A QuickStart tennis study.

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ABSTRACT

Quickstart Tennis is a USTA format that incorporates the Tennis 10s format within the US market, one of the leading ‘Quickstart’ clubs in the US is Midtown in Chicago.

INTRODUCTION

Midtown Tennis Club has long been a leader in tennis teaching, player participation and competition in the United States. Midtown is primarily a tennis club with 18 indoor courts and fitness facilities. Founded in 1970 by Alan Schwartz and his father, the club has 36 tennis professionals and, in addition to membership and court revenues, generates 3.5 million dollars of lesson revenue annually.

Butch Staples, Midtown’s Head Professional and one of 78 QuickStart National Workshop trainers, was selected to conduct one of the USTA pilot programs for the then named 36/60 program in 2007. The pilot was created to study the feasibility and acceptance of a format using modified balls, shorter racquets and smaller courts. The Midtown courts were modified for play by using temporary and tape lines and portable nets.

Staples made some sweeping changes in his teaching methodology and selected and trained some of Midtown’s teaching professionals to use the new system for players 10 and under. The lessons became more game based with more activity, hitting and play. Midtown had to overcome resistance from parents who objected that their kids were not learning the proper way by developing their strokes on regulation sized courts with “real” yellow balls.

Staples and his team of professionals also added kid-friendly non-elimination tournament competition for young players in the form of round robin and compass draw tournaments initially using red balls on 36 foot courts and orange balls on 60 foot courts. All tournament play was based on the six QuickStart Tennis specifications; court size, age, net height, racquet length, ball and scoring format.

Within the course of a year, parents were believers as they saw the tremendous progress of their children and their ability to play at a high level by using courts, balls and racquets that fit the child. Retention greatly increased because young players were having fun because they could play the game successfully. Regularly scheduled tournaments served to showcase the skills and tactics these children were learning.

Midtown soon had to create several levels of competition for red court and orange court players. Just recently, a green court level was introduced for 10 and under children using a 78-foot court for players who displayed mastery in tournament play on the orange court.

Leah Friedman, Director of Junior Develop at Midtown stated, “Up until a couple of years ago, our largest obstacle was
convincing the parents that their children could actually learn to play on courts to scale for young children. Now that the game is fun and fair and the parents see very positive results, they have become our best sales force for the program."

The results speak volumes for all of the work Staples and Midtown’s dedicated professionals have done, and the support they received by the Midtown management team. Lesson revenues for this age group are up 42% in the past 4 years. Pros are able to teach more hours because the standard court can be used by four to five group clinics and even private lessons when using a 36 foot red court. Two group clinics or private lessons are possible when using a 60 foot orange court. Staples is even experimenting with a combination of 36 foot and 60 foot courts on one standard sized court for maximum efficiency.

Lesson revenues in every category; clinics, camps and private lessons have increased because the program is very successful and the retention is far greater than it was when kids were learning in a traditional manner with very few opportunities for competitive play. Revenues are created by more lessons per court, more kids in the program because of better retention, additional tournament and special event revenue and even a significant increase in family memberships to the club.

One example of an additional special event for young children not previously offered at Midtown Tennis Club is a monthly QuickStart Tennis Pizza and Movie night. Parents can drop their children off and kids participate in organized play on red and orange courts, along with a movie and pizza on a Saturday night from 6:00-9:00 PM.

Perhaps the greatest testament to the under 10 activities at Midtown is that the children involved develop an amazing love for the game which may keep them active in tennis for years to come. That love began with wonderful, nurturing, kid friendly instructors and grew with their abilities made possible by the 10 and under format that enabled them to experience the fun of playing tennis rather than just learning strokes.

Butch Staples, a long time tennis professional and one of the top coaches in the United States sums up his excitement and professional satisfaction very well when he says, "The success of our Junior Development Pathway using the QuickStart format has been the most incredible journey of my career. To see the results after four years of children who began on the red court and who are now outstanding green court players is extremely rewarding. The true bottom line is that we have more young children playing and staying in the sport."

Midtown is a great example of a successful program that pioneered the QuickStart Tennis play format both with instruction and competition. They overcame some initial resistance from parents and even reluctance from some of the traditional teaching professionals. With perseverance to the program and keeping the six QuickStart Tennis specifications in synch with young players, the results have not only changed the perception of the parents and pros, but also completely altered how young children are introduced to learning, playing and competing in the 10 and under age group.

The General Manager of Midtown, Michael Mahoney is very proud of the success of the teaching professional staff and very pleased with the increase in participation. Mahoney offered, "The success of Midtown’s junior program is attributed to Butch’s leadership, the direction of Leah Friedman, who oversees junior development, and Midtown’s dedicated professionals. All of our 10-and-under activities are here to stay. We look to the future of our junior tennis which we believe will reveal the players’ continued improvement and participation in tennis."

Longtime owner and a legend in the tennis club industry, Alan Schwartz, makes a very compelling final comment. “QuickStart Tennis has turned ‘tryers’ into ‘stayers’ and ‘stayers’ into ‘players.’ QuickStart is the closest thing I have seen to a silver bullet to grow our sport.”

SUMMARY

Quickstart Tennis has grown across the US since it’s launch in 2008, clubs like Midtown are already seeing the benefits of retaining and developing players by scaling the equipment to suit the children involved.