This study guide is an essential part of PTR’s 10 & Under Certification. It provides information on the why, how, what and when of coaching players of different age groups, although it concentrates on 10 & Under players.

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

In January 2012, the ITF rules of tennis for 10 & Under competition changed.

The new rule is significant in many respects. For the first time, and as in other sports, young children will be able to compete on courts and with equipment that is appropriate to their stage of development. This will help them enjoy the game and become better tennis players. As a direct result of the rule change, the methods of coaching 10 & Under players will change.

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

Good coaches are essential to introducing children to sport. They need organization and communication skills that match children’s ages, but they also need experience and knowledge of tennis to demonstrate, explain and develop the skills and the game. Research indicates children are more likely to drop out of a sport when they are coached by people who are unable to perform the skills themselves, because the lack of a good role model affects the child’s ability to feel competent.

Thanks to the PTR Education Committee and subsequent approval by the PTR Board, PTR’s new educational and certification pathway is now a reality. This study guide is for the 10 & Under Workshop and Certification. I must acknowledge the editing and technical assistance from PTR’s Steve Keller and Tennis LMS’ Sasha Friljanic. Some of the activities included in the Appendix to this study guide were originally developed by Mike Barrell for the PTR Kids Tennis course. PTR recognizes the excellent start Mike gave to the 10 and Under program. The PTR 10 & Under Workshop develops and progresses PTR Kids Tennis, in introducing new coaching programs, player development and research information.

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

The 10 & Under workshop and certification will train and certify coaches in the specific competencies needed by 10 & Under players. For the first time, and because of an increasing need, this Study Guide includes material for young players aged 3-5. The workshop is therefore part, not just of the new pathway, but of the PTR’s different and developing approach to educating the next generation of coaches. PTR also has three Master of Tennis programs of which one is Junior Development for those coaches who wish to increase their knowledge and skills in working with junior players, after their Certification.

While the 10 & Under age group is clearly the one most affected by the ITF rule change, there will be a ripple effect when these players move up to the 11-13 year old age group. 10 year olds do inevitably become 11 year olds! Therefore, coaches will need improved coaching skills and understanding to work with players from 10 & Under tennis, because they will have a higher skill level. In February 2013, PTR will launch a new workshop and Certification for coaching 11-17 years olds in clubs, which will also enable coaches to proceed to the Master of Tennis Junior Development program.

The ITF rule change and subsequent changes by national tennis federations have saved the day for junior tennis. PTR predicts that tennis will see a big rise in the number of children starting to play the game. The key question is will they stay in the game? The answer to that question is up to you and the thousands of other tennis teaching professionals and coaches who teach junior tennis. I hope you enjoy your educational journey, so you can continue to Make a World of Difference.

Anne Pankhurst

PTR Educational Consultant

January 2013
UNDERSTANDING 10 & UNDER PLAYERS

10 & Under players are, first and foremost, children who are growing and moving first toward puberty and then adulthood. Between 3 and 10 years of age, the actual process of growth is steady - just two or three inches a year. This age is therefore a great time to teach the basic skills of hitting the ball and learning to play the game.

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

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

The process of learning varies for different children, so coaches must be able to use appropriate teaching methods to set environments that meet each child’s needs. As 10 & Under programs develop it is clear that coaches need more ideas and information for working 3-5 year olds because this group in increasing in number. Some information is included in this Study Guide and will be discussed in the workshop.

There are differences even within the 10 & Under age group. For example, almost everything is new to 3 or 5 year olds, who find it hard to concentrate, need security from their parents, and struggle to cooperate with other children. The 10 year olds, on the other hand, are gaining experience, confidence and social skills, and are quite happy without their parents around.

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

While coaches must therefore understand the 10 & Under age group as a whole, the specific issues that impact different age groups within it are even more important. The first section of the study guide will discuss the characteristics of the different age groups and how these impact coaching practice.
3-5 Year Olds

Mentally, emotionally and socially, children of this age:

• are very active, cannot concentrate on one thing for very long and are curious about new ideas, therefore they need many different activities to keep them interested and where they can ‘invent’ games. Small groups are essential. Keeping them in order can be difficult, so coaches need to learn to ‘go with the flow’ and maintain a safe environment.

• have favorite games very quickly and great imaginations, therefore giving every activity a name and repeating the favorites is essential.

• need to have fun, therefore coaches and helpers must take part in different activities with them to increase their enjoyment.

• need to develop confidence; therefore a positive and encouraging environment is essential. Having parents close by is a good idea.

• are learning basic physical and coordination skills, therefore skills like running, jumping and skipping games must be done in every lesson to help them.

• find big movements (gross motor skills) much easier than small ones, therefore they should be shown big actions to copy and not be given small skills or parts of skills to learn.

• have very little experience. They take longer to react and understand what they have to do. For example, reacting to and tracking and anticipate a ball is hard for them, therefore they need to play with large, slow foam or red balls, or even balloons.

• are self-centered and find it difficult to cooperate and share with other children, therefore they should work in small group (3 or 4) with a helper.

• find listening to and following instructions very difficult; therefore always show them what to do so they can copy.

• get excited easily; therefore coaches must be calm.

• get tired quickly; therefore they need frequent breaks to re-hydrate and then to try another activity.

• find it very difficult to make decisions therefore do not give them choices.

Physically, children of this age:

• Need to learn different skills than older children or adults. Activities should be designed to teach specific skills in a fun way.

• The key skills that need to be developed with 3 to 5 year olds are:
  - agility, static balance, simple coordination and very short (5 seconds) speed
  - running, jumping and skipping in a fundamentally sound way
  - twisting, turning and sliding
  - throwing, rolling and catching balls with both hands
  - hitting and kicking large and light balls in a straight line.
- handling different types of equipment
- developing strength (own body weight)
- reaction and tracking skills

Young children are small, have short arms and legs (relative to adults), less strength, and a high center of gravity. All of this affects their ability to cover distance, control a piece of equipment such as a racquet, and keep their balance. Coaches should concentrate on developing the basic physical skills, because this is the crucial age for children to learn them. Parents should be asked to help their children at home with basic physical skills.
5-6 Year Olds

Mentally, emotionally and socially, children of this age:

• are highly active, can concentrate for a little longer and love to learn, therefore they need many varied and new activities to keep them interested. Keeping them in lines with the coach feeding the ball is boring, not productive, or even necessary with the right equipment and good coaching.

• have favorite things and great imaginations, therefore giving every activity a name and repeating the favorites makes tennis fun.

• need to have fun, therefore coaches and helpers must take part in different activities to increase their enjoyment.

• need to develop confidence; therefore a positive and encouraging environment is essential.

• are learning basic physical skills, therefore skills like running, jumping and skipping must be done in every lesson to help them.

• find big movements (gross motor skills) much easier than small ones, therefore they should be shown big actions to copy and not have skills broken down into parts.

• Lack experience and take longer to react, track and anticipate a ball, therefore they need to play with large, slow foam or red balls, or even balloons.

• tend to be self-centered and find it difficult to cooperate and share with other kids, therefore they should be kept in small groups with a helper to assist them to relate to other children.

• find listening to and following instructions very difficult, therefore any instructions must be very short and clear.

• get bored easily; therefore every activity must challenge their abilities at just the right level.

• get tired quickly; therefore they need frequent breaks and changes of activity.

• learn by imitating and copying, therefore simple demonstrations, repeated several times, will show them what to do and what to copy.

• cannot make decisions and do not understand concepts, therefore scoring and winning and losing are difficult for them to understand and need to be incorporated into lessons very slowly.

Physically, children of this age:

• Have very different levels of skill from older children or adults. Coaches need to adapt activities and develop them in a fun way.

• The key skills that need to be developed are:

  - agility, static balance, simple coordination and speed
  - running, jumping and skipping
  - twisting, turning and sliding
  - throwing and catching with both hand, hitting and kicking
- handling different types of equipment
- reaction and tracking skills

- Young children are small, have short arms and legs (relative to adults), less strength, and a high center of gravity. All affect their ability to cover distance, control a racquet, and keep their balance. Coaches should concentrate on the basic physical skills, because this is the crucial age for children to learn them.
6-8 Year Olds

Mentally, emotionally and socially, children of this age:

• need to have fun and be active; therefore many different activities must achieve the same objective. The activities should be changed frequently and be simple and basic. Standing in lines is unnecessary, boring and inappropriate for children. Working in pairs or small groups achieves faster progress. Setting up circuits of activities keeps their interest and increases the opportunity for success.

• are increasing in confidence, therefore developing a positive and encouraging environment is vital.

• are better able to concentrate and focus on a task, but only for short spans of time, therefore coaching them in pairs or small groups increases their concentration.

• are able to listen and follow quick simple instructions, therefore give them brief instructions and positive feedback. Tell them what they have done well and get excited at what they do!

• learn best by copying (visual learning), therefore show them (demonstrate) what they need to do and challenge them to try. Set activities where, in succeeding, the children are doing it right.

• are learning to make simple decisions (making a choice between two things), therefore encourage them by setting simple problems and praising when they make a good choice.

• need and seek adult approval frequently, therefore parents and helpers must show them what to do, how to do it, and then praise and encourage their efforts.

• are slowly understanding the concept of competition, together with winning and losing, therefore provide many simple opportunities to score points without pressure.

• are happy if their parents are nearby, therefore set the parameters with parents - nearby, quiet and visible. If they are helping, make sure they do not work with their own child. (see Working with Parents)

• can share with and help others in a group, therefore give them simple ‘teaching’ tasks with a partner.

• can understand simple rules and fairness, therefore introduce them to simple games with a few basic rules.

• often prefer to be with their own gender, therefore keep them with their friends at first, then mix the groups later in the lesson.

• enjoy taking responsibility for simple tasks and requests, therefore give them specific tasks to do before, during and after the lesson and praise them.

• can accept coach and official decisions; therefore praise them when they do so.

Physically, children of this age:

• Are developing many of the gross motor skills. Throwing, for example, now has more body turn and weight transfer for boys, but still needs to be developed in girls.

• Should be taking part in many different physical activities. This is very important because skills can be transferred between different sports and activities.

• Have slower reactions and many find tracking and contacting a ball quite difficult, although they
improve rapidly with help and practice.

• Have very different levels of skill from older children or adults, so adapt and develop different activities in a fun way.

• The key skills that need to be developed are:

  - agility, static and dynamic balance, simple and more complex coordination and speed
  - strength using their own body weight
  - flexibility
  - running forward and backward, jumping and skipping
  - twisting, turning and sliding
  - throwing overhand, catching with both hands, hitting and kicking
  - handling different types of equipment
  - reaction and tracking skills
8-10 Year Olds

Mentally, emotionally and socially, children of this age:

• enjoy activity and having fun, therefore keep interest levels high by moving children between different activities (for example, in a circuit).

• learn visually, therefore demonstrate what they should do, then challenge them to do what they have seen. Teach and develop technical skills (serve and rally) within the game in order to improve their ability to play.

• are able to concentrate for longer periods of time, therefore they can practice the same and more difficult tasks for longer.

• are interested and inspired by people they like, therefore coaches need to be enthusiastic and energetic, as well as positive and encouraging.

• are more self-reliant and able to solve problems, therefore they can be given responsibility and solve simple problems, perhaps in a game or drill.

• are able to understand the concepts of winning and losing, even if they need help learning how to cope with them, therefore provide plenty of competitive opportunities, in different formats and with increasing pressure.

• are able to share and help others, therefore working in different groups and teaching other players will develop their confidence.

• enjoy being in teams, especially girls, therefore team competitions are a good way of teaching the skills of winning and losing, as well as making tennis fun.

• can learn simple goal setting, therefore set a specific task for the lesson or the next few lessons.

• need to feel successful, therefore set tasks that enable them to improve and feel competent in a specific skill.

• find it hard to distinguish between ability and effort, therefore the coaching environment should be positive and encouraging with effort praised as much as ability.

• can increasingly make choices and decisions, therefore set tasks and challenges that require decision making, especially in the game.

• are aware of who they like and dislike, therefore keep friends together at first and find different ways of mixing groups for short periods.

• are happier working with their own gender, therefore keep players in gender groups and teams at first, before mixing them up.

• are appreciative of adult opinions, therefore give them frequent feedback related to the task.

• are able to verbalize opinions and thoughts and explain well, therefore ask them to evaluate their performance and contribute to the evaluation of the lesson.

Physically, children of this age:

• Are more able to show fluent and well developed skills.
• The key skills that need to be developed are:

  - agility, static and dynamic balance, simple and more complex coordination and speed
  - strength using their own bodies, flexibility
  - running forward and backward, jumping and skipping
  - throwing overhand, catching with one or both hands, and hitting
  - core strength
  - reaction and tracking skills
The Coaching Environment

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

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

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

There are some important characteristics of a positive coaching environment:

• Learning in pairs and small groups means that children get more individual help and more opportunities to learn. Being treated as an individual is important for everyone, including small children.

• In the past, using regular tennis balls and large racquets, children stood in lines and were fed a ball to hit, one child at a time. This approach, while perhaps necessary, was of limited use and made tennis boring. With the availability of modified equipment and smaller playing areas, there is no need for children to stand in lines. Tennis can now be a positive experience.

• Learning different activities that link to the game and playing a variety of games in a lesson, increases the interest and concentration levels of the children and makes it more likely they will achieve success. They enjoy the experience and want more.

• Learning in an interesting way increases enjoyment and progress. Children 10 & Under learn by watching and copying, not by listening. Coaches who recognize this have more activity. They demonstrate both the process and the outcome of any skill, and challenge and encourage the children to copy what they have seen. These coaches also teach whole skills, rather than breaking them down and practicing each part. Learning the parts is rarely necessary if coaches understand how young children learn, are patient, and help children solve any coordination issues.

• Giving opportunities for children to play and experiment in tasks that require them to try out their own ideas, increases interest and confidence.

• Helping children teach each other in a positive and supportive environment is a proven method of learning and something that young children enjoy doing.
How 10 & Under Tennis links to the Coaching Environment

This study guide has already identified that 10 & Under players have specific skills, abilities and needs.

They:

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

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

The chart on the next page takes a number of coaching factors and links them to the changes in coaching practice that can now take place for 10 & Under players.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COACHING FACTOR</th>
<th>PREVIOUS COACHING PRACTICE</th>
<th>10 AND UNDER COACHING PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Players in lines, with the coach as a static feeder</td>
<td>High level of player and coach activity, often with players as feeders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of feedback</td>
<td>Negative, based on error correction</td>
<td>Positive, based on development and what is done well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching environment</td>
<td>Uninspiring, even boring, because of the lines of players</td>
<td>Positive, fun and motivating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical development</td>
<td>Not researched, based on personal preference</td>
<td>Biomechanically sound and age appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill teaching</td>
<td>Fine motor skill first, part skill teaching first</td>
<td>Gross motor skill first, whole skill teaching first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and coaches</td>
<td>Parents and beginner coaches with limited training and tennis experience</td>
<td>Players who become educated and certified coaches trained to specific competencies for 10 and Under kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching style</td>
<td>Verbal instruction, few role models</td>
<td>Demonstration and copying of quality role models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor skill development</td>
<td>Deliberate practice too early and little use of sound Principles of Practice</td>
<td>Rally and play based. Understanding of motor skill learning and use of sound Principles of Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tactical development</td>
<td>Inappropriate mental, emotional and social competitive base for age and stage of player</td>
<td>Age appropriate application of mental, emotional and social skills in the competitive base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progression</td>
<td>Unstructured and random</td>
<td>Structured, cooperative to competitive, together with open to closed to semi-closed to open learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the coach</td>
<td>Feeder and commentator</td>
<td>Proactive enabler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Coach centered - slow learning rate</td>
<td>Player centered - rapid learning rate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communication Skills

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

1. **Verbal skills** (WHAT is said) are important, but there are ‘rules’ that apply when teaching young children:
   - Language must be appropriate for young children to understand.
   - Explanations should be very brief.
   - Words should be specific, clear, and spoken in an adult voice.
   - Make sure that the children understand what has been said.
   - Players’ names should be used often and at the beginning of the sentence, so the child is listening.

2. **Paralanguage** (HOW something is said) is often more important with children than verbal information:
   - The intonation, volume and speed must be appropriate.
   - The volume for the group and the individual should be appropriate, without shouting.
   - The tone should be interesting.

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

   The ‘rules’ for demonstrations are:
   - Repeat the demonstration several times and ensure it shows what the children should see. When showing a stroke, make sure the whole action is shown and not parts of it. Young children need gross, not fine, movements to copy
   - Make sure the demonstration is simple and basic so the children feel confident to try
   - Explain what they need to watch, and then ask, “Can you do that?”
   - Make sure every child is able to see and hear. Some children learn more easily if they also have space to move as they watch.
4. Informal communication

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

5. Feedback and Motivation

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

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

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

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

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

Organizing the Program means advertising and recruiting young players, developing and managing within the club and working with other coaches, club officials and parents. Coaches and parents working together on issues such as the objectives of the program, medical records and emergency procedures need to be developed through regular meetings.

Before the lesson starts coaches should:

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

During the lesson coaches must be able to organize:

• Time: so that each part of the lesson (warm up, skill development, game development and cool down) has the right amount of time to achieve the goals.

• Children: so that, for each activity, they know:
  - where to go
  - what to do
  - how to do it
  - when to do it

• Activities: for each part of the lesson so that children learn, improve and have opportunities to lead and take simple responsibilities.

• Helpers: so that they know what to do, and when, throughout the lesson

• Equipment: so that it is right for the age group, available, in good condition, and is picked up and stored at the end of the lesson.
Courts, Equipment, Scoring and Competition

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTOR</th>
<th>PREVIOUS PRACTICE</th>
<th>FUTURE PRACTICE FOR COMPETITION</th>
<th>FUTURE PRACTICE FOR TEACHING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racquet size</td>
<td>Various sizes, usually full size</td>
<td>Specific size for age and court size</td>
<td>Specific size for age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball speed</td>
<td>Yellow ball</td>
<td>Specific speed for age (red for 8 and Under, orange for ages 9-10, green for 9-12)</td>
<td>Appropriate speed for player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net height</td>
<td>Full height net</td>
<td>Specific height for age</td>
<td>Specific height for age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Court size</td>
<td>Full size court</td>
<td>Specific size for age</td>
<td>Appropriate size for training objective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children from 5 years of age need to play and compete on court areas that match their physical stature and abilities. The full size court is out of proportion to their size and they have to adapt how they play.

The full size court is out of proportion to their size, unless they use a green ball.

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

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

For children aged 3-5, a small court or area up to 30’ x 10’, with a tape or very low net could be used. The size of the area MUST be appropriate to the size and ability of the children.

For children aged 5-8, the RED court is 36’ long and 18’ wide.

The Red court and net

The red court can fit exactly between the service court line and the baseline of the full court, because its length is the width of the normal tennis court between the doubles sidelines.

The full court from the service line to the baseline is the width of the red court.

A portable net or tape is then placed across the red court. The center service line and the serve hash marks should be made with either painted lines, throw down lines or masking tape.

On a full’ court with a standard distance between the baseline and fence, it is possible to fit six (6) red courts.

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

The red court dimensions are the same for doubles.

The height of the net must relate to the height of the child. On a red court, the net height is reduced. This height can be reduced further to help very young players.
For children aged 8-10, the orange court is 60’ long and 21’ wide.

The orange court and net
Young players between the ages of 8 and 10 are usually taller and stronger, so they need a larger court. The orange court can be marked on the full court, using either painted lines, throw down lines or masking tape. A line is placed halfway between the full court baseline and service court line at either end to make the orange court baseline. (This line is also the center service line of the red court placed in the full court backcourt.)

The orange sidelines are placed 3’ inside each full court singles sideline, to make the orange court only 21’ wide.

For doubles, the full court singles sideline becomes the outside line of the alley, giving a 3’ alley. The orange court gives 8-10 year olds a court area that is more appropriate to their physical size and ability.

The regular tennis net is used on an orange court in the US.

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

It is also possible not to use the 36’ or 60’ courts at all, but to mark out a small area, especially with very young players or with beginners for whom the net can be an obstacle to success.

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

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

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

The rule changes for 10 & Under tennis include the use of appropriate racquets and balls for each age group.

Racquet Length, Weight and Grip Size

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

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

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

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

For success, and to develop sound basic technique, young players need the right length and weight of racquet, with a grip size that fits their smaller hand. Children ages 10 & Under do vary in height, so the following recommendations are made for different ages:

- Children 3-5 should have a 19” racquet (17” are available in other nations)
- Children 5-8 should have a 19”, 21” or 23” racquet
- Children 8-10 should have a 23” or 25” racquet
- These are junior racquets with weight and grip size proportionate to the racquet length

Measuring the racquet length for the child

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

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

The yellow regulation ball is difficult for 10 & Under players to play with because:

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ball type for different ages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For children aged 3 to 5, light plastic balls, foam balls and then red felt balls are appropriate,</td>
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<tr>
<td>For children aged 5 to 8, red foam balls or red felt balls are appropriate, because they are slower, lighter, have a lower bounce, and do not travel very far. (The density and construction of the foam ball is important: some are more suitable for adults, because of their high bounce height.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For children between 8 and 9, orange balls move a little faster through the air than the red ball, but have a lower bounce height than the green ball. The ball can be hit within the confines of the 60’ court, so the player can rally, serve and volley with great success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For children between 9 and 10, green balls are faster, but have a lower bounce height than the yellow regulation ball. The green ball can be hit within the confines of the full court, so the player can rally, serve and volley with great success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Scoring and Competition

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 &amp; Under Scoring.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-5 year olds need to know how to count before they can score. By the age of 5 they may be able to play and score one game of 7 points.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The basic principle of tennis is best of three: the first player to score 2 games or sets is the winner. This format can be used successfully or 1 game only could be played.

1. 5-8 year olds can play best of 3 games of first to 7 points or just 1 game to 7 points.

2. 8-10 year olds can play best of 2 sets - first player to win 4 games with proper scoring but no ads, with a game of first to 7 points as a decider, if necessary. (These rules are for orange and green balls for 10 & Under players.)

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

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

With the above scoring systems, the length of a match should be a maximum of 20 minutes for 5-8 year olds, and 40 minutes for 8-10 year olds. This time frame is appropriate for each age group and also enables organizers to plan specific periods of time for a competition and parents can be given a start and finish time.
Lesson Structure

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

The structure and coaching role / process of each lesson should always be the same, but the time frames for each section will change at different ages. The 10 and Under Workshop will follow the basic structure of the lesson plan below, but this should be modified for 3-5 year olds to include many different activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson Plan for 3-10 year olds</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equipment needed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Organization / Safety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Warm up activities (physical skills) and teaching points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Coaching role: observe and analyze performance in an open skills situation</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Skill development and teaching points</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Coaching role: teach skills in a closed situation</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Games development and teaching points</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Coaching role: develop and evaluate skills in an open situation</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Cool down activities and homework task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Coaching role: evaluate performance</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evaluation of lesson
Lesson Content

Warm up • 20% of the lesson

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

The warm up should:

• Be dynamic, well structured, and progress through different physical activities that have been planned in advance
• Increase the focus of the children for the lesson
• Enable the players to have fun
• Help develop the specific physical skills for the age group
• Concentrate on quality so the children improve
• Be a group activity led by the coach to hold concentration

• Begin with running forward, sideways and backward, and/or skipping or jumping, to warm large muscle groups and increase the heart rate. When the players are thoroughly warm, but not tired, speed development, followed by coordination skills, such as throwing and catching, stability and balance are important. There should be simple and appropriate strength based activities, followed by a quick water break.

A number of activities should relate to the specific skills to be learned in the lesson. For example, if the lesson was to include forehands and backhands the children could move sideways and learn to catch at waist height with one hand on either side,

• For young players of 4-8 years of age, there should be five or six different ‘fun’ exercises, and for 8-10 year olds, seven to nine exercises should be included. (Several ideas for warm up can be found in the Appendix.)

Skill Development • 40% of the lesson

All technical skill development should follow the technical parameters of the different tennis strokes. These are ‘built’ into the information below. The coaching role is to develop different skills.

A major part of any lesson must be to teach children different skills so they can play. For this part of the lesson, the skills that children should learn are explained below, so that coaches can select the appropriate skills to teach in any single lesson.

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

Equipment for children 10 and Under helps them learn to serve, rally and play more quickly, but it is important to link what is being taught and the physical, mental and emotional skill abilities of the age group.

Coaches need to teach the basic skills and techniques of tennis. There is evidence that children drop out of a sport when they are not taught the skills they need to improve their play. In the past, tennis lessons often concentrated on technical skills without linking them to the game, and so made learning boring and repetitive for young players.
Young children can often learn different skills when these are ‘hidden’ in fun activities that are structured in such a way that the child develops skills without even knowing. For example:

- Hitting a ball along the ground is easy for any child. It needs a swinging action similar to hitting a ball at the side of the body. This is the precursor to hitting the ball at the side after one bounce. In addition, children can rally by hitting the ball along the ground, while learning to count the score.

- Feeding the ball underhand by either rolling or tossing it to a partner helps the child develop the arm swing and follow through of a basic forehand.

- Swinging the racquet to hit a ball with a space between the body and the ball encourages the semi-western grip: the grip then does need to be taught formally.

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

Every young player needs three basic skills to play tennis.

1. React, track and anticipate where to receive the ball as it comes towards them

2. Handle the racquet

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

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

1. Reaction, tracking, anticipation and receiving the ball
   To hit the ball coming toward them, the player must be able to react to it, track it through the air and anticipate where it will land. For example, the ball could be coming to the right or left of the player, straight at them, in front of or behind them. It could be traveling slowly or quickly and it could be spinning. The earlier children can learn to identify and track these characteristics of the ball, the easier it will be for them to anticipate where it will land and so move to the right place to receive it and hit it. Put simply, the easiest way to learn is to have lots of experience!

The challenge for coaches (and parents) of most 3-6 year olds (and even older players and adults) is to develop their ability to react, track and anticipate where to receive the ball so they can learn to hit it. The central issue is that young children - because they are young, have very little experience of reacting to and tracking moving objects, so they cannot anticipate where a ball will land. Their reaction speed is slow, but will improve if it is worked on and they gain experience.

The objective for the coach must be to increase the experience, and consequently the ability of the children to react, track, anticipate and move to the ball. Standing in lines to hit one ball at a time does not help. Neither does receiving the same ball (fed by the coach) at the same speed over and over. Coaches often think that children should have the same easy balls. That is fine if tennis (and sport) is played standing still, but it isn’t! Playing other ball sports, playing with parents and learning to catch and feed balls to other players in tennis will increase the experience and help children learn reaction, tracking and anticipation skills. The use of slower foam and red low compression balls also helps.

2. Handling the racquet
   Some young children will be used to playing with other equipment or even tennis racquets. To play tennis, the player has to hold and control the racquet. Some learn this very quickly, especially when they have a racquet of the correct length. Again, experience is essential.

3. Hitting the ball, along the ground, after the bounce and without a bounce
We know that hitting the ball depends on the player being able to track the ball, handle the racquet and coordinate specific movement. Hitting is very difficult if the previous two skills are not in place. Therefore hitting is the last skill young children should learn, not the first! Some young children find it easier to hit a ball along the ground before hitting it after the bounce and others can hit it before the bounce. While they need eventually to do all of these, giving them confidence by succeeding in one is important.

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

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

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

**Rallying: The Groundstrokes**

The objective for 10 & Under tennis (and for the ITF Play and Stay program) is to help children serve, rally and score as quickly as possible. This objective for early success means children should learn to play as they develop the basic strokes. The rally skills - the groundstrokes - are learned first, because they are easier and because then children can play a game.

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

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Right from the start the coach should help children do things well. It is much easier to build the correct skill base than change grips and actions as young players develop.
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Instead of concentrating on the grip as has happened in the past, if coaches show young players the basic shape of the racquet action away from their body and to the side, and get them to copy it, the grip will just happen. Making a space between the body and the racquet, and using shorter racquets with low compression balls, means young players have to adopt a sound and comfortable grip that will be very close to the right one, without knowing they have done so.

The basic racquet action for the groundstroke is to:

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

The most suitable grips are linked to the basic action:

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

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

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

The Serve

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

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

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

The basic underhand serve should be developed as follows:

• Start with the racquet head vertical to the ground with the ball held on the strings, out in front of the body (as for the overhand serve). Starting with both hands close and the racquet vertical helps the grip and then the coordinated action.
• The children stand behind the baseline, turned sideways, with feet about shoulder width apart to help their balance. The children should stay sideways throughout the action.

• Move the racquet and ball arms in opposite directions (as for the overhand serve). The racquet is taken back with one hand and the ball is tossed straight up, a short distance in the air with the other hand so that it drops onto the racquet as it swings forward. This coordinated separation of the arms is very important and should be taught in the first serving lesson. Once it is in place, the serve is easy!

• Swing the racquet swing forwards after contact to finish in front of the body.

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

For the basic overhand serve the player should:

• Start by holding the racquet and ball held together out in front of the body as for the underhand serve

• Stand sideways to the baseline, with feet about shoulder width apart for balance

• Split (separate) the racquet arm and ball arm simultaneously and move them in opposite directions. (This is a complex coordination movement that some children find difficult to start with, but simply needs time, help and patience from the coach)

• Move the ball arm up to release the ball above and in front of the head, and swing the racquet arm past and behind the body before moving it quickly up and forward to contact the ball

• Extend the arm so the racquet contacts the ball slightly in front and to the side of the body

• Follow through with the racquet arm moving across the body to the opposite side.

The children should be shown the WHOLE serve action several times and then asked ‘Can you do that?’ The serve should NOT be broken into different parts. The practice of breaking the overhand serve action down into parts should be avoided for the vast majority of children who are quite capable of copying the whole action if they are given a little time to practice.

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

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

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

• An accurate ball toss is VERY difficult for young children. Their center of gravity is very high and with their arm extended above their head, their balance is compromised, so the ball toss cannot be accurate on a consistent basis, regardless of how much it is practiced.

• The balance issue also impacts the position of the feet on the serve. 10 & Under players can maintain their balance better with their feet apart throughout the action.

• Young children should not be taught to bend their knees on the serve, since their lower leg strength is not yet sufficient to contribute to the serve action through the kinetic chain, and neither is their ability to use a fully coordinated action.
• Teaching young players to rotate the hips and shoulders is of no real value given their stage of physical development.

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

The volley

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

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

The basic volley action should encourage the children to:

• Hold the racquet head up and above the hand with their elbows away from their body and out in front, so that they punch the racquet head forward at the ball

• Keep the action very short with the wrist firm

• Finish the stroke with the racquet in front, the opposite foot to the racquet hand forward so they maintain their balance

• Teach the continental grip after a little while, but a forehand or backhand grip are fine to start with

Game Development • 30% of the lesson

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

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

Consistency

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

Accuracy

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

Positioning

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

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

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

Cool Down and Homework • 10% of lesson

The coaching role is to evaluate the lesson with the children.

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

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

Evaluation

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

Differentiation

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

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

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

For example, in learning to rally:

- Some children could be rallying the ball over the net using racquets
- Others could have one child throwing the ball for another to hit, for a hit and catch rally between them
• Others could have two children throwing and catching to each other for a rally from a position close to the net

• Others could be rallying the ball between each other along the ground

• Others could be close together without a net, tapping the ball onto markers on the ground

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

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

• The playing areas

• Having a net or not

• Having a racquet or not

• It would also be possible to change to a faster or slower ball

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

• Rules of the task

• Court areas children use

• Balls used

When and Why to Move Children to the Next Level

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

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

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

• The physical size of the child may mean he/she should move to a bigger court. The court size (width and length) and net height always need to fit the physical stature of the player. Height and leg and arm length, are all linked and in proportion for most 10 and Under children, so a taller player can play on a larger court.
• The more skilled child may need a longer racquet and faster ball in order to stay challenged and improve.

• Some young players may be able to play more often. Their ability to play the game at a higher level than other children, rather than just perform the technical skills, is an important consideration in deciding when to move the child up.

• It is important to provide a positive social environment for each child. Young children, especially girls, want to be with their friends, so moving them to another level and group of players could prove counterproductive.

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

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

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

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

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

• Playing the game well (is tactically sound, able to move the ball and the opponent around, can serve overhand consistently to both sides and different areas of the service court, and can vary the depth of the ball deliberately)

• Able to score without adult help

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

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

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

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

Understanding appropriate competitive formats for 10 and Under means understanding the mental, emotional and social abilities of children and what they can do. Teaching competitive skills to children without this understanding is unlikely to be successful. As previously noted, these abilities (p. 4-10), but some are repeated here in order to emphasize the important role of coaches in developing competitive skills.

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

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

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

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

Parents are an important element of coaching 10 & Under players, because they are important in the lives of their children.

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

The coach needs also to understand the consequences of the child’s relationship with their parents and make sure the parents are present, when necessary, for the child, and especially with 3 to 5 year olds... Inevitably both the relationships and the roles change as children develop and mature.

3-5 year olds want their parents close by. The parent is a strong and visible support to them. The parents should remain outside the court (unless they are helpers) and should not offer comments to the child during the lesson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The issues for coaches to consider are:

1. Facilities and surfaces: Slippery surfaces, especially indoors or after rain, debris on the court, fences, net cranks and posts are all potential hazards. Red courts are usually positioned across the full court and creating spaces between them is important. If clay courts are used, the nailed lines should be checked.

2. Equipment. Balls: ball carts, racquets, racquet bags and other equipment left on court are all potential safety hazards for players.

3. Environmental conditions: Rain, lightening, heat and humidity are all conditions that can affect practice and play. The coach and the facility should have policies and procedures in place to determine when sessions should be cut short or not take place.

4. Children and space: The coach needs to constantly vigilant about creating space between the players because they will not necessarily have the self-awareness to do so. Young children need to be given guidelines about, for example, when to collect balls and when to stop any activity.

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

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

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

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

Heat and humidity are real issues and the coach must be vigilant in monitoring the effects on young players.

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

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

**Goal setting** is a tool for coaches and players to help 10 & Under players reach levels of competency that fit their age of stage of development. Making progress inspires even young players!

Goals should obviously be in time frames that fit such young players: 10 & Under players will need shorter time frames than 10 to 13 year olds. Coaches should have physical, technical, tactical and mental/emotional process goals for each player, although these are not necessarily communicated to the players. The goals should match the competencies in different skills for the age group. Competitive (outcome) goals should be of minor importance for young players.

**Evaluating and monitoring of players**

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

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

**Evaluating and monitoring coaching performance**

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

The coach should also make sure that all insurances and professional memberships are kept up to date.

Regular and on-going training should be automatically undertaken.

Background checks are important and are increasingly necessary for coaches.

Parents and managers can also contribute to coach evaluation and monitoring on a regular basis. In a program where several coaches work together, there is also an invaluable opportunity for coaches to help and evaluate each other on a regular basis.
APPENDIX

ACTIVITIES AND DRILLS FOR 10 & UNDER PLAYERS
Warm Up

The warm up should help young children develop the appropriate physical skills for the age. They should also link directly to the technical skills. Balance, agility and coordination are especially important... It is important that coaches watch each child and help them develop quality movement. The games and activities that follow provide useful ideas.

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

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

Developing a variety of physical skills during the warm up

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

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

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

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

4. Stealer
   - Every player starts with a ball balanced on the racquet. The objective is to try to steal the ball from other players’ racquets and to collect the most balls.

5. Grandmother’s Footsteps
   - Players start on the baseline with a ball and a racquet. The coach stands at the net facing them. When the coach faces the other way, the players must try to reach the coach while balancing the ball on the racquet. When the coach turns around, the players must stand still. If the ball falls off or if they are still moving, they go back to the baseline.
6. Cone Walks
   Walk with a cone balanced on the head with hands behind back.
   Walk with a cone balanced on the head and one on each arm - walk slowly at first, then faster.

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

8. Rolling Racers
   Players are in pairs. The coach starts at the net and rolls a hoop toward the baseline. Players have to chase the hoop and link their hands through the hoop while it is moving. They must count how many seconds they keep their hands together before the hoop stops rolling or they knock it over.

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

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

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

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

3. Cuckoo
   Players are in two small teams. Each team has a ball and is given a color that matches one of the cones on the court. When the coach says, “Go”, the players must take their ball and put it on any cone that is NOT their team color. They move any balls off that the other team has placed. They may not go back to any cone twice in a row and must pick up and put down by standing with their back to the cone, twisting around to place the ball down with two hands.
4. Follow the Ball
   The coach stands in front of the players, who are in the ready position and spaced out on the court. The coach has a ball in one hand that s/he moves in different directions. Players must move in the direction of the ball – left, right, forward and backward. At any time, the coach can shout out the name of a player. As s/he does, players toss the ball in the air. If the named player can get to it and catch it before it bounces twice, s/he becomes the coach.

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

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

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

8. Masters of the Sky
   Players spread out on the court. The coach shows different arm movements using both arms together.
   1. Eagle: arms outstretched gliding around
   2. Hummingbird: arms move as fast as possible
   3. Sparrow: arms move up and down at a medium pace
   4. Albatross: arms move in big circles as in the serve.
   The coach calls out which bird the players must be and then jog around without touching anyone.

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

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

In pairs, throw a large ball:

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

Jumping

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

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

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

Develop the following progressions:

1. running action through the rope while staying in place
2. hopping over the rope
3. sideways
4. backward
5. high knees
Reaction speed (responding quickly to a stimulus)

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

Strength (without weights)

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

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

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

Handling the racquet

1. Walk the dog
   roll the ball around cone with the racquet, then try to score a goal by hitting ball to a target
tap the ball along the lines. As above, but using both sides of the racquet

2. Keep-it-ups
   hit ball in air, let it bounce, hit again
   bounce ball down with racquet
   hit ball in air with alternate sides of the racquet
   hit ball with strings, then side of the racquet
   hit ball with strings, then handle
   hit ball and change racquet into the other hand
   hit ball with racquet behind back
   try to keep two balls in the air at once

Rallying

Across the court / over a line (no net)

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

Over the net

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

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

Accuracy

1. To understand the idea of space, players throw the ball over the net away from partner, so partner has to move to catch it

2. One feeder and one hitter. The feeder tosses the ball and the hitter tries to hit the ball back over the net so that the feeder cannot catch the ball after an appropriate number of bounces. Players change roles after a number of turns or a certain number of successful shots

3. One feeder and one hitter. The feeder hits the ball in and the hitter tries to hit ball to a designated space. The feeder tries to hit ball back and then play out the rally.
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