

# Benefits of the Tennis Play and Stay principles for the physical development of young tennis players

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## ABSTRACT

This article analyses the advantages of the principles of Tennis Play and Stay in the physical development of young tennis players. The early years of the child in sport are very important since they help them to develop the motor base that will later provide important benefits for development.

**Key words:** Tennis Play and Stay, motor development, significant learning, comprehensive method

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## INTRODUCTION

Tennis is a complex sport that requires coordination, perception, decision making and specific skills. If we consider children under 10, we must bear in mind that they undergo a number of physical processes that have a direct impact on what the child can do. It is key for the coach to understand the child's growth and maturation processes which may limit their capability to perform a task. For many years children and adults were presented the activities in a similar way; regardless of their age or maturity.

Luckily, the introduction of Tennis Play and Stay has helped children to experiment a learning process adapted to their psycho-motor needs, developing a more significant learning.

Among its most important benefits, we can mention the following key points:

### IT CREATES A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FAVOURING A MOTOR PERCEPTIVE ADJUSTMENT

From the motor point of view, the child is under continuous growth, going through a motor perceptive adjustment depending on the Space, the Time, and the relation to the objects (the Ball and the Racket). The adaptation of these axes in the progression of the exercises will help the child to keep

an optimal challenge in the activities, going through each stage with the right degree of difficulty.



The motor axis for an appropriate adjustment are:

- The body
- The space
- The time

- The ball
- The racket

In view of the above, it is key for the coach to define the right degree of complexity in each case, so as to favour a harmonic and progressive development. Designing creative courts with a great number of problem situations to solve, will be key for the future command of complex situations.

### IT ALLOWS FOR BASIC MOTOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

All those who have worked with young tennis players have laid emphasis on players' skills. The greater the kids' motor experiences, the greater their possibilities to learn specific skills.

Including activities that develop motor skills like running, tossing, hitting or receiving will help the child to get more motor tools which will be useful in the future to solve situations successfully.

A harmonic and structured organization of the body, the basic motor skills in different situations and with varying and increasing degrees of difficulty will impact on the movement and stroke execution process.

It is key for the coach to understand that the child will undergo different learning stages for these skills.

- Early stage: The child appears not to have a command of the exercise, many errors are made (errors are part of learning).
- Refined stage: The child shows a basic command of the skill and can be successful on some occasions (it is very important to give enough time at this stage).
- Fluent stage: The child performs the skill automatically, improving the execution (in this stage, it is key to create a certain instability increasing the difficulty and learning new skills).

### IT FAVOURS THE INCORPORATION OF SPECIFIC MOVEMENTS, NOT OFTEN USED IN DAILY LIFE:

There is a trend to expect a child to manage the racket rapidly, concentrating attention in this fact, and not in the movements of the body to move the racket. The child must have a good command of his body and the movements, it is the "body that moves the racket" and not the other way around.

There is a set of specific movements which need a great control of the body in tennis and young children cannot use them in daily actions.

Examples of these movements could be:

- To perform two opposing movements for the same action with the upper and lower body (Ex. The lower body moves while the upper body turns and rotates backwards to execute a stroke on a forehand drive).

- To perform actions on a distal axis to the centre of gravity above the head (Ex. The service – smash).



- To use both arms in coordination for the same action (Ex. Two handed backhand)

- To use the non-dominant arm for an action that calls for accuracy (Ex. tossing for service)

Stimulation prior to these movements by means of games, activities or exercises will greatly benefit the future learning of technique. A Play Tennis adapted area through the adaptation of the courts and balls will be ideal to strengthen these motor practices.

### IT IS THE IDEAL ENVIRONMENT TO STRENGTHEN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COORDINATION CAPABILITIES:

Motor coordination plays a key role in these stages of learning since it can be considered an integrating capability of all areas. This stage occurs in a very sensitive period of development. That is, coordination acts as a link among all elements in a movement, it integrates the perceptive aspect, the decision making process and the motor aspect.

Strengthening each of these capabilities will help the child in motor situations with certain difficulty to make better and more accurate decisions.

Coordination development will help the child, among other things:

- To develop motor memory.
- To favour creativity.

- To assimilate new movement patterns.
- To justify learning the technical aspect.
- Cognitive predisposition for learning.
- Economize on effort.
- Improve attention.

Once the child manages to build this "set" of movements, it is just a question of combining them.

To invest time on balance development, the appropriate muscle tone for a good position, the proprioception and sensitivity of their bodies in new situations or balls in movement, will create a more complete athlete that will adapt to unstable or unexpected situations, which are so frequent in modern tennis.

The player who takes up the habit of coordinated movement at early ages will be able to continue working on it later on, and will add on more skills while developing others. He will be able to act more rapidly (speed) during a longer period (endurance) and more strongly.

### TOWARDS A MORE INTEGRATIVE CONCEPT

Each and all of the aspects above favour the development of a complete athlete. The Tennis Play and Stay environment is the best stage to implement the idea of an integral method for the technical, tactic, motor and cognitive aspects to integrate the same session, depending on the objectives set.

In this integrating concept we have to include learning and practising other sports.

Among the most important advantages of including other sports or activities and their own issues, we can consider:

- They favour the physical development in general, the capability to acquire a skill, coordination, mobility and to develop senses.
- To solve difficult situations, typical of other sports, develops a great improvement in the problem solving and decision making process.
- It motivates children and lets them share team spirit, a sense of belonging to a group, and helps them to identify and practice solidarity in an individual sport.

### CONCLUSION

The teaching system by means of Tennis Play and Stay is no doubt the best scenery to develop those skills that will make up the motor base of the child, and let them solve the situations they face in sport more successfully.

To know "what" and "how" to respond in sports like tennis, that call for a great reaction speed, accuracy in the execution technique, and a great variability in decision making is more than enough to support the new methodological theories that underpin all the concepts mentioned in this article

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