Tennis 10s and Play and Stay in Portugal.

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**ABSTRACT**
The advent of Play and Stay meant an opportunity to be taken strongly, in a small country eager to make a dent in world class tennis. A world standard on how to introduce the sport to beginners is a powerful message and leaves little margin for coaches to argue a different approach. However trying to change tradition is often very hard, even with powerful marketing tools and science support.

**INTRODUCTION**
Coaches tend to keep using old methodology, sometimes 20 or 30 years old, regardless of empiric or scientific evidence. It is a natural tendency to slip into comfort zones, repeating the same process of teaching over and over again. Even with research proving a staggering 70% dropout rate of the sport, coaches resist change.

Clearly the task was daunting, but possible. A key aspect in any project of this kind is the perception that objectives are attainable only through a long term approach. If we change the way coaches introduce the game to kids, competitive results will only appear in ten years or so.

**IMPLEMENTING PLAY AND STAY**
A strategy was established to promote a slow but sure transition to the new methodology, ensuring that the use of the slower balls and court sizes would become the norm, in a few years time. First phase would imply integrating the Play and Stay concept in all the activities of the Coaches Education and Research Department of the Portuguese Tennis Federation (FPT). This started in 2006 when the concept was already mature and was imbedded in the coaches manual and multimedia CDs for coaches courses (all levels), coaches updates (mandatory every three years for Portuguese coaches), and in School Tennis manuals for Physical Education Teachers. From 2006 until the end of 2009 more than 130 tennis courses, seminars and updates were conducted, reaching 1500 coaches and more than 600 Physical Education Teachers. Leaflets and other media where produced and sent to clubs and regional associations.

Although effective in passing the concept, this was clearly not enough to produce the desired effect. People were interested but to make a real change in courts more had to be done. It clear from the get go that competition was the real key for the implementation of the new methodology and materials. Our goal was to make this approach to teaching tennis a standard in every Portuguese tennis club and that would be impossible without competition.
10 & UNDER COMPETITION

Using as a base a nationwide program for talent ID, the FPT started to do official under 10 competition based on Play and Stay standards: U-10 = green level and U-8 = orange level. First regional tournaments started in late 2006 and early 2007, with Porto leading the way. The rest of the country quickly went in and by June 2007 (during the official ITF launch, the FPT did a simultaneous launch at the National Stadium in Lisbon) the FPT could present a number of successful experiences with this concept.

The structure of the competition was set up dividing the country in three continental zones (north – based in Porto, center – based in Lisbon, and south – based in Faro in the Algarve) with two more with the Azores and Madeira islands. Regional official tournaments where held, with nationals coinciding with the National Masters competition. In 2008 the total number of official competitions passed 50, with the system being overwhelmed with more and more people wanting to participate. Great care was taken with this process, giving lectures to the parents about tennis competition and always providing a healthy competitive environment for the kids (not a very easy task). In 2008 the total number participants was 1803, with kids, parents, clubs and coaches engaged.

The experience of all this process was always exchanged with international knowledge and during the last Tennis Europe Specific Theme Conference, in Rotterdam, the FPT tweaked the age groups, giving more flexibility to the orange group by overlapping the ages allowed. This was implemented seamlessly revealing the maturity of the all process.

INTEGRATING TENNIS 10S

The FPT was always in close collaboration with the ITF and a great proponent of the introduction of Tennis 10. As soon as this project was unleashed, Portugal adopted the logo immediately, always combining the Play + Stay campaign now with Tennis 10. Coaches Education courses and updates continuously gave the coaches a perspective of the evolution of all the processes (that was very fast evolving), leaving the less active and progressive coaches (not so keen in their own education as coaches) really feeling obsolete with their colleagues.

Topping all this activity, the FPT was using every tennis event to promote the strong logos of P+S and Tennis 10. Davis Cup, Fed Cup and the Estoril Open are a classic example of the capability of the FPT to draw attention to all this. In the first semester of 2010, the FPT organized P+S events 2 Davis Cup ties, one Fed Cup and the Estoril Open, getting a lot of media attention, culminating with the event with Roger Federer for the first time playing with kids in a P+S event.

SUMMARY

We can say for sure that the implementation of the official under ten competition was key to consolidate Play and Stay as standard methodology of introducing tennis to kids. Without it
the task would be much difficult, if not impossible. Summarizing, it is our strong opinion that successfully implementing P+S in any country depends on the conjunction of:

- Coaches Education passing the information relentlessly;
- Organizing official under 10 competition;
- Using all events (tennis or others) to promote the program;
- Link everything together, involving top players and coaches in the process.