



Tactical and technical development considerations for 10 and under players.

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ABSTRACT

This article will outline the advantages of using the Red/Orange/Green approach to U10 development for building foundational tactical and technical skills.

Key words: Game-based Approach (GBA), Red/Orange/Green (R/O/G).

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INTRODUCTION

Training and competing with the Tennis 10s system allows players to develop their tactics (and associated technique) in ways not available to younger players using a regular ball on a full court. With Tennis 10's, they will actually be able to play like they would when they fully mature (in contrast to playing a 'junior' game and then having to change it later).

The Tennis 10's system is very conducive to using a Game-based Approach to coaching. A simple definition of GBA is: "Get players to play then, help them to learn to play better". The scale appropriate balls, courts and equipment allow players to play with some success right away. In addition, it makes tactical and technical fundamentals easier to develop.



TACTICAL DEVELOPMENT

Tennis is a game, and the goal of any game is to win. Tactics are the 'during game goals' players must perform to win more

points (or lose less). In development, the job is to help players master the tactics they will need when they are mature players. Here are a few tactical aspects affected by scale:

- **Style of Play Development:** Kids on a full-size court have far more ground to cover than if the court is scaled. The result, they tend to hit high arcing balls to give time to chase shots down. The style of play becomes very defensive. With Progressive Tennis, players can successfully explore all-court, counter-puncher, or net rushing styles. They even come to the net regularly (something rarely seen when kids use full-sized equipment and courts since it is far too difficult to cover the court).
- **Mastery of Court geometry (space):** The proportional space and ball characteristics promote a better understanding and proficiency in managing the geometry of the court. This affects lateral movement as well as moving into the net, not to mention the appropriate recovery locations, angles and timing of these movements.
- **Phase of Play Development:** With full-sized play, defense is the primary phase utilized. The other phases of play (attack, forcing, counter, and a proper neutral rally) are all difficult to successfully execute. Scaled tennis allows all the phases to be developed.
- **Shot Selection Development:** Varying the ball is extremely difficult with regulation equipment and courts. Players get stuck hitting high arcs to the middle of the court. Angles, spins, drives and drops are all available with the scaled equipment (We know because we observe players in our program doing them). Plus, using the appropriate court size and ball speed

promotes proper decision-making and critical timing of the decisions.

Why would a coach settle for a player who is just consistent when they could also have the ability to play and make decisions like the ones they will use when they are older?

Basic tactics

One key goal for 10 and under development is to build a smart player. Juniors are notorious for being, 'mindless ball hitters'. This is unfortunately reinforced by the type of training they often engage in. Developing basic tactical play in an All-Court style will give the player the most options for their future. The following is a list of basic tactics players need to master early. These are aspects of controlling time and space in a match which is much more relevant and practical if Tennis 10's is used.

- Keep the Ball in Play
- Direct the Ball
- To the same side (e.g. To an opponent's weakness)
- To different sides (Move the opponent)
- Control Height (gain time when needed)
- Take the Net

Every one of these should be explored and nurtured through drilling and match play



TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT

Tactical development is not the only thing at stake. If tactics with Tennis 10's are more in line with what they will use as mature players, so is technique since technique is only a means to perform tactics. Here is a quick summary of just some of the technical elements that are easier to develop:

Groundstrokes

- Racquet Acceleration: One of the skills that sets advanced players apart from the rest is controlled racquet acceleration. The lighter, slower/ lower bouncing balls allow for increased racquet acceleration through the impact zone, which helps many advanced actions. In contrast, when children use adult balls, courts and racquets, it encourages deceleration and more 'blocking' actions.

- Grip: Using the scaled equipment makes it easier to develop "eastern" grips (minimizing the full "western" grips that regular balls and courts entice younger players to use).

- Swing Path: Players can develop leveling and attacking actions easier as well as control various trajectories (high, medium and low arcs). Regulation balls promote higher arcs and extreme low-to-high actions as players try to 'survive' the higher/faster bouncing balls and cover the oversized court. Although players eventually must learn to receive high and low balls, there are less extremes, and the high and low balls are proportionate to the player's physical size.

- Biomechanical Linkage: The slower, softer balls make it easier to use good rotation from the ground up without the psychological fear of sending the ball out. More balls bouncing at waist level provide repetition for good rotation. Players can be more relaxed. With regular balls they will often tighten up in order to not, 'lose the collision' with the adult ball.

- Reception Skills: Set-up of the body, racquet and footwork are affected by the ball received and the size of the space being covered. Training and playing with disproportionate balls, courts, and racquets adversely affect the development of these motor patterns.

Volleys

- Reception Speed: Players can develop all the volley actions (catch, touch, punch, etc.) and are not stuck only 'blocking' the faster regulation balls. Their footwork will become easier to develop because of the proportionate space they learn to cover.

- Biomechanical Linkage: If players are not stuck blocking, they can use the ground force more effectively ("volley with their feet"), which allows better overall use of the body. Good balance is easier to train since they don't have to stretch to cover an oversized area.

Serve

- Biomechanical Linkage: Lighter ball allows for a better overhead throwing action using all the segments of the body from the ground up. Mechanics change with inappropriate ball weight and distances.

• Grip: It is easier to develop a continental as the ball is lighter and the player doesn't feel the need to use a forehand or 'fry pan' grip to send the heavier ball further.

It is interesting to note that coaches have developed all these elements with younger players using regular balls and courts. However, the way they do it is to use their own ball control skills through feeding to deliver balls to the player lower, slower, from closer distance, etc. Why create this 'false world' when all the ball control characteristics will occur naturally with the Tennis 10's equipment? (as well as happening ball control characteristics will occur naturally with the Tennis 10's equipment? (as well as happening during play and not just in training with the coach feeding). Younger players can obviously be developed and play on a full court with regular balls, the real question however is, what approach is more effective for developing their long-term skills?



CONCLUSION

The ITF has endorsed this method as part of their world-wide Tennis... Play and stay initiative (www.tennisplayandstay.com). The majority of countries are on board with more on the way. Hopefully, this will be the dawn of a new era to encourage growth and retention of young tennis players. Parents and coaches have an unprecedented opportunity to cooperate to make tennis more accessible for young children and improve their long-term development pathway.

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