

Top 10 Games & Activities Every Coach Should Know

Welcome to Top 10 Games and Drills Every Coach Should Know. This manual was developed for use by rookie coaches, mid school and high school coaches, and tennis instructors who are responsible for conducting team practices and group lessons for beginning, intermediate, and advanced players.

This manual attempts to narrow down the most fundamental on-court activities into an easy-to-follow coaches guide. The activities chosen were able to meet the following criteria: 1) handle 4-8 players per court, 2) be operated by the coach or the students, 3) adaptable to various skill levels, and 4) Able to integrate technical and tactical issues. Coaches are encouraged to build upon this base of activities with additional drills and games as they continue gaining experience.

Consistent with “play based” coaching, it is important to structure practices and workouts based on observing players in match situations. This provides the context for which skills can be developed and honed. The practice formula below provides an ideal framework for helping players master skills and be effective in match play.

1. Fun Warm-up (includes movement, tracking, and rallying)
2. Theme of the Day (based on observing players in match situations).
3. Structured match play with supervised coaching (utilize creative scenarios and roam amongst matches)
4. Fun Wrap-Up and Cool Down (Large group game with everyone participating)

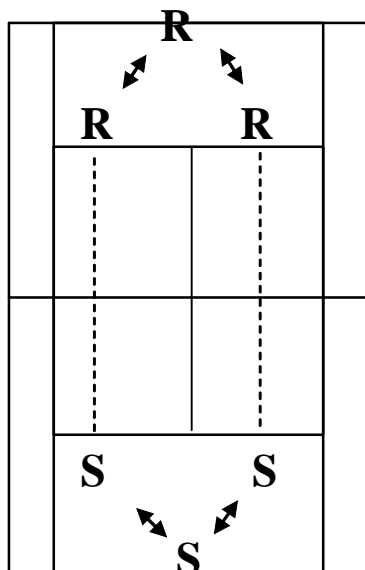
Coaches can pick and choose from the drills in this manual and plug them into the formula above based on their needs. In addition, this manual includes information on basic strategies, suggestions for properly incorporating ball feeding drills and point playing drills, as well as information on how to organize practices with limited courts and multiple players.

I hope this manual proves to be a handy resource for your daily coaching activities and I wish you a lot of fun and success in all your coaching endeavors!

Jason Jamison, 2005

Warm-Up/Stroke Grooving

Cooperative Warm-Up

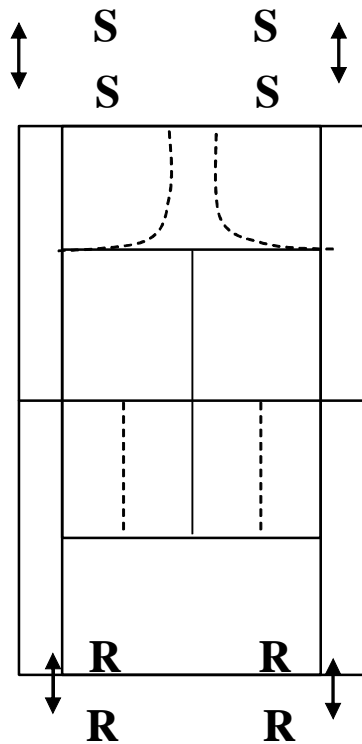


Players rally with one another half court beginning from the service line and progressing gradually to the baseline. Note the progression as follows:

1. Service line to service line ground strokes
2. 3/4 court to 3/4 court ground strokes
3. Full-court ground strokes
4. Net to baseline (volleys & overheads) and switch
5. Serves and Returns (see diagram below)

Variations:

- Extra players can rotate in after an error is made.
- Practice hitting cross-court and down the line.
- Allow only one ball on the court for each two players. When a player misses, they must hustle to get the ball.
- Play out points with one ball in play. Whoever misses rotates out.
- Play out points with two balls in play. Begin with two simultaneous crosscourt rallies. Once the first error is made, the remaining ball becomes live and is played out amongst the four players (= "One-Ball Live" Game).



Serve, Return, and Rally (6-8 per court)

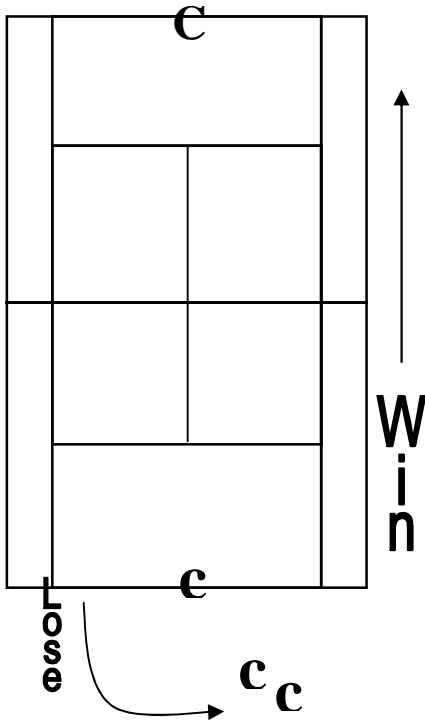
Two teams of servers and returners compete against each other. In order to score a point, the server must get the ball into the correct box and the returner must return the ball cross-court to the server. Servers switch out after each point. Games can be played to 7 or 11. Teams can race against each other or each turn can be taken gradually so proper form is not compromised.

Variations:

- For more advanced players, require a serve, return, and two rallies for a point to be earned.
- Score points for the team each time the ball crosses the net.
- Require players to serve from singles and doubles positions.
- Divide the service box and require certain placements or spins to be executed.
- Have the servers compete against the returners on the diagonal half court.
- Have the servers alternate with the returners after each point (works well for larger numbers and keeps players moving).

Singles Games

Champ of the Court Singles (4-6) per court



A designated champion competes against a line of challengers. Points can be started with a ground stroke or with serving and returning. If a challenger wins the first point, they play out a second point. If they win two points in a row, they become the Champ.

Variations:

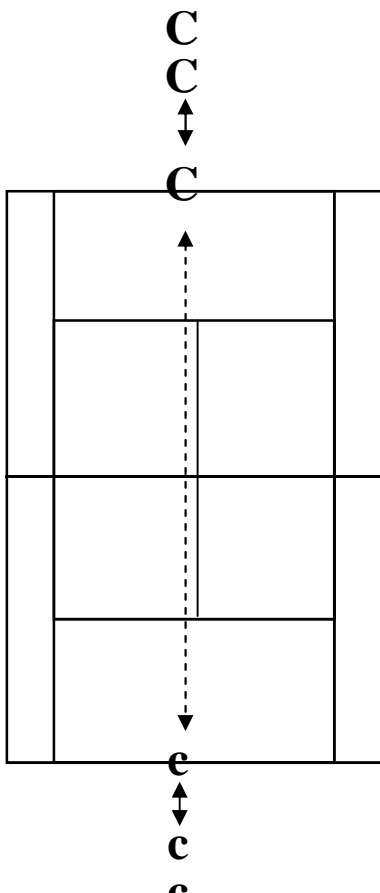
longer lines, players should take turns playing out one point at a time. Once a challenger accumulates three total points, they take the place of the Champ.

require a player waiting at the net post (on deck) to take the place of the champion. divide the court in half to create two separate games.

require the champ or the challengers to start at the service line to focus on net play.

The coach can feed the ball into play to create different scenarios (e.g. high and deep to backhand, short approach, running forehand, etc.).

Champions and Challengers (6-8 per court)



Three or four players on each side play out singles points, one player at a time. One side is the Champions side and the other side is the Challengers side. If a player wins the point, they go to the end of the line on the Champions side. If they lose the point, they go to the end of the line on the Challengers side. Players can start the point with a baseline feed or with a serve and return.

Variations:

coach can feed the ball into play to create different point scenarios (e.g. high and deep to backhand, short approach, first volley, running forehand, etc.).

keep the game moving, require players to switch sides of the court after every point, regardless of who won the point.

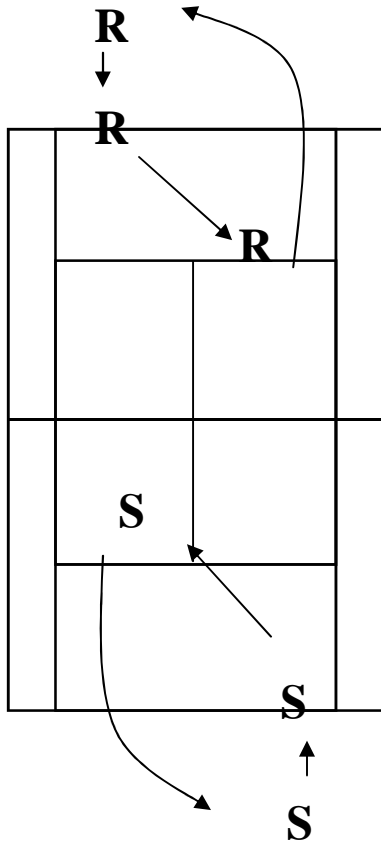
allow only one hit per player before running to the other side of the court (Around the World).

require that the first player to win 7 cumulative points "wins the court" and does not have to pick up balls.

play two games straight ahead by dividing the court in half down the centerline.

This will accommodate 12-16 players per court.

Doubles Games

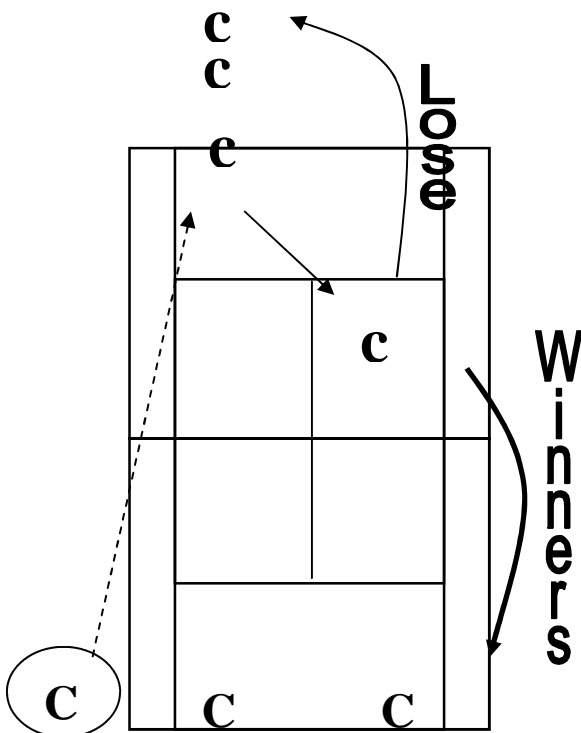


Team Doubles (6-8 per court)

One side is the serving side and one side is the returning side. After a point is played out, players take turns rotating one spot through the doubles positions. Games can be played to 7 or 11 with teams switching sides of the court after each game. This serving and returning rotation can be played from deuce court to deuce court or from ad court to ad court.

Variations:

- If a player makes an error, they immediately rotate out to the end of the line.
- The coach can require players and/or award extra points for serving and volleying, poaching, lobbing the return, etc., depending on the skill being emphasized.
- The coach can play on one of the teams or play in a fixed position that the players rotate around.



Champs of the Court Doubles— Rotating Approach (6-8 per court)

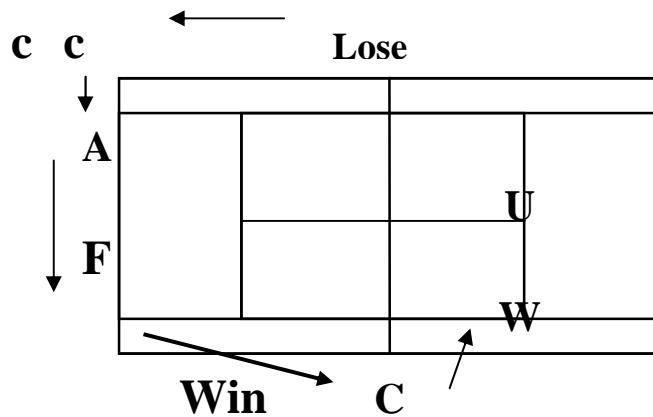
The champions start off at the baseline on the same side as the Coach. The challengers play three points against the champions. On the first point, the coach feeds a short ball to the approaching player on the challengers' side. The coach feeds the second point as a volley or half-volley. The third and final point is fed as an overhead. If the challengers win 2 out of 3, they take the place of the champions. The coach counts down, "3-2-1" and feeds the next team while the new champions hustle over and play out the point.

Note: The coach can vary the success experienced by each player by adjusting the difficulty of the feed.

Fun Group Games

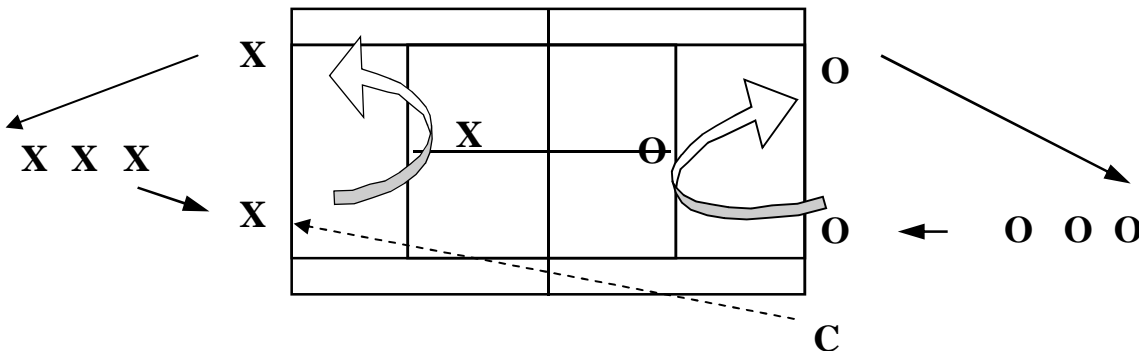
Pro Tour (6-8 per court)

The ball is put in play amongst four players on the court. All the challengers (Challenger Circuit) wait on deck and substitute into the game following a counter clockwise rotation. The goal is to work up towards the last position of the rotation (US Open) without being knocked out of the game and back to the outhouse. Whenever a player loses a point, they immediately go to the outhouse and players rotate to fill the gap. Whoever remains in the U.S. Open position after a designated number of points (e.g. 21) wins the game. The counter clockwise rotation is as follows: challengers → Australian Open → French Open → Commercial Shoot (net post) → Wimbledon → U.S. Open. Note: This game can be played full court or as a fast action net game with players starting at the service line on both



Triples (6-12 per court)

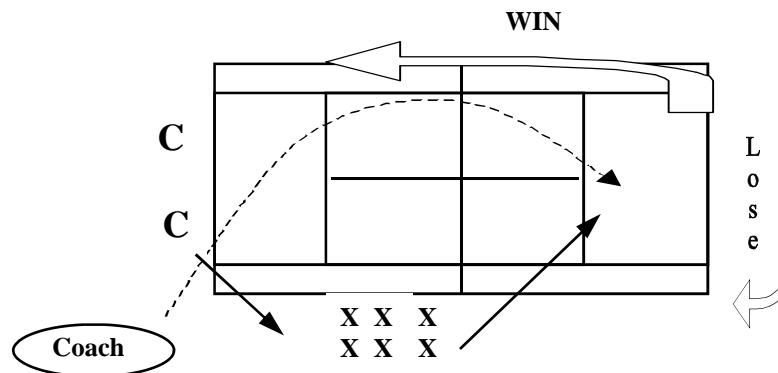
Players are divided into two teams (usually between 3-6 players per team). Each side forms a triangle with one person at the net and two people at the corners of the baseline. Extra players wait at the back fence to fill in from the baseline after each point. The ball is fed into play and the point is played out. After each point, the team that is fed the ball rotates counterclockwise and the other team rotates clockwise. The first team to 11 wins the game. This game helps develop quicker reactions and alertness at the net.



Fun Group Games--Super Sized

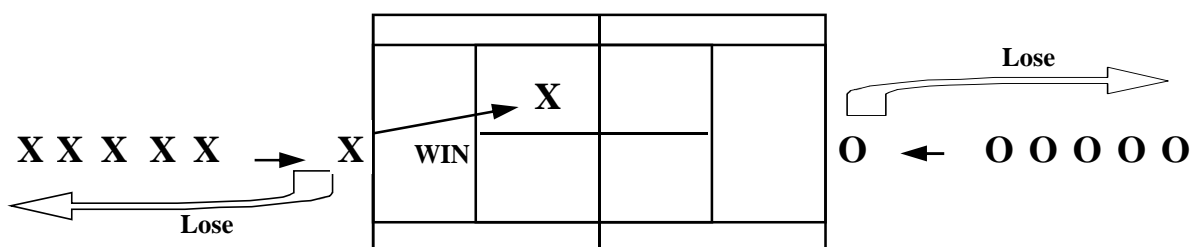
Deep Desperation (10-20+ players per court)

A doubles team (champions) is placed on one baseline. All other players line up at the net post with a partner. The instructor begins each point with a high lob to the open court. The first team at the net post must chase down the lob (letting it bounce) and play out the point against the champion team. If the challenging team wins, they run over to replace the champions while a new ball is fed high into the air to the next challenging team. If a challenging team loses the point, they quickly go to the end of the line and the next team of challengers comes in to play out the lob. Whoever is left in the champion position after a designated number of points is played wins the game.



Wipe-out (10-20 players per court)

Players are divided into two teams and line up on opposite baselines. The first person from one team plays a point against the first person from the other team (singles court). The side that wins the point gets to add another player onto the court and challenges a new player on the other team (thus it becomes 2 vs. 1, doubles boundaries vs. singles boundaries). The goal is to get six players onto the court without losing a point to win the game. If a team loses a point against a single player from the other side, the team is wiped out and the other side gets to add a player. This game usually seesaws back and forth with teams adding players and then getting wiped out. This game is effective for extra large groups of 10 – 30 people per court. If singles points are not desired or team size is very large, points can begin with a minimum of two players on each side. Note: Always start the ball from the side with the fewer number of players in the game and be sure players maintain their batting order.



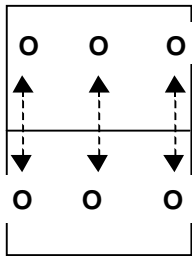
Conducting Effective Team Practices

Suggested Team Practice Formula

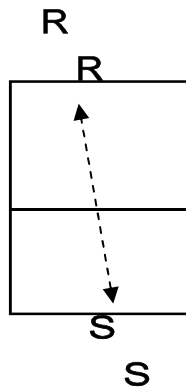
1. Fun Warm –Up (movement, tracking, and cooperative hitting)
2. Theme of the Day (based on observations from match play—tactical, technical, mental, and physical)
3. Structured Match Play with Supervised Coaching (utilize creative scenarios & roam amongst matches)
4. Fun Wrap-Up and Cool Down (large group game/activity involving everyone)

Court Management (Diagrams below can accommodate 16-24 players)

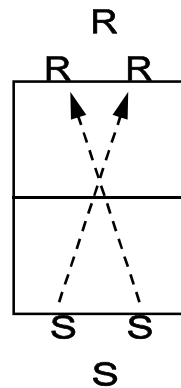
Option A (The Roaming Coach): Coach deputizes players to operate drills and roams amongst the courts—The same theme or different themes can be assigned to each court based on player needs.



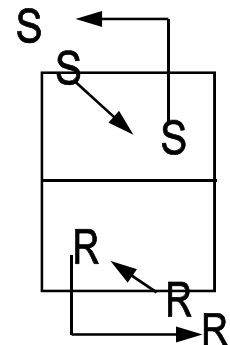
Cooperative Rallying



Team Singles

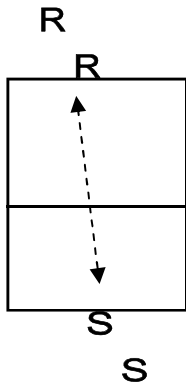


Serves/Returns

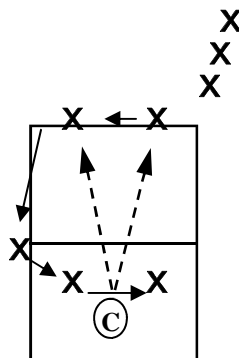


Team Doubles

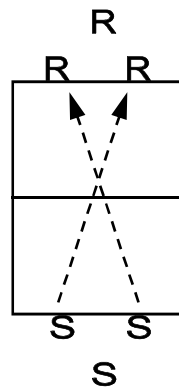
Option B (The Stationed Coach): *The coach stays on one court with a specific theme and assigns fixed themes to other courts (singles theme court, doubles theme court, serves/returns court). Players are rotated through each court every 15-25 minutes so that everyone gets a chance to work with the coach.



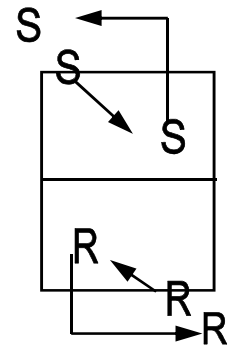
Singles Theme
(e.g. Drills # 2 & #3)



***Coach Drill**
(e.g. drill # 6)



Serves/Returns
(e.g. Drill # 2)



Doubles Theme
(e.g. Drills #4 & #5)

Coaches Dilemma: How do I run a practice if I only have 3-4 courts and 20-25 players to teach?

Solution: To start the practice, divide the team into two groups. The first group can begin the dynamic warm-up and light fitness activities off-court and the second group can begin the stroke grooving/cooperative warm-up on court. After 15 minutes, the two groups switch. Once all players have completed the dynamic warm-up and stroke grooving, the coach can break the players into theme courts as diagrammed on the opposite page.

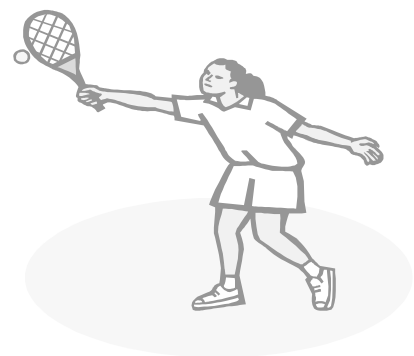
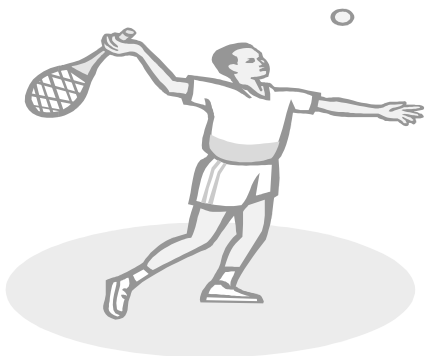
Option 2: Offer two separate practice times: Varsity 3:00 – 4:30; Junior Varsity 4:15 – 5:30—JV players can begin the dynamic warm-up off court for the first 15 minutes. Also, a special day can be set aside such as Friday afternoons for a “farm team” practice so that no one is cut from the team. Top ranked varsity players can be deputized to serve as assistant coaches to help develop the farm team.

How can I structure my practices to integrate my varsity and junior varsity players?

Pick a game and organize multi-court competitions with players of mixed ability. Winning teams move up to the next higher court and losing teams move down to the next lower court. Thus, all players have an opportunity to work up to a higher court. The coach can also require that teams split up each time they move to a new court = mix and split.

MODIFIED GAME & MATCH PLAY SITUATIONS

- Play tie-breakers or start each game at deuce
- Closing out a match: One player starts receiving with a 4-1 lead
- Coming from behind: One player starts serving down 1-4
- Playing a pusher: One player can only hit moonballs
- Coping with cheating: Each player can make two intentional bad calls per set
- Converting games: Once at 40, must convert the game or go back to 0
- Playing under pressure: Creative consequences—Have two players play a tie-breaker with all other players watching, 1/2 cheering for one player and 1/2 cheering for the other with the losing team carrying in the equipment at the end of practice.
- Must serve and volley at least once a game
- Ace wins game; double-fault loses game
- A player is given three serves per point to increase aggressiveness with serve
- Server gets to start halfway between the service line and the baseline (helps returner get adjusted to playing against hard servers)
- A player is given 1 serve per point to focus on consistency
- One player serves underhand for the other player to work on attacking weak serves
- Groundstroke games to 7, 11, or 21—Options:
 - Three balls in play before point begins (encourages consistency)
 - No points awarded for hitting winners (encourages consistency)
 - Players must approach the net on balls landing inside the service line
 - Bonus points awarded for winning points at the net (3 or 5 point bonus—rewards net play and closing out points)



Singles and Doubles Strategies for the Recreational Player

Fundamental Singles Strategies:

1. Get it in
2. Move it around
3. Mix it Up
4. Hit to a weakness
5. Utilize strengths

Fundamental Doubles Strategies:

1. Get it in (first serve & every return)
2. Hit deep to deep (to build point) = be steady when in the backcourt
3. Hit close to close (to finish point) = be aggressive when at the net
4. Hit to weaknesses/or to the weaker player
5. Utilize strengths

Common Shortcomings for High School Tennis Players

Singles:

1. Failure to get the serve and return in play--no intent
2. Short and inconsistent rallies
3. Playing too tentatively--pushing
4. Poor shot selection --choosing the wrong shot at the wrong time
5. Not mixing it up--hitting at only one speed

Doubles:

1. Poor positioning and movement
2. Failure to get the serve or return in play
3. Passiveness and reluctance at the net--shirking responsibility
4. Playing low percentage shots--trying to win points outright (= dingles instead of doubles)
5. Lack of communication

Doubles Match Play

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

As the server: Stand further away from the center mark than when playing singles. Get your first serve in with the intent of setting up your partner for putaways. Typically, serving towards the centerline of the service box will give your partner the best chance to poach because it reduces the angles of the returner. Always try and communicate with your partner where you plan to serve.

As the server's partner: Start in the center of the service box. Leaning over towards the alley gives the returner too much area to return the ball cross court. Shift in the direction in which the ball is served--if served wide, shift out wide; if served down the middle, shift to the middle. Stay active at the net with a lot of movement and always look for an opportunity to make a play on the ball.

As the returner: Generally hit your shots cross court, away from the net person in front of you, to set up your partner for put always. Occasionally, hit down the alley to keep the net player honest and don't hesitate to lob to change momentum and/or to keep your opponents from taking the net. Focus on quick feet and attacking the return with forward momentum as opposed to taking a big swing.

As the returner's partner: Start at the service line. Make the call on the service line and immediately focus your attention on the net person directly across from you; once the ball passes their reach, close towards the net in the direction the ball is traveling and look for an opportunity to make a play on the ball.

COMMON THEMES:

- If you are at the net, you are the closer. Look to finish points.
- If you are in the backcourt, you are the assist person. Generally, hit the ball safely cross court to set up your partner for putaways. Remember, a good doubles player is someone that not only can finish at the net, but more importantly can set up their partner to close off points.
- Only hit to the person at the net directly in front of you if you can put the ball away or if that person is significantly weaker than the other player.
- When at the net, focus your attention on the person closest to you until the ball passes their reach.
- To increase reaction time, always keep your eyes on your opponents and never watch your partner hit the ball.
- When attempting to poach, if the ball is low coming at you, let it go; if the ball is high, say goodbye!
- Be prepared to poach anytime your opponents have to dig the ball out of a low position.
- Develop a ritual of communicating with your partner between points to share thoughts about serving and returning options as well as to build greater unity and chemistry throughout the match.

Finally, remember this tennis adage:

First Serve, First Return, First Volley--Put pressure on your opponents through consistent execution, smart shot selection, and good court positioning.

Singles Match Play

Singles in tennis is a one on one competition between players of all ages, gender and skill levels.

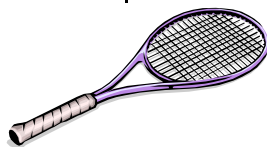
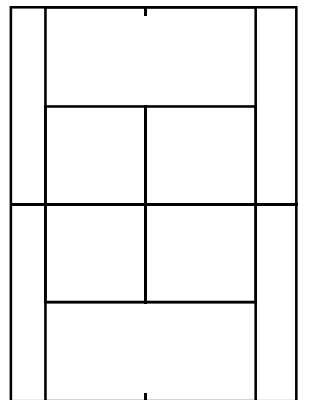
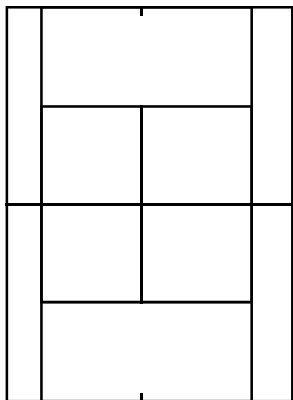
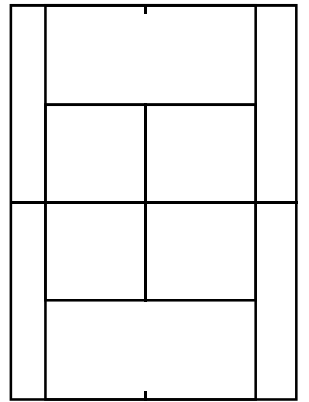
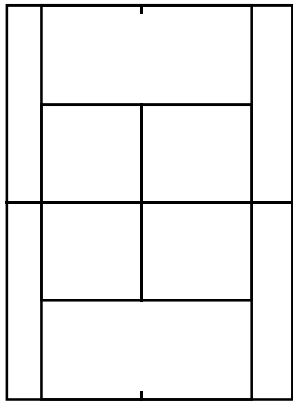
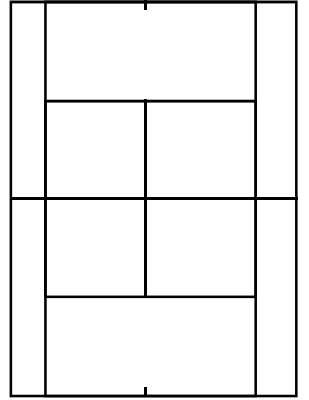
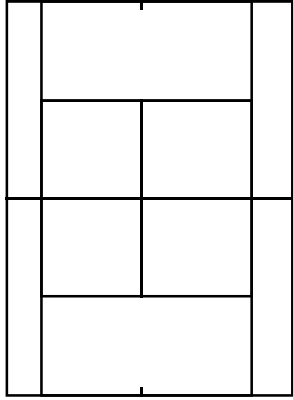
Key Points to Remember:

1. Meet your opponent, introduce yourself and spin to see who will serve first, who will receive and from which side each player will begin play.
2. After a brief warm up period the server will begin the match by serving from the deuce court to the opponents deuce court (2 chances to get 1 serve in the service court)
3. The receiver will return the serve to the server's court and the two will play out the point. After the point, the server will move to the left court or ad court and serve again and the two will play out the point. The players will continue until one player wins the game.
4. After the first game, the players change ends of the court (to equalize factors like the sun, wind and natural distraction and players only change ends when the number of games played equals an odd number) and the receiver in the first game will now become the server.
5. The first player to win 6 games and be ahead by 2 games (6-1, 6-2, 6-3, 6-4 or 7-5) wins the first set. The match consists of the first player to win 2 out of 3 sets. Tiebreakers would be played when the score reaches 6-6 in any set.
6. Points during the game can be won by hitting a winning shot that the opponent cannot reach or by the opponent hitting the ball in the net or out of bounds.
7. Try to determine which side your opponent has more difficulty returning (forehand or backhand) and play to that side. Also decide if they have a more difficult time returning high bouncing balls or low short balls. You can also try hitting the ball harder or softer to give your opponent a challenging time.
8. Practice serving A-B-C (toward the alley, into the body or up the center) to direct your serve so the receiver will have the most difficult time returning the ball.
9. When returning the serve or rallying the ball back and forth, aim for one of the four squares on the court (Square 1- the deuce court, square 2 – between the service line and baseline on the deuce side, square 3 –between the service line and baseline on the ad court side and square 4 – in the ad service court).
10. Most disagreements in tennis come from forgetting the score in the game or set, so be sure to call out the score before putting the ball in play.

Singles Match Play contributed by Ken Dehart, 2005



Coach's Collection





Notes

