



photo courtesy of Yves Boulais

Utilizing QuickStart in a Tough Economy

Times are tough in our global economy. Tennis, however, continues to grow in the US and in many other countries throughout the world. QuickStart, PTR Kids Tennis, and the ITF Play and Stay Campaign will be pivotal in the continued expansion of tennis into the 21st century.

In order to run a successful QuickStart program, an initial investment is required to purchase balls, nets and lines. The obvious return on investment is the ability to put numerous players on a single tennis court. In addition to multiple players on court, there are many other economic advantages of running a successful QuickStart/PTR Kids Tennis program that are often overlooked.

by Craig S. Jones

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EQUIPMENT

Balls

The cost of foam and low compression balls is more than standard balls. However, they last much longer and therefore money is saved in the long run. Additionally, with a change in teaching methodology, even greater savings can be achieved (see next page).

Don't forget to sell foam and low compression balls in your pro shop. Imagine not selling regular tennis balls in a pro shop. If you are teaching clinics with the balls, you want your students to practice with the right ball.

Nets

Once training begins with modified equipment, you realize that costs can be reduced by building your own mini-nets. Obviously, there are economic reasons behind these makeshift nets. However, there are benefits to using caution tape, rope, pennant flags, etc.

- With a regular net, if the ball is hit too low, the rally starts over. With some type of string or rope, the ball can be hit over or under, sustaining the rally so kids can succeed whatever the age and ability.
- There are numerous drills to intentionally hit, toss or roll the ball under the net/string. This adds another dimension of creativity for teaching on the 36' court.
- Make it a rule that students cannot touch the net/string during the clinic. The obvious reason is students may cause the net to be lowered. That is just the beginning. See if they can come up with creative ways to go under or over the net when switching sides; limbo, Starsky & Hutch roll under, duck walk, lift their legs or jump over (bigger kids). Not only does it teach the students a basic rule not to touch the net, it serves as another source of athletic development.

Lines

Lines can be another source of stress for pros. Remember, there is a huge difference between official competition and training. For training purposes, put down the bare minimum number of lines for clinics.

36' Courts

- For six 36' courts on a regular court, use a total of eight throw down lines (TDL) during classes, unless working on the serve.
- For the two courts that go from the 78' court baselines to the fence, put two TDLs on each side for the baseline. Don't worry about the sidelines; the fence can be a boundary (the ball hits it, the point ends). The fence can also be utilized for competition, making it like wally ball on a racquetball court where players can bank a shot off of it and it counts.
- For the other four courts, don't worry about adding lines unless you are working on serving. For the 36' court closest to the regular net, use the net as a boundary the same way as the fence.

- If practicing serve, place one TDL per side.
- For official competition, tape down the lines (2" light green painters tape) so the kids can be on an official court. This cost should be picked up by the local league or included in the tournament budget.

60' Courts

- Keep the same philosophy for the 60' court, only put down the bare minimum. For the baseline, use two or three TDLs on each side.
- For our clinics, we rarely put down the sidelines because we normally put two 60' x 18' courts on one court. This is done by using the center line to doubles lines as 60' court sidelines.
- To make two side by side 60' x 21' courts, put three TDLs 3 feet outside of each doubles line. Remember that a regulation net on a 78' court extends 3 feet past the doubles line. Just use the net posts as your guide when putting down the TDLs.
- For a full 60 x 21' singles court, put two TDLs on each sideline, three at the very most.

Set up of TDLs

Utilize "cheat marks" on the courts. Use a Sharpie pen and put marks where the TDLs go. Then, train the kids to put out the nets and TDLs. You will be surprised how many kids fight over the chance to put down or take up the nets and TDLs.

Be as creative as possible with TDL alternatives. Chalk works great on hard courts, use your racquet to mark lines on clay courts, and string or rope work just fine. Remember, it is practice, and as long as it is safe, anything goes.

Racquets

QuickStart has specific length requirements for junior racquets. At first this seems like a hassle, but it has meant a lot of sales for our pro shop. Now the racquet companies are manufacturing many more 25" racquets to meet the 60' court requirements. Instead of jumping from a 23" to a 26", most kids will and should progress to a 25". In addition, racquet manufacturers are starting to offer composite, high performance 23" racquets. Because little kids on the 36' court want to look like little Federer and Williams, not Barbie and Spiderman, their parents don't mind spending \$40 on a 23" racquet.

Clothing

Once again, kids want to look like little pros and what could be more important than clothing? Clothing manufacturers are getting on board and making more and more junior clothing that looks like what the pros wear. If you have a pro shop, don't be afraid to increase your junior clothing stock from last year.

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photo Patrick Dobler

Space

Everyone with a little QuickStart knowledge knows about putting six 36' or two 60' courts on one regular court. There are plenty of other sources and combinations you can use to maximize court space.

1. Take advantage of the space between courts. If there is no gazebo between the courts, string caution tape from net post to net post to create another narrow 60' court.
2. Take advantage of the space from net post to side fence. Many courts have a great deal of room from the outside of the court to the fence. Connect caution tape to the net post and run it to the side fence, and if there is no fence, connect it to a teaching cart, ball hopper or even a chair.
3. Make sure to always recycle the caution tape. You can use it again and again.
4. Remember for 60' courts, there is still wasted space from the 78' court baseline to fence. This is a great place to put another 36' court facing the other direction (one on each end of the court). This is great for disparity of levels in a clinic or to work on transition topics.
5. Most clubs have a backboard and most backboards have a perfect concrete pad for a 36' court.
6. Think outside of the box (your facility) and look at any area with concrete. Maybe there is a road for service vehicles that is long and wide enough, or a safe area of your parking lot. This is great when you have frozen clay courts or a tournament in progress.

Time

Multiple court income is the way to go to maximize income. I have shown (in the previous column) how to fit more kids on court. You can leverage your space and time even more.

1. Since there is more court space, why not add another clinic or program at the same time? At our club, we have up to three different clinics going on at once. In the summer or on Saturdays, why not use two regular courts to conduct an under 10s' class (with up to 40 kids) the same time the adults are playing league?
2. If you have a reduced staff, or just a little extra space, you can overlap clinics to increase revenue. While one class is doing conditioning (fewer instructors needed), the other class can start with a mini-tennis warm up for 20 minutes. While the older kids are doing match play (fewer instructors needed), start the 6-8 year olds' class in the parking lot with 36' courts.

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The two keys to QuickStart success are to put appropriate competition in place and change your view as to how you teach tennis to players under 10 years old. The main change in methodology needs to be kids working together. They can work together rolling a ball back and forth, feeding balls to each other, rallying a ball together, or just performing a basic cooperative skill. The byproduct of this change in methodology is an increase in quality of instruction, with kids learning as they help each other, and even greater profit margins for your program.

- When kids are able to work together on the 36' court, it allows you to roam and observe more players.
- When kids are actively engaged in pairs and groups, you can provide more one on one instruction (feedback) without stopping the entire group.
- Courts are smaller and closer together, which means closer proximity to the kids than ever before. There are now 24-36 kids on six courts in the span of 120 feet!
- Employing skilled feeders is no longer an issue, since the kids can feed to each other. A 3.5 lady or high school player with a great personality are perfect "instructors". Teaching tactics to 7 year olds is not that complicated.
- Athletic development is of extreme importance in a successful U10 program. You can easily have an instructor safely handle 8-12 kids at a time.
- The more capable the kids are, the more you can handle. An alert pro can easily handle 10 kids playing points and provide quality instruction.
- Work on giving the kids fewer and fewer balls to use. A basket of 40 balls just means if they miss they can grab

another one. We want to put a premium on control and when kids have a limited supply of balls, they focus more on staying within boundaries.

- When you have kids dead ball feed to each other, make them chase the balls hit, or add a third kid as catcher. Any ball that is struck is a great opportunity for someone to work on tracking and receiving skills.
- Purchase small plastic containers for the balls. We have \$1.80 containers that hold 8-10 red balls (foam or large low compression). If kids feed to each other, they should never feed more than 4 or 5 at a time before rotating.

Don't Get Greedy

One of the mistakes I made early on was listening to the cash register go cha-ching, instead of focusing on the quality. Yes, you can increase the student to teacher ratio, just be careful.

1. Younger kids have shorter attention spans and need to be observed more carefully.
2. Lower skilled players cannot rally at first and are not able to perform as many cooperative skills.
3. Working on a developmental theme, such as introducing the overhead, requires more instruction than playing a group game.

So remember, when the children need more attention, keep the ratio smaller.

CONCLUSION

It is easy to see the financial benefits of running a well planned QuickStart program. With just a little money, you can receive a tremendous return on your investment. Just remember that quality is more important than quantity, and the money will come!