



The trajectory as the basis of tactics: Basic work on red courts

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the great success of the ITF Play and Stay initiative while also reflecting on some technical and methodological issues noticed in its practical application. After defining such issues, potential solutions are suggested in regards to the contents and targets set for this fundamental phase of the game. Finally, ideas and suggestions are provided to further enhance the beginner player's tennis experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Without doubt the success of the introduction of the ITF Play and Stay initiative has surpassed all expectations. Tennis 10s has allowed many children to experience tennis and to continue playing the game. The smaller courts and lighter balls help children to develop their technical skills, allowing children to experience competition during the learning process (Miranda 2007).

However, some issues have arisen following the implementation of the new initiative. Our own personal experiences along with conversations held with other coaches, indicate that problems with the initiative have cropped up, with those reoccurring issues listed below:

1. Lack of clarity in the coaching and equipment resources to be used on the different types of courts.
2. Teaching programmes and objectives in the different stages are unclear for parents and players. The priority becomes "going up", or progression to the larger court rather than meeting the education and learning objectives of each stage.
3. People typically tend to define the three types of courts (red, orange and green) by age instead of ability level. So, for instance, the red court is only used with those between five and seven years, the orange court for eight and nine year olds and the green court for children aged nine and ten. So what happens to a ten year old who has never played tennis before? It is likely the child will be placed onto a green court even though he/she is very much a beginner.
4. Anxiety to "go up" or to progress to the next court without having completed all the progressions within that stage (Tennant, 2011).
5. Poor use of the orange court because it requires more time to setup. For instance, not marking the side lines and just using a line inside the regular court (Tennant, 2011).
6. Lack of imagination to create different alternatives and combinations of balls, rackets, and court sizes (Elderton, 2010).
7. Lack of emphasis placed on incorporating the parents into the process of a child's education/development (Crespo, 2010; Young, 2011).

INITIATION OBJECTIVES AND CONTENT

One of the most important things is to have clear objectives and methodology at the early stages when the tennis teaching process begins. What is the first objective? We all agree we must begin with a playful process for the children to have fun, while competing and learning at the same time. A great number of games have been included as a result of the additional available coaching courses and materials that are now being offered. But, what about learning the game based on the ITF slogan: "Serve, rally and score?" Are we really using it or are we prioritising these new coordination and development drills/tools and therefore forgetting the original focus for children new to tennis? (Barrell, 2007)

This article will be based on the following processes and targets:

Control of the ball

It is key for the child (or any beginner in general) to have the feeling not only of impacting the ball and developing control as soon as possible, but also of hitting it over the net and into the court consistently. Is there a competition or "game" for this? Absolutely. For example, simply counting the number of shots made over the net and into the court, creating a competition with the other players or a player focusing on improving their own personal best score.

Consistency

I have witnessed juniors hitting hundreds of balls with no clear objective or goal on numerous occasions. Furthermore the teacher often fails to recognise that the majority of balls are comfortably missing the court. What is this first objective? To make the ball bounce inside the designated court. Something very basic but too often forgotten. Again, is there a competition or game for achieving this objective? Just like above, numbers, percentages, games against themselves, etc. So, we now have a junior player that is able to hit the ball to the other side of the court. Then, can we start teaching technique? At this point I don't think so. I believe we must make him/her understand how to "manage" the ball better, therefore I

propose teaching what will be one of the principles of “Her majesty the trajectory”:

Depth

How do we do it? It is very easy, just ask a couple of players to start rallying close to the net, maintaining control of the ball (keeping it in play) while moving towards the baseline before returning and almost touching the net with their hands with the ball still in play. Not only will beginner players learn to play at deeper or shorter lengths but they will also discover that they must vary their preparation and follow through to accomplish it. Once again, this can be done in a competitive situation.

Now, having controlled the ball and being able to vary its depth, can we go to the orange court? No, definitely not yet. We still have a long way to go, and many targets to achieve.

“Her Majesty the trajectory”

There are beginner kids who can already control the ball and have a basic notion of how to vary the length of their shots. We must then help them to realise that their repertoire must include elements like:

Direction

Move your opponent. This can be accomplished by placing targets on the court for kids to aim at, first to one side and then to the other side of their opponent. In other words, “they must play the ball to where their opponent is not”.

Height

If the opponent positions themselves deep in the court, the player cannot play the same ball he would have played if his opponent had been near the baseline, or perhaps inside the court, not only should he play the ball deeper, he must hit it higher. The same reasoning, but used in reverse, must be applied if the player is inside the court, closer to the net and the opponent has played a high ball the child will need to produce a lower, more aggressive shot. It is evident that in this stage of a player’s development, competition is a frequent and almost daily (Barrell, 2013). Are there any aspects of the red court stage that can be improved? Of course there are, such as:

Speed

It is important that the red player is aware that he/she needs (a key tool) to hit the ball hard to the other side of the court, when the conditions allow, in order to close the point at a reasonable speed and be in a position to play a shorter, slower shot, if he/she so desires.

Effect

Appropriate management of the effects will be required to develop the previous aspects.



CONCLUSION

What is the most appropriate way of incorporating the concepts that have been discussed in this article?

Of course, we can include them separately, identify each aspect and then work one by one. However, the most appropriate methodology would be to learn these concepts during the matches on the red court (Pestre, 2007) with a teacher who is always ready, with good communication skills and aware of the junior player’s capability and therefore can assist the player during matches in utilising these elements (González, 2012). So it is up to us as coaches to provide dynamic and enjoyable classes that will further enhance a player’s development and learning.

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