How the tennis industry will be affected by Tennis10s.

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ABSTRACT
The mission of the Tennis Industry Association (TIA), the not-for-profit trade association for tennis in the U.S., is to promote participation growth in alignment with the USTA and support the economic vitality of everyone in the industry. The TIA helps oversee grassroot initiatives including Tennis Welcome Centers, facility registration of QuickStart Tennis, and owns Cardio Tennis. This article looks at the impact of Tennis 10s in the United States as well as its potential global impact for those in the industry.

INTRODUCTION
In the United States our version of Play and Stay is called QuickStart Tennis (QST). QST was formally introduced in the U.S. about 2 years ago, so this is a much newer product for our coaches and industry compared to the rest of the world. Since its introduction it has been generally well-received overall and today there are approximately 1,600 facilities in the U.S. that are using the QST play format for their 10-and-under programming.

Thus far one of our bigger challenges has been changing people’s perceptions in regards to what tennis should look like for kids 10 and under. We know the task of educating children, parents and coaches on the benefits of playing with age-appropriate equipment and courts will be ongoing. Those who see QuickStart Tennis in action understand it and see the immediate results, and are very favorable towards the format.

As is the case in most countries, many coaches have used low-compression balls and/or modified courts in their past instruction. QuickStart Tennis (and Play and Stay) is the complete package consisting of 6 components: age, net height, ball, court size, racquet and scorekeeping.

So in 2 years how has QuickStart Tennis impacted the industry and affected the market?

Tennis Participation

From 2004 to 2009, the number of children ages 6 to 17 playing tennis in the U.S. increased 28% from 8 million to 10.2 million. Last year, U.S. tennis participation, for all ages, reached more than 30 million participants as reported in research conducted for the TIA and USTA. Supporting studies by The Physical Activity Council has seen tennis growing 43% since 2000 and gaining the #1 rank among traditional sports. We attribute this extensive increase in participation to many factors – including but not limited to - the unified industry grassroot efforts, the fact that tennis is easily accessible and affordable, especially in today’s economic market, and to the healthy images portrayed by the pro tour’s positive role models.

As more and more parents become aware of QST and more and more coaches adopt the format, we are confident that QST will have a major impact on the 10-and-under age groups, allowing children to learn quickly and play sooner. In the two years, since its launch, participation for this age group is up
40%, retention has increased from 45% to 63% and 20,000 parents and coaches have received QST training.

We have found that when parents know about QST—and when QST programming is accessible to them—it helps to put tennis on a par with other popular sports that have kids’ versions, including basketball, baseball and soccer, as a viable choice for younger children. Also important is that QST is safer for children with age appropriate equipment and courts, and they can play in the QST format with their friends on or even off the tennis court.

Consumers/Parents

As we continue to expose more and more consumers to QST we appear to be attracting more adults to our sport as well as kids. Anecdotal evidence from facilities and teaching professionals across the U.S. tells us that parents are realizing the use of low compression balls makes the game much easier for them, too. In addition, tennis is seen as a “family” activity—hook young children on tennis, and we’re finding there’s a good chance parents will start to play. The USTA also offers community “workshops” for parents, teachers and others to help with QST programming.

Through programs developed by the USTA and other groups, tennis using the QST format is also being introduced to more and more children in school physical education programs and in after-school intramural programs. Coaches are also seeing the benefit as their players can progress at a fairly rapid rate to where they can play a match in as little as two weeks of practice.

Equipment Manufacturers / Retailers

For racquet manufacturers, QST has the potential to reap great rewards as it becomes part of the playing culture in the U.S., and retailers have an added opportunity to attract new customers with QST packaged product. The TIA produces more than 80 research reports annually for the industry including census shipment reports which have been trending upward—especially for youth racquets. Recently, the TIA further defined this reporting to include QST specific equipment for balls and racquets and will soon be able to trend this data. The manufacturers are working closely with the USTA to ensure—

Increasing the revenue per court. In many instances, as mentioned above, parents are willing to help out on the QST courts.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that many facilities that have active QST programming are experiencing growth in membership, as more families join once their children are involved in QST programming—and this again leads to more tennis play, lessons and court time booked by adults. In 2009, a majority of facilities offering the QST format rated it as “excellent” or “good.” Approval rating was strong for QST offered in all settings, including public parks, private facilities and school/college facilities.

Many early adopters of QST who have added programming and permanent courts have seen great results in reaching hundreds of kids in their local communities and developing the infrastructure at their facilities with this broad base of young children who will be retained for future, ongoing programming.

Coaches/Teaching Professionals/Tennis Facilities

Tennis teaching pros and facilities that have embraced QST programming are finding that it is quite profitable. One of the keys is that—particularly with 36-foot courts (four of them fit within a normal 78-foot court)—many more children are on court at one time,
red, orange and green balls, nets and racquets are more readily available for the marketplace. Key is also to getting them widely distributed and visible at facilities across the country in addition to communicating and messaging that QuickStart is the way to start playing tennis.

Court Construction

The court construction industry stands to benefit by the push to have permanent 36- and 60-foot courts built, or to have permanent QST lines put onto regular 78-foot courts. Multi-court QST facilities have been built, and some court builders are recommending to facilities that QST courts be built on pieces of land not big enough for a normal-size court. Also, when court builders add QST lines to existing courts, they’re able to “inspect” facilities and recommend any other repair work that may need to be done.

The USTA has been a key source for QST court construction and for lining courts. The USTA Technical Department offers free assistance to facilities and parks adding courts. And the USTA’s Facility Assistance Services has a program to help subsidize 50% of the cost of painting permanent lines for 36- and 60-foot courts to facilities or organizations that apply. (The Rules of Tennis allow USTA National/Sectional/District events or tournaments to be played on courts with QST lines, and recently the Intercollegiate Tennis Association approved a rule allowing college matches to be played on courts that also have QST lines).

CONCLUSION

While smaller courts, transition balls and shorter racquets have been used to teach kids in the past, the unified “packaging” of QuickStart has everything in sync - age, racquets, balls, court sizes, net height and scoring. Everything is set up so a child can succeed and get in the game fast. Our U.S. culture for youth is very dependent on organized play, practice and competition however research shows that organized youth sports such as soccer, basketball and baseball are negatively impacted as kids age-up and drop out. QuickStart is being positioned to not only attract more kids to tennis and get them in the game earlier, but will keep them there. When children succeed in tennis at an early age with pathways developed for their continuing involvement, we will create players for life. And that means this industry continues to grow and remain vital in all areas: participation, teaching and coaching, facilities and court construction, equipment manufacturing and more.

REFERENCES

USTA/TIA Participation Study.
TIA/USTA Court Activity Monitor. TIA Tennis Marketplace Report.
Racquet Sports Industry Magazine.