

# LEARN TO RALLY AND PLAY

## Practice Plans and Tips for Coaching Kids Ages 5–17



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# Preface

What makes tennis fun is being able to rally a ball back and forth over a net with a partner. The sooner youngsters can rally, the sooner they can actually play the game and participate on a team. This book is designed to give coaches and parents who work with youngsters at the beginning stages of development the necessary tools to get children playing the game during their first practice—tools such as simple lead-up activities and ways to modify the court, net, racquets, balls and match length.

This 2009 edition of *Learn to Rally and Play: Practice Plans and Tips for Coaching Kids Ages 5–17* includes practice plans that are age specific for children 5-6, 7-8, 9-10 and 11-17. Each series of practice plans is designed appropriately for the physical, mental and social skills of that age group. As a coach, you can refer specifically to the series of practice plans written for the age group you are coaching.

In addition to the skills needed by children to play the game successfully, this edition has instruction for the coach to make practice sessions safe and fun for young players. Just as the instruction for kids is age specific, the section and tips for adults is specific to youth coaches and provides examples of how to be fair, keep practices fun, view competition through a child's perspective, and even provides input on performance and skill development. This information for youth tennis coaches is new and vitally important, as more children are beginning tennis at younger ages and more adults are coaching young players and teams.

Each practice session is designed as a team practice that will prepare players for competition and match play, including USTA Jr. Team Tennis. Coaches can use the first few practices as preseason sessions and continue through the series as the team tennis season continues, so the child has an opportunity to practice in a group and play team matches.

In this edition, children are introduced to the game through the QuickStart Tennis format. QuickStart Tennis includes six specifications: age, court size, racquet length, ball weight and speed, net height and scoring format. This enables youngsters to practice and play real tennis to scale and allows them to play and learn at the same time—as opposed to the traditional model of learning the skills before playing the game. Since rallying and playing is much more fun than standing in line, children will want to continue to learn the game and develop the skills necessary to play with their friends on a team.

Enjoy this series of practice plans, and have fun getting kids playing this great game of tennis!

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# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 1: Rally and Play: An Introduction

### Introduction

Many sports have recognized the importance of giving children the opportunity to learn and play. For young people to be attracted to and succeed in a sport, the equipment, playing area and competitive structures need to be appropriate.

In the pages that follow, we will provide tools in the form of resources, instruction and opportunities that you as coaches and parents need to get our youngsters onto the tennis court and rallying and playing as quickly as possible.

An important component of this is the practice session plans (available in Chapters 4-7). These plans are written for coaches who are teaching children who are either new to the game of tennis or at the early stages of development. The activities are specific to the ages listed in each chapter. Each chapter and each age group is written in a progressive order so coaches can build a foundation and follow the progression as skills are developed.

For any coach, it is not uncommon to get a variety of ages in a beginning class or on a beginning team. You can use this book to find activities that will challenge and allow kids to succeed by moving forward or even back among the age group sessions.

This book contains a large number of activities. The key is to change the activities frequently, but don't hesitate to use activities or games the children enjoy from one practice to another. Just as young children enjoy the same story or movie, they like the familiarity of their favorite games.

### The Needs, Abilities and Characteristics of Young Players

Children are not adults. They will eventually become adults, but only after a lengthy developmental process. That development takes place throughout childhood and adolescence. Children, especially those pre-puberty, have specific physical, mental and emotional needs and abilities that differ greatly from those of an adult.

These specific needs and abilities are highly related to the progress a child can make in any sport because sport requires technical and tactical competence. The ability to perform a technical skill is highly dependent on physical development. Competitive competence depends on tactical knowledge, which relies on a certain level of mental and emotional skill. Children also learn in different ways from adults, so teaching approaches must fit a child's needs.

Moreover, there are differences in the rate of growth and development among children of the same age and between boys and girls. Chronological age can be very

different from developmental age, and two children of the same age can be up to three years apart in developmental terms.

Youth tennis coaches need to recognize the differences between children and adults as well as among children themselves. Such recognition means adapting to the way in which children learn to play, and requires an understanding of what is best for them to enjoy the experience and make progress. In addition, sport has a responsibility to consider the development of the child as a whole person and not just as an athlete.

The following section describes the needs and abilities of each age group and then describes the equipment, scoring and competition, and teaching needed for each age group to have fun, progress and succeed.

## **Ages 5 to 6**

### **Characteristics of the Age Group**

Children in this age group are small in stature and lack strength. They are highly active. They are learning how to move and have great difficulty with “fine” motor skills. Partly because they are young but also because they lack experience, their reactions and anticipation skills are very low.

Some children of this age have not yet attended school and are only beginning the process of learning to read, write and count. They tend to be self-centered. They lack a sense of time and are impatient, become easily bored and have a very short attention span. They get tired quickly. They imitate and copy. Listening to and following instructions is very difficult for them. Concepts such as scoring and winning and losing are not understood yet.

Children of this age can run, jump and land, crawl, twist, hit and kick. They are developing agility, coordination and balance. They throw with limited rotation and catch with both hands. They are learning to handle equipment and have slow reactions and poor tracking skills.

They develop confidence through fun and success, and they are very creative. They enjoy exploring and copying. They are learning to share, to be part of a group and think about other people.

### **Equipment**

These children should use 17- to 21-inch racquets, foam balls/Koosh balls/balloons and small playing areas such as a single service court. (Equipment is covered further in Chapter 2, on the QuickStart Tennis format.)

### **Practice Sessions**

Children need to be taught in small groups of no more than one teacher/helper to four students (1:4). A ratio of 1:1 or 1:2, using parents or a sibling for added oversight, is ideal. Sessions should be fun, active and interesting. Coaches and helpers must be actively involved.

Many different activities should be covered in the same session, perhaps in a circuit of four or five different stations. Don't hesitate to repeat activities from one session to another. Children like to repeat activities they enjoy.

Teaching should be in very short time spans and highly visual with almost no—or very brief—explanation. The children learn by copying what they see, meaning that demonstration is more important than explanation. Children of this age group enjoy teaching aids and love to explore and to play with various colors and shapes.

Activities such as grips, swing action and rallying over a net can be too advanced for most children in this age group. The focus should be on a wide variety of skills such as balance, movement, agility, coordination, throwing, catching and hitting because this is the crucial age for the child to learn them.

Ask parents to help with “homework tasks” or “take-home activities” that continue the activities/lessons covered in the practice sessions. Parents then develop a better understanding of what their children are capable of doing and what they need to develop.

### **Length of Practice**

A 30-minute time period is optimal for children of this age.

## **Ages 7 to 8**

### **Characteristics of the Age Group**

Fun continues to be of paramount importance for 7- to 8-year-olds. As children mature physically, neural pathways are becoming established and many gross motor skills are being developed; for example, throwing has more body turn and weight transfer. Children of this age group are likely to participate in many activities. This is important because skills can be transferred between different sports and activities. Reaction speed is improving but many children find tracking and making contact with a ball quite difficult.

Concentration and focus are improving, but copying is still the best way for them to learn, so demonstration is still the key. They seek adult approval frequently and are learning the concept of winning and losing.

Children of this age group are beginning to cooperate and share with others. They prefer to be with their own gender and show responsibility through simple tasks and requests.

### **Equipment**

Children should use 19- to 23-inch racquets, foam or oversized low compression balls, a net height of 2-foot-9 and a court size of 36 feet in length and 18 feet in width.

### **Scoring and Competition**

This age group should play two-out-of-three games, with each game being the first player to win seven points. (These matches should last approximately 20 minutes.) Multiple matches in round robin formats works best. Children of this age like being on and playing as a team.

### **Practice Sessions**

Coaching children with a ratio of one coach/helper to four children (1:4) is ideal. Parents and siblings can show the children what to do and how to do it. Keeping children with their friends is important. Children 7-8 do best in a very active, fun and positive environment.

This is the time to introduce children to simple guidelines such as scoring and calling lines so they begin the process of learning the basic rules of tennis.

### **Length of Practice**

The optimal length for each session is 45 minutes with a short break after 20 minutes.

## **Ages 9 to 10**

### **Characteristics of the Age Group**

This age group is becoming better able to concentrate and focus for longer periods of time. However, they need to be interested and inspired by enthusiastic and energetic coaches who are positive and encouraging.

Physically, they have more refined motor skills and, with practice, show fluent and well-developed skills. The children of this age group are becoming more independent and are able to understand concepts of winning and losing, even if they need help in knowing how to cope with them. They are able to share and enjoy being on teams. Some may be early maturers, especially girls. Players can be taught skills and positioning at this age and can be taught doubles positioning and tactics.

Players ages 9-10 have improved reaction and anticipation skills and more rotation while serving and when hitting ground strokes. Their decision-making skills are developing along with their independence and confidence. They need to be rewarded for effort and not just ability. They play well with others and prefer to be with their own gender. They seek and accept adult opinions. They are able to verbalize their thoughts and feelings.

### **Equipment**

This age group should use 23- to 25-inch racquets, low compressions balls and a court that is 60 feet long and 21 feet wide (27 feet wide for doubles). The net should be 3 feet at the center and 3-foot-6 at the net posts.

### **Scoring and Competition**

For match play, scoring is two-out-of-three, four-game sets with the final set determined by the first player or team to score seven points. Doubles play should be encouraged.

### **Practice Sessions**

Have team practices in fun and positive environments, and reward effort and good attitude. Develop skills, good court positioning and shot selection. Keep practices active and simple.

### **Length of Practice**

The recommended time for each practice is one hour, or 90 minutes for practice and a match.

In the case that you follow a practice with a match, divide the session so that no more than 45 minutes is devoted to practice. Take a short break and finish with match play for approximately 45 minutes.

## **Ages 11 to 17**

### **Characteristics of the Age Group**

Players in this age group are beginning—and moving through—puberty, but at different times and at different rates. Girls are likely to begin puberty up to two years earlier than boys. As a result, the differences between boys and girls of the same age can be very apparent in terms of physical maturity and in their mental and emotional development. Players of this age group will grow rapidly and in spurts, and can become tired quickly and will not have much strength until the muscle growth catches up with bone growth.

Girls will begin menstruation and boys will begin to develop male features. All these events are the result of hormonal changes and can make behavior a little unpredictable. Ups and downs are the norm. Coaches working with this age group need to understand what is happening as these children develop into young adults.

Children ages 11-17 have bodies with longer arms and legs—with their center of gravity constantly changing—and need activities that will help them with coordination, speed, endurance and power. These young players are making more of their own decisions and, thus, often choosing to play tennis and be on a team with their friends.

They are developing self-discipline and have the ability to work hard for longer periods of time.

### **Equipment**

This age group should use 26-inch and full-sized 27-inch racquets with standard balls on full-sized courts for singles and doubles competition. Skills and tactics can still be taught using slower balls and smaller courts.

### **Scoring and Competition**

Players should play matches using best two-out-of-three sets. It is acceptable to use a match tie-break (traditional tie-break, first to seven points) to determine the winner if the match score is one-set-all.

### **Practice Sessions**

Players should practice and prepare for matches on teams. They can focus on concepts and activities for longer periods of time. Coaches should use the game as the focal point and should concentrate on skills that will improve game performance.

These players should have the opportunity to contribute. Let them voice preferences and opinions. They can understand verbal methods of coaching.

### **Length of Practice**

The recommended time for each practice is 60 to 90 minutes. If the practice includes a scrimmage or match play, the session could last two hours—with the first hour devoted to skills, followed by a break and concluding with match play.

## Teaching Tools and Equipment for Instructing the Developing Player

Each practice plan has a list of the equipment recommended for that session. Using the appropriate equipment allows young players to rally and play more effectively, especially as the ability to rally and play relates to the weight, length, speed and size of the equipment used.

It is highly recommended that all children have their own racquet, not only for the practice sessions but also for the take-home activities. These racquets should be the appropriate length based on the size of the player. The best way to measure for racquet length is to have a child stand up straight with his or her arms at their sides. (See page 9 for an illustration.) The distance from the tip of their fingers to the ground is the length the racquet should be.

Foam balls and oversized felt-covered balls are used on a 36-foot court. (Court dimensions are explained further in Chapter 2.) Foam balls are light, safe and bounce well. They are ideal for indoor use, especially if courts are set up on smooth surfaces. They are also recommended for safety reasons if there are lots of kids in a small space. Oversized low compression felt-covered balls may be more appropriate for outdoor use, especially in windy conditions. Many of these balls are approved by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) and fall under the Stage 3 or “Red” classification.

A low compression ball is used on a 60-foot court. This ball is a standard size felt-covered ball, but is softer, lighter and moves slower through the air than the traditional tennis ball approved for a full-sized court. The ITF approves these low compression balls as Stage 2 or “Orange” balls.

Other equipment listed makes learning easier and fun for kids and offers variety to the practice sessions. This equipment is available from all major tennis manufacturers and much of it can be obtained from sporting goods, department and toy stores. Many times a substitute can be created from items found around the house.

Below is a list of equipment with a description and some possible substitutes:

**Cones:** These are colorful plastic pylons used as obstacles or targets. Substitute with shoe boxes, tennis ball cans or pyramids created by tennis balls.

**Koosh balls:** A ball made up of colorful rubber strings bound together to form a ball, available at most toy stores. Substitute with beanbags or sock balls.

**Playground balls:** 10- to 12-inch textured inflated rubber balls. Substitute with beach balls, volleyballs, soccer balls or basketballs.

**Poly spots and donuts:** Colorful flat rubber, non-slip spots and circles for on-court marking. Substitute with carpet squares or sidewalk chalk.

**Portable nets:** Several portable net systems are available and come either in individual pieces that need to be joined to construct a frame for a net, or with all pieces attached by an elastic cable so they easily fit together and pop up so the net can be attached to the frame. A simple substitute would be to use caution tape or surveyor tape tied to the net, fence or chair.

**Throw-down lines:** Flat non-slip rubber strips approximately 2 inches by 24 inches that can be used as temporary lines for courts. Substitute with sidewalk chalk, a chalk snap line, masking tape or painter’s tape. (Use a tape that will not pull up the court surface or leave a residue on the court.)

# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 2: QuickStart Tennis: Equipment and Rules for the Developing Player

The easier it is for kids to play tennis, the greater the chance that they'll stick with the game over the long haul. And the chances of retaining them are higher if they achieve early success and have fun playing.

That is the basis behind QuickStart Tennis. In an effort to engage children at the beginner level, other sports bring their games down to scale, from a smaller diamond for Little League baseball to a shorter goal and smaller ball for basketball.

For tennis, the answer is the same. In QuickStart Tennis, children will play on courts that are either 36 or 60 feet long, depending on their age and development, and with racquets that are shorter than the standard 27 inches for adults. Also, children will start by using a foam ball or an oversized low compression felt ball that bounces lower and moves through the air slower than the traditional felt ball.

Overall, there are six specifications to QuickStart Tennis—court size, age of player, type of ball, racquet length, net height and scoring—that allow children to learn and play tennis to scale. It is critical that all six specifications be used at the same time for the complete development of the child as a tennis player, and to create consistency for competitive play throughout the United States.

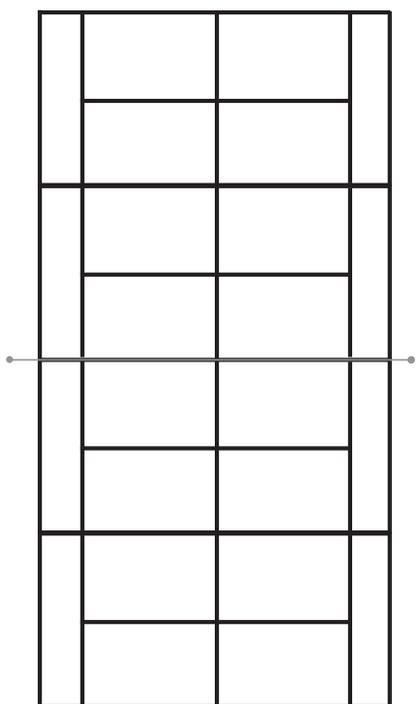
Age	Court Size	Racquet	Ball	Net Height	Scoring
8 and under	36' x 18'	Up to 23"	Foam and oversized low compression (Red Ball)	2'9"	Best of 3 games – first to 7 points
9-10	60' x 21' singles 60' x 27' doubles	Up to 25"	Low compression (Orange Ball)	3'	Best of 3 sets – first to 4 games with third set first to 7 points

### Court Size

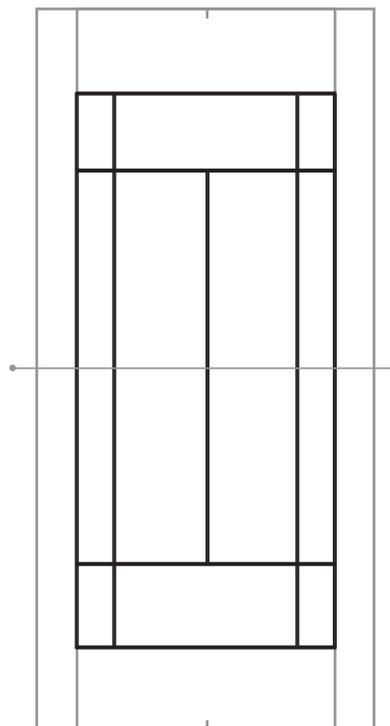
**Thirty-six feet** is the width of a regulation court, including the doubles alleys. On a 36-foot court, the doubles sidelines are the baselines and the singles sidelines are the service lines. A center service line should be marked between the two regulation sidelines. The width of the court is 18 feet and the regulation service line and baseline are used as sidelines.

The **60-foot court** is a three-quarters-sized court using the existing regulation net, while the baseline is moved 9 feet inside the existing, regulation baseline. The sidelines are moved in 3 feet on each side for singles, and the existing singles sidelines are used for doubles. The regulation service court is used as the service court for 60-foot tennis.

The narrower sidelines on the 60-foot court develop youngsters' abilities to move forward and close out points at the net. Young players also find it easier to anticipate a ball moving to the side of them, and the 60-foot court encourages them to learn how to "read" the height and depth of the incoming ball. If the court width was the regulation 27 feet, children would have to cover a distance almost the equivalent to an adult playing singles on a doubles court, and side-to-side ground strokes would become the most dominant shots.



**36-foot Court**



**60-foot Court**

## Age

Children ages **8 and under** play on the 36-foot court and use the specifications recommended for a court measured from doubles sideline to doubles sideline. They will enjoy tennis on a court where they can rally, recover and play points when the ball stays in play for several hits.

Children ages **10 and under** play on the 60-foot court and use all of the specifications recommended for this court, which is three-quarters the size of a standard court. These children are mature enough to play a complete game on a three-quarter-sized court, and they will develop technique, shot selection, rallying skills and the ability to hit and recover on a 60-foot court. By reducing the size of the court to 60 feet, children 10 and under will be able to compete in both individual and team tennis events on a platform that fits their size and suits their abilities.

## Ball

**Foam** and **oversized felt-covered balls** perform better based on court size, racquet length and the height of the child. Using the correct ball and racquet is critical so children can hit with full strokes and strong grips.

For the 36-foot court, foam balls are lightweight, move more slowly through the air and have a lower bounce. They can be easily hit and controlled with shorter and lighter racquets. An alternative to the foam ball is an oversized felt-covered ball, which is especially useful outdoors. It is helpful in that the ball—which moves slower and bounces lower—can be hit at the right height and the right speed in relation to the child. Otherwise, extreme grips become the norm as children adjust to consistently hitting balls above their heads. The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has official specifications for this ball that classify it as a Stage 3 or “Red” ball.

For the 60-foot court, a low compression, lightweight, felt-covered ball is ideal. It moves slower through the air and the bounce height is lower. The ITF has official specifications for this ball that classify it as a Stage 2 or “Orange” ball.

## Racquet Length

Children will play much better if they use a racquet that is the appropriate length. A child using a racquet of the correct length will be able to control the swing pattern and angle of the racquet face. Ultimately, with the right racquet, he or she will be able to control direction, height, distance, spin and power.

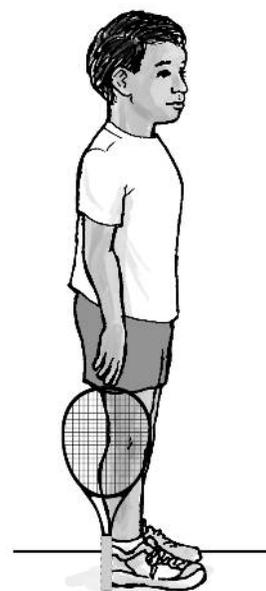
Children on the 36-foot court will generally use racquets up to 23 inches in length. On the 60-foot court, racquet length should not exceed 25 inches. These racquets are readily available, are to scale based on the height of the child and allow the child to develop racquet skills so they can hit with various speeds and spins. (These junior racquets have weight and grip sizes proportionate to the racquet length.)

Racquets that are too long are difficult for a youngster to control. These longer racquets also have more power, and thus children cannot hit with full strokes.

To measure for the correct length, have the children stand straight with arms at their sides. The racquet should be no longer than the distance from the fingertips to the ground.

These short racquets, varying in length from 17 to 23 inches, are usually made of aluminum; they are lightweight and have small grips.

As children grow taller and stronger, so should the racquet be longer and stronger. Children on a 60-foot court using low compression balls can begin with aluminum racquets but also have the option of using stronger and more powerful graphite composite racquets that are 23 and 25 inches in length. (A standard racquet is 27 inches.)



**Racquet Length**

## Net Height

The 36-foot court uses a net height of 2 feet, 9 inches; this is more appropriate to the height of a child 5 to 8 years old and is the height of many temporary nets. No adjustments need to be made when using the 60-foot court and the regulation net that is 3 feet high at the center strap (and 3-foot-6 at the net posts).

## Scoring

Young children need shorter matches based on their age, energy level and attention span. Children 8 and under play the **best-of-three, first-to-seven point games**. The server gets two serves and each player serves two points before changing servers.

The 60-foot match for 9- and 10-year-old children consists of two-out-of-three, four-game sets with the final set determined by one first-to-seven point game. The serve rules are the same as regulation tennis.

Optimally, children should play in small teams, where the result of their match counts as a point for the team. Any singles tournament should be round robin, compass draw or a similar format that enables as many players as possible to play as many matches as possible. (See the appendix for more on compass draws.)

*Note: QuickStart Tennis is designed for players 10 and under. However, teaching techniques incorporating foam balls, low compression balls, shorter racquets and smaller courts can be applied to beginners at any age level. Also, the 60-foot court is very effective for senior players to play singles or doubles.*

# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 3: Keys to Coaching Young Players

### Coaching 101

In this book, we will spend much time focusing on how to rally a tennis ball and consequently play tennis, but it is important at the outset to look at what it means to play. Not just *play* tennis, but *play* itself. We'll explore what it means to play and to have fun and what makes things fun for a child. Without this understanding and framework, we could produce mechanically sound tennis players yet not give children the tools they really need to continue in tennis or other sports—or to be successful in life.

### Buttoning Your Shirt

Have you ever buttoned your shirt wrong? Maybe you were in the dark, or you were in a hurry or you hadn't had your morning coffee. Somehow you ended up with one more button than you had a hole for. What happened? At which button did you do wrong? Was it the last one where you discovered your error? No, it was the first one. And then you just continued along, doing what you normally do. It seemed to make sense. It felt right. It's what everyone else does. It's how you always do it. It is how it's done. But if you start out wrong, you're going to end wrong.

Youth sports are like buttoning your shirt. If you start out wrong, you're going to end wrong. You may miss teaching something really important in the beginning stages, and as you go along, one button after the next, you get to the end and wonder what happened.

- “This is what the other coaches are doing.”
- “It's how you've always done it.”
- “This is what parents expect.”
- “If we're going to win, this is what we've got to do.”
- “This is the way my college or high school coach treated me.”
- “I'm just teaching a bunch of kids; how hard can it be?”

It's not hard. You just have to pay attention—and be intentional—in the early stages. You have to start out right to get the results you and the kids want. What do kids want? Why do they start tennis and why do they quit? It's important to understand these questions—and answers—before you even think about picking up a tennis racket.

## Child Sports Statistics to Know

There are three statistics that make up the 70/80/90 rule of teaching kids. The first alarming statistic is that 70 percent of kids drop out of youth sports by the age of 13! Seventy percent! And tennis is no different. You can have tons of kids in your junior program, but if you keep doing what you've always been doing (buttoning your shirt without paying attention to how you start), 70 percent will be gone by age 13. Why? Adults! We're it! The top three reasons kids drop out of sports are because of us—coaches and parents. Despite our best intentions, we are the reason that kids quit.

### **Top Three Reasons Kids Drop Out of Youth Sports:**

1. It's not fun anymore
2. Parental pressure to perform
3. Unmet coaching expectations

You can take those reasons and boil them down to two primary components: pressure and performance. This is the sad state of youth sports in America, and tennis is no different. If we don't change what we do, what we've always done, and how we do it, we're going to keep getting the same results, with 70 percent of kids checking out.

The 80 percent statistic is that kids (yes, even a 6-year-old) can remember with 80 percent accuracy what was said to them by a coach. Coaches, on the other hand, can only remember with 20 percent accuracy what they have said to children. The summary of the study on why kids drop out of youth sports, by University of Washington Ph.D. researchers Frank Smoll and Ronald Smith, is that "coaches are blissfully unaware of what they say to children and the impact it has on kids."

- "I didn't say that."
- "I wouldn't have said that."
- "Who are you going to believe: me, or a kid?"
- "They're just making that up."

Really? Statistics show they're not. Children are four times more likely to have an accurate recollection of what we said than what we "know" we said. That's scary! We have the best intentions. We want to do and say the right things. But sometimes in the heat of the battle or the afternoon sun, with a dozen or so little kids running around, when they just aren't cooperating, again, we say something trying to restore order. It may not be abusive, but it may not be the thing our kids need to stay active and involved in tennis, or even sports in general.

The 90 percent stat is that 90 percent of kids would rather play on a losing team than sit on the bench of a winning team. Kids want to play; they want to be involved. They don't want to sit around or wait in line for their turn. They want to be actively involved and engaged. Too often it's an adult model of scheduling, performance and competition that is imposed on kids and that influences how they experience youth sports.

## Opportunities to Respond

The more opportunities you provide children to play, the better they will become at their chosen sport. The more they stand in line, waiting, watching and listening rather than moving, running and doing, the fewer opportunities they have to respond and learn. Sure, there will be times when you are instructing while they are watching and listening, but those times must be kept in balance and out-weighted by tons of time for them to play tennis. Experience is the best teacher. Let them experience every aspect of tennis. Create environments where children have as many opportunities to respond as possible.

## Teach Kids to Think

As you will learn later in this book, tennis is an open skills sport in which there are no set plays. There are a multitude of decisions to be made, fluidly and in a split second. It's a lot like driving a car. There is some skill involved in making the car go left and right, but the critical element is in the decisions that go along with that. When to slow down or speed up, when to pull out or when to wait, and being prepared for what the other driver might do are all examples of the importance of learning to think that come with driving a car. But these decisions are independent of the skill and the actual mechanics of making the car go.

You can have players with great shots but poor shot selection. They can be very fast but always too close to the ball. They can be good volleyers but approach the net at the wrong time. It is important that we teach kids to think at all ages and stages of development. Too often as adults, coaches and parents, we order kids around the court, telling them what, when and how to do something. In the process, they become too reliant on a coach or parent to be able to handle situations on their own. For the kids who we do teach how to think, they become the smart players—those who “just know” where to be on the court and what shot to hit. Generally, they are in the right place at the right time. We often label these types of players as gifted, but most often they have been taught to think and react on their own at an early age. Give the kids you coach space to learn and space to make mistakes.

## Making Mistakes

Mistakes are part of learning. They are to be expected. From children to pros, everyone makes mistakes. Even you make mistakes. When was the last time you tripped or bit your tongue? These are basic life functions, yet we sometimes make mistakes even in the simplest of tasks. Tennis is no different. You will sometimes make mistakes on the simplest of shots. The key is to determine when mistakes are just mistakes, and when they are a sign that something else is going on.

When children keep making the same mistakes, it is generally a sign that they have not learned the desired skill or strategy properly. Taking that a step further, they generally have not learned it because we have not taught it effectively. They are not trying to annoy you, ignore your instruction or think they are smarter than you. They are kids. Often we adults do not provide age-appropriate instruction or activities. One of the biggest mistakes that adults make in teaching children is failing to understand the difference between showing them a skill and actually teaching them. The more we just “show and tell,” the less learning takes place and the more reliant they become on our instruction.

So if the ultimate goal in the performance spectrum is not to make any mistakes, how do you get there? The key is understanding that the opposite of making mistakes is not perfection. If you focus on NOT making mistakes, you will create fear, as well as a protective, cautious player. When children—or adults for that

matter—focus on not making mistakes, they are more likely to make them. Embrace mistakes. Allow them. Encourage them. Understand your part in the children's mistakes and adjust your instruction. And after you have done everything you can, expect that they will make some more.

## **Fun**

What makes things fun? Why do you do what you do? Why do kids do what they do? Is there a difference between what is fun for you and fun for them? Certainly. Fun, or play, is different for everyone. The best definition of “play” is something done for the enjoyment of the doer. That's it. It's that simple. Two people might be skiers: One likes to jump off cornices into deep powder bowls, while the other likes safe, groomed runs. Who's having more fun? The person jumping off cornices may be hoopin' and hollerin' as he/she jumps, but the other person loves being outside in the winter, the crisp mountain air followed by a warm hot chocolate at the end of the day. They are both having fun doing what they love to do.

Tennis is no different. Who has more fun playing tennis: a 3.0 player or a 4.5 player? They both can have fun. Because we are in the business of helping people get better, we can too easily move toward saying the 4.5 player. However, it is incorrect to think that skill proficiency equates to more fun. The same is true in coaching children. Girls—and boys—“just wanna have fun.” Coaching beginning tennis means helping kids have fun and it happens to be on a tennis court. There is a paradox of play that says the more you make it about skill acquisition and performance, the less fun it will be and the more likely kids are to drop out. The more fun you make it—without focusing on performance—the more children like it and the better they will perform.

## **Video Games & Skate Parks**

Several years ago if you were to ask kids, “If you weren't playing tennis, what would you be doing,” they would have said playing. Now they say playing video games. Therefore, our beginning-level teaching experience with kids is of the utmost importance. It is this first encounter with tennis that can set the stage for kids becoming—and staying—athletic and moving. While we would love for them to continue in tennis, our first priority is to create an environment that is fun and filled with movement. The more you equate fun with doing and movement, the more likely a child will be to stick with tennis and, ultimately, perform better.

Have you been to a skate park lately? They're packed. Why? Why are skate parks so crowded and, for the most part, baseball and soccer fields are empty, except for organized activities? The difference is adults. There aren't too many adults hanging out at skate parks, while they line the sidelines of other venues for games and practices. The United States Olympic Committee Athlete Development Department believes the best athletes in the country are at skate parks. Why? There are no coaches. Skate parks are filled with self-motivated athletes. There is no one telling the kids how to do certain tricks. Just kids teaching kids. They will work on something for hours, or even days. They'll figure it out by trial and error. And then they'll get it. They flip the board over once in the air. They will celebrate their achievement briefly, and then some other kid will show them how to flip it twice. Then they'll work on that. All without an adult guiding them, telling them what to do, showing them how they are doing it wrong, or getting in their face about not trying hard enough. The kids will even say it's fun. It's fun because they are learning at their own pace, moving, risking, hanging out with friends, challenging one another, laughing and, at the deepest level, playing.

If you run a tennis program, your competition is not another tennis program. It's the local skate park. It is the truest example of kids playing athletically across America. The pick-up games of baseball and basketball have largely been replaced by skate parks. The last sentence from the previous paragraph described why you did what you did as a youngster and describes what still make things fun for children.

## **Kid Magnet**

Kids naturally gravitate to whatever is fun. Is your tennis program fun from a kid's perspective? Or has an adult model of performance and skill acquisition taken over? Using the following list of characteristics of play, how does your program rate?

Learning at their own pace	Performance expectations
Full of movement	Standing in line, waiting
Promote risk taking & experimentation	Don't swing so hard; just get it in...
Being with friends	Separating kids so they get more done
Kids teaching kids	Adults-only models
Laughing	Stop goofing around; we've got a lot to do
Play	Structured environment

If you are like most of us, we can all use a little help making our programs a little more kid friendly. That's OK. All of us have been kids at one time, but it may have been a while. And what we used to do—mostly by accident—when we were kids turns out to be much healthier than what we are experiencing today. There are more options for kids today, which is great. But 70 percent of them are choosing not to participate in sports by the age of 13. What can we do to change that number? What can you do to change that number for the kids in your program?

## **Program Health**

How healthy is your program? How do you judge that? By the trophies in the hall case? By the sheer numbers in each age bracket? By the smiles on the kids' faces? How skilled are your coaches? Are they skilled at working with children? Are they good tennis players but lack the skills and patience to work with kids? If your program is like most, your youngest coaches work with the kids' program. That is a U.S. model of coaching. The European model of coaching is to have the best coaches, the ones with the most experience, work with the youngest players. That could account for the number of great athletes that come from small countries, where they have fewer athletes and yet can compete on the world's stage.

## **Changing the Formula**

Let's say you have a coach who is in charge of an age group that wins 85 percent of its matches, yet only 50 percent of the kids come back the following year. You have another coach who wins only 45 percent of his matches, but almost all of his kids continue with tennis the following year. Who is the better coach? Do you value performance or participation? Can you value both? Sure. But you can't value performance and expect participation to increase. (That's what we've been doing, and it doesn't work.) The more you value participation, the more performance comes. But it's so hard not to force it, to get in our adult model of scheduling, organization, competition, performance and winning.

There is a simple formula for working with children:

- The more they enjoy it, the more they will do it.
- The more they do it, the more they learn.
- The more they learn, the better they will perform.

Simply put, the more they enjoy it, the better they will perform. We typically start with the outcome and work our way backward, creating performance milestones to gauge our progress to make sure we are on target. We become so focused on the outcome and milestones that we fail to hold a child's heart and attention. We may have better players at age 10 than we ever had before, but still 70 percent of them are going to be gone in just three more years.

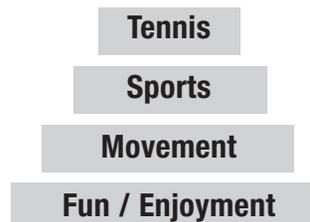
We need to get serious about play and about having fun playing tennis.

### **Invent and Pretend**

Kids love to invent and pretend. It comes naturally for them and is a huge component of play. The more your practice activities incorporate the ability of a child to invent and pretend, the more fun it will be. To you it may appear more chaotic, but a skilled coach of children will know how to harness what is happening.

Do you know the football term “audible”? It's when the quarterback goes up to receive the ball snap and, in making a last-second read of what the defense is going to be doing, changes the play. To the outsider, it looks like a mad scramble. But to the experienced quarterback, it's a planned change. Working with young children is much the same. To the outsider, it looks pretty crazy. But if you are well prepared and can make adjustments on the fly based on what the kids are doing, you will create an environment where children will have fun and flourish. If your lesson plan is sequentially choreographed, you will become frustrated and your kids will be bored. A good rule of thumb is to have 12 things planned and hope to do eight. Give the kids a chance to choose what they want to do. Find out what game they like best in the first few practices and save that for last in subsequent practices.

There will be a great desire on your part to make the lesson be about tennis and acquiring skills. Kids don't play to acquire skills; they play because its fun. If they are acquiring skills at a high rate and aren't having fun, they are good candidates to join the 70 percent who drop out. There is a foundation of needs that must CONTINUALLY be met in order to keep kids playing tennis.



Too often as coaches and parents we go straight for the top and make all that we are doing with kids be about tennis. The more we continue to build the base, not just in the first age level or two, but continually, the more we create a foundation where a child can build the appropriate aptitude and training to become an athlete AND a tennis player.

## The Zone

At the end of every lesson with kids, we often look at what was accomplished. Did they get it? How proficient are they at the skill that was taught? Who needs more work on what? What's next on the lesson plan? While that thinking is good, organized and normal, it focuses only on the top tier. Basically, it's an adult model of sport. It is primarily concerned with performance.

At the end of EVERY lesson, ask yourself—or better yet, ask the kids—did they have fun today? Did you hear laughter? Were they smiling? Would they want to invite their friends to join in?

The highest level of performance is called “the zone.” That same state of being, of awareness, of performance, actually, in children, is called a state of play. Grand Slam champions have it AND children in your classes can have it—when they are so focused on “the now” that they lose track of time and space. Just like when you were outside playing as a child and your parents would call you to come in “in five minutes.” And after 20 minutes had passed, you and your brothers and sisters were rounded up and headed home complaining, “It's not fair! It hasn't even been five minutes yet. Can't we stay out longer?” That is a state of play. It is focused attention and performance.

As coaches, we can create an environment where children can experience “the zone”—when they are focused on “the now,” the activity, the joy they are experiencing. They aren't aware of how hot it is, who is watching or the match that will take place next. They are immersed in now. So an important question is this: Are your kids glad your lesson is over? Are you struggling to fill the time slot? Or are they, and you, wondering where an hour went? Do you have to kick them off the court because they just want to stay and play? Were you so immersed as well that you can't believe the time is over? That is the ultimate lesson, regardless of the skills that were taught. It invites participation. It captures the spirit of a child. They want to come back. They want to keep playing. And the more they do, the better they will be.

## The Most Important Thing to Give Kids

Of all the things you can give kids, what's the most important? A winning attitude? Great forehands and backhands? Amazing tactics? A killer server? A killer instinct? Or would it be compassion and/or understanding?

According to research by Benjamin Bloom, author of *Developing Talent in Young People*, the most important thing is a love of the game. More than 20 years ago, Bloom did an in-depth study of young, talented people across different genres, including music, art, drama, science, math and sports. He looked for correlations between the diverse group of high-performing teenagers, similar to what Stephen Covey would do in his best-selling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Bloom found that it wasn't discipline, specializing at a young age, being part of a great program, having enough money to make kids' dreams come true or being naturally talented that made the biggest difference. All the high-performing kids Bloom studied had, at an early age, a parent, teacher or coach who gave them a love for the game or a love for learning. The best student is a self-motivated one, the one who asks, “Why?” One who seeks out knowledge on his own. One who loves learning. One who reads voraciously. One who practices and then practices some more. The true gift of those labeled as gifted is not their talent, but their love for whatever it is they do.

## **But, How?**

It's simple. You just "give" them a love for the game and your children will become champions. As Happy Gilmore says about golf, "Golf would be so much easier if you just hit a hole-in-one every time. You wouldn't have to learn how to putt." So how do you give children a love for the game? How do you give them something so powerful, yet so simple? The best way to give children a love for the game is to model it. You can't scream, yell, demean, scold, intimidate, or use fear or public humiliation with children and expect them to love it. You need to take to heart ALL the things we have said thus far AND simply just love playing tennis yourself. Go out there and have fun! Laugh and play! If it's not fun for you, how would you ever expect children to have fun? Remember, what's the No. 1 reason kids drop out of youth sports? It's not fun anymore.

"I try to make it fun, but the kids just don't respond." Have you ever felt that way? Like you're doing your best and it's just not clicking. You just went to a clinic and saw a high school coach do a great drill. But it isn't working with your kids. It's not any skill or drill that captures a child's heart; it's YOU! It's your attitude. It's your passion for life, sport and tennis that brings them back.

## **Can You Be a Dork?**

One of the best ways to capture a child's heart is to not be afraid to be viewed as dorky. The best school teachers, year after year, are those who are not afraid to go out on a limb and be a little—or a lot—dorky. It's scary. You make yourself very vulnerable. Especially in front of a bunch of kids who could laugh at you. Still, those who aren't afraid to show a passion for life—and tennis—are able to inspire kids and create an environment where they will flourish.

Watch the movie *Patch Adams* for inspiration. A clown suit. Funny glasses. Crazy hats. Music on the court. Talking in rhymes. Backward Day. 1970s Day. Using a superball. Playing with two balls. Making noises. Making up games. Letting the kids make up games. There will be times when it won't look or sound like tennis. But your programs will be fun. Your programs will be full (because they are fun). Kids will stay around longer. And they will perform better because they are there and self-motivated.

## **Discipline**

On the other end of the "fun spectrum" is the typical usage of the word "discipline." Typically we think of discipline as getting someone to do something they don't want to do. But the root word of discipline is "disciple," which means a joyful follower. Do you demand discipline or do you earn it? Are you trying to get kids to do something they don't want to do? Don't focus on what it is, but look at why they don't want to do it. The more you create a love of the game for your young players, the fewer discipline problems you will have.

Tennis enjoyed an explosion in participation when tennis whites were no longer required. More people became involved when the sport was more acceptable and the definition of proper attire was changed. Tennis may see its next explosion at younger ages when PROPER includes what is proper behavior for children. When your tennis lessons look less like school and work, and more like what KIDS would be doing naturally, your programs will grow in size.

## **The Most Important Thing to Teach Kids**

If a love of the game is the most important thing you can GIVE the children you coach, the most important thing you can TEACH the children you coach is effort. The one quality that makes the biggest difference at the professional level is the thing you need to teach your kids at the youngest age. TEACH them that effort makes a difference! Don't just tell them after they've lost; teach them by the way you conduct yourself. Show them what maximum effort looks like! How can you expect them to dig deeper and give more effort when they don't feel like they have anything left if you don't model that, too? Imagine, you've already been on the court for six hours in a row, in the hot sun, and now you've got third graders. Do you have what it takes to dig deeper? Do you model effort?

### **Teaching Effort**

The psychology of effort, and that of low effort, is a very interesting topic and could be a whole book in itself. In fact, there is such a book, and it's called *Mindset*, by psychologist Carol Dweck, Ph.D. She has done more than 30 years of research on success, failure and effort. Reading her book will change the way you coach and parent. She chronicles numerous personalities, including John McEnroe, and examines their mindsets in how they approached difficulties. Dweck says the best way to inspire success is to praise/reward effort, not performance. This is as true with elite athletes as it is with young children.

Praise effort! Don't praise the victory; praise the hard work in practice that makes the victory possible. Don't praise the number of forced errors; praise the effort it took to make the change. Don't praise the shot selection; praise how well they have been paying attention in practice. Don't placate a player in a loss; let him know there is more to learn and that continuing to work at it will make a difference.

None of us who has ever enjoyed some level of success would say that it came easily. Especially if you wanted to sustain it. Success comes to those who try. To those who persevere. To those who continue to work, or even struggle, through difficult times, dry spells or injuries. To those who are OK with making mistakes. Those who are successful have risen above all odds because they have discovered that is worth it to try again.

### **Careful What You Say**

You can have the best strokes. You can move around the court with the greatest of ease. You can have a rocket first serve. You can even be masterful at communicating all of this to children. You are fit and all of the muscles in your body are fine-tuned for creating tennis excellence—except one. And this one muscle can be the most damaging to your young athletes. The muscle many of us need to work overtime to keep in check is our tongue. Remember the statistic that made up the 80 percent part of the 70/80/90 rule of teaching kids? Kids can remember with 80 percent accuracy what was said to them by a coach, and coaches can remember with only 20 percent accuracy what they say to kids. It is crucial that you take a serious look at everything you say to children.

The most damaging, and often overlooked, type of communication we use with others—and specifically children—is sarcasm. You can have all your other ducks in a row regarding teaching and instructing, but if this one is out of line, you are out of line. Using sarcasm may be OK for you. Your friends use it. They use it with you. It's not that big a deal. But a child may perceive it very differently, and what may not be a big thing for you can be very damaging to the child.

A young child who encounters sarcasm for the first time has a mental process to go through that is unfamiliar to them. An instructor may “jokingly” say, “Your grandmother is faster than you are.” The naïve child begins thinking, *The coach doesn’t know my grandmother. I **am** faster than she is. I **really am**. At least I thought I was. Is the coach lying to me or is he/she telling me the truth?* Children process your sarcastic comment by wondering and then begin the process of deciphering whether you are lying to them. It’s the same thing you do when you encounter sarcasm as an adult from your friends, your spouse or your kids. As adults, we are faster at processing it and have more communication skills to judge the sincerity of the comment. Or at least we think so. Isn’t that where sarcasm bites, when you feel there is some thread of truth encoded in the message?

Controlling your tongue and eliminating sarcasm when teaching children will greatly improve your communication and effectiveness with them. Wouldn’t it be great if they knew that everything you ever told them was true? There would be no need for them to process your communication by running it through the sarcasm/lying filter. They would inherently know that you were speaking the truth to them and that they could trust you immediately. They would know that you are on their side and have their best interest in mind. Again, you might not think it’s a big deal, but it is to children. Take the high road and be the best YOU can be!

## Teach and Inspire

When you break down all the things we do on a tennis court with children, it comes down to two things: to teach and to inspire. That’s it. That’s the heart of a great tennis instructor. Your kids will not have success without both components. You may have taught them well, but if they don’t play inspired or aren’t inspired to give maximum effort, they will fall short. If you just inspire them without teaching them the skills they need to build upon, they again will fall short.

You have an incredible opportunity to make a difference in the life of child! As the Benjamin Bloom book, *Developing Talent in Young People*, points out, you are one of the greatest sources of influence in the life a child. It’s not just about tennis, or forehands and backhands. It’s about making a difference that can last a lifetime! It’s about having them fall in love with movement, sports and tennis. If tennis is fun, they’ll keep playing. If they keep playing, they’re going to learn something along the way. And the more they learn, the better they will perform.

Have fun!

Laugh, giggle and be dorky!

You’ll feel like a kid again.

You’ll fall in love with tennis all over again!

You’ll play better than you ever have before.

And your playing at tennis will draw in more kids!

# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 4: Driveway, Playground and Wall Tennis

Children often get their first exposure to sport through a parent or family member. As in other sports, this probably means going into the backyard with mom, dad or an older brother and playing catch, kicking a ball between the rose bush and the hedge, or shooting a lightweight basketball into a 4-foot basket. The list goes on, depending on the sport.

The common characteristic is that the equipment is smaller, lighter and the intent is to learn a very simple task: throwing, catching, kicking, dribbling or shooting. The instructions, if any, are generally brief and simple with the emphasis on activity. The duration is short because any activity is interesting for a brief period of time and could be interrupted by a passing butterfly or the discovery of a colorful flower in bloom.

### Driveway/Playground Tennis

By that same token, tennis can be a driveway or a playground activity. The goal of playing catch is to learn to enjoy throwing and catching, not playing baseball. The goal of driveway and playground tennis is to rally with a family member. This is possible when everything is scaled down to the size of the child.

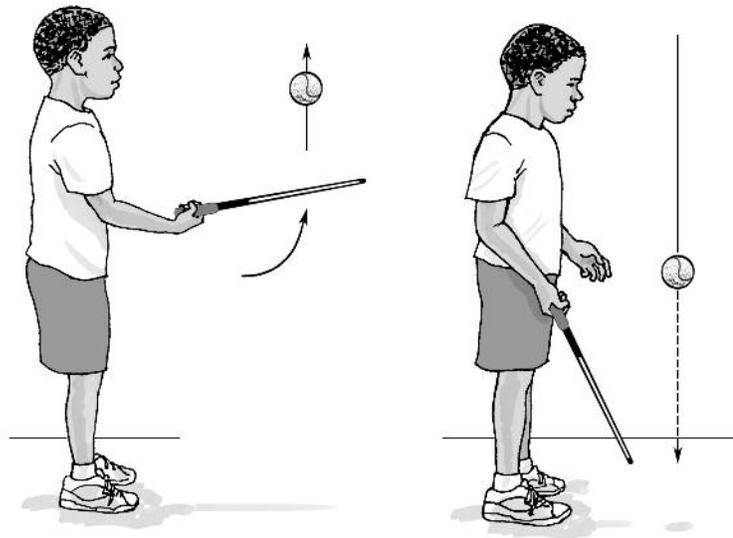
### The Equipment

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the most important variables are the ball, racquet and length of the court. It is a good thing that the driveway or playground space not be anywhere near the size of a regulation tennis court (which is 78 feet long by 27 feet wide). Even a space of 10 feet in length will work, provided that the racquets are short and the ball is light and slow. The “net” could be as simple as a line on the driveway/playground, rope or caution tape tied to a tree and chair across the driveway. A pop-up portable net is also an option. Lines can be drawn by using sidewalk chalk, or you can use the existing seams in the driveway or playground for the lines of the court.

Children under 5 years old should be using very short and lightweight tennis racquets in the 19- to 21-inch range. The ball should be a lightweight foam ball that rebounds well off the driveway/playground surface. Large foam balls with a diameter of around 4 inches are very forgiving if the surface is somewhat irregular. These lightweight balls will not travel very far or fast, and contact does not need to be made in the center of the racquet to make the ball go forward. The foam ball is easy on the arm and will not cause the racquet to twist in the hand of a child if hit off center.

## Getting Started

The starting point for children is hitting the ball up in the air, letting it bounce on the ground and trying to hit it up again. This is a self rally, and children should attempt to hit the ball up as high as their head before the ball bounces so they can hit it again. This height is important because it gives kids an idea of how hard they must hit the ball to get it head high and allows them time to get in position to play the ball again after the bounce.



**Tap Up**

To develop better control and to create a challenge, a circle of about 2 feet in diameter could be drawn on the pavement as a target. This gives the youngsters something to aim for as they tap the ball up and try to land it on the target.

The next step is to do the same activity with the parent, but this time alternate hits. This is actually a mini rally since the ball is being alternately struck by the child and the parent. Once some level of success is attained, the next stage is to create two target areas a few feet apart. These targets should be on either side of a line, and the rally will go back and forth between the two targets placed three or four feet apart on the court.

So far, this is simple and the instruction has been visual as in “see if you can hit the ball up like mommy.” Once you get to the stage of rallying the ball back and forth over a line to two targets, you are ready to put up the makeshift net using a rope or caution tape. You have now created a small tennis court and are ready to rally the same lightweight foam ball back and forth the over the net. The distance is short, the ball is very light and slow moving, and the racquet is short, so hitting balls with everything to scale will be a joy and countless hours can be spent hitting balls back and forth on the driveway or playground.

As the child becomes taller and stronger, boundary lines can be placed farther away from the net because the child will hit with more power. This gives the child an opportunity to rally by hitting balls after they bounce (ground strokes), and if he or she is closer to the net, out of the air (volleys). Eventually, children will learn to begin a rally and even play points with an overhand serve. They will also make up their own scoring and play different games.

Even older children can have an enjoyable driveway/playground experience in a limited space if the ball remains slow and light and the racquets remain short. Foam balls and 23- or 25-inch racquets over a net height of 30 inches will create enjoyable playing opportunities for children and adults alike on the driveway without a regulation-size tennis court.

## Wall Tennis

Hitting balls off a wall or garage door has been a starting point and a method of practice for a number of champion players in the past. Many players have spent hours hitting balls off a wall and imagining themselves playing matches and match points against the champions of the day in the final of the US Open.

### The Equipment

When using a regular hard ball, hitting against a garage or wall is possible only after developing some playing skills. The regular hard tennis ball rebounds off the wall quickly and gives little time to move to, prepare for and return the ball to the wall. The harder ball is simply not appropriate if the wall or garage door is irregular and certainly not an option if there are any glass windows anywhere near the wall or door.

With lightweight foam balls, hitting against the garage door can be much more accessible and enjoyable, even for younger children. Hours can be spent rallying off the wall without the need of a partner or any type of court set-up.

### Getting Started

Children should begin with the progression described above for driveway or playground tennis: Begin with a self rally, hitting the ball head-level high. Once children can accomplish this, they should tap the ball to the wall instead of to a target 3-4 feet away. The ball should be hit up to a target about head high and returned to the wall after the bounce.

As the child becomes more accomplished, he or she can gradually move back and increase the length of his or her strokes. Contests can be created by drawing a line on the pavement farther away from the wall so the child can hit every ball from behind the line and develop full-length ground strokes. Rallies can eventually be started by using an overhand serve.

As children become older, stronger and more proficient, they can graduate to a longer racquet. If they continue to use the soft, slow foam ball, they will be able to generate power and racquet head speed to hit the ball and still have time to recover, prepare and return the next shot.



# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 5: Practice Sessions (Ages 5-6)

This chapter contains eight progressive practice sessions for children ages 5-6 playing on a 36-foot or smaller court and with 17- to 21-inch racquets and foam or oversized low compression balls. (By progressive, we don't mean that these lessons are ahead of their time; it means that each practice session sets the stage for the next.)

The goal of these practices is to help children learn how to use their racquets and judge the flight and path of the ball using fun activities. The ultimate goal is to have these children enjoy the experience of hitting balls back and forth.

Initially, with the 5- to 6-year-old age group, this will begin with floor tennis, leading to passing and throwing tennis. These activities will develop a child's ability to send and receive a ball before being able to rally a ball over a net or low barrier.

Also included in each practice is a list of equipment that is used for that session. Practices for this age group should last no longer than 45 minutes.

The practice session for 5- to 6-year-olds will contain the following:

1. Theme of the day
2. Movement Activities
3. Skill development
4. A take-home tennis activity

*Note: Each practice session contains a tip for coaches written by Gary Avischious, an expert on coaching youth sports. Gary has done extensive study on how to make practices fun and how to motivate kids, as well as developing creativity in your practices and even what to say and what not to say to young players. If your practices are fun and challenging, your kids will want to come back to practices, and they will get better if they continue to come to your practices.*

## Practices at a Glance: Ages 5-6

This one-page guide outlines the eight practice sessions that follow. It serves as a handy reference for what is covered in more detail during each practice

<b>Practice 1</b>	<b>Controlling the Ball and Racquet</b>
Movement Activities	Flamingo, The Bird, Frog Hops, Racquet Quickness
Skills	Roll with Hands, Koosh Ball Pass, Tunnel Ball, Rolly Polly, Alligator River
Take Home Tennis	Koosh Ball Pass
<b>Practice 2</b>	<b>Sending and Receiving</b>
Movement Activities	Simon Sez, Red Light-Green Light, Team Tag, Cannon Ball
Skills	Catch Me if You Can, Underhand Throw and Catch, One Bounce-Two Bounce, Tennis Hockey
Take Home Tennis	One Bounce-Two Bounce
<b>Practice 3</b>	<b>Sending and Receiving with Direction</b>
Movement Activities	Funny Bones, Ball Drop, Sharks in a Tank, Dodge Ball
Skills	Lollipops, Throw Ball, Dirty Harry
Take Home Tennis	Throw Ball
<b>Practice 4</b>	<b>Sending and Receiving with the Racquet</b>
Movement Activities	Lobster Trap, Team Lily Pad, Through the Tunnel, Crash Test, Side Show
Skills	Tennis Shoot Out, Home Base
Take Home Tennis	Lobster Trap
<b>Practice 5</b>	<b>Sending and Receiving with Racquet on the Backhand</b>
Movement Activities	Train Crash, Applause, Racquet Splat, Bungee Jump, Clear the Court
Skills	Tennis Hockey, Alligator River
Take Home Tennis	Applause
<b>Practice 6</b>	<b>Rally Skills</b>
Movement Activities	Statues, Call My Name, Slamma Jamma
Skills	Jacks, Partner Jacks, Rally Me, Survivor
Take Home Tennis	Rally: Player and Adult
<b>Practice 7</b>	<b>Rally Skills with a Partner</b>
Movement Activities	Follow the Leader, Partner Toss and Catch, Inch Worm
Skills	Partner Rally Jacks, Splat, Mini Rally, Tag Team Singles
Take Home Tennis	Mini Rally
<b>Practice 8</b>	<b>Play Day</b>
Take Home Tennis	Mini Rally

## Practice 1

**Theme:** Controlling the ball and racquet

**Equipment:** 17- to 21-inch racquets, foam or oversized low compression balls, Koosh balls or beanbags, large balls such as playground balls or beach balls

*Note: For more information on equipment—including a definition of terms and possible substitutes—see Chapter 1.*

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.



### Movement Activities

**Flamingo.** Have the children move around the court like an animal the coach chooses. When the coach shouts out “Flamingo,” the players stop the animal imitation and balance on one foot with their arms out and eyes looking straight ahead. Repeat several times, choosing a different animal to imitate. You can even let the children make the animal noise.

**The Bird.** Have the children move around the court with the coach, but this time imitating one of three different types of birds that the coach will call out—either a hummingbird with arms moving short and quick, a robin with medium length and medium speed arm movements, or an eagle with long and slow arm movements.

**Frog Hops.** Jump from a crouching position along the ground, landing quietly on the balls of the feet and with both feet together.

**Racquet Quickness.** Two players (or player and coach) stand facing one another, each standing a racquet on the tip of the frame with the handle pointing up. At the count of three, the players will switch places and catch the other player's racquet without letting it drop. After several successful trials, move the children back a half-step at a time and see how far they can go without letting the racquets drop.



### Skills

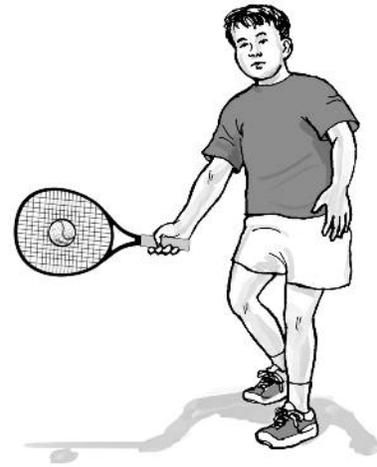
**Roll with Hands.** Using a playground ball or beach ball, have the children stand 4 to 5 feet apart and have them roll the ball back and forth to their partner or coach. Have them catch the rolling ball with two hands directly in front of their body.

**Koosh Ball Pass.** Use one Koosh ball or beanbag for each pair. Have the players begin by standing close together with their racquets, passing the Koosh ball back and forth from one racquet to the other. After several successful trials, have them move back so they have to use a gentle toss to get the Koosh ball from one racquet to the other. Add a challenge by tossing the Koosh ball low, high and even adding a creative catch, such as standing on one leg, between the legs, just above the ground, on one knee, etc. Let the kids be creative with their catch.

**Tunnel Ball.** Two players stand across from each other about 4 or 5 feet apart with one foam ball per pair. One player rolls the ball to her partner, who moves so the ball will roll through her legs without touching her feet. Every time the players are successful, they score a point.

**Rolly Polly.** The players stand across from each other on either side of the doubles alley. Players have a racquet and should position themselves sideways to the ball as they might be positioned for a forehand (see illustration)—with the edge of the racquet on the ground behind the ball and the strings touching the ball. Using the racquet, the player with the ball rolls it to his partner, who stops the ball with his foot and rolls it back. After five successful attempts, the two players roll the ball—and stop it—with the racquet before rolling the ball back.

**Alligator River.** The players line up across from each other on either side of the doubles alley, with their racquets and one ball for each pair. The coach or one of the players is the “alligator” and is going to walk down the “river” (i.e., the alley). As the coach walks down the alley, the players roll the ball to their partner, trying to hit the alligator.



**The Forehand**

## **Take Home Tennis**

**Koosh Ball Pass.** Have parents, older siblings, friends, relatives, etc., pass a Koosh ball back and forth with the player. As the player gains success, have her move back and toss the Koosh ball and catch it on the strings. See if the player can move back two or three steps. Have her toss the ball low and high, and be creative in how the ball is caught on the strings.

## Practice 2

**Theme:** Sending and receiving

**Equipment:** 17- to 21-inch racquets, foam or oversized low compression balls, large balls such as playground balls or beach balls, cones, poly spots or donuts

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Don't show kids "the right way" so they can be as good as you. Allow them to discover and experiment so they can be better than you!

### Movement Activities

**Simon Sez – Lines of the Court.** Use this activity to learn the areas and lines of the court. The coach calls out a line or area of the court and a movement. For example: "Hop on one foot, skip, tip-toe, little mouse steps, monster steps, etc." After all players have gone to their line or part of the court, the coach goes to the correct area so everyone learns the correct line or area.

**Red Light – Green Light.** Players line up side by side, facing the coach who is a distance away. Players have a racquet with a ball, beanbag or Koosh ball balanced on the strings. The coach calls out either "green light" or "red light." On green light, the players can move toward the coach. When red light is called, they must stop. If the players are caught moving when red light is called, if the ball falls off the racquet or if they touch the ball, they must go back to the starting line. The first player to reach the coach wins.

**Team Tag.** Divide players into two groups. Use the area between the baseline and the service line. Call the name of one player who will attempt to tag as many players as he can in 30 seconds. If a player moves out of the defined playing area or if they get tagged, they are out. After 30 seconds, all players are back in and the coach calls out a new name.

**Cannon Ball.** The coach uses a large ball, either a playground ball or a beach ball, and tosses it high in the air and calls out a player's name. The player attempts to catch the ball after it bounces, counting how many times it bounces before it is caught. This continues until all the players have been called. This can also be done with partners, with one player tossing the ball up and the other partner catching it.

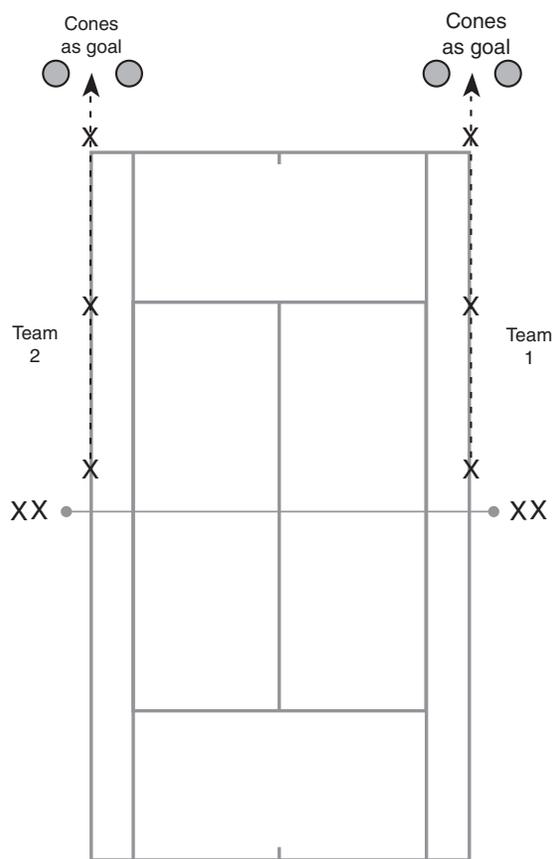
### Skills

**Catch Me If You Can (self toss and catch).** Each player has a ball and tosses it in the air at least head high, lets it bounce on the court and catches it.

**Underhand Throw and Catch (add clapping).** Show children how to toss the ball underhand, standing with both feet facing the target and stepping forward with the opposite foot (left foot if they are right-handed) and swinging their arm at their side. Place a target for the ball about two-thirds of the distance to the partner so the player has an aiming point. Have the catcher clap when the ball bounces before catching. You can have them add multiple claps if they elect to catch the ball after two or three bounces.

**One Bounce – Two Bounce.** One player tosses the ball underhand over the net and calls out “One” or “Two.” The other player must allow the ball to bounce that number of times before catching it and tossing it back, also calling out a number. Start with playground balls and progress to one player trapping the ball with the racquet, and then eventually hitting the ball on either one or two bounces.

**Tennis Hockey.** Players form two teams and stand across from each other on the doubles sidelines and place two cones as goals about 3 feet beyond the end of the line. Keeping the ball close to their racquets, the children tap the ball along the line (have them name the line) trying to keep the ball on the line. When they get to the end, they must try to score a goal for their team by hitting the ball between the two cones.



**Tennis Hockey**

### **Take Home Tennis**

**One Bounce – Two Bounce.** The adult or older partner tosses a playground ball up in the air and calls out “One,” “Two,” “Three” or even “Zero.” The player must allow the ball to bounce that number of times before catching it and tossing it back to the adult. Begin with a playground ball and progress to a foam ball with the child trapping the ball on the strings of his racquet.

## Practice 3

**Theme:** Sending and receiving with direction

**Equipment:** 17- to 21-inch racquets, foam and oversized low compression balls, poly spots/donuts, playground balls

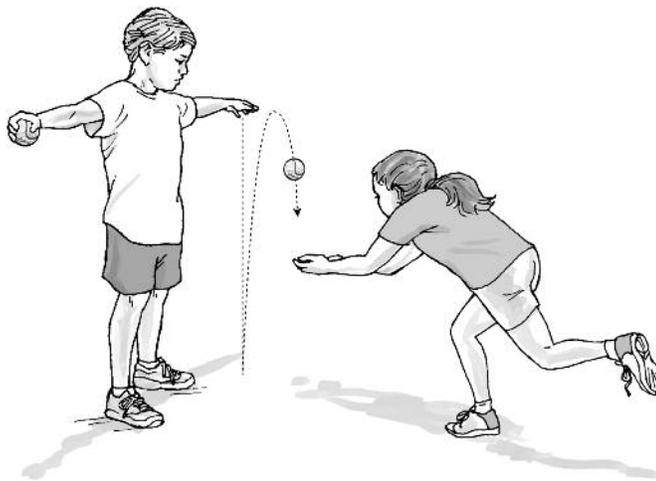
### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

It is not well executed forehands and backhands that get a child hooked on tennis. It is movement, fun and play that captures a child's heart—and it happens to occur on a tennis court.

### Movement Activities

**Funny Bones.** To get kids moving, balancing and learning the lines of the court, have them move to the lines called out by the coach and balance on the line with the instructed number of body parts. The coach will give two commands: One will be for the line, and the second will be for the number of body parts to put on the line. For example, the coach could say “Skip to the baseline and balance on three body parts” (as in two feet and one hand), or “March to the center service line and balance on two body parts, but you can only use one foot.”

**Ball Drop.** In pairs or with a coach, one player has a ball in both hands with arms extended at shoulder height. The player drops one ball and the partner runs and catches the ball after one bounce. Move slightly back after each successful drop and catch.



**Ball Drop**

**Sharks in a Tank.** Define the play area, such as the entire backcourt (between the service line and the baseline) or one service court, depending on the size of the group. The coach calls out the name of the child and that child becomes the “shark” and attempts to tag as many players as possible. When a player is tagged, he steps out of the boundaries, does two jumping jacks and then rejoins the game. It is a good idea to control the movement—calling out “fast walk,” “skip” or “march”—to prevent anyone from getting hurt while running. The coach changes the identity of the shark frequently.

**Dodge Ball.** Players with racquets form a circle. One player is selected to be in the middle of the circle without her racquet. Players attempt to roll a foam ball across the circle and tap the player in the middle with the ball, who is dodging the rolling ball. Make this game move even quicker by using two or even three balls.

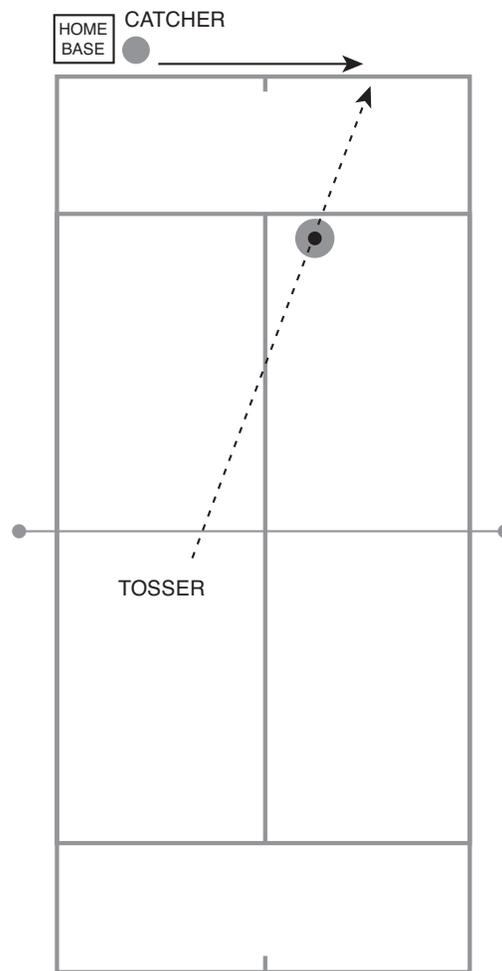
## Skills

**Lollipops – Roll or Toss to a Color.** Two players, each with a racquet, stand 5 to 6 feet from each other with two spots of different colors in front of them. One of the players calls out a color of one of the spots and rolls the ball to that spot. The partner moves to stop and pick up the ball, calls out a color and rolls the ball back to that spot. Start this game with a rolling ball, progress to a tossed ball and finally incorporate rolling the ball with a racquet.

**Throw Ball.** Using a playground ball and a 36-foot court, children play tennis by throwing the ball over the net with two hands and catching it on the opposite side. You can permit multiple bounces but all other rules of tennis apply. By using two hands you can encourage rotation and getting sideways. Players learn to see empty spaces and can play over a net with relatively little skill while learning to move the opponent and learning the tactic of hitting to the open court.

**Dirty Harry.** Each player has a partner. One player is positioned off to one side of the court (tossler) while the other player (catcher) is starting on her “home base.” Home base is just inside the singles side line of the 36-foot court. The tossler makes an underhand toss diagonally to a large target area (working on crosscourt). The “catcher” has to move out to catch the ball. Allow players three bounces, then two bounces, then one bounce before catching the ball. The “catcher” then does an underhand toss back to the tossler before returning to “home base.” Address side shuffle on the recovery. The tossler can only toss the next ball once the catcher has returned to home base.

Each time the catcher successfully catches the ball and the tossler tosses the ball in the target area, they get one point. Use either scoring flip cards or cones to keep track of the score. The coach announces the number of points the players need to achieve. Players who are struggling may be challenged to score fewer points than more skilled



**Dirty Harry**

players. As they progress, the team can be challenged to get seven points. Stay within the seven-point goal, as this will help them learn the match play scoring system for QuickStart Tennis. When a team reaches their designated points, they yell “Dirty Harry” and they are the winners. All players rotate roles after a team has a “Dirty Harry.”

*Note: A large target area is essential to ensure success by all.*

*Variation: The tosser tosses the ball underhand to a large target area straight ahead (working down the line).*

*Variation 2: The tosser tosses from the other side of the court.*

## **Take Home Tennis**

**Throw Ball.** Have the child and an adult rally with a playground ball by throwing and catching over a line/net in the driveway or any other flat surface. You can allow multiple bounces and let the child move closer to the line/net for better success.

## Practice 4

**Theme:** Sending and receiving with the racquet

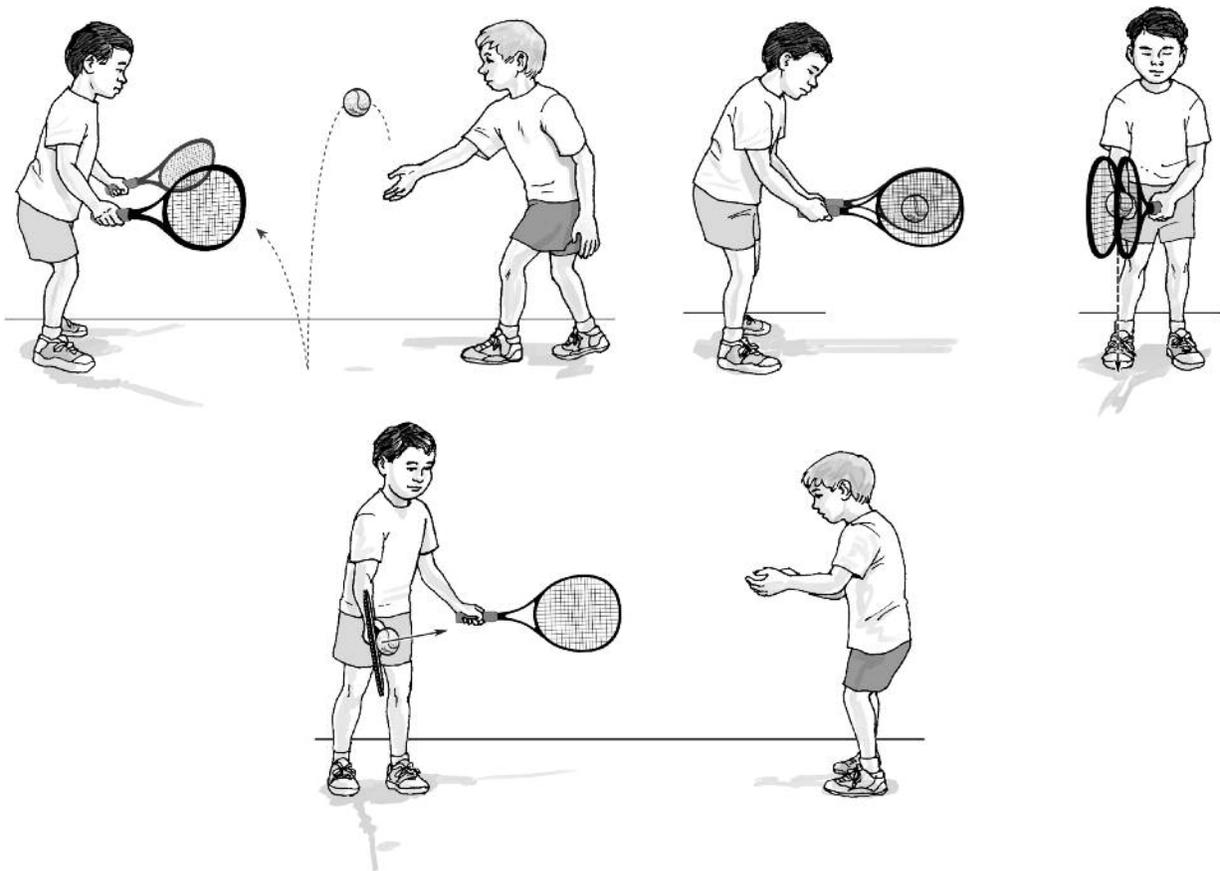
**Equipment:** 17- to 21-inch racquets, foam and oversized low compression balls, poly spots/donuts, playground balls, cones

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Who are you becoming because of tennis? It's not your win/loss record that is important. In the game of life, the bigger picture is more important than the details.

### Movement Activities

**Lobster Trap.** This activity is done in pairs. The players stand 8 to 10 feet apart, with one player holding two racquets, one in each hand, and the partner with one ball. The player with the ball (the tosser) makes an easy underhand toss and the player with the racquets (the lobster) catches the ball after the bounce by trapping the ball between both racquets. After trapping the ball, the player drops the ball from the racquets and hits the ball back to the tosser. Encourage the "lobster" to trap the ball at the side of his body so it is easy to make the drop and hit from a sideways position. Change tossers and "lobsters" after five tosses.



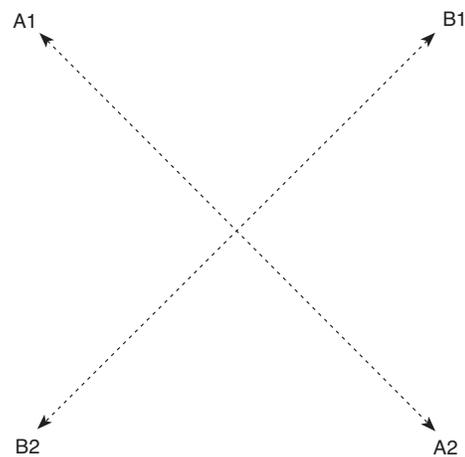
Lobster Trap

**Team Lily Pad.** Players work as a team to get from one side of the court to the other (the swamp). To cross the swamp, one player must step only on the “lily pads” (poly spots or donuts). Each team has two poly spots and one player places one “lily pad” in front, where the other player can hop to or step on. The partner picks up the vacated “lily pad” and moves it in front so the partner can move forward by stepping or hopping to the next “lily pad.” This continues until one team makes it across the swamp. At this point, the players change roles and one person moves the lily pads while the other steps or hops to the open lily pad in front until she makes it back across the swamp.

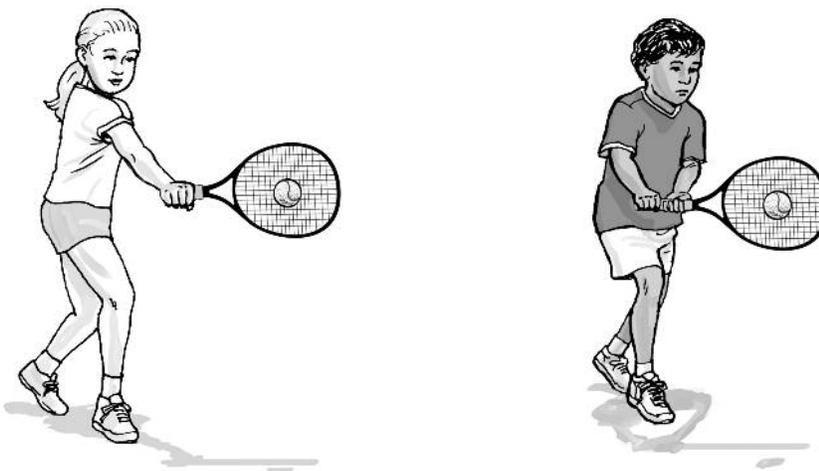
**Through the Tunnel.** Players line up right behind each other, with their legs wider than shoulder width apart. The last player in line, or the coach, rolls the ball between the legs of the other players. After the player rolls the ball, she runs to the front of the line and tries to stop the ball before it passes her. Continue this format until the team reaches a designated area, such as one of the lines of the court.

**Crash Test.** This activity uses four players, each with a racquet and one foam ball per pair. Partners stand diagonally opposite each other with one ball, and the other pair is also diagonally opposite with one ball. When the coach calls out, “Go,” the players roll the ball with their racquets to their partner opposite them, so two balls are going at the same time. If the two balls collide in the middle, the players yell out, “Crash.”

**Side Show.** Players are in pairs, throwing a playground ball with both hands across their body to a partner on the other side of the net. The throw should resemble that action of the forehand and backhand (see illustration) ground stroke.



**Crash Test**



**One-Handed Backhand, Two-Handed Backhand**

## Skills

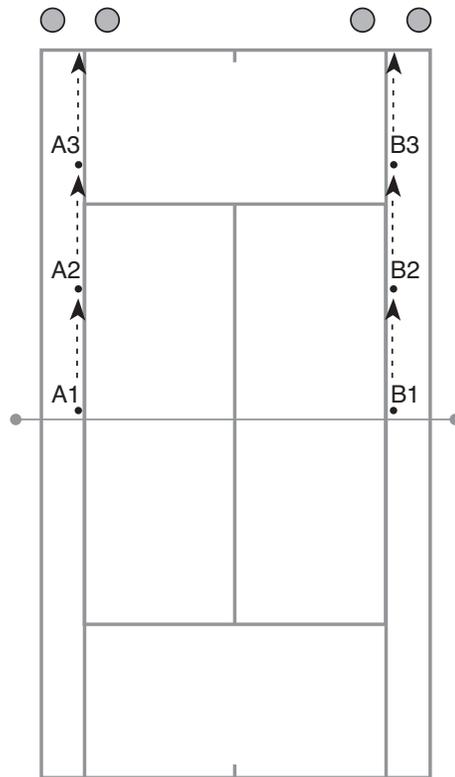
**Tennis Shoot Out.** Players are divided into two teams. Spots are spread out along each singles sideline of the 78-foot court, and two cones forming a goal are placed behind the baseline. Make sure the goals are large enough to ensure success. Players from each team stand on a spot so they form a line along the singles sideline.

The ball starts with the player at the net, who rolls the ball with his racquet to the next player, who stops it and rolls the ball to the next player until it gets to the last player, who shoots the ball between the cones with her racquet. The first team to get the designated number of balls between the cones wins the game.

**Home Base.** Players are hitting or tossing a ball to each other over the net. A spot is placed in the center of the baseline as the “recovery spot.” Every time a ball is tossed or hit, the player goes for the ball, traps it on his strings and hits or throws the ball to the other side of the net and recovers to his spot. The players are working cooperatively to score five points—a successful hit or toss, the trap, return and recovery.

## Take Home Tennis

**Lobster Trap.** The adult has one foam ball and the child has two racquets, one in each hand. The adult makes an easy underhand toss to the child, who traps the ball between both racquets after the bounce. After the trap, the child turns to the side, drops the ball from the racquets and hits a forehand to the adult. See page 34 for illustration.



**Tennis Shoot Out**

## Practice 5

**Theme:** Sending and receiving with racquet on the backhand

**Equipment:** 17- to 21-inch racquets, foam balls, oversized low compression balls, cones

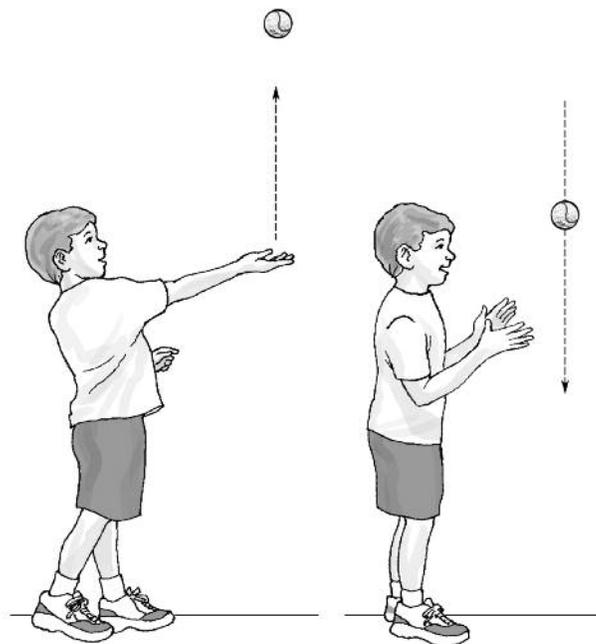
### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

You can't scream, yell, demean or humiliate a child into loving tennis. What are you going to do TODAY to help them fall in love with it?

### Movement Activities

**Train Crash (use backhand side of racquet).** Two players stand on either side of the doubles alley, each with a ball. Players roll the balls back and forth with their racquet, using the backhand side without the two balls hitting. As they get more successful they can move back a step.

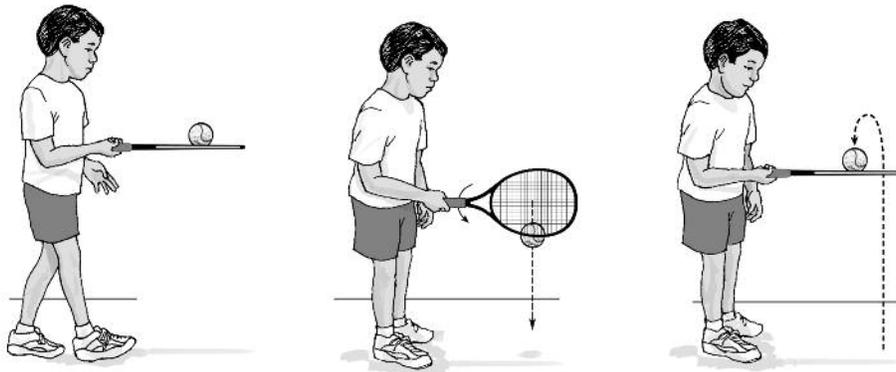
**Applause.** All players have a ball in their own space. Each will toss the ball up, clap and catch after the bounce. To increase the difficulty, have them clap twice before catching, then three times, then as many times as they can before the ball bounces twice.



Applause

**Racquet Splat.** Two players with one ball are facing each other. Place a racquet between the two players who are standing 8 to 10 feet apart. Each player will make an underhand toss attempting to hit the racquet face. Each time the ball hits the face of the racquet, the team scores one point. Make this a cooperative game so each team is trying to score as many points as possible in the allotted time. Keep the time frame short, such as 30 seconds, and switch partners frequently.

**Bungee Jump.** Each player has a ball that is balanced on the strings. The players move around the court balancing the ball. When the coach calls out, “Bungee Jump,” the players let the ball drop off the racquet, let it bounce and then catch the ball back on the racquet. They may have to use their hands to trap the ball on the strings, but with practice they can just use the racquet face. Once the ball is on the strings, the player continues to move until the coach calls, “Bungee Jump,” again.



**Bungee Jump**

**Clear the Court.** Divide players into two teams and put them on either side of the net. Dump out as many foam balls as you have on both sides of the court. When the coach calls out, “Clear the Court,” players pick up balls and throw them over the net to the other side of the court. Let them continue to catch or pick up balls and throw them over to the other side for a minute to see what side of the court has the fewest balls.

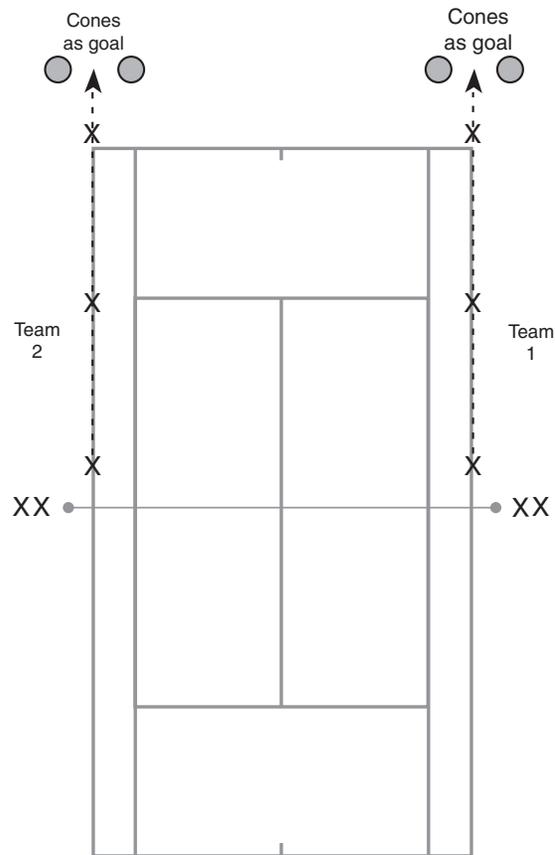
## Skills

**Tennis Hockey – Use Backhand Side of the Racquet.** Place children in groups along a line starting by the net. Place two cones as a goal about 4 feet beyond the baseline. Keeping the ball close to the racquet on the backhand side, the children tap the ball along the line while trying to keep the ball on the line. When they get to the baseline, they try to score a goal by hitting the ball between the two cones.

**Alligator River – Use Backhand Side of the Racquet.** The players line up on either side of the doubles alley, each with a racquet and with one ball for each pair. The coach or one of the players is the “alligator” and is going to walk down the “river” – the alley. As the coach walks down the alley, the players roll the ball to their partner trying to hit the alligator’s feet.

## Take Home Tennis

**Applause.** Use a foam or playground ball. The adult tosses the ball up and the child claps and catches the ball after the bounce. Do the same with two claps and three claps before the catch. See if the coach and player can clap between the toss and catch without a bounce. Can you do two claps before the bounce? Three claps?



**Tennis Hockey — Backhand**

## Practice 6

**Theme:** Rally Skills

**Equipment:** 17- to 21-inch racquets, foam and oversized low compression balls, throw down lines, poly spots or donuts

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

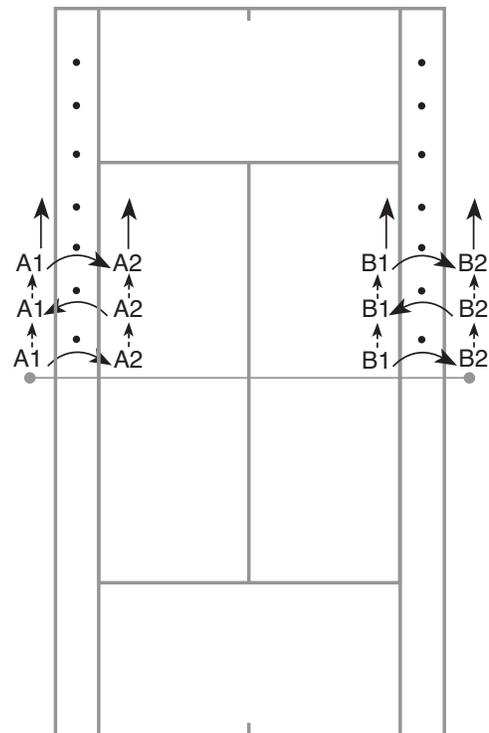
"I don't get excited about talent. I get excited about unconditional effort and I'm looking for it every time I'm with you." —Dr. Jim Loehr

### Movement Activities

**Statuses.** Children jog around the court until the coach calls out, "Freeze." Children have to stop very quickly and hold their balance.

**Call My Name.** Children are in pairs, one partner with a ball and the other with her back to her partner. The partner with the ball tosses it up and calls out the partner's name. The partner has to turn around and catch the ball after one bounce.

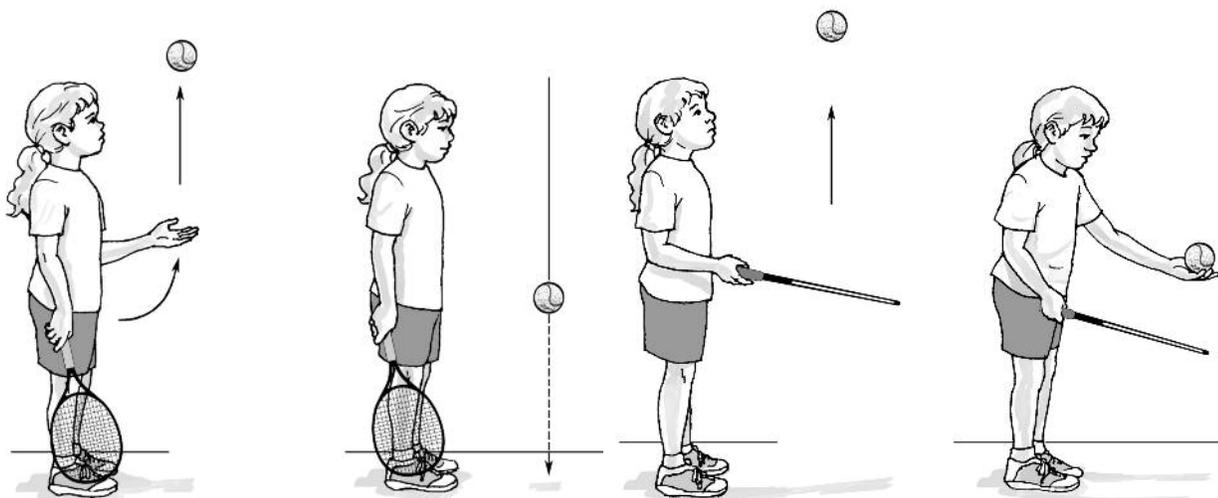
**Slamma Jamma.** Place throw down lines or poly spots/donuts every 5-6 feet inside the doubles alley. Players stand on either side of the doubles alley facing each other. Players side shuffle up and down the court tossing a ball underhand to a partner. The ball must bounce between the players before the partner can catch it. The goal is to move from the net to the baseline without dropping the catch. Every time a player drops the ball, the team quickly goes back to the nearest throw down line or spot before continuing on.



**Slamma Jamma**

## Skills

**Jacks.** The player tosses the ball up and lets it bounce, bumps it up with the racquet one time and catches it—“onesies.” The player then attempts to tap it up twice—“twosies”—and so on until they reach “fivesies”—or five in a row.



Jacks

**Partner Jacks.** Same as above except the ball is caught by a partner on each tap-up.

**Rally Me.** Within the service box, the player tosses the ball, lets it bounce off the court and bumps it up with the racquet, lets it bounce and taps it up again. This can be done while moving around the service box.

**Survivor.** Players line up on one side of the net (the island), and drop and hit a ball over the net—or, if need be, hit from a toss made by the coach. If the ball goes over the net, the player stays on the island and goes to the end of the line.

If the player misses, he is off the island and goes across the net, where he will try to catch a ball. If he catches the ball in the air, everyone on that side (the off-the-island side) gets to return to the island. If the ball is caught after one or two bounces, only that player goes back to the island. The last player left who successfully hits the ball over the net, into the court and that is not caught is the survivor.

## Take Home Tennis

**Rally: Player and Adult.** Player rallies with an adult on any flat surface with a foam or oversized low compression ball. Alternate hitting up after one bounce and trying to keep the ball from going outside a defined area, such as an area in the driveway, sidewalk or playground.

## Practice 7

**Theme:** Rally Skills with a partner

**Equipment:** 17- to 21-inch racquets, foam or oversized low compression balls, beanbags or Koosh balls

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Effort trumps everything, including talent.



### Movement Activities

**Follow the Leader.** Have children follow the coach around the court and imitate the movement of the leader, such as run, hop, swinging arms, monster walk, march, shuffle sideways, skip, etc. The coach can substitute a player to serve as the leader.

**Partner Toss and Catch.** Place two players in a service court with one ball. The player with the ball will toss it up at least head-level height so it lands anywhere in the service box. The other player must move and catch it after one or two bounces, then toss it so the first player must run and catch it. See how many successful toss and catches each team can make. Change partners frequently.

**Inch Worm.** Players line up shoulder to shoulder in a straight line, with their racquets held out in front with the strings facing up. The last player in the line has a beanbag or Koosh ball. That player passes it from his racquet to the next player in line and then runs behind the line of players to the front of the line. As each player passes and moves to the front of the line, the line will move forward to the opposite end of the court.

## Skills

**Partner Rally Jacks.** Partners alternate hits going from one hit each, “onesies,” up to five hits each, “fivesies.”

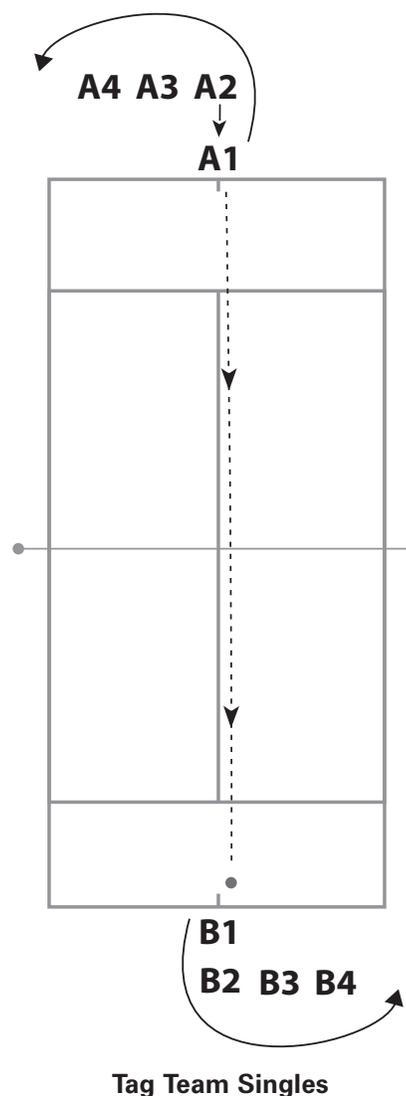
**Splat.** Two players each with a racquet and a ball pyramid made of four balls (three for the base and one on top). One player drops and taps the ball up at about head-level height, trying to hit the ball pyramid to make it “splat.” When the balls are hit, the player scores a point.

**Mini Rally.** Partners work together and rally over a line or low obstacle that serves as the net. They stand close to the obstacle and gently rally balls over the line or obstacle using the forehand. To start the rally, have players start close and sideways to each other, match up racquet faces and take two steps back.

**Tag Team Singles.** There are a few variations to this cooperative game where players in two lines on opposite sides of the net hit and move to the end of the line while keeping the ball in play. The rally begins with the first hit being a drop hit by the first player in line or by an underhand toss from the coach. This game is perfect for coaches and helpers to play as part of the team. They should get in line and participate just like the kids, hopefully adding consistent and accurate hits when they play.

## Take Home Tennis

**Mini Rally.** Player mini rallies with an adult over a line or low obstacle such as a racquet bag or any low barrier made by items from the house or garage. Use a foam or oversized low compression ball.



## Practice 8

**Theme:** Play Day – Tennis Olympics

**Equipment:** 17- to 21-inch racquets; selected from practices above

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Praise effort, not ability and performance. Don't praise the first-serve percentage; praise the work it took to get that.

### Movement Activities

This is a fun day and the activities can be just for fun or competitive, especially if the kids are placed on teams. Stations are set up around the court and players start at an assigned station and perform the activity. When the time is up, they move to the next station. All of the activities have been done somewhere in the first seven practice sessions.

Here are some samples of simple activities for the stations around the court:

- Self rally
- Rally with a partner
- Splat
- Inch Worm
- Throw ball
- Tag Team Singles
- Any other activity that the players enjoy

### Take Home Tennis

**Mini Rally Over a Line.** Player mini rallies with an adult over a line or low obstacle such as a racquet bag or any low barrier made by items from the house or garage. Use a foam or oversized low compression ball.

# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 6: Practice Sessions (Ages 7-8)

This chapter contains eight progressive practice sessions for children ages 7-8 playing on a 36-foot court, and with 21- to 23-inch racquets and foam or oversized low compression balls. The goal of these practices is to help children learn the basics of a rally by being able to hit a ball back and forth over the net with a partner.

This chapter will build on and reinforce children learning to use their racquets and judging the flight and direction of the ball by using fun activities and games. While the emphasis will be on rally skills using both forehand and backhand ground strokes, other skills needed to play a complete game of tennis are introduced, including the serve and return, along with the volley.

The goal is to move a young player along from a simple rally to actual game play on a 36-foot court. Points will begin with a serve and players will learn simple tactics, recovery after the hit and shot selection. The rules of tennis also are introduced, and young players will learn to keep and announce score and to call their own lines.

Each session for this age group will include an opportunity for kids to rally and play. The chapter will begin with roll ball, where kids roll balls back and forth using the 36-foot court, followed by throw ball, where they throw and catch one ball over a net into the 36-foot court. This will lead into rally and play opportunities. Don't be concerned if kids struggle some keeping the ball in play. As a coach, you need to get them moving, tracking and hitting. The kids might not be very successful initially, but they will probably think this is the most fun, and they will get better in every practice.

Included in each practice session is a list of equipment that is used for that session, as well as a coaching tip from youth coaching expert Gary Avischious. Practices for this age group should be no longer than 60 minutes.

The practice sessions for 7- to 8-year-olds will contain the following:

1. Theme of the day
2. Movement activities
3. Skill development
4. Game
5. A take-home tennis activity

## Practices at a Glance: Ages 7-8

This one-page guide outlines the eight practice sessions that follow. It serves as a handy reference for what is covered in more detail during each practice.

### **Practice 1**

Movement Activities  
Skills  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Racquet Control**

Different Moves, Ball Chase  
Kirk-O-Rama, Lobster Trap, Half-Pound Lobster Trap  
Roll Ball Tennis  
Roll Ball Tennis

### **Practice 2**

Movement Activities  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Instant Rally Progression – Forehand**

Dynamic Warm-up, Ball Drop  
Instant Rally Progression—Forehand  
Splat, Throw Ball Tennis  
Driveway/Playground Forehand Tennis or  
Forehand Wall Tennis

### **Practice 3**

Movement Activities  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Instant Rally Progression – Backhand**

Two Ball Roll, Two Ball Toss, Jog Ball  
Instant Rally Progression—Backhand  
Lobster Rally  
Driveway/Playground Backhand Tennis or  
Backhand Wall Tennis

### **Practice 4**

Movement Activities  
  
Skills  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Forehand and Backhand Rallying**

Partner Ball Tossing and Catching, Call My Name,  
Rally Me, Jacks  
Reinforce Forehands and Backhands  
Four Square, Tag Team Singles  
Driveway/Playground Continuous Rally or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 5**

Movement Activities  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Serve and Return**

High Fiver, Mirror  
Introduction to Underhand Serve  
Champions  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 6**

Movement Activities  
Skills  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Rally Skills**

Slamma Jamma  
3-2-1 Juggle Rally, Continuous Rally  
Tag Team Singles, Up and Down the River  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 7**

Movement Activities  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Volley**

Jog Ball, Koosh Ball Step-Back  
Volley Introduction  
Champion of the Court, Star Catcher  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 8**

Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Play Day**

Star Team  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

## Practice 1

**Theme:** Racquet Control

**Equipment:** 21- to 23-inch racquets, foam or oversized low compression balls

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Seventy percent of kids drop out of youth sports by the age of 13. What are you going to do today to make sure the kids in your program are not part of the 70 percent?

### Movement Activities

**Different Moves.** Players are in pairs with one person designated as the leader. The leader will do a movement activity on the court, such as jogging, hopping, skipping, jumping, etc., and moving in different directions—forward, backward, sideways. The partner has to copy the movement and follow the leader as closely as possible. Players should take turns as the leader.

**Ball Chase.** Both players stand beside each other, one with the ball, and the other player with his back to his partner. The player with the ball rolls it away from the partner and calls out, “Go.” The other player turns around, chases after the ball and stops it before it finishes rolling. *A variation is to face forward and have the back player roll the ball between the legs of the player in front, who runs after the ball and stops it before it stops rolling.*

### Skills

**Kirk-O-Rama.** To liven up simple racquet-handling activities like bouncing balls up and down, add some music and change activities every 20 to 30 seconds. Use a variety of activities and have players change every time they hear a whistle. With racquets, have players try any or all of these activities for variety in your practices:

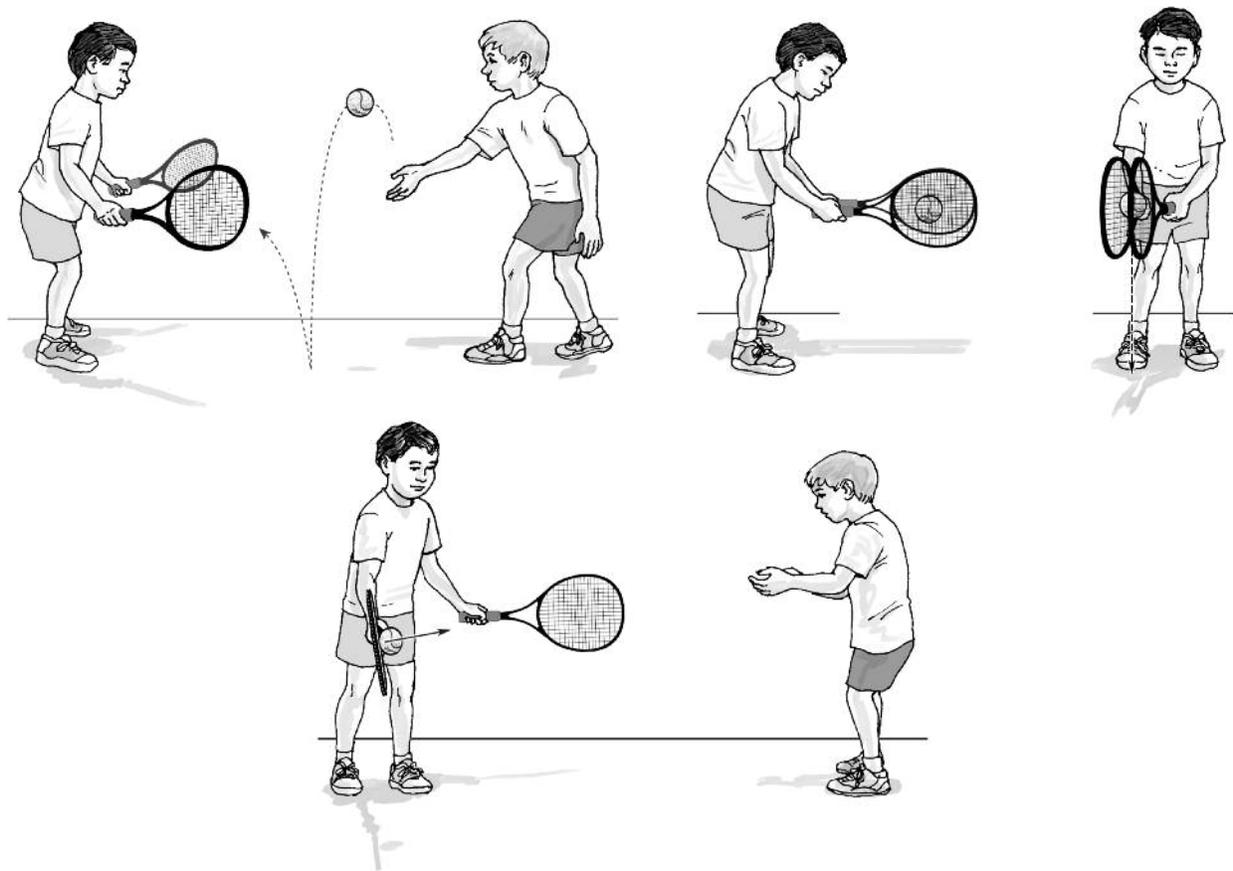
1. Bounce ball down
2. Bounce ball up, letting it bounce on the court after each hit
3. Bounce ball down on the edge of the racquet
4. Bounce ball up, keeping the ball in the air
5. Bounce ball up, alternating sides of the racquet
6. Bounce ball up, alternating sides but add a hit up on the edge between hitting on both sides
7. Bounce ball high
8. Bounce ball low
9. Bounce ball while on one knee
10. Bounce ball while sitting on the court
11. Bounce ball while lying on the court
12. Bounce ball in a circle around the body
13. Bounce ball in a Figure 8 around the legs
14. Bounce ball down while hopping on one foot
15. Bounce ball up while hopping on the other foot
16. Bounce ball up, with the racquet between the legs
17. Bounce ball up, with the racquet around the back

18. Toss the ball up and catch it on the racquet without it bouncing on the strings
19. Balance the ball on the strings and turn the racquet 180 degrees without the ball falling off the strings
20. Spin quickly in a circle while balancing the ball on the strings

**Lobster Trap.** Players work with a partner, one player holding two racquets and one player with a foam ball. The feeder (player with the ball) makes an underhand toss and bounces the ball to the other player, who traps the ball between two racquets (lobster claws). The player then turns sideways, drops the ball from the racquets and gently hits the ball back to the feeder, who catches it after one bounce.

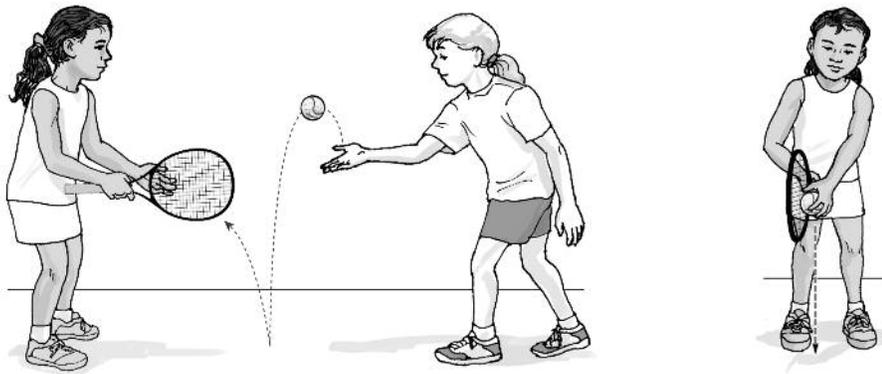
Increase the challenge by having both players with two racquets and have both do the sequence: turn sideways, drop, hit, bounce and trap. Include a large target area so players have a visual of where to aim their drop-hit or underhand toss.

**Half-Pound Lobster Trap.** One player has a racquet and the other player has a



**Lobster Trap**

ball. The player with the ball will underhand toss to the player with the racquet. The player with the racquet holds the racquet with the butt cap against the belt buckle in line with the contact point and the ball should be caught (trapped) against the strings with the hand after one bounce.



**Half-Pound Lobster Trap**

## Game

**Roll Ball Tennis.** With two players on either side of the 36-foot court, each player will roll the ball under the caution tape (no net is used for this game). The other player moves into position, where she stops the rolling ball with her racquet and rolls it back. See how many rolls and stops the players can get in a row. As a variation, have the players stop the ball with their feet before rolling it back.

## Take Home Tennis

**Roll Ball Tennis.** Players will find a flat area such as a driveway, playground or even hallway and play roll ball tennis, rolling and stopping a ball back and forth with a partner. See how many consecutive rolls and stops the player and partner can get.

## Practice 2

**Theme:** Instant Rally Progression – Forehand

**Equipment:** 21- to 23-inch racquets, foam balls, oversized low compression balls, poly spots or donuts, playground balls

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Fill in the blanks.

What does your tennis program have in common with smiling, joy and laughter?

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Hopefully you need more space!

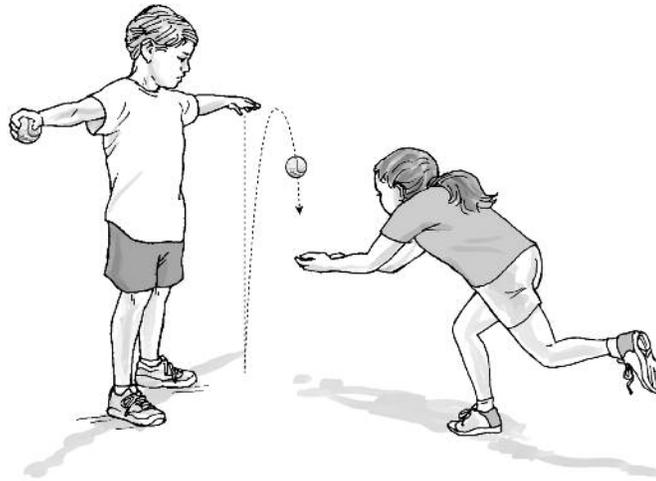


### Movement Activities

**Dynamic Warm-up.** The following activities are a perfect way to warm up and also give players an opportunity to toss, catch and learn about the flight of the ball. Use some or all of these with the coach leading the activities:

1. Jog in place while juggling ball from right hand to left hand and back
2. Slow jog and fast juggle
3. Fast feet and slow juggle
4. Regular jog and regular juggle
5. Skip and regular juggle
6. High knees and regular juggle
7. Heel kicks and regular juggle
8. Pass ball around left leg three times
9. Pass ball around right leg three times
10. Pass ball around waist three times, stop and reverse direction
11. Pass ball around knees three times, stop and reverse direction
12. Pass ball around neck three times, stop and reverse direction
13. Toss ball straight into air with a leap and catch
14. Dribble ball from right hand to left hand
15. Dribble ball through the group
16. Toss one ball with a partner while shuffling through the group
17. Bounce pass one ball with partner while shuffling through group

**Ball Drop.** Players are in pairs facing each other. One player has one ball in each hand and his arms extended at shoulder level. The player drops one ball and the other player has to run and catch the dropped ball after one bounce. Switch partners after three drops. To increase the difficulty, have players move one step farther away after every successful drop, bounce and catch.

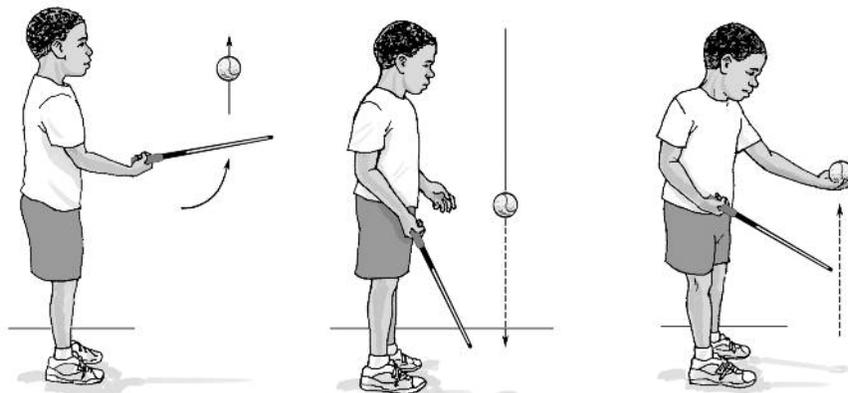


**Ball Drop**

## Skill

**Instant Rally Progression – Forehand.** Each child will have a racquet and ball. Follow this sequence in order and young players will develop rally skills in just a few minutes. To keep kids engaged, move through these activities quickly. For example, the coach might say, “Let’s see how many you can do in 30 seconds.”

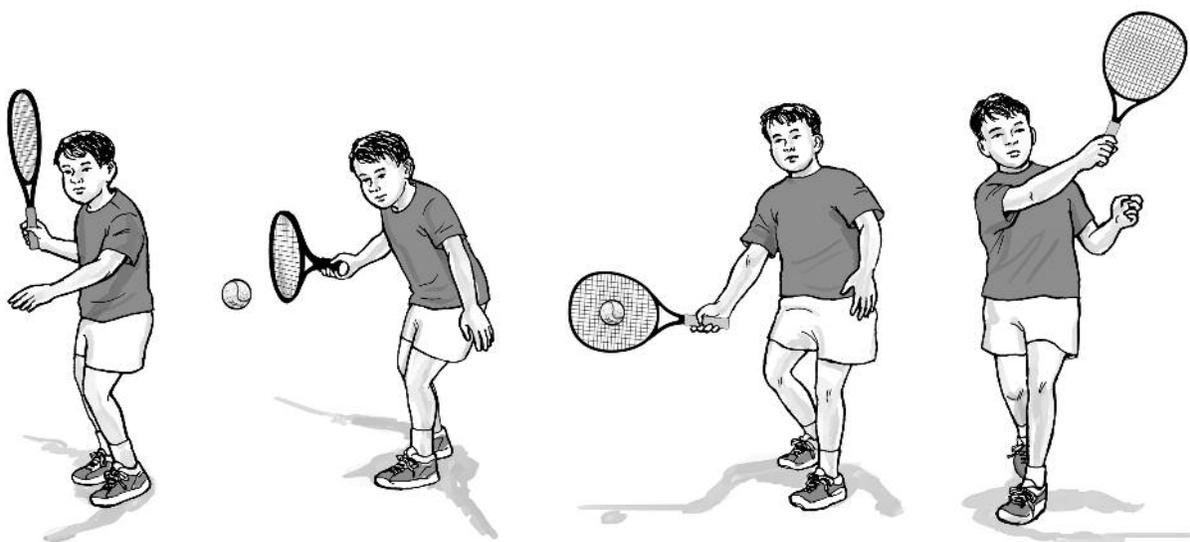
1. **Tap up, bounce and catch.** Players will tap the ball up about head-level height, let the ball bounce and catch it.



**Tap Up**

2. **Self rally.** This time, rather than catching the ball after the first bounce, continue to tap the ball up after one bounce to about head-level height.

- 3. Rally with a partner to a target.** Find a partner and alternate tapping the ball up to about head level. After the bounce, the partner taps up and lets the ball bounce. See how many consecutive tap ups each pair can get in a row. To help them focus on hitting up rather than out, place a poly spot, donut or draw a chalk circle as a target between the two players. Players should try to hit every ball up to head level.
- 4. Rally over line with partner.** Draw a line or find a line and place each player on either side. Have them match up racquet faces forehand to forehand and move back two to three steps. Have them rally so the ball bounces over the line. The ball should be hit about head high. See how many they can get in a row, hitting all balls on the forehand side.
- 5. Rally over a net.** This is similar to the above, but the players will rally over a net or barrier. Start at the net and have players match up racquet faces forehand to forehand and move 3-4 feet away from the net and play all shots on the forehand side. To assist them with control and direction, add a target about three feet from the net (poly spot, donut or chalk circle).



The Forehand

- 6. Game—Step-back forehands.** Players are on either side of the net and match up racquet faces forehand to forehand, then take two steps back. The player with the ball drops and hits it to the partner, and they rally for two shots on the forehand side. After two successful consecutive hits, both players take one step back and try again for another two-ball rally. After each successful two-ball rally, they move back. If they miss, they must both move forward one step. Try this again with a three-ball rally before the players can step back and eventually get to a four-ball rally.

## Games

**Splat.** To add some excitement to the instant rally progression, go back to Activity No. 3—Rally with Partner to a Target—but this time the target is made up of four tennis balls constructed in a pyramid. (This is done by placing three balls on the ground in a triangle, with one ball on top.) All balls must be hit up to head level, and the team scores a point every time they hit a shot that knocks the pyramid down.

**Throw Ball Tennis.** Players are on either side of the net on a 36-foot court. Players throw a foam ball underhanded over the net. The opposite player must catch it and throw it back after the ball bounces one time on the court. To make this game easier, players can use a larger ball (such as a playground ball) and they are allowed multiple bounces before catching. Also, they can move closer to the net, marked by a poly spot or donut, before throwing the ball back over the net.

Play can be a continuous rally, or let the players play points to see if they can toss the ball in the court and away from the opponent. (This simulates real match conditions and strategy.)

## **Take Home Tennis**

**Driveway/Playground Forehand Tennis or Forehand Wall Tennis.** Player hits forehand rallies with a partner in the driveway or playground over a line/net, or hits against a wall using a foam ball.

## Practice 3

**Theme:** Instant Rally Progression – Backhand

**Equipment:** 21- to 23-inch racquets, foam and oversized low compression balls, poly spots or donuts, chalk

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Teach your players to think. The more you voice-activate them in practice, the more reliant they become on you—and the less they learn and the less they perform.

### Movement Activities

**Two Ball Roll.** Players line up facing a partner on either side of the doubles alley. All players have a ball that they roll at the same time to one another so each player catches the opposing rolling ball. They continue to roll and catch at the same time. Create some movement by letting the players roll the ball a step or two away from their partner.

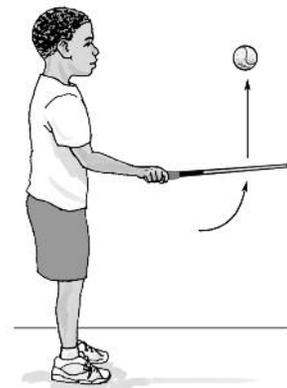
**Two Ball Toss.** This is an extension of Two Ball Roll described above, but this time, rather than rolling, the players will make an underhand toss and they will catch the balls after one bounce.

**Jog Ball.** While players are jogging in a large circle, they toss the ball up and catch it after the bounce with two hands, then with the right hand, then the left hand. Keep players moving and have them change direction when the coach calls out to change directions.

### Skill

**Instant Rally Progression – Backhand.** This is the exact same progression as the Instant Rally Progression on the forehand side, but players are using only the backhand side of the racquet. Players can use two hands on the backhand side, or some might elect to use only one hand. Have them follow this sequence:

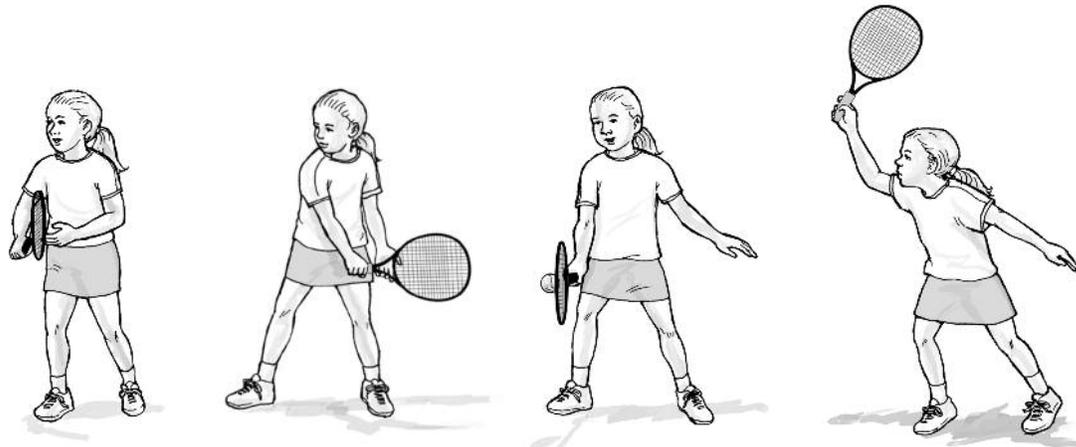
1. Tap up on the backhand side of the racquet, bounce and catch. Players will tap the ball up to about head-level height, let the ball bounce and then catch it.
2. Self rally. This time, rather than catching the ball after the first bounce, continue to tap the ball up on the backhand side of the racquet after one bounce to about head level.
3. Rally with a partner to a target. Find a partner and alternate tapping up to about head level on the backhand side of the racquet. After the bounce, the partner taps the ball up and lets it bounce. See how many consecutive tap ups each pair can get in a row. To help them focus on hitting up rather than out, place a poly spot, donut or draw a chalk circle as a target between the two players. Players should try to hit every ball head level high.



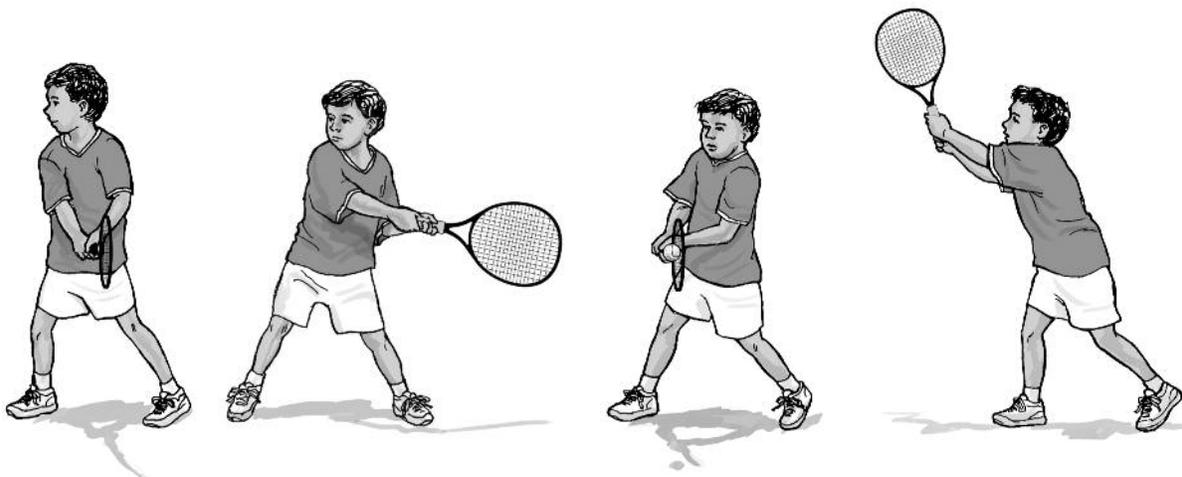
Tap Up

4. Rally over a line with a partner. Draw a line or find a line on the court and place each player on either side. Have them match up racquets on the backhand side and move back two or three steps. Have them rally so the ball bounces over the line. The ball should be hit about head high. See how many they can get in a row hitting all balls on the backhand side.
5. Rally over a net. This is similar to above but the players will rally over a net or barrier. Have them match up racquet faces backhand to backhand and move 3-4 feet away from the net and play all shots on the backhand side. To assist them with control and direction, add a target about 3 feet from the net (poly spot, donut or chalk circle).
6. Game—Step-back backhands. Players are on either side of the net and match up racquets backhand to backhand and take two steps back. The player with the ball drops and hits it to the partner and they rally for two shots on the backhand side. After two successful consecutive hits, both players take one step back and try again for another two-ball rally. After each successful two-ball rally, they move one step back. If they miss, they both must move forward one step.

*Note: Players hitting two-handed backhands might have trouble dropping and hitting on the backhand side. You can allow them to put the first shot in play with a forehand, and the return would be the first backhand shot on their way to four consecutive hits.*



**One-Handed Backhand**



**Two-Handed Backhand**

## Game

**Lobster Rally.** Players are on both sides of the net with two racquets each and one ball. The first person drops the ball and hits it over the net. The second player moves and traps the ball between his racquets, turns sideways to the net, drops the ball and hits it over with the back racquet. Play can go for a continuous rally or the players can try to hit to the court on either side of the partner on the opposite side of the net. (See Practice 1 for illustration of Lobster Trap.)

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground Backhand Tennis or Backhand Wall Tennis.** Player rallies with backhand ground strokes in the driveway or on the playground with a partner. One player can rally against a wall with a foam ball.

## Practice 4

**Theme:** Forehand and Backhand Rallying

**Equipment:** 21- to 23-inch racquets, foam or oversized low compression balls, throw down or chalk lines

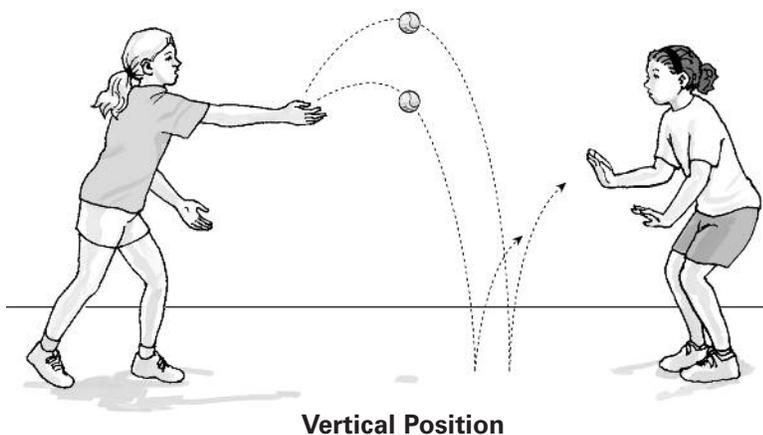
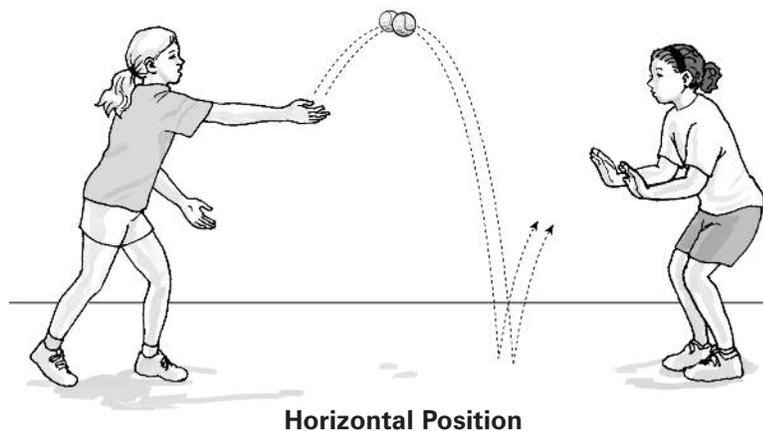
### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Mistakes are part of learning. They tell you what you need to spend more time teaching. And after you invest time and energy in skillfully teaching, children will still make mistakes.

### Movement Activities

#### Partner Ball Tossing and Catching:

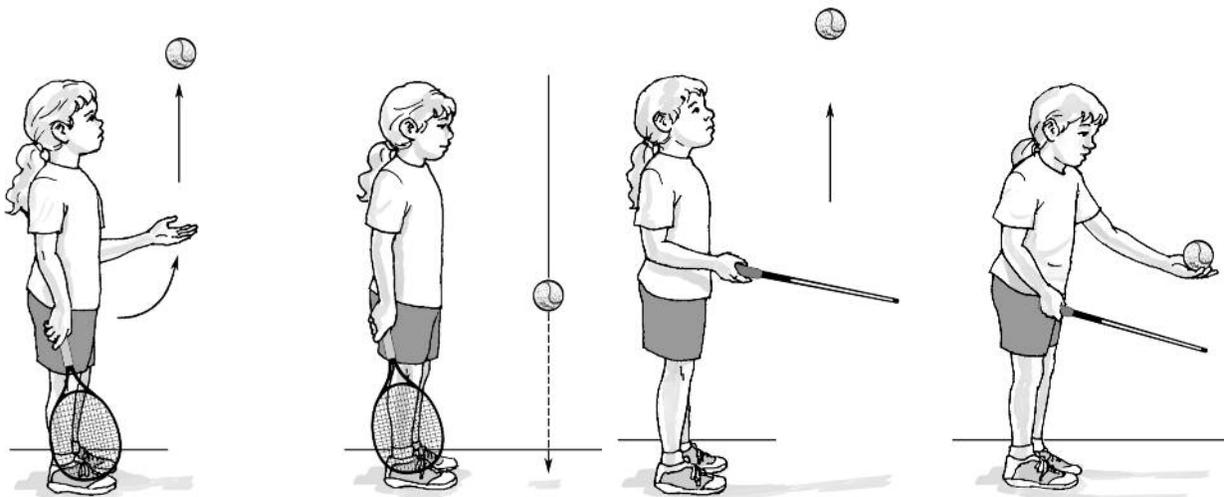
- Roll the ball to a partner standing 6-8 feet away. Start with one ball and then do two balls at the same time.
- One player underhand tosses; one player catches the ball after one bounce.
- One player with two balls in her hand tosses two balls positioned side by side (horizontal position). Her partner catches balls on one bounce or two bounces.
- One player with two balls in her hand tosses two balls stacked on top of each other (vertical position). Her partner catches the balls after one or two bounces.



**Call My Name.** Children are in pairs, one with a ball and the other with his back to the partner. The player with the ball tosses it up and calls out the partner's name. The partner has to turn around and catch the ball after one bounce.

**Rally Me.** All players begin in one of the service courts. Each has a ball and racquet. They toss the ball up, let it bounce off the court and bump it up with their racquet. They continue to bump the ball up after it hits the court (self rally). This can be done while moving around the service court.

**Jacks.** The player tosses the ball up and lets it bounce and bumps it up with the racquet and catches it and announces, "onesies." The player then attempts to tap it up twice, "twosies" and so on until they reach "fivesies."



**Jacks**

## Skills

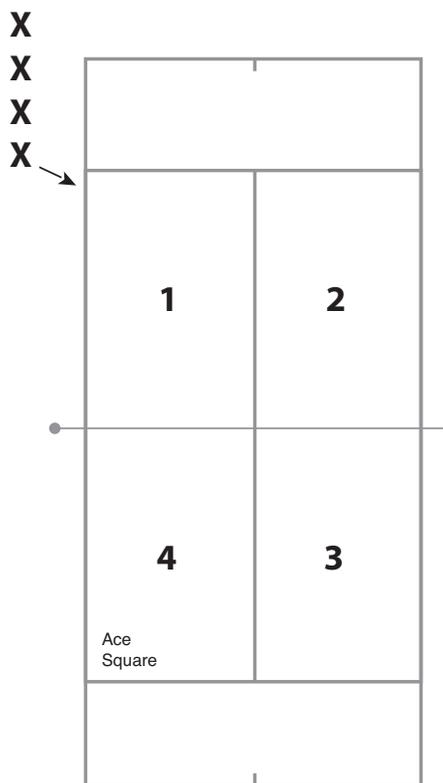
There are no new skills introduced in Practice 4. Review the forehand and backhand and play the following games to reinforce forehand and backhand rally skills.

## Game

**Four Square.** This popular playground game can be adapted for tennis. It can be played over the net using the four service courts of the 36-foot court. Each service court is numbered one through four, and players enter the court in Square 1.

All points begin in the Ace Square (Square 4). The player in Square 4 starts the ball with a drop-hit into any of the other three squares. The player in the receiving square must hit the ball before it bounces twice. If the player hits it out of any of the squares, or if it bounces twice before she hits it, that player is out, the remaining players move up to the next vacant square and a new player enters on Square 1. (For example, if the player in Square 3 misses, the player in Square 2 moves up to Square 3 and the player in Square 1 moves up to Square 2.)

The game can be played without racquets by tossing and catching a larger ball.



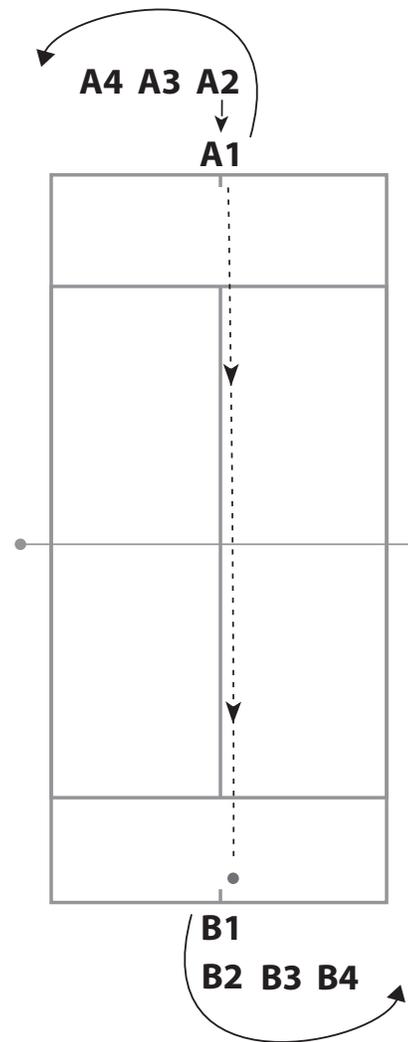
**Four Square**

**Tag Team Singles.** A minimum of four players are needed for this game. Divide players into two groups, with each group forming a line behind the middle of each baseline. One player is up on each side (A1 and B1). The first player from side A (A1) drop-hits the ball over the net and moves to the back of her line. The first player on B (B1) returns the ball and goes to the back of the line on his side. From there, each subsequent player hits one ball and moves to the back of the line, keeping the point going until one side misses. This can be a cooperative game and the team (players in both lines are on the same team) attempts to get 10 consecutive rallies. For safety, make sure you use a waiting spot for those players not hitting.



### Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground Continuous Rally or Wall Tennis.** Player works on a continuous rally either over the net with a partner or off the wall individually with a foam ball.



Tag Team Singles

## Practice 5

**Theme:** Serve and Return

**Equipment:** 21- to 23-inch racquets, foam or oversized felt covered balls

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Experience is the best teacher. But what do your kids experience waiting in line? Engage their minds and bodies every chance you get.

### Movement Activities

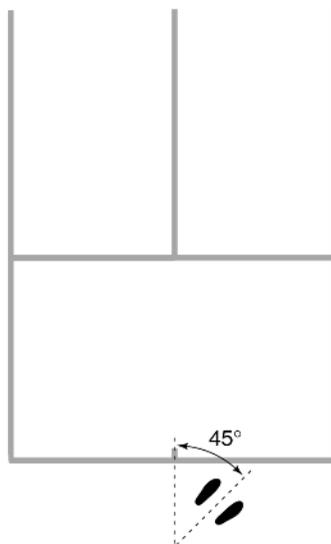
**High Fiver.** Players line up just inside the doubles alley facing a partner. Players will move together up and down the alley with a side shuffle, high fiving each other with both hands as they move.

**Mirror.** Players stand facing a partner. One player is the leader and the other is the follower. The leader can move any way she wants and the partner must mirror the actions. Ensure that the teams have enough personal space for safety.

### Skill

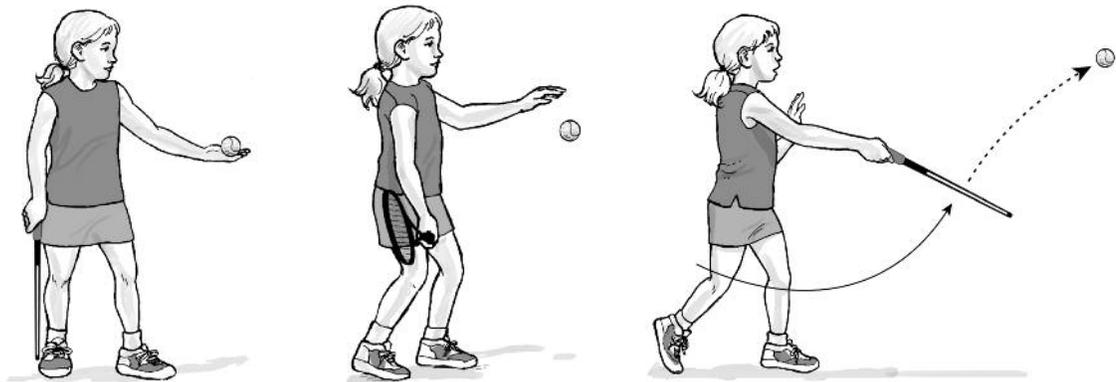
#### Introduction to the Underhand Serve:

- Players will begin with a racquet facing up and a ball in their opposite hand. Each player will drop the ball on the strings and tap it up. Players will catch the ball after the bounce (self serve).
- Players will underhand serve over a line and to a partner. The partner will trap the ball on her strings with the racquet and hand and then serve it back. Players should be positioned about 6-8 feet apart and be standing with their feet at a 45-degree angle to the line.
- Players move back so they are 10 feet apart. The server will hit an underhand serve over the net and into the court. The partner will return the ball back to the server, who will then trap the ball on his strings. Each pair will do five serve-and-return sequences and change servers and returners.



Feet Position

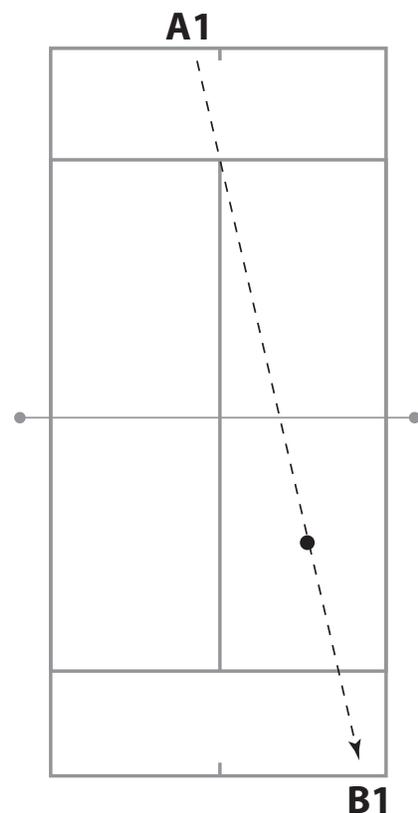
- Step-back serves. This activity starts with the previous formation and distance away from the net. Every time the server hits the serve into the court, the partner returns the ball and the server traps the ball on her racquet, the team can move back one step each. If they miss, they must move forward one step. Change servers after every five serves. You can elect to have the players let the ball bounce three times before the trap, then progress to two and, finally, one bounce before the trap.
- Serve, return and trap. Both players will be 10-12 feet away from the net. The first player begins with an underhand serve. The second player returns the ball back to the server and the server traps the ball with her hand and racquet. Do this sequence, but have targets for the server and the returner so they can concentrate on an aiming point for each shot.



Underhand Serve Sequence

## Game

**Champions.** Partners stand on opposite sides of the net. One player is the server and the other is the catcher. The server (A1) starts with an underhand serve, attempting to serve into the diagonal service box. The catcher (B1) is trying to catch the ball after one bounce. After catching the ball, the catcher tosses it back to the server. The server and catcher score a point for a successful diagonal serve and catch, trying to reach the number set by the coach. Stay within the seven-point goal to help the kids learn the match play scoring system for QuickStart Tennis. Use either scoring flip cards, cones, throw down lines or clothespins to mark the score. When the players reach the set number of points, they yell, “Champions,” and are declared the winners. Rotate roles and repeat.



Champions

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Player begins every rally in the driveway or playground with a serve. On the wall, begin with a serve and rally until you miss, then begin again with the serve.

## Practice 6

**Theme:** Rally Skills

**Equipment:** 21- to 23-inch racquets, foam or oversized low compression balls, throw down lines or spots, beach balls

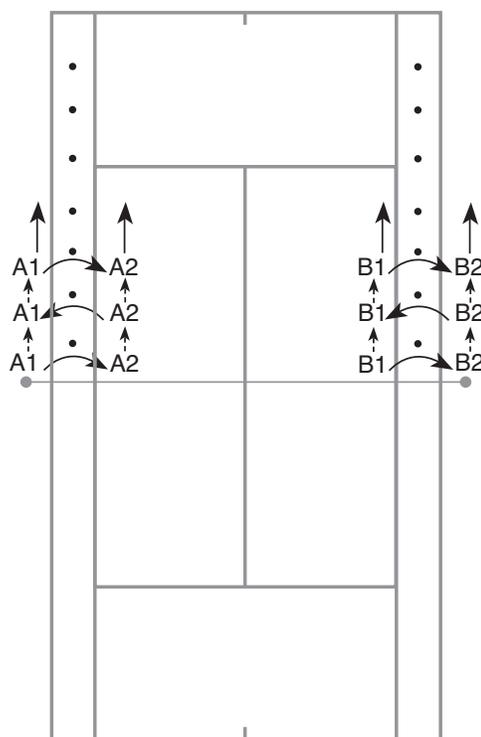
### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

We are hardwired to play.  
Nothing excites the brain like play.  
Play is the wellspring of creativity and imagination.  
Where does standing in line fit into your program?

### Movement Activities

**Slamma Jamma.** The coach places spots or throw down lines every 5-6 feet inside the doubles alley. Players stand on either side of the alley facing each other. Players side shuffle from the net to the baseline tossing underhand to a partner with a foam ball or beach ball. The ball must bounce between the players before the partner can catch it. The goal is to move from the net to the baseline without dropping the catch. Every time a player drops the ball, he quickly goes back to the nearest spot or throw down line before continuing on.

To increase the difficulty, have the players catch the ball in the air. If you have large numbers, use the width of the court (doubles sideline to doubles sideline) and place spots or throw down lines every 5-6 feet.



**Slamma Jamma**

### Skills

No new skills are introduced in Practice 6. Use the following activities and games to reinforce the rally skills that were previously introduced and prepare your players for match play.

**3-2-1 Juggle Rally.** Players are paired up with one player on either side of the net. One player self-rallies (tap up and bounce) the ball three times and hits it over to her partner. The partner does the same three-ball self-rally and hits the ball back over to his partner. The next time the players self-rally twice, and finally once, before hitting it over the net. Do this on both the forehand and backhand sides.

**Continuous Rally.** Players are in pairs with one player on either side of the net. Players begin with an underhand serve and see how many balls they can hit back and forth over the net without missing. When an error is made, the opposite player will begin the rally with an underhand serve.

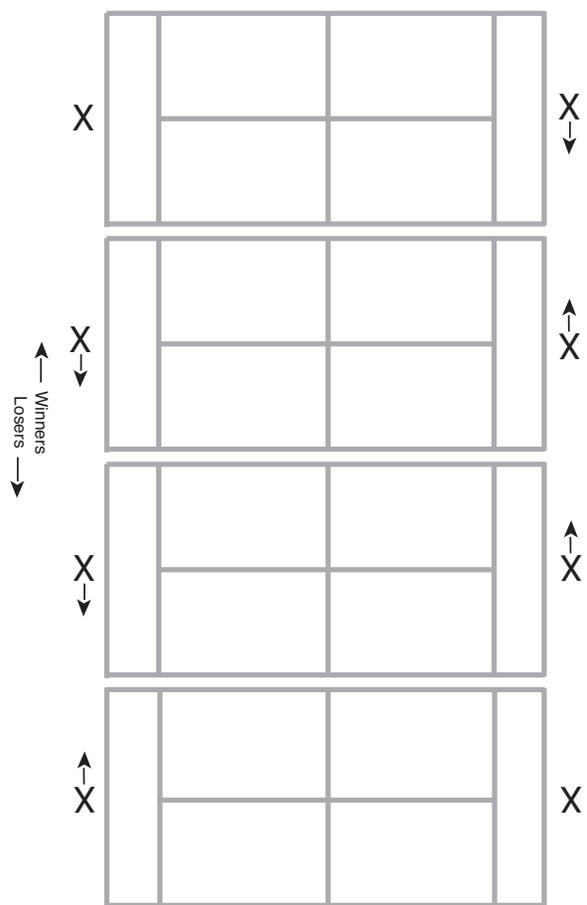
## Games

**Tag Team Singles.** A minimum of four players are needed for this game. Divide players into two groups, with each group forming a line behind the middle of each baseline. One player is up on each side (A1 and B1). The first player from side A drop-hits the ball over the net and moves to the back of her line. The first player on side B returns the ball and goes to the back of the line on his side. From there, each subsequent player hits one ball and moves to the back of the line, keeping the point going until one side misses. This can be a cooperative game, with the team (players in both lines are on the same team) attempting to get 10 consecutive rallies. This is also an excellent game to include other coaches or parents as players in both lines.

*Note: See Practice 4 for diagram.*

**Up and Down the River.** Players are paired up and will play singles matches on the 36-foot courts. Points begin with an underhand serve and one player serves two points before switching servers. Play can be done using either a set amount of time determined by the coach or a set number of points. Players could play any number of points up to seven. Seven replicates the scoring used for this age in the QuickStart Tennis format. Players play until time is called or until they reach the established number of points.

Whoever is ahead when time is called or if someone reaches the set number of points, the winner moves up and matches up with a different player. The runner-ups move down and match up with a different player. The designated amount of time works well for this game because everyone changes, either up or down, at the same time.



**Up and Down the River**

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Players play the continuous rally game on the driveway or playground court with a partner or parent, or see how many consecutive rallies they can make against the wall by themselves.

## Practice 7

**Theme:** Volley

**Equipment:** 21- to 23-inch racquets, foam or oversized low compression balls, Koosh balls or bean bags, hoops or ropes for circles

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

“Smart players” have learned where and when to be there, with the appropriate shot selection. Teach this. Teach your players to think and don't just voice-activate them around the court.

### Movement Activities

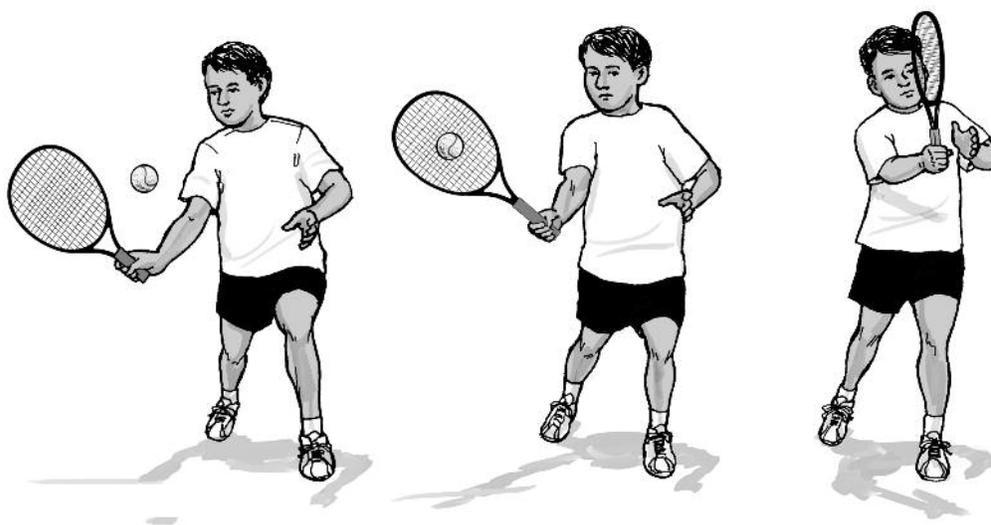
**Jog Ball.** While players are jogging in a large circle, they toss the ball up and catch it after the bounce with two hands, then with the right hand, then with the left hand. Keep players moving and have them change directions when the coach calls out to change directions.

**Koosh Ball Step-Back.** Players are in pairs, each with a racquet with the strings up, facing each other with one Koosh ball (or bean bag) on the strings of one player's racquet. They begin by turning the racquet so the Koosh ball drops onto the partner's racquet. After the successful exchange, they both move back one step and pass the Koosh ball from one racquet to the other. As they step back, they will have to toss the Koosh ball from one racquet to the other. See which pair can get the most distance between partners and still toss and catch the Koosh ball without it falling off the strings.

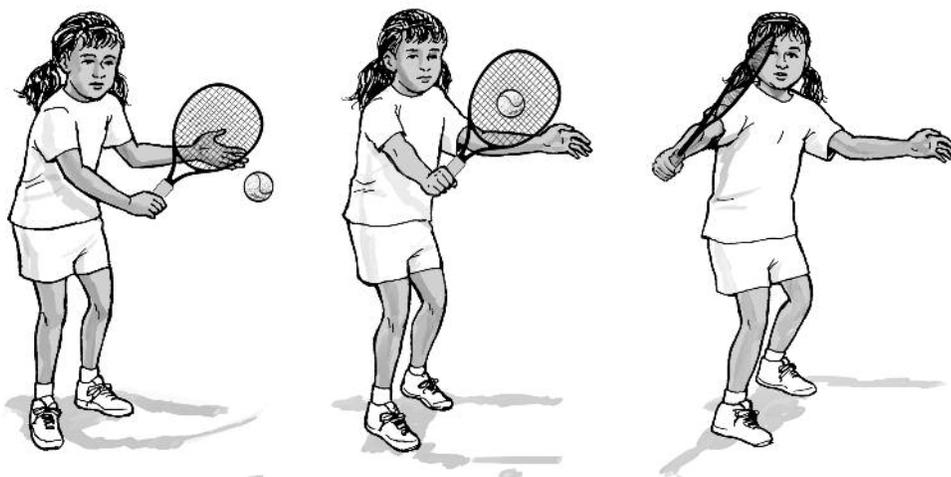
### Skill

**The Volley.** Begin with two players positioned on either side of the net about 2-3 feet apart. One player has a ball and the other player has his racquet up so the strings are facing the tosser (like holding a stop sign). The tosser will make five underhand tosses and the partner will volley the ball back so the tosser can catch the ball in the air. Do five volleys each on the forehand side.

Step 2 is to move farther apart. The one player will underhand toss the ball to her partner, who will volley it back so it bounces on the court and the tosser will trap the ball with his hand against the racquet face. Do five toss, volley and traps before switching roles on the forehand side.



**Forehand Volley**



**Backhand Volley**

Step 3 begins with the players slightly farther apart. One player (Player A) will drop-hit the ball and the partner (Player B) will volley it back so it bounces on the court. Player A will then hit the ball back so it can be volleyed by Player B and finally trapped by Player A. Switch roles after five drop-hit, volley, rally, volley, trap sequences.

Do the same sequence using the backhand side.

- Toss, volley and catch
- Toss, volley and trap
- Drop-hit, volley, rally, volley and trap

The first two steps can be done with players. The final step might be best executed with a coach or helper in the ground stroke position so they can keep the ball in play.

**Volley Game—Basketball.** Make targets by using circles or hoops on the court. Give a point value for every target, with the closest targets worth less than a target farther away. The players attempt to volley a ball that is fed with an underhand toss by a partner to a target so they score points. Go for one minute (one quarter), total the score and switch roles. Play for four minutes (four quarters) and total the scores for all four quarters.

## Games

**Champion of the Court.** A designated “champion” competes against a line of at least three players, with the champion assuming a baseline position on one side of the court (A1) and the other players (i.e., the challengers) waiting at the back of the opposite side of the court.

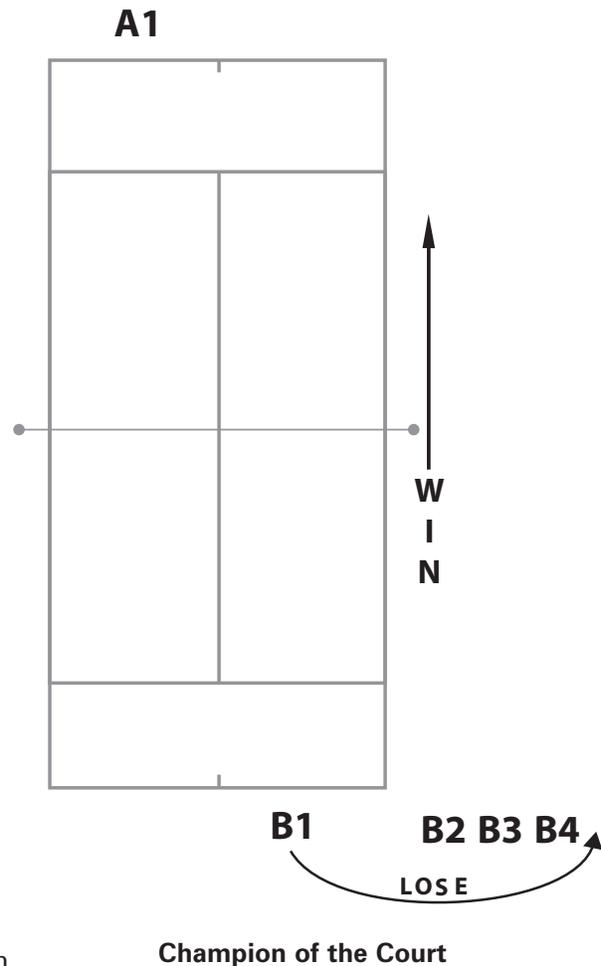
The first challenger (B1) assumes a position at the baseline and underhand serves the ball to the champion (A1). A point is then played using the 36-foot court boundaries. If B1 wins, he is the new champion and runs to the other side of the court (the champion’s side). If A1 wins, she stays and plays a point against B2.

**Star Catcher.** Use a series of 36-foot courts to play this game. Players play singles games to a designated number of points, such as first to five or seven. At the conclusion of the game, both players exit the court and return to the coach. The winner gets a sticker or star on their hand or racquet. Players in a line by the coach fill in as courts become available.

Points begin with an underhand serve and each player will serve two points before switching servers. Make sure that players go back out on the court against a different partner.

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Players play tennis with a foam ball on a driveway or playground with a partner, or play wall tennis if a partner is not available.



## Practice 8

**Theme:** Play Day

**Equipment:** As needed

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

The #1 reason kids drop out of youth sports is because it's not fun anymore. "Are you saying I need to make tennis fun for a bunch of whiny 8-year-olds?" Yes, we are! Capture their hearts and imagination for movement, sport and tennis by making it fun.

### Game

This is a fun day and the activities can be the favorite activities from this series of practices. Individual activities can be set up in stations around the court. Teams can be created and games can be played in a team format.

Star Team is a variation of Star Catcher and is a fun team game. Divide the group into two teams and each team will always play from one side of the court. It is played just like Star Catcher, but when the players return to the coach, rather than get a star, they move one cone from a stack of cones to their side of the court. Play continues until all the cones are gone. Count up the number of cones for each team to determine the winning team.

### Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Players play driveway or playground tennis with a partner or wall tennis individually using a foam ball.

# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 7: Practice Sessions (Ages 9-10)

This chapter contains eight progressive practice sessions for children ages 9-10 playing on a 60-foot court with 23- to 25-inch racquets and low compression balls. The goal of these practices is to help children learn the basics of a rally by using forehand and backhand ground strokes so players can hit balls back and forth over the net with a partner after the first session.

From that point, an array of skills will be introduced so these players can play and begin to have an understanding of singles and doubles play. The overhand serve is introduced and the return of serve is emphasized more with this age group. Also, volley and overhead skills are introduced, and players will learn to move from the backcourt to the net by hitting an approach shot.

Each practice will develop the technical skills that will enable players to develop the tactics for different playing situations associated with the game of tennis. Shot selection and court positioning are important to introduce to this age group so these players can have fun learning and competing. Many of the games and activities used by the kids ages 11-17 on a 78-foot (full-size) court are applicable for this age group, when kids are playing on a 60-foot court with low compression balls and 23- to 25-inch racquets.

The practice sessions are categorized by the following playing situations and skills are introduced in the context of the situation:

- **Playing Situation 1: Both players in the backcourt.** The skills needed for this situation are rallying skills, or more specifically, forehand and backhand ground strokes. Once children can rally, games and contests can be used to get them on the court and playing tennis.
- **Playing Situation 2: Serving and returning.** The skills needed are serves and returns.
- **Playing Situation 3: One player at the net and one player at the baseline.** The skills for the net player include the volley and the overhead, while the player at the baseline will hit ground strokes and lobs.
- **Playing Situation 4: Transitioning from the baseline to the net.** This is a result of moving forward from the baseline to return a short ball and then continuing to the net. The skill necessary is the approach shot.

Also included in each practice session is a list of equipment that should be used for that session, as well as a coaching tip from youth coaching expert Gary Avischious. Each practice session for this age group lasts 60 minutes.

The practice sessions for the 9- to 10-year-olds will contain the following:

1. Theme of the day
2. Movement activities
3. Skill development
4. Game
5. A take-home tennis activity

## Practices at a Glance: Ages 9-10

This one-page guide outlines the eight practice sessions that follow. It serves as a handy reference for what is covered in more detail during each practice.

### **Practice 1**

Movement Activities  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Instant Rally**

Kirk-O-Rama  
Instant Rally Progression – Forehand  
Tag Team Singles  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 2**

Movement Activities  
  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Rally Skills**

Roll and Catch; Toss and Catch; Toss and Trap;  
Toss, Turn and Trap  
Instant Rally Progression – Backhand  
Champion of the Court Singles  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 3**

Movement Activities  
  
Skills  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Serve and Return**

Two Ball Toss, Jog Ball, Two-Hand Ball Passes,  
Overhead Throw  
Overhand Serve Progression, Serve Return  
Champs and Chumps with Serve  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 4**

Movement Activities  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Volley**

3-2-1 Juggle Rally, Circle Volleys  
Volley Progression with a Partner  
One Ball Live  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 5**

Movement Activities  
Skills  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Approaching the Net**

Dynamic Warm-up, Ball Drop  
Approach Shots, Approach Shot and Volley  
Champions of the Court Doubles  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 6**

Movement Activities  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Singles**

Partner Ball Tossing and Catching, Catch It!  
Singles Tactics  
Champion of the Court Singles  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 7**

Movement Activities  
Skill  
Game  
Take Home Tennis

### **Doubles**

Ball Drop, Jog Ball, Circle Volleys  
All Position Doubles  
Team Doubles  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

### **Practice 8**

Activities  
Games  
Take Home Tennis

### **Play Day**

Team Games  
Deep Desperation, Wipe Out  
Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis

## Practice 1

**Theme:** Instant Rally

**Equipment:** 23- to 25-inch racquets, low compression balls, poly spots, donuts or chalk for targets

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

When was the last time you had more fun coaching tennis than your kids did in class? The more you model fun, the more your kids will catch it.



### Movement Activities

**Kirk-O-Rama.** To liven up simple racquet handling activities, such as bouncing balls up and down, add some music and change activities every 20 to 30 seconds. Use a variety of activities and have players change every time they hear a whistle. Use any or all of these activities to add variety to your practices:

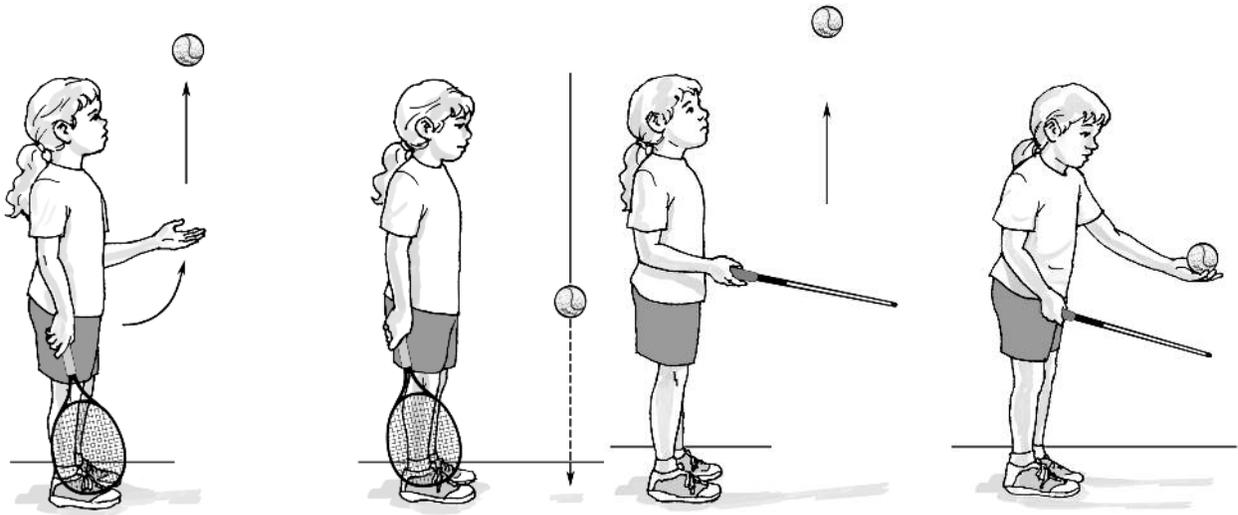
1. Bounce ball down
2. Bounce ball up, letting it bounce on the court after each hit
3. Bounce ball down on the edge of the racquet
4. Bounce ball up, keeping the ball in the air
5. Bounce ball up, alternating sides of the racquet
6. Bounce ball up, alternating sides but add a hit up on the edge between hitting on both sides
7. Bounce ball high
8. Bounce ball low
9. Bounce ball while on one knee
10. Bounce ball while sitting on the court
11. Bounce ball while lying on the court
12. Bounce ball in a circle around the body
13. Bounce ball in a Figure 8 around the legs
14. Bounce ball down while hopping on one foot
15. Bounce ball up while hopping on the other foot
16. Bounce ball up, with the racquet between the legs
17. Bounce ball up, with the racquet around the back
18. Toss the ball up and catch it on the racquet without it bouncing on the strings
19. Balance the ball on the strings and turn the racquet 180 degrees without the ball falling off the strings
20. Spin quickly in a circle while balancing the ball on the strings



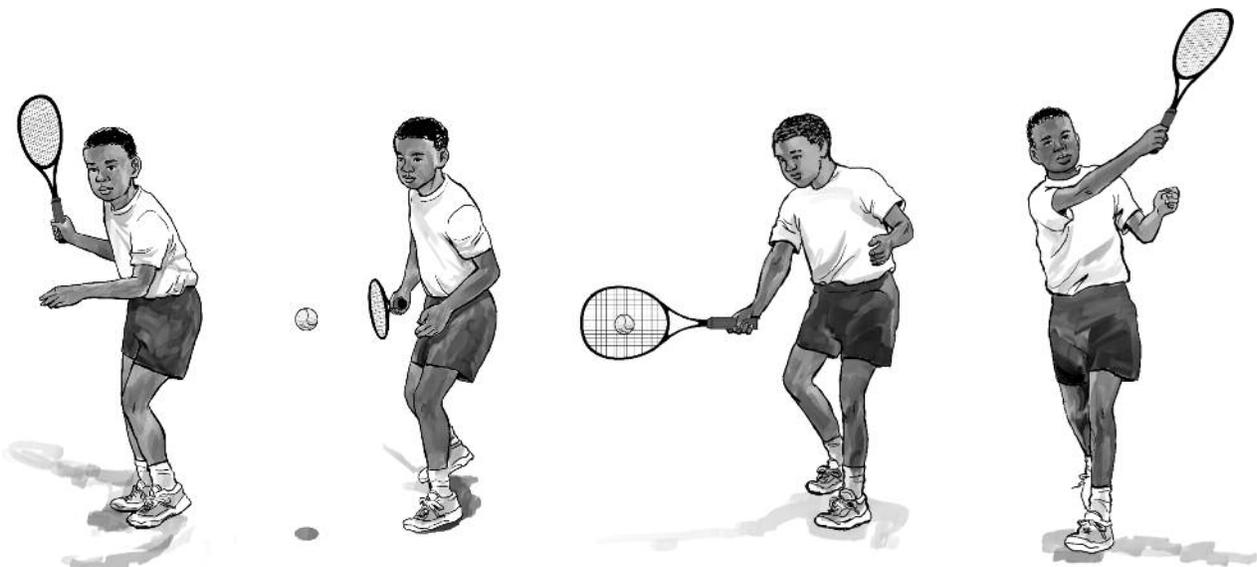
### Skill

**Instant Rally Progression – Forehand.** Each player will have a racquet and a low compression ball. Follow this sequence and young players will develop rally skills in just a few minutes. To keep kids engaged, move through these activities quickly. For example, the coach might say, “Let’s see how many you can do in 30 seconds.”

1. **Tap up, bounce and catch with the non-racquet hand.** Players will tap the ball up about head-level high, let the ball bounce and catch it after one bounce with their non-dominant hand (that is, the opposite hand they use to grip the racquet for their forehand).



2. **Self rally.** This time, rather than catching after the first bounce, continue to tap the ball up after each bounce to about head-level height.
3. **Rally with a partner to a target.** Find a partner and alternate tapping up about head level. After the bounce, the partner taps the ball up and lets it bounce. See how many consecutive tap-ups each pair can get in a row. To help them focus on hitting up rather than hitting forward, place a poly spot, donut or draw a circle with chalk as a target between the two players. Players should try to hit every ball up to head level and have it land in the circle.
4. **Rally over a line with a partner.** Draw a line or find a line on the court and place each player on either side. Have them match up their racquet faces forehand to forehand and move back two to three steps. Have them rally so the ball bounces over the line. The ball should be hit to head-level height. See how many they can get in a row hitting all balls on the forehand side.



The Forehand

5. **Rally with partner over a net.** This is similar to “rally over a line with a partner,” but this time the players will rally over a net or barrier. Start at the net and have players match up racquet faces forehand to forehand and move 3-4 feet away from the net and play all shots on the forehand side. To assist them with control and direction, add a target about 3 feet from the net (e.g., a poly spot, donut or chalk circle).
- 6 **Step-back forehands.** Both players are on either side of the net and match up racquet faces forehand to forehand, then take two steps back. The player with the ball drops and hits it to the partner, and they rally for four shots in a row on the forehand side. After four consecutive hits, stop the ball and both players take one step back, then they try again for another four-ball rally. After each successful four-ball rally, they move a step back. If they miss, they must both move forward one step.

## Games

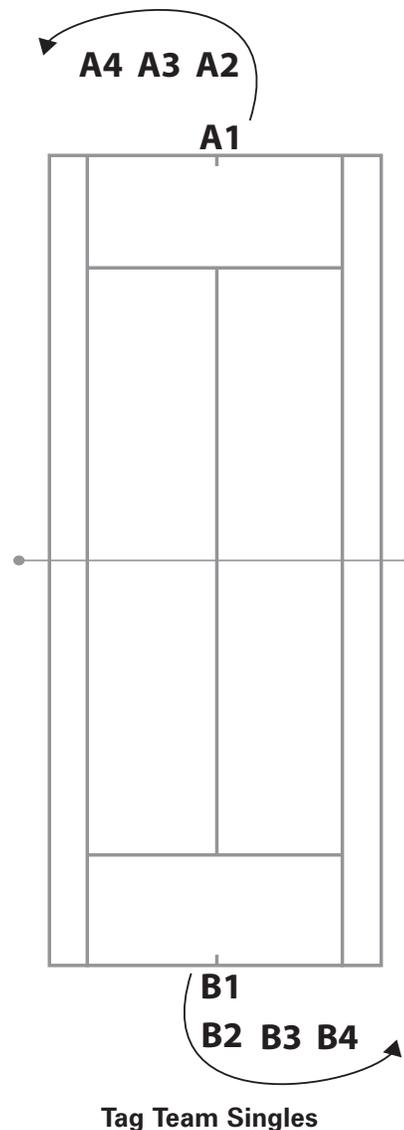
**Tag Team Singles.** A minimum of four players are needed for this game. Divide players into two groups with each group forming a line behind the middle of each baseline. One player is up on each side (A1 and B1). The first player from side A (A1) drop-hits the ball over the net and moves to the back of her line. The first player on B (B1) returns the ball and goes to the back of the line on his side. From there, each subsequent player hits one ball and moves to the back of the line, keeping the point going until one side misses.

This can also be a cooperative game, with the team (players in both lines are on the same team) attempting to get 10 consecutive rallies.

## Take Home Tennis

### **Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.**

Play a continuous rally game on the driveway or playground court or see how many consecutive rallies you can make against the wall.



## Practice 2

**Theme:** Rally Skills

**Equipment:** 23- to 25-inch racquets, low compression balls, poly spots, donuts or chalk for targets

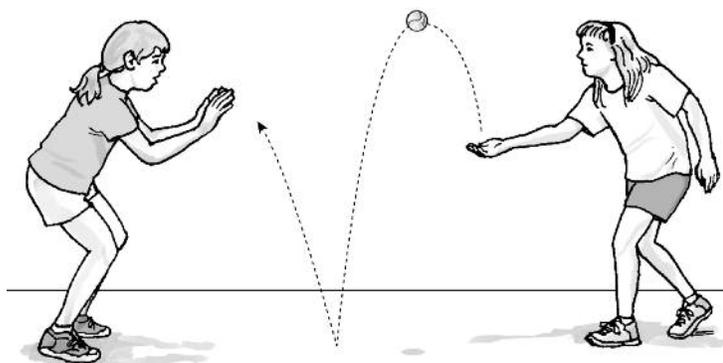
### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

We ask kids to give 110 percent effort in a match. How do they know what that looks and feels like if we don't model it to them?

### Movement Activities

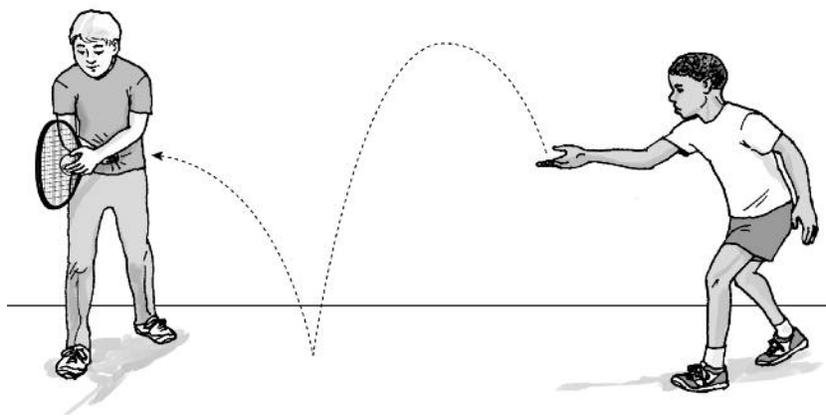
**Roll and Catch.** Players should stand 10 feet apart, with one ball for each pair. The player with the ball (Player A) rolls the ball to either side of the partner (Player B), and Player B moves so she can catch the ball directly between her feet. Player B should shuffle into position and squat down, keeping her back straight to catch the ball. Player B then rolls the ball back to either side of player A, who also catches the ball and rolls it back. Add some variation by having players use two balls and have them both roll and catch at the same time.

**Toss and Catch.** This activity is similar to "Roll and Catch," but this time Player A tosses the ball underhand so it bounces on the court, and Player B catches the ball with one hand with the fingers pointing up. This will force each player to move quickly side to side and to get below the ball so the fingers are up, similar to the position of the hand when executing a volley. Player B then tosses the ball underhand to Player A, who has to try to catch the ball in the same manner as mentioned earlier. For a greater challenge, have both players toss and catch two balls at the same time.



**Toss and Catch**

**Toss and Trap.** This activity is similar to “Toss and Catch,” but this time the player will have a racquet. The racquet is held at its throat with the dominant hand, and the butt of the racquet is held against the stomach at the “belt buckle” position. Player A tosses the ball and Player B traps the ball on the strings with the non-dominant hand in a perfect contact position.



**Toss and Trap**

Player B tosses it back to Player A, who moves and traps the ball against the strings with his racquet butt against the stomach and the dominant hand at the racquet throat. This is an excellent warm-up activity to train players to move into the perfect spot for the ideal contact for a ground stroke. All players will have to move quickly to trap all balls on the forehand side of the racquet while facing sideways when making the trap.

**Toss, Turn and Trap.** This time, Player A uses a higher underhand toss to Player B, who is holding her racquet and with her back to the feeder (Player A). The tosser calls out the partner’s name and the partner (Player B) turns 180 degrees, locates the ball and moves to trap the ball against her strings. Have each pair do this five times, then change tosser and trapper.

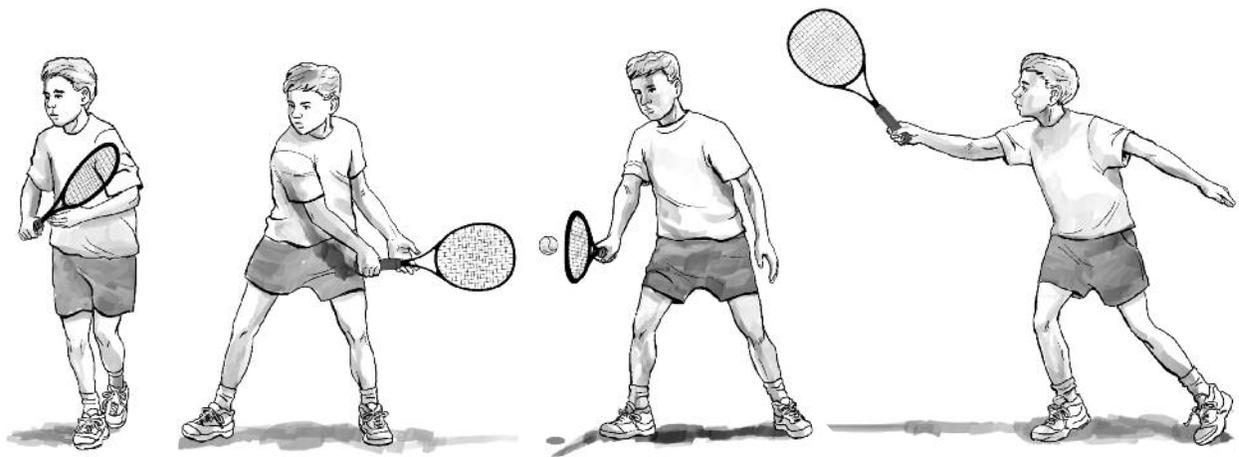
## Skill

**Instant Rally Progression – Backhand.** This is the exact same progression as the Instant Rally Progression on the forehand side, but players are using only the backhand side of the racquet. Players can use two hands on the backhand side, or some might elect to use only one hand. Have them follow this sequence. To keep kids engaged, move through these activities quickly. For example, the coach might say, “Let’s see how many you can do in 30 seconds.”

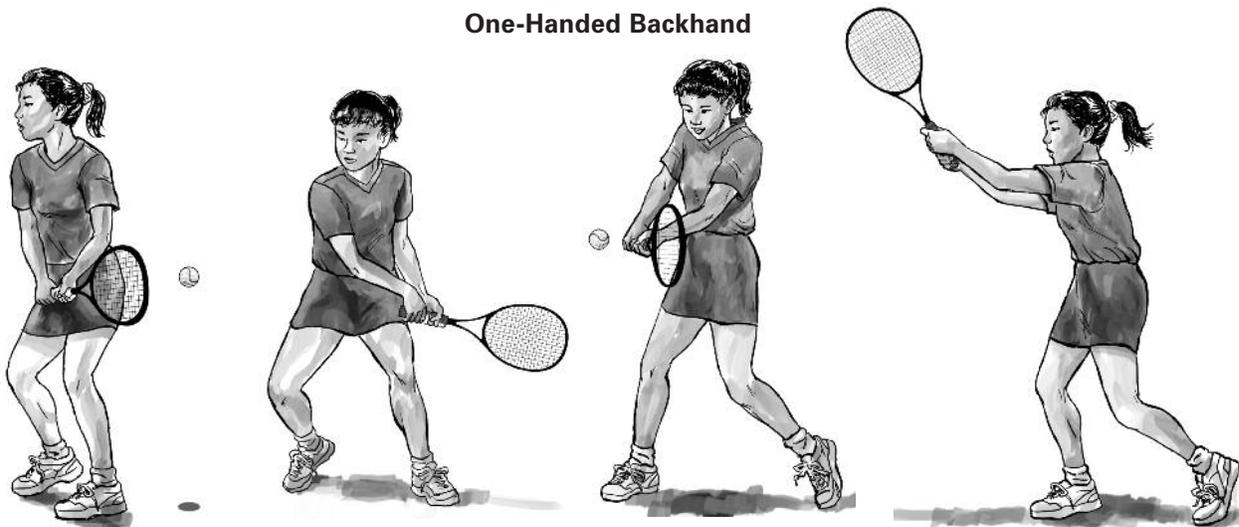
1. **Tap up on the backhand side of the racquet, bounce and catch.** Players will tap the ball up about head-level high using the backhand side of the racquet, let the ball bounce and catch it after one bounce with their non-dominant hand (that is, the hand not gripping the racquet on the forehand).
2. **Self rally.** This time, rather than catching after the first bounce, continue to tap the ball up after each bounce to about head-level height.
3. **Rally with a partner to a target.** Find a partner and alternate tapping up about head level on the backhand side of the racquet. After the bounce, the partner taps the ball up and lets it bounce. See how many consecutive tap-ups each pair can get in a row. To help them focus on hitting up rather than hitting forward, place a poly spot, donut or draw a circle with chalk as a target between the two players. Players should try to hit every ball up to head level and have it land in the circle.

4. **Rally over a line with a partner.** Draw a line or find a line on the court and place each player on either side. Have them match up their racquet faces backhand to backhand and move back two to three steps. Have them rally so the ball bounces over the line. The ball should be hit to head-level height. See how many they can get in a row hitting all balls on the backhand side.
5. **Rally with partner over a net.** This is similar to “rally over a line with a partner,” but this time the players will rally over a net or barrier. Start at the net and have players match up racquet faces backhand to backhand and move 3-4 feet away from the net and play all shots on the backhand side. To assist them with control and direction, add a target about three feet from the net (e.g., a poly spot, donut or chalk circle).
6. **Step-back backhands.** Both players are on either side of the net and match up racquet faces backhand to backhand, then take two steps back. The player with the ball drops and hits it to the partner, and they rally for four shots in a row on the backhand side. After four consecutive hits, stop the ball and both players take one step back, then they try again for another four-ball rally. After each successful four-ball rally, they move a step back. If they miss, they must both move forward one step.

*Note: Players hitting two-handed backhands might have difficulty dropping and hitting on the backhand side. You can allow them to put the first shot in play with a forehand and the return would be the first backhand shot on their way to four consecutive hits.*



**One-Handed Backhand**



**Two-Handed Backhand**

## Game

### **Champion of the Court Singles.**

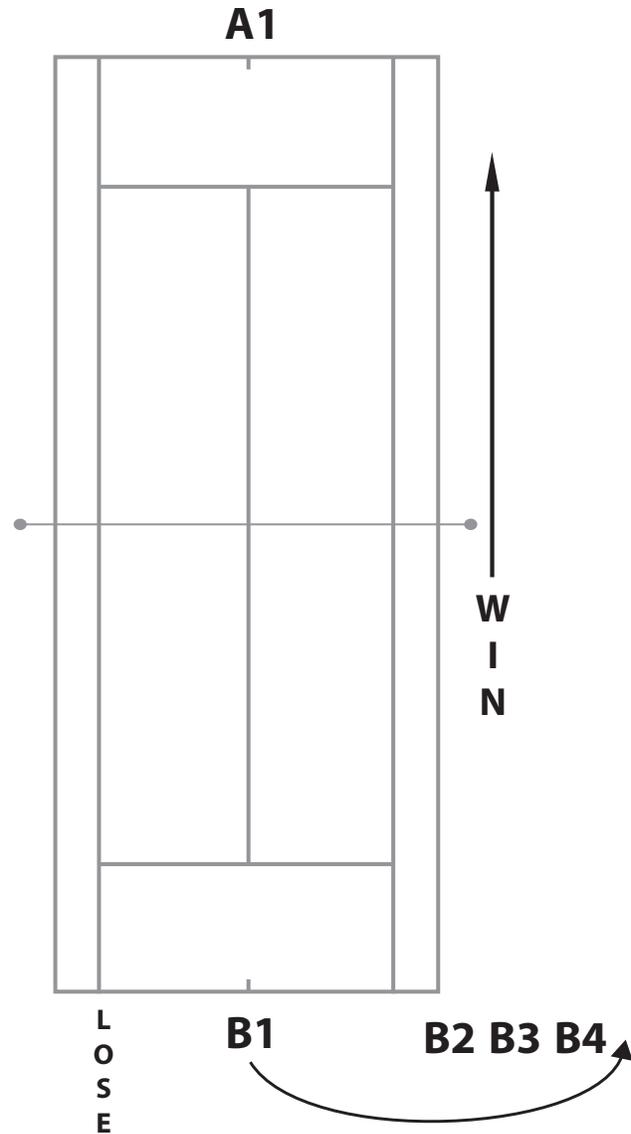
A designated “champion” competes against a line of at least three and no more than six players, with the champion assuming a baseline position on one side of the court (A1) and the other players (i.e., the challengers) waiting at the back on the opposite side of the court.

The first challenger (B1) assumes a position at the baseline and drop-hits the ball to the champion (A1). A point is then played using the singles boundaries on the 60-foot court. If B1 wins, he is the new champion and runs to the other side of the court (the champion’s side). If A1 wins, she stays and plays a point against B2.

*Note: This game can be varied by making the challengers have to win two or three points against the champion before they can assume the champion’s position.*

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Play a continuous rally game on the backhand side on a driveway or playground court, or against the wall with a foam ball.



Champion of the Court Singles

## Practice 3

**Theme:** Serve and Return

**Equipment:** 23- to 25-inch racquets, low compression balls, playground balls and Nerf footballs

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Are you winning the game? Are you winning the battle against your kids continuing to move and love tennis compared to becoming sedentary and playing video games? If not, why not?

### Movement Activities

**Two Ball Toss.** Players line up facing a partner about 7-8 feet away. Both players have a ball that they underhand toss at the same time to each other and each player catches the ball after one bounce. Create some movement by letting the players toss the ball a step or two away from their partner.

**Jog Ball.** While players are jogging in a large circle, they toss the ball up and catch it after the bounce with two hands, then with the right hand, then with the left hand. Keep players moving and have them change direction when the coach calls out to change directions.

**Two-Handed Ball Passes.** With partners 10 feet apart, players pass a large ball, such as a beach ball, volleyball or playground ball, back and forth in the air. Do two-handed chest passes, an overhead pass forward and an overhead pass backward to the partner. Have players face their partners directly and have them use their legs to drive up and fully extend their arms on all tosses.

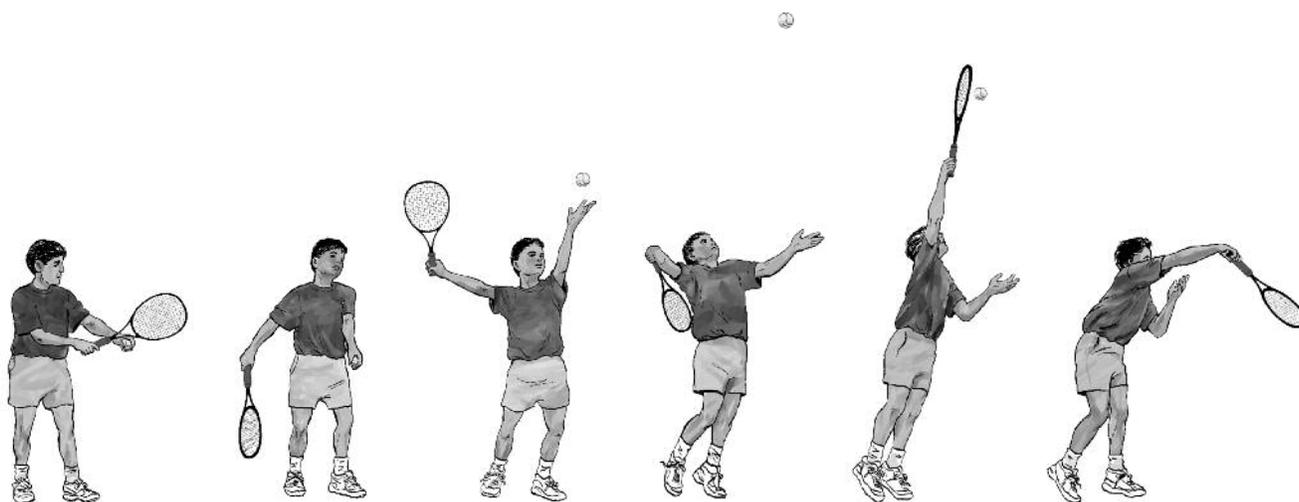
**Overhand Throw.** Have players use an overhand throwing motion to throw a ball back and forth to a partner who is 15 to 20 feet away. Have players begin sideways and rotate so they are facing their partners as the ball is released. (This simulates the overhand service motion.) *Tip: Use NERF footballs to develop a good overhand throwing motion and release.*

### Skills

**Overhand Serve Progression.** Demonstrate an overhand serve in slow motion from the baseline into the service court on the 60-foot court. Explain that serves must be hit from behind the baseline into the opposite service court. Each game begins with a serve in the deuce court, and the server plays the next serve into the ad court, alternating sides for every serve until the game is complete. The server gets two serves to get the ball in the correct service court.

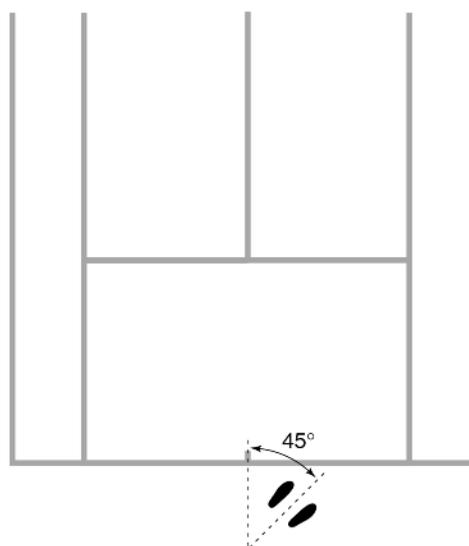
The following activities demonstrate a **Serve-and-Return Progression** and are done with a partner on the other side of the net:

- **Throw over the net to a partner.** Since the serve is like an overhand throwing motion (see Overhand Throw to ensure players are throwing the ball correctly), have players throw a ball over the net to their partners, who catch it after one bounce and throw the ball back. Both players should start at the service line and move back to the baseline after a series of successful throws and catches.



### The Serve

- Toss, touch and freeze.** Position players two steps away from the net. Have them stand at a 45-degree angle to the net with their racquets back and their arms bent at the elbow like a quarterback preparing to throw. Have players toss the ball up with the non-dominant hand, reach up to full extension and freeze at the contact point. The racquet face should be directed at the service court. Several players can be positioned along the net with their partners on the opposite side. The partners will trap the ball, move two steps from the net and serve it back over the net.



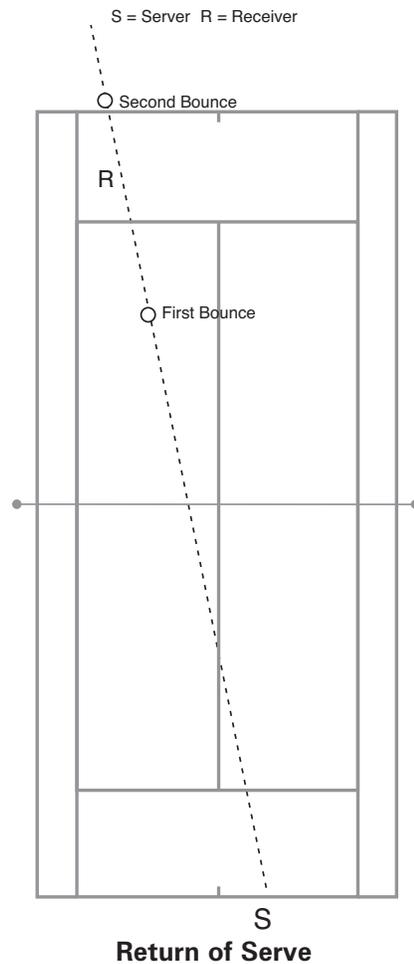
**Feet Position**

*Note: Make sure that players freeze at the point of contact so they can see the contact point and make any necessary corrections to the toss. To prevent them from over-swinging, see if they can make the ball bounce four times before it goes over the service line.*

- Toss, touch, follow through and trap.** Position players four steps away from the net. Instead of freezing at the contact point, have players toss, hit and follow through across their bodies. As the players reach up with their racquets, the heel of the back foot lifts off the ground so the body can rotate forward toward the net. Players should work on an accurate toss, consistent contact point and good balance throughout the swing. The partner moves and traps the ball on the racquet with his hand and then serves the ball back.

- **Add a step, serve and trap.** Begin all players four steps from the net. Have players toss, hit and follow through so the ball goes to the partner in the service court. After one bounce the partner traps the ball on the racquet face with his hand and serves it back to his partner. After each time the partners serve and trap, both players move back a step and repeat the activity. Players should be sideways when trapping the ball.

- **Serve, return, rally and trap.** Players start in the same position as the above. The server will serve, followed by a return by the partner, followed by a rally from the server and finally a trap by the returner. The returner now becomes the server and she starts the sequence of serve, return, rally and trap. Players should be sideways when trapping the ball.

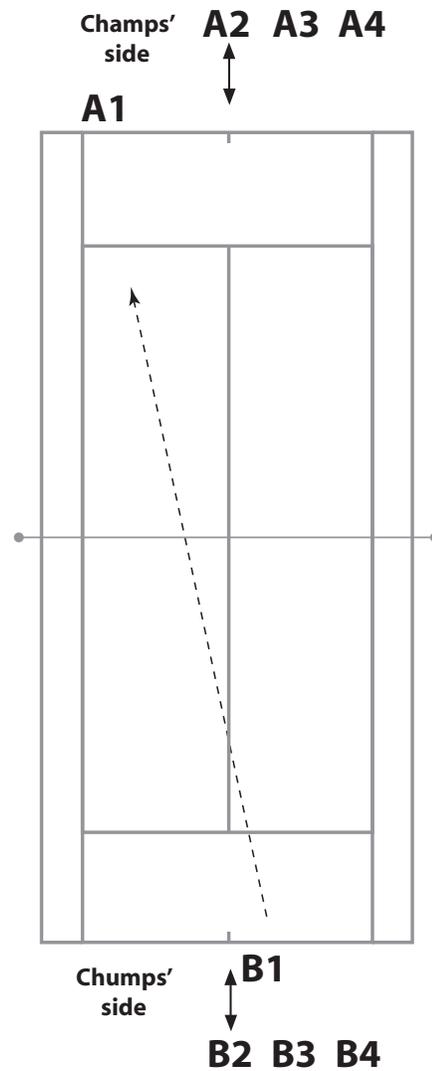


## Game

**Champs and Chumps with Serve.** A minimum of four players is needed for this game. One group is on one end of the court behind the baseline and the other group is behind the other baseline. One side of the court is designated as the Champs' side, while the other is called the Chumps' side. The first player from each side plays a point, using the singles boundaries. The player that wins the point goes to the end of the Champs' line while the loser goes to the end of the Chumps' line. The other players rotate through their line in order. Players on the Chumps' side always begin the point with a serve (getting two faults to get the serve in play).

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Play driveway or playground tennis or wall tennis beginning every point or rally with a serve using a foam ball.



Champs and Chumps with Serve

## Practice 4

**Theme:** The Volley

**Equipment:** 23- to 25-inch racquets, low compression balls, foam or oversized low compression balls

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Kids will naturally gravitate to whatever is fun. Is your program fun, or is it becoming programmed?



### Movement Activities

**3-2-1 Juggle Rally.** A player stands with her racquet at one service line and self-rallies (tap up and bounce) the ball three times and then hits it to a partner on the other side of the net at the other service line using either a foam or oversized low compression ball. The partner then self rallies three times before returning the ball back over the net. Do three juggle rallies for a minute, then two juggle rallies for a minute followed by one juggle rally for a minute.

**Circle Volleys.** Players form a circle and bump a foam ball to each other at random after one bounce. After two minutes, move in a step and keep the foam ball in the air while it goes randomly from player to player around the circle.

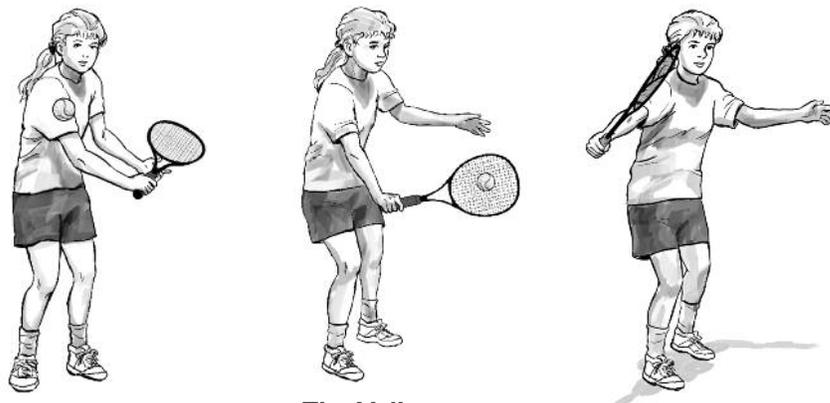
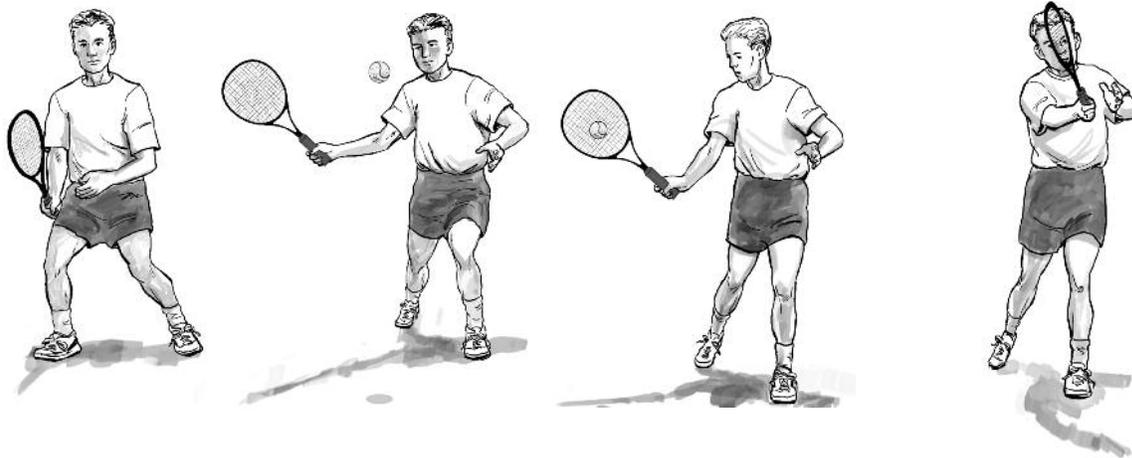


### Skill

Describe and demonstrate the forehand and backhand volley, emphasizing that the ball is hit before it touches the ground and that there is no backswing.

**Volley Progression with a Partner.** Position players 4 feet apart in pairs on either side of the net. Players take turns tossing underhand and hitting a forehand volley through the following sequence:

- The player should hold the racquet at its throat and bump the ball back to the tosser. Move the hand and racquet together so the stroke is not “wristy.” The hitters hold the racquet as if they were signaling “Stop” and gently volley the ball back to the tossers. Switch tossers and hitters after five trials.
- The volleyer should move his hand halfway down the handle and volley the ball back to the feeder so the tosser catches the ball in the air. Switch after five volleys.
- Have the volleyer hold the racquet at the handle and gently volley the ball back to the tosser. Switch after five hits.
- Have volleyers turn so they are facing in the opposite direction and repeat the sequence with a backhand volley. Change tossers and hitters after five volleys.



**The Volley**

**Ground Stroke - Volley Combination.** Position one player at the net and the partner at the opposite service line:

1. From the service line, one player drop-hits a forehand ground stroke to a partner at the net.
2. The player at the net volleys the ball back to the partner at the service line.
3. The “feeder” traps the ball on the strings with her hand and repeats the ground stroke – volley – trap sequence.

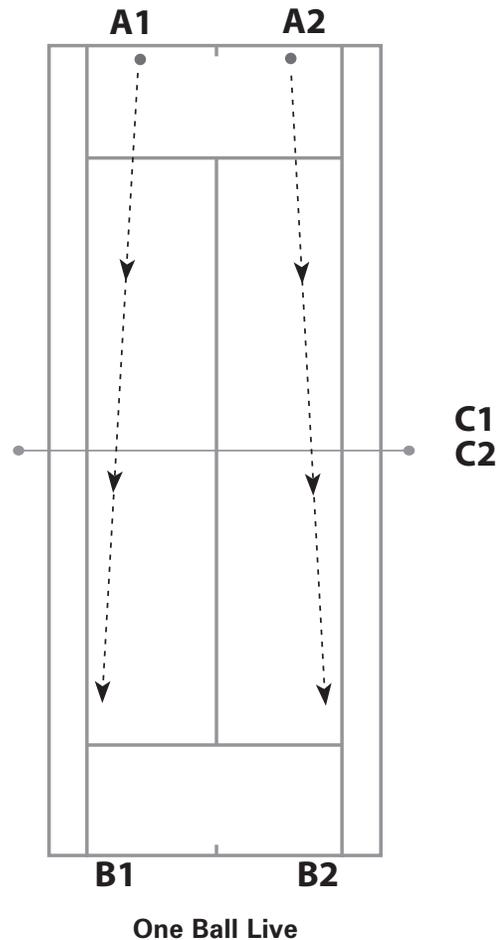
Change positions after five hits each. This activity is much easier if you start with foam balls and move to low compression balls as the players master these skills. Players should be sideways when trapping the ball.

## Game

**One Ball Live.** A minimum of six players is needed for this game. Two pairs of players rally with one another in a “split-court” set up in which the court is halved vertically. Two balls are put in play with a drop-hit straight ahead for two simultaneous rallies. Once an error is made, the person calls out “one ball live!” and the remaining ball is played out among the four players. The winning team scores a point and stays to play against two new players.

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Have players play driveway or playground tennis or wall tennis, emphasizing and practicing the volley when possible using a foam ball.



## Practice 5

**Theme:** Approaching the Net

**Equipment:** 23- to 25-inch racquets, low compression balls, poly spots or a throw down lines

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

The more kids enjoy it, the more they will do it.  
The more they do it, the more they will learn.  
The more they learn, the better they will perform.

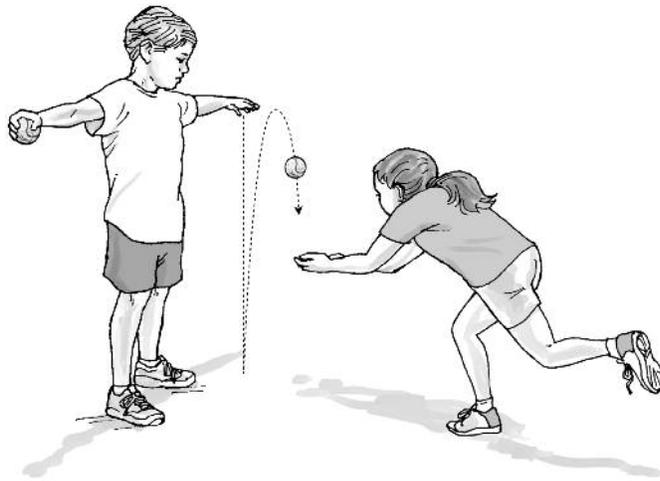


### Movement Activities

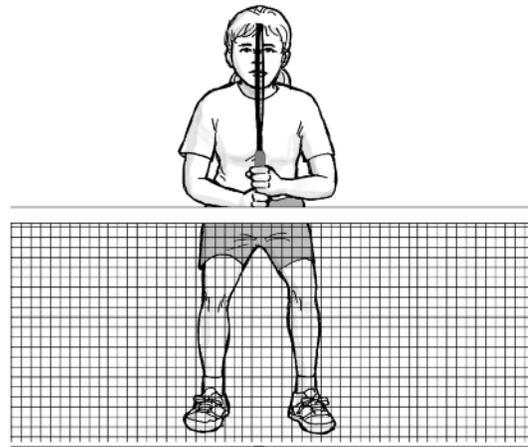
#### Dynamic Warm-up.

- Jog in place while juggling ball from right hand to left hand
- Slow jog and fast juggle
- Fast feet and slow juggle
- Regular jog and regular juggle
- Skip and regular juggle
- High knees and regular juggle
- Heel kicks and regular juggle
- Pass ball around left leg three times
- Pass ball around right leg three times
- Pass ball around waist three times; reverse direction
- Pass ball around knees three times; reverse direction
- Pass ball around neck three times; reverse direction
- Toss ball straight into the air with a leap and catch
- Dribble ball from right hand to left hand
- Dribble ball through the group
- Toss one ball with a partner while shuffling through the group
- Change partners and continue with tossing and catching, but now using two balls at the same time

**Ball Drop.** In pairs facing each other, one player has her arms extended at shoulder height and a ball in each hand. This player drops one ball at random and the other player has to catch the ball after one bounce. After each successful drop and catch, move apart one step. Change catchers and droppers after five trials.



**Ball Drop**



**Ready Position at the net**

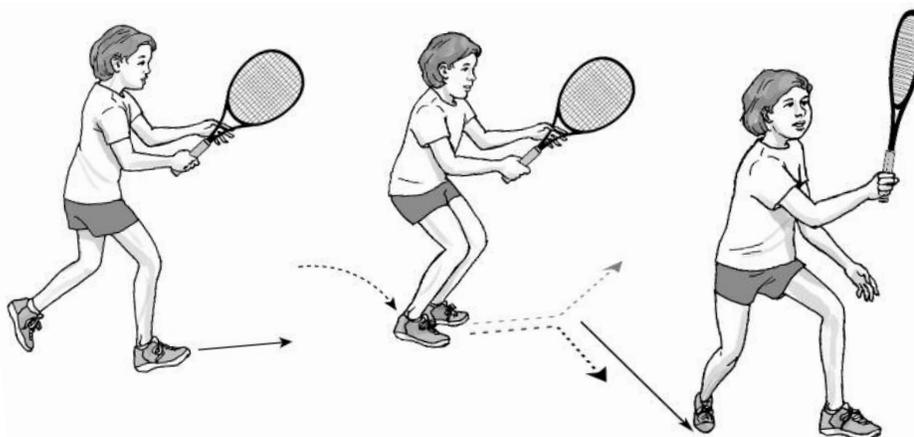
## Skills

**Approach Shots.** Hitting this transition shot effectively will allow the player to move from the backcourt, where the player usually hits shots that are either neutral or defensive, to the net, where the shots are generally offensive and the player can end the point with one shot. The playing situation is for one player to be in the backcourt and for the other player to be moving from the backcourt to the net with just one shot.

**Step 1 – The Approach Shot.** Have players in a single-file line at the baseline, with the coach between the service line and the net. The coach underhand tosses a ball short into the court and the first player moves forward quickly, gets sideways and moves through a forehand ground stroke. From there, the player quickly moves to a point between the service line and the net, assumes a ready position with a split step with both feet pointing at the net so the player can move either right or left. You can mark the spot between the service line and the net with a poly spot or throw down line to emphasize that this is where the player needs to be by the time the ball lands on the court.

Also do this same drill but using the backhand side.

*Note: Since the approach shot is hit from well inside the baseline and the player is moving toward the net at contact, only a short backswing is necessary to get the ball deep in the court.*



**The Split Step**

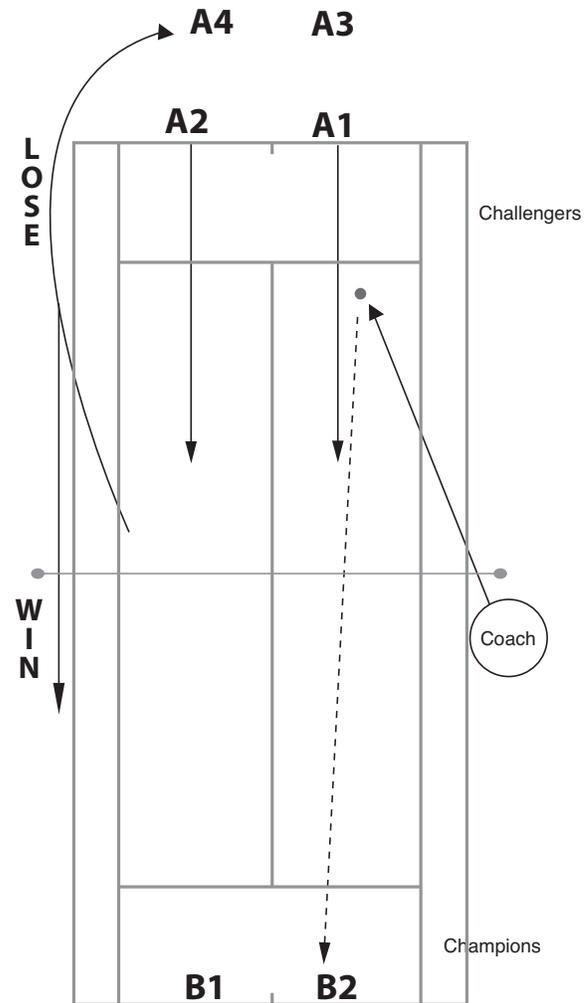
**Step 2 – Approach Shot and Volley.** Toss a short ball from the opposite side of the net. Players move forward to play the approach shot and then immediately move forward again to achieve a good ready position between the net and service line. The coach tosses a second ball so the player can hit a volley into the open court.

## Game

**Champions of the Court Doubles.** This game requires a minimum of six to eight players per court. A designated “champion” team (B1 and B2) competes against a line of challengers, with the champion team assuming a baseline position on one side of the court while the other players (i.e., the challengers) wait at the back of the opposite side of the court, with the first two (A1 and A2) assuming the baseline position.

The challengers play three points against the current champions. On the first point, the coach feeds a short ball to the challengers (A1 and A2); the challengers hit an approach shot, move to the net and play out the point. On the second point, the coach feeds to the same side so the team at the net can volley. On the third point the coach feeds another ball to the team at the net.

If the challengers win two or three points from the champions, the challengers take the place of the champions and hustle to the other side of the court. The coach then counts, “3-2-1,” and feeds to the next challenging team while the losing team rotates to the back of the challengers’ line.



**Champions of the Court Doubles**

## Take Home Tennis

### **Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.**

Have players play driveway/playground or wall tennis, working on their approach shot and first volley.

## Practice 6

**Theme:** Singles

**Equipment:** 23- to 25-inch racquets, low compression balls, foam or oversized low compression balls, different colored poly spots, donuts or chalk

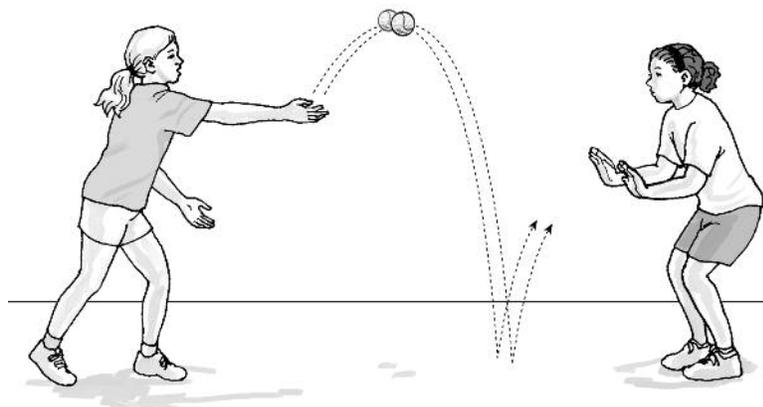
### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

There will be a great desire on your part to make your lessons about tennis and acquiring skills, but kids PLAY tennis because it's fun. If it's fun, the tennis and skills will come. If it's not fun, it won't matter how skilled you are at teaching skills.

### Movement Activities

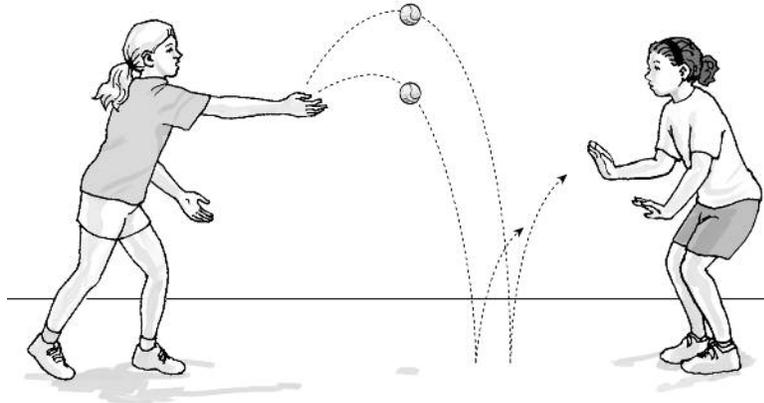
**Partner Ball Tossing and Catching.** All of these activities are done with a partner and the two players should be positioned 8-10 feet apart:

- A player rolls one ball to either side of his partner. The partner moves so she is directly in front of the ball and catches it directly between her feet. Add a second ball so there are two balls going at the same time.
- Players still moving their partners side to side, one player rolls and the other player underhand tosses. Reverse roles.
- One player underhand tosses back to her partner in the air and the other player bounce passes. Reverse roles.
- One player tosses two balls stacked side by side (horizontal) to partner. Change after five tosses.
  - Partner catches both balls at the same time after one bounce.
  - Partner catches both balls at the same time after two bounces.
  - Partner catches both balls at the same time with arms crossed.



Horizontal Position

- One player tosses two balls stacked on top of each other (vertical) to partner. Change after five tosses.
  - Partner catches both balls at the same time after one bounce.
  - Partner catches both balls at the same time after two bounces.



**Vertical Position**

- **Turn and catch.** Both players are facing the same direction. The front player has a racquet and is in the ready position. The back player tosses a ball up and calls out the name of his partner. The partner turns, reacts to the ball and traps the ball on the strings with her hand in the ideal contact point. Change tossers and trappers after five tosses.

**Catch It!** Players are in pairs facing each other about 4-5 feet apart. Players position themselves at the net. Both players have balls and underhand toss balls back and forth at the same time. Players will side shuffle from the net to the baseline and back tossing and catching without letting the ball drop.

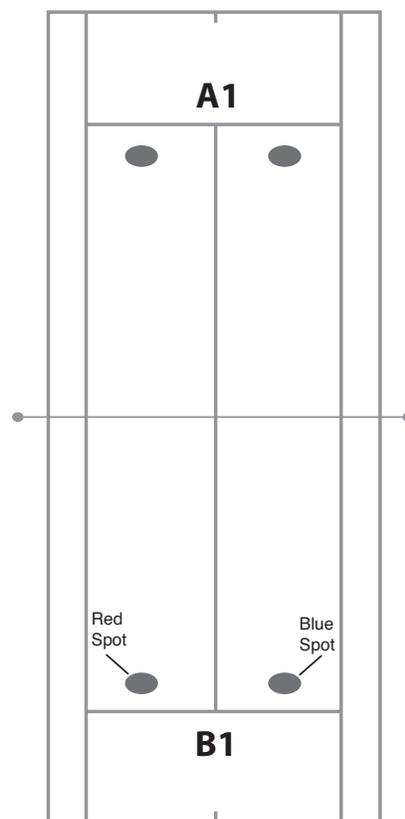
## Skill

**Singles Tactics.** Now that players have learned to hit ground strokes, volleys, serves and returns, it is time to add some simple singles tactics to their game. The easiest singles tactic is to keep the ball in play. This means that the players will always attempt to hit one more ball back than their opponent. This tactic is based on consistency and patience.

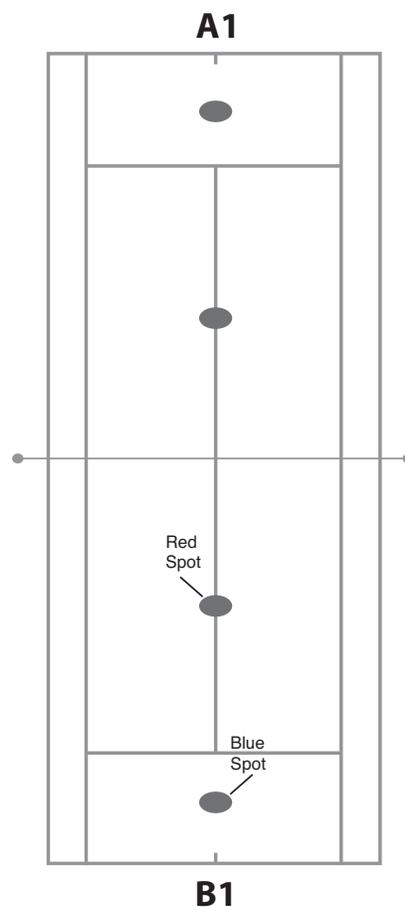
- **Continuous rally – keep the ball in play.** Players are on either side of the net, rallying balls back and forth to see what team can get the greatest number of rallies in a row. You can start your players with foam balls or oversized low compression balls and have them rally from service line to service line before moving back to go baseline-to-baseline on the 60-foot court using low compression balls.

- **Move your opponent side to side.** Beginning service line-to-service line, position different color targets (poly spots, donuts or chalk circles) on the court about 6 feet apart on either side of the players. Players rally back and forth using foam balls or oversized low compression balls and have to call out the color of the target before hitting the ball. Players can use both forehand and backhand ground strokes (first do this drill with all forehands, then with all backhands) and must recover to the center after each shot. Players can move back to the full 60-foot court and use low compression balls. Move targets 8 to 10 feet apart.

- **Move your opponent up and back.** Position different color targets about 6 feet apart—one inside the service line and one behind the service line. Players using foam balls or oversized low compression balls call out the color of the target before hitting each short or deep ball. Players must recover to behind the deep target after every shot. Move targets back and use the 60-foot court with low compression balls. Players will recover to behind the baseline after each shot. Place short target in back of the service line for this activity.



**Move Your Opponent Side to Side**



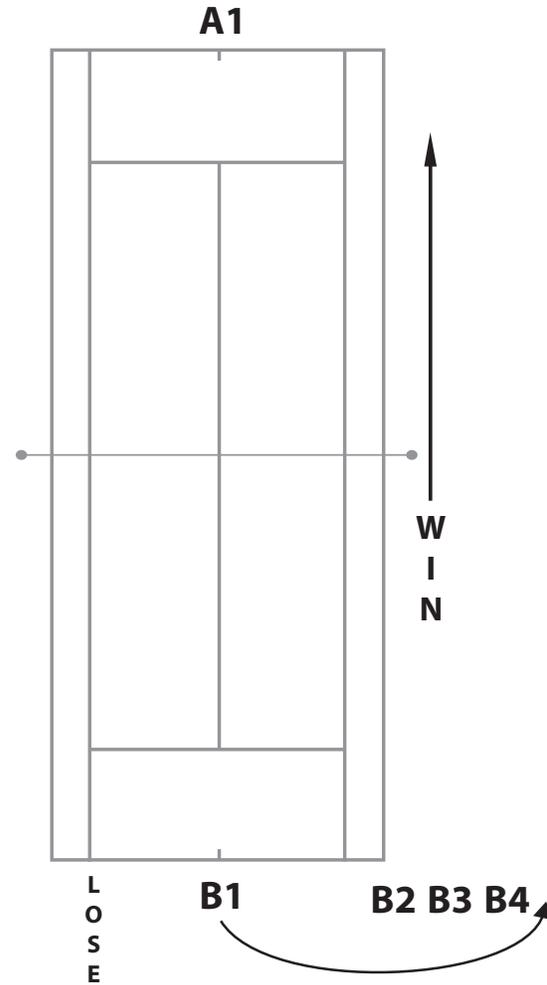
**Move Your Opponent Up and Back**

## Game

**Champion of the Court Singles.** A designated champion competes against a line of at least three challengers. The champion (A1) assumes a baseline position on one side of the court. Other players (i.e. the challengers, diagrammed as B1-B4) wait at the back of the opposite side of the court. The first challenger, B1, assumes the opposite baseline position and drop-hits or serves (two serves to get one ball in the service court) the ball to A1 and a point is played using the singles boundaries. The court size should be 60-foot long and 21-foot wide. If B1 wins, she is the new champion and runs to the other side of the court (Champion's side). If A1 wins, he stays and plays a point started by B2. For a variation, have the challengers win two or three points before becoming the Champion.

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Have players play driveway or playground tennis with a partner/parent, or play wall tennis with a foam ball.



Champion of the Court Singles

## Practice 7

**Theme:** Doubles

**Equipment:** 23- to 25-inch racquets, low compression balls, foam balls

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Ultimate performance occurs in “the zone.” The combination of thought, feeling and action. Where THEY can “just do it.” Create the fertile soil in which a player can grow into that kind of performance.

### Movement Activities

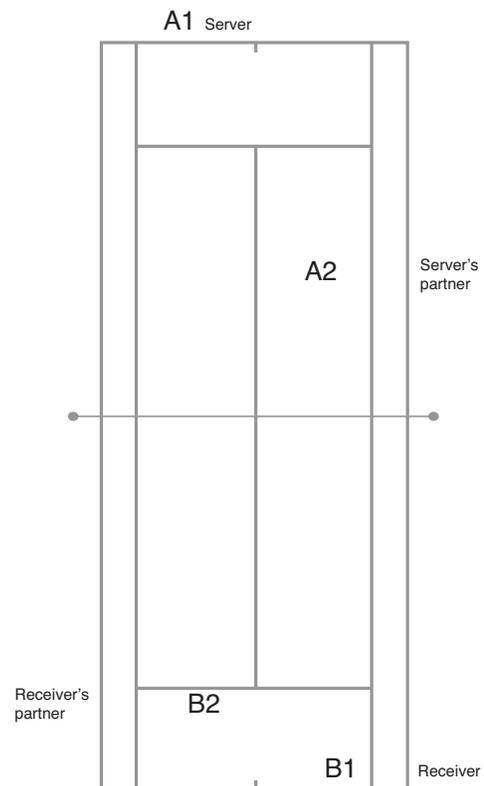
**Ball Drop.** In pairs facing each other, one player has her arms extended at shoulder height and a ball in each hand. This player drops one ball at random and the other player has to catch the ball after one bounce. After each successful drop and catch, move players apart one step. Change catchers and droppers after five trials. (See Practice 5 for illustration.)

**Jog Ball.** While players are jogging in a large circle, they toss the ball up and catch it after the bounce with two hands, then with the right hand and then with the left hand. Keep players moving and have them change direction when the coach calls out to change directions.

**Circle Volleys.** Players form a circle and bump a foam ball to each other at random after one bounce. After two minutes, move in a step and keep the foam ball in the air while it goes randomly from player to player around the circle.

### Skill

**All Position Doubles.** This activity is a great way to teach players the positions and responsibilities for doubles. Position four players in the proper doubles positions—the server (A1), the partner of the server (A2), the serve returner/receiver (B1) and the partner of the returner (B2). A point is played starting with a serve or a drop-hit. Once two or three points are played, each player rotates to the next doubles position. After the rotation, more points are played with the players in their new doubles positions.



**Court Positions**

The coach can work on the positions of these players as they play a large number of doubles points. They also can focus on the shot selection. This is a good time to get players thinking about hitting deep to deep (players at the baseline should be hitting back to the opposite baseline player) or close to close (players at the net should think about hitting to the side of the opposite volley position).

The coach also can take one of the doubles positions and she will stay at that position while everyone else rotates. For example, the coach might be in the service return position and have three balls. The coach hits the return from the server and a point is played. When the point ends, the coach can put another ball in play and a second point is played. Continue until the coach plays all three balls, making sure that every player hits a shot or two from his respective doubles position. This coach formation with multiple balls before rotating ensures more hitting before moving to the next position.

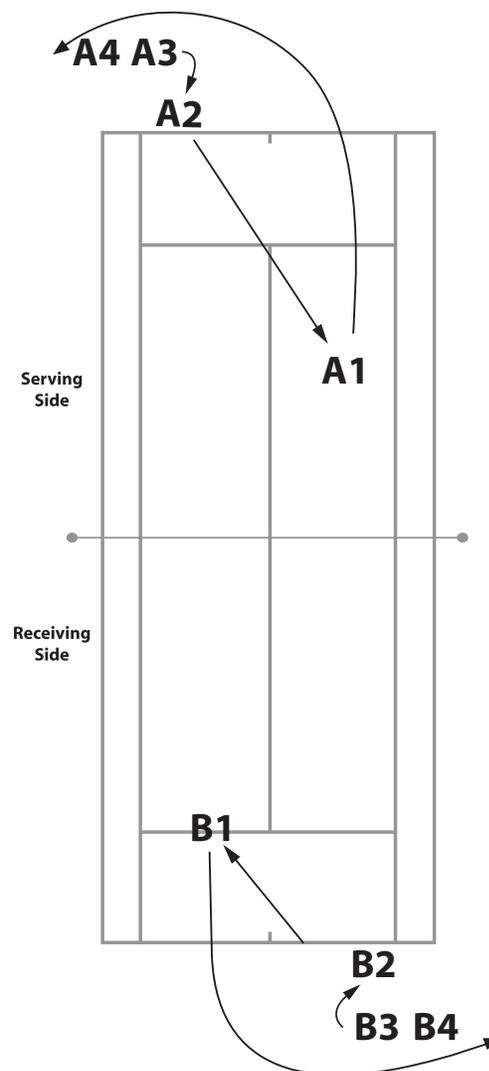
## Game

**Team Doubles.** This game requires a minimum of four players but can easily accommodate eight players. Four players assume the typical doubles positions on each side of the court. One side is the serving side and the other side is the returning side.

Points can begin with a drop-hit or a serve. After a point is played, players rotate one spot on their side of the net. For example, player A1 would move to the back of the “A” line, player A2 would move to the net and A3 would be on the baseline. Games can be played to 7 or 11 points with teams switching ends of the court after each game. One side serves the entire game. All serves are from the deuce court.

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Have players play driveway or playground tennis with a partner/parent, or play wall tennis with a foam ball.



**Team Doubles**

## Practice 8

**Theme:** Play Day

**Equipment:** As needed

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

The most important thing you can give your kids is a love of tennis. That will carry them through difficult times, injuries, bad calls, bad coaches and tough competition. Their love for the game will take them further than any other thing you could teach them.

### Games

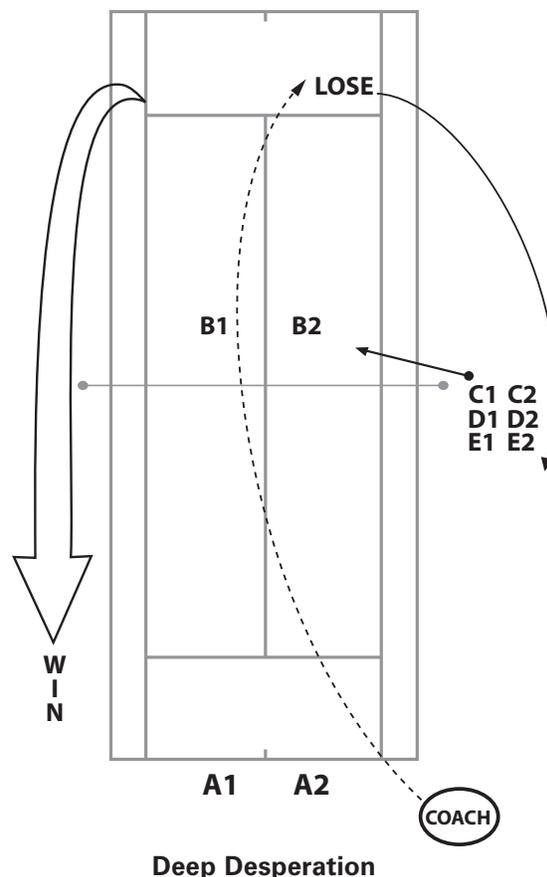
This is a fun day and the activities can be the favorite activities from this series of practices. Teams can be created and games can be played in a team format.

There are some large group games that are ideal if you have enough players:

**Deep Desperation.** A doubles “champion” team (A1 and A2) is positioned on the baseline. The other players line up with a partner at the net post. The first team at the net post takes positions at the net. The coach begins each point with a lob over the heads of the team at the net. Begin with an easy lob that the players can move back and return after one bounce. This ball will most likely land in the service court to start. The players at the net must chase down the lob and play out the point against the champion team. If the challenging team wins, they run over to replace the champions.

A new ball is fed as soon as the new challengers are in the volley position. If the challenging team loses, they quickly go to the end of the line at the net post and the next team of challengers comes in to play out the next point started by a lob from the coach.

Whoever is left in the champion position after a designated time wins the game.



**Wipe Out.** Divide the group into two teams (A and B) of at least four players each. Each team stands in a line along the back fence on opposite ends of the court. To begin, one person from each team plays a singles point beginning with a drop-hit. After the point, the winner (A1) stays on the court and adds a second person (A2) to her side of the court. The player who loses the point (B1) goes to the end of her line (side B) and the next player (B2) begins the point with a drop-hit to the two people on the opposite side.

The team that wins the point keeps adding an additional player until all players are on the court and that team wins the point. When multiple players are playing against one player, the lone player can use the doubles boundaries, and the multiple players must use the singles court. The game ends when one side has all its players on the court and wins the point.



## **Take Home Tennis**

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Have players play driveway or playground tennis with a partner/friend, or play wall tennis individually.

# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 8: Practice Sessions (Ages 11-17)

This chapter contains eight suggested practice sessions for children ages 11-17. The goal of this series of practices is to get children playing the game as quickly as possible so they can enjoy the experience of hitting balls back and forth over the net.

These practice sessions are categorized by playing situations, and skills are introduced in the context of the situation:

- **Playing Situation 1: Both players in the backcourt.** The skills needed for this situation are rallying skills, or more specifically, forehand and backhand ground strokes. Once children can rally, games and contests can be used to get them on the court and playing tennis.
- **Playing Situation 2: Serving and returning.** The skills needed are serves and returns.
- **Playing Situation 3: One player at the net and one player at the baseline.** The skills for the net player include the volley and the overhead, while the player in the backcourt will hit ground strokes and lobs.
- **Playing Situation 4: Transitioning from the baseline to the net.** This is a result of moving forward from the baseline to return a short ball and then continuing to the net. The skill necessary is the approach shot.

Each practice session will incorporate tactics, skills and rules so these are learned as the children are playing the game. Announcing the score, calling lines, knowing the rules and court etiquette, court positioning and shot selection are elements of these practices. More specific information is reviewed for singles and doubles positioning in Practices 7 and 8.

Included in each practice session is a coaching tip from youth coaching expert Gary Avischious. Practice sessions should last a minimum of 60 minutes but no longer than 90 minutes. Play should be on full-size courts and with regulation equipment.

Each practice includes:

1. The theme and objective of the practice.
2. A warm-up activity that helps develop the athletic skills of the age group.
3. A review of what was learned in the previous session.
4. A new skill and a series of practices for that playing situation.
5. A team game that reinforces the skills and tactics of the playing situation.
6. A take-home tennis activity.

## Practices at a Glance: Ages 11-17

This one-page guide outlines the eight practice sessions that follow. It serves as a handy reference for what is covered in more detail during each practice.

<b>Practice 1</b>	<b>Rally Skills – Forehand</b>
Movement Activities	Roll and Catch; Toss and Catch; Toss and Trap; Toss, Turn and Trap
Skill	Rally from the Forehand Side
Game	Tag Team Singles
Take Home Tennis	Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis
<b>Practice 2</b>	<b>Rally Skills – Backhand</b>
Movement Activities	Roll and Catch; Toss and Catch; Toss and Trap; Toss, Turn and Trap; Lobster Trap
Skill	Rally from the Backhand Side
Game	Champion of the Court Singles
Take Home Tennis	Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis
<b>Practice 3</b>	<b>Serve and Return</b>
Movement Activities	Toss and Trap, Lobster Trap
Skills	The Serve, Return of Serve
Game	Serve Relay
Take Home Tennis	Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis
<b>Practice 4</b>	<b>Volleys</b>
Movement Activity	Partner Rally Using Forehand and Backhand Ground Strokes
Skills	Volley Progression, Ground Stroke - Volley Combination
Game	Champs and Chumps
Take Home Tennis	Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis
<b>Practice 5</b>	<b>Overheads and Lobs</b>
Movement Activities	Alternate Forehands and Backhands from the Service Line, Bucket Head
Skills	Lob and Overhead
Game	Team Doubles
Take Home Tennis	Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis
<b>Practice 6</b>	<b>Approaching the Net</b>
Movement Activities	Alternate Forehands and Backhands from the Service Line (with Volley)
Skill	Approaching the Net to Volley
Game	Champions of the Court Doubles
Take Home Tennis	Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis
<b>Practice 7</b>	<b>Singles Play</b>
Movement Activity	Continuous Rally into the Doubles Alley
Skills	Singles Positioning and Tactics
Game	Champion of the Court Singles
Take Home Tennis	Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis
<b>Practice 8</b>	<b>Doubles Play</b>
Movement Activity	Volleys and Ground Strokes into the Doubles Alley
Skill	All-Position Doubles
Game	Deep Desperation
Take Home Tennis	Jr. Team Tennis

## Practice 1

**Theme:** Rally skills using forehand ground strokes

**Objective:** To provide the tools needed to get kids rallying from the forehand side during the very first practice

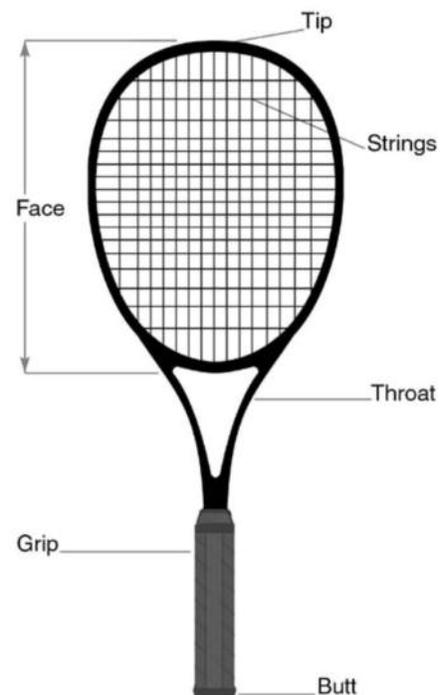
### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

The more you play with an idea, the more you play with tennis, the more you play with your kids, the more kids learn how to play tennis. And when kids learn to play tennis by having fun, they will perform better than you ever imagined.

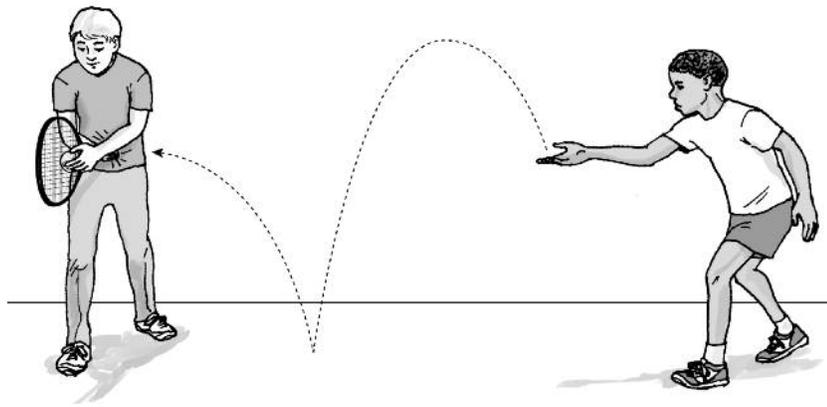
### Movement Activities

**Roll and Catch.** Players should stand 10 feet apart, with one ball for each pair of players. The player with the ball (Player A) rolls the ball to either side of the partner (Player B), and Player B moves so she can catch the ball directly between her feet. Player B should shuffle into position and squat down, keeping her back straight to catch the ball. Player B then rolls the ball back to either side of Player A, who also catches the ball and rolls it back. To add some variation, have players use two balls and have them both roll and catch at the same time.

**Toss and Catch.** This activity is similar to the first, but this time Player A tosses the ball underhand so it bounces on the court, and Player B catches the ball with one hand with the fingers pointing up. This will force each player to move quickly to get below the ball so the fingers are up, similar to the position of the hand when making a volley. For a greater challenge, have both players toss and catch two balls at the same time.



**Toss and Trap.** This activity is similar to “Toss and Catch,” but this time each player will have a racquet. The racquet is held at its throat with the dominant hand, and the butt of the racquet is held against the stomach at about “belt buckle” position. Player A tosses the ball and Player B traps the ball on the strings with the non-dominant hand in a perfect contact position. Player B tosses it back to Player A, who moves and traps the ball against the strings, holding his racquet butt against his belly and the dominant hand at the racquet throat. This is an excellent warm-up activity to train players to move into the perfect spot for the ideal contact for a ground stroke. All players will have to move quickly to trap all balls on the forehand side of the racquet.



**Toss and Trap**

**Toss, Turn and Trap.** This time, Player A uses a higher underhand toss to Player B, who has her back to the feeder (Player A). The feeder calls out the partner’s name and the partner (Player B) turns 180 degrees, locates the ball and moves to trap the ball against her strings. Have each pair do this five times, then change tossers and trapper.

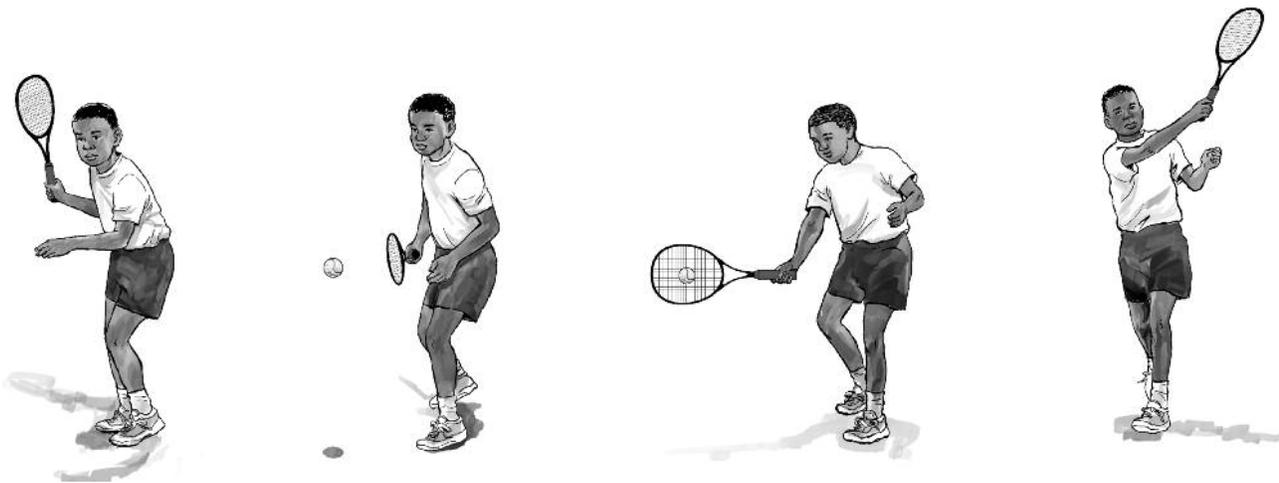
### Skill: Rally from the Forehand Side

Follow this progression to get players rallying from the forehand side:

1. **Self rally.** Each player hits the ball up in the air to eye-level height, lets the ball bounce and hits it again. Try for as many hit-bounce rallies as possible.
2. **Partner rally to a target.** Two players rally the ball eye-level high, trying to land the ball on a shared target on the ground.
3. **Partner rally over a line.** Two players are positioned two steps apart and rally the ball at eye-level height over a line on the ground.
4. **Partner rally over a net.** Two players are four steps apart and rally the ball over a net. Targets on the court are helpful to provide a precise landing point for the shots.
5. **Partner rally over a net and side to side.** Both players are in the same position as the previous activity, but this time attempt to hit shots on either side of a line, either to the right or left of the line. Players call out the direction of the shot before hitting the ball.
6. **Partner rally over a net (short and deep).** Similar to the previous activity, but this time players hit the ball either in front of or behind a line, short and deep. Briefly discuss that a higher trajectory sends the ball deeper. Players call out short or deep before hitting.

**Rally Reinforcer.** This step may be necessary if the players are having difficulty with the final stages that require additional control. If the players are not judging, moving and positioning themselves quickly and properly before hitting, have one player drop-hit a ball and the other player trap the ball after the bounce with his hand and the racquet face in the ideal contact area. Once players quickly and accurately move into the proper position, have them repeat any steps necessary.

**Step-Back Rallies.** With a partner, each player is two steps away from the net. One player begins with a drop hit to the partner, who returns that ball, and the pair rallies the ball for four hits. After four hits, both players take one step back and repeat the rally drill, trying to keep the ball in play for four consecutive hits. Every time they successfully rally four in a row, they each move back a step. If either player makes an error, each player moves forward a step and tries to rally four in a row again before moving a step back.



**The Forehand**

### **Coaching Tips**

- Tapping the ball up to head-level height will give the player an idea of how much swing is required to hit the ball a few feet.
- As the distance increases, so does the length of the backswing and the follow through.
- Using foam and low compression balls gives players more time to move to the ball and will provide earlier success.

## Game

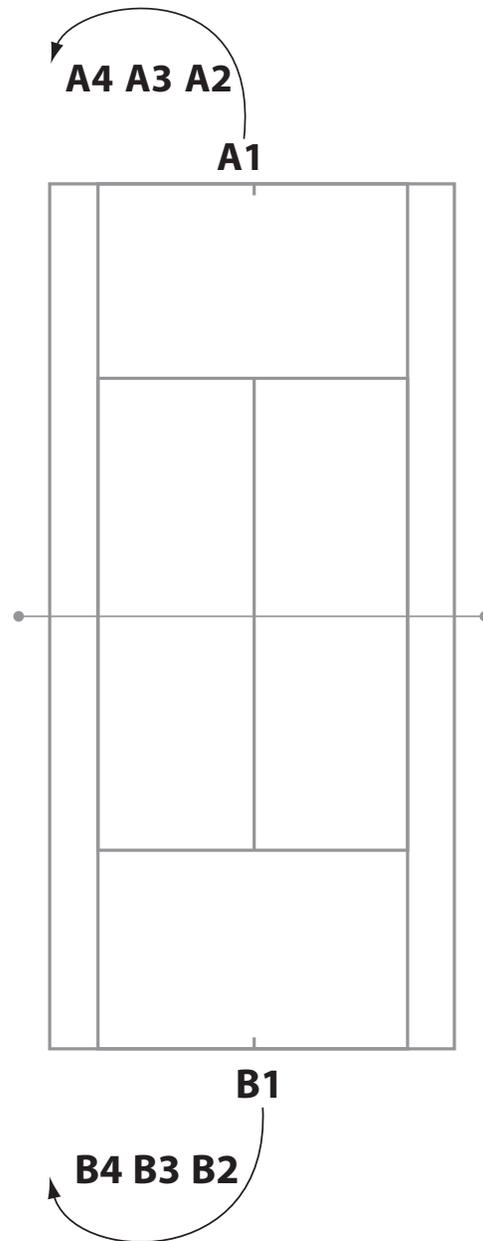
**Tag Team Singles.** A minimum of four players is needed for this team game. Split players into two groups, with each group forming a line behind the middle of each baseline. One player is up on each side (A1 and B1). The first player from side A (A1) drop-hits the ball to the first player on side B (B1) and moves to the back of her line. The first player on B (B1) returns the ball and goes to the back of the line on his side. From there, each subsequent player hits one ball and moves to the back of the line, keeping the point going until one side misses.

Each line keeps track of how many points it wins. The first team to 10 points is declared the winner.

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Player plays driveway tennis or wall tennis. Setting up a modified court in the driveway or on a playground with chalk lines and a temporary net, rope or caution tape provides a fun way to continue this practice session. With a partner, the player should see how many forehand ground strokes she can hit using a short court and foam balls. This activity can also be done on a tennis court using a foam ball and the service lines.

If the player can't find a partner, or if he can't set up a short court, hitting forehand ground strokes off a garage door or wall is ideal practice. Have the player use a foam ball and see how many he can hit in a row off the wall.



Tag Team Singles

## Practice 2

**Theme:** Rally skills using backhand and forehand ground strokes

**Objective:** To complete all the options in Playing Situation 1, where both players are in the backcourt; once players can rally using both forehand and backhand ground strokes, they can play points

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Discipline comes from the root word “disciple,” which means joyful follower. As a coach you earn respect instead of demand it. If you're joyful, they will follow. If you're not, you will find yourself demanding more respect.



### Movement Activities

**Roll and Catch.** (Same as Practice 1.) With one ball for each pair, players should stand 10 feet apart. The player with the ball (Player A) rolls the ball to either side of the partner (Player B), and Player B moves so she can catch the ball directly between her feet. Player B should shuffle into position and squat down, keeping her back straight to catch the ball. Player B then rolls the ball back to either side of Player A, who also catches the ball and rolls it back. To add some variation, have players use two balls and have them both roll and catch at the same time.

**Toss and Catch.** (Same as Practice 1.) Player A underhand tosses the ball so that it bounces on the court, and Player B catches the ball with one hand with the fingers pointing up. This will force both players to move quickly to get their hand below the ball so the fingers are up, similar to the position of the hand when making a volley. For a greater challenge, have both players toss and catch two balls at the same time.

**Toss and Trap.** The activity is a repeat of Practice 1, but have the player trap on the opposite side of the body, holding the racquet at its throat with the non-dominant hand and with the butt of the racquet against the stomach at the “belt buckle.” Repeat this activity from Practice 1, but this time all traps are done on the backhand side of the racquet.

**Toss, Turn and Trap.** (Same as Practice 1, but trap all balls on the backhand side of the racquet.) Player A uses a higher underhand toss to Player B, who has his back to the feeder (Player A). The feeder calls out the partner's name and the partner (Player B) turns 180 degrees, locates the ball and moves to trap the ball against his strings. Have each pair do this five times, and then change tossers and trappers.

**Lobster Trap.** Player A uses an underhand toss to either side of Player B, who is in a ready position with two racquets. The player with two racquets (lobster) traps the ball with both racquets on one side or the other, then drops the ball and returns a left-handed or right-handed drop-hit forehand, depending on the side he trapped the ball. Change tossers and “lobsters” after five tosses. (See Chapter 6, Practice 1 for illustration.)

## Review: The Forehand

Review the forehand ground stroke and demonstrate swing pattern, contact point and follow through. Stress that all shots from the baseline begin from the ready position and will involve movement to the ball, set-up, swing and a quick recovery back to the center of the court and a return to the ready position.

- **Step-back rallies:** With a partner, each player is two steps away from the net. One player begins with a drop hit to the partner, who returns that ball, and the pair rallies the ball for four hits. After four hits, both players take one step back and they repeat the rally drill, trying to keep the ball in play for four consecutive hits. Every time they successfully rally four in a row, they each move back a step. If either player makes an error, each player moves forward a step and tries to rally four in a row again before moving back a step.

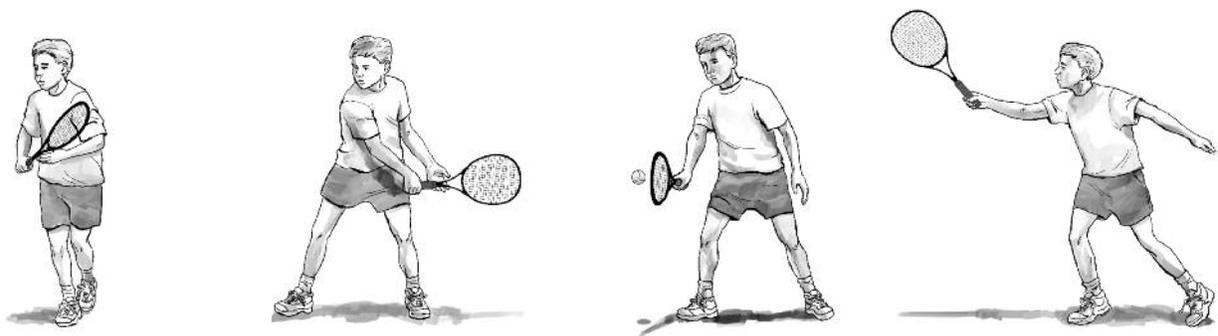


## Skill: Rally from the Backhand Side

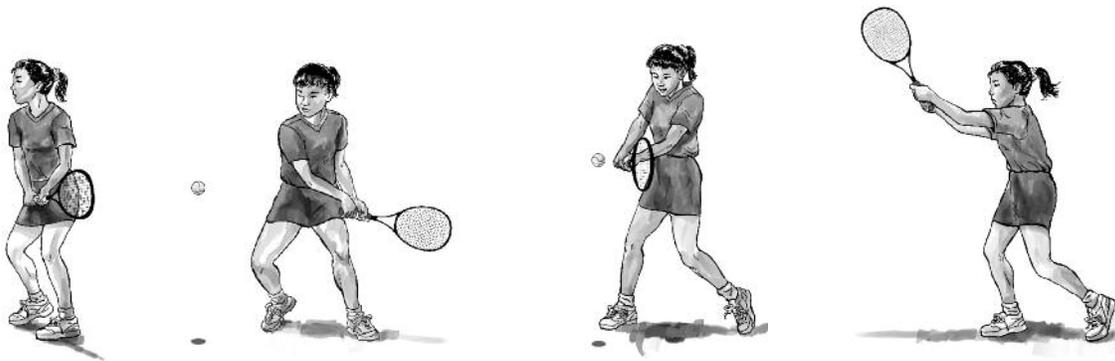
The new skill for Practice 2 follows the same pattern as those in Practice Session 1, except this time the backhand is used. See Practice 1 (page 100) for the description of each activity:

1. **Self rally**
2. **Partner rally to a target**
3. **Partner rally over a line**
4. **Partner rally over a net**
5. **Partner rally over a net and side to side**
6. **Partner rally over a net and short and deep**
7. **Partner rally using alternate forehand and backhand ground strokes.** Partners hit balls straight ahead and both alternate hitting on the forehand side and the backhand side. After four successful hits by each player, the partners can take one step back and repeat the activity. If either makes an error, both players must take one step forward and try for four successful rallies each before moving back.





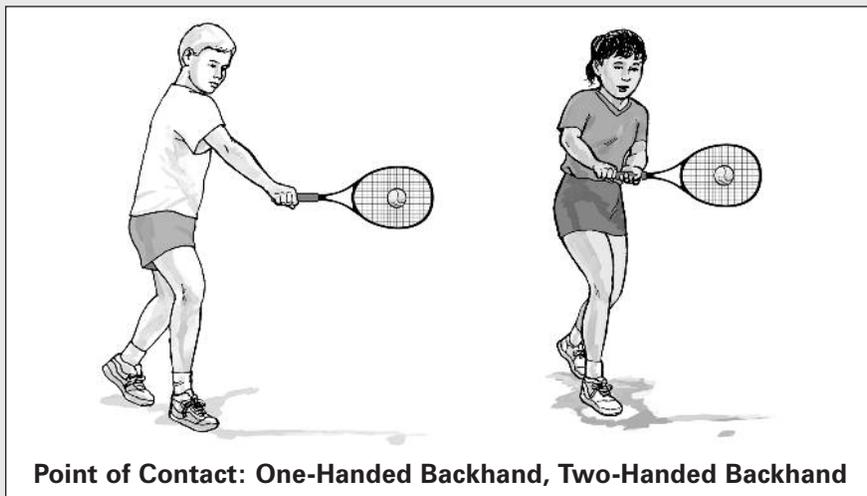
**One-Handed Backhand**



**Two-Handed Backhand**

### **Coaching Tips**

- When players hit on the backhand side, they change to a one-handed backhand grip during the turn from the ready position.
- The contact point for a two-handed backhand is the same as a left-handed forehand.
- The contact point for the one-handed backhand is in front of the forward foot.
- When balls are hit at the body, have players move quickly so they play the ball on their favorite side.



**Point of Contact: One-Handed Backhand, Two-Handed Backhand**

## Game

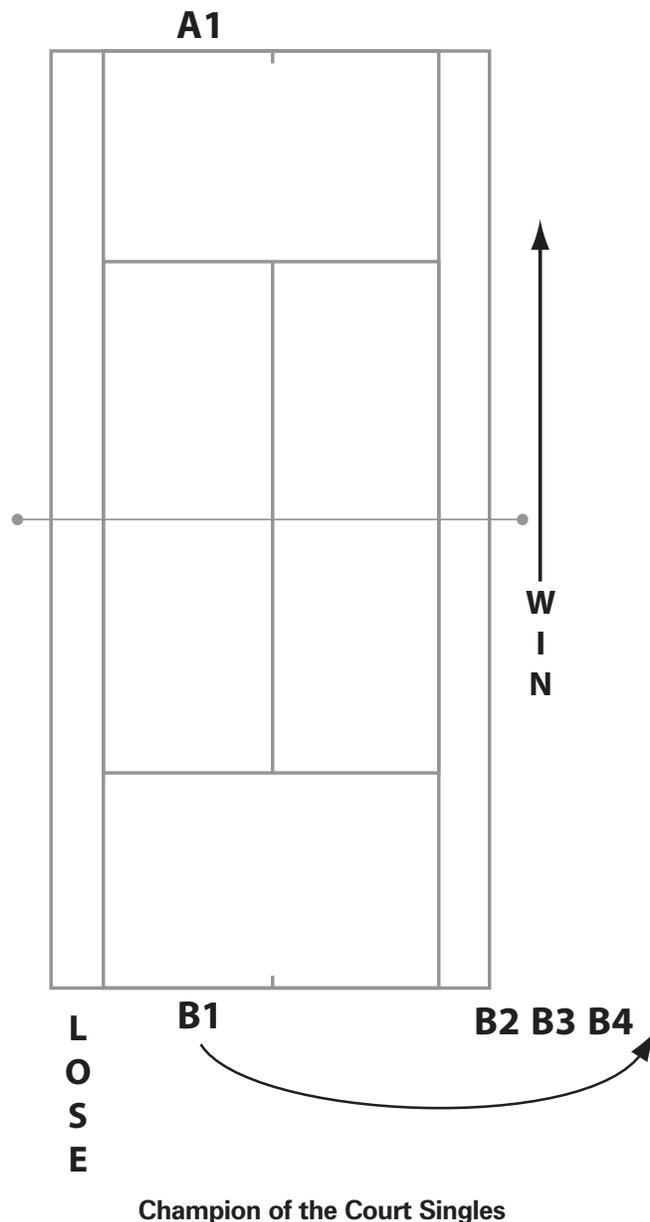
**Champion of the Court Singles.** A designated “champion” competes against a line of at least three players, with the champion assuming a baseline position on one side of the court (A1) and the other players (i.e., the challengers) waiting at the back on the opposite side of the court.

The first challenger (B1) assumes a position at the baseline and drop-hits the ball to the champion (A1). A point is then played out using the singles boundaries. If B1 wins, he is the new champion and runs to the other side of the court (the champion’s side). If A1 wins, she stays and plays a point against B2.

*Note: This game can be varied by making the challengers have to win two or three points against the champion before they can assume the champion’s position.*

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Player plays driveway/playground tennis or wall tennis. On the driveway/playground court or against the wall, the player should concentrate on the backhand ground stroke and see how many consecutive backhand ground strokes she can hit. Player should graduate to alternating by hitting one forehand and one backhand.



## Practice 3

**Theme:** Serve and Return

**Objective:** To begin points with a proper serve and return so players can begin to play according to the official rules

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

The true giftedness of “natural” athletes is not their talent but their love for the game and their self-motivated desire. It's not their ability; it's their effort.



### Movement Activities

**Toss and Trap.** (Same as Practice 1.) Have the player hold the racquet at its throat with the dominant hand; the butt of the racquet is held against the stomach at about “belt buckle” position. Player A tosses the ball and Player B traps the ball on the strings with the non-dominant hand in a perfect contact position. Player B tosses it back to Player A, who moves and traps the ball against the strings with his racquet butt against his belly and his dominant hand at the throat of the racquet. This is an excellent warm-up activity to train players to move into the perfect spot for the ideal contact for a ground stroke. All players will have to move quickly to trap all balls on the forehand side of the racquet.

**Lobster Trap.** (Same as Practice 2.) Player A uses an underhand toss to either side of Player B, who is in a ready position with two racquets. The player with two racquets (lobster) traps the ball with both racquets on one side or the other, then drops the ball and returns a left-handed or right-handed drop-hit forehand, depending on the side she trapped the ball. Change tossers and “lobsters” after five tosses.

### Review: Forehand and Backhand Ground Strokes

Review both the forehand and backhand ground strokes. Demonstrate the swing pattern of each from the ready position and include the backswing, contact point and follow through. Show the grips used for the forehand, along with the one-handed and two-handed backhand. Reinforce that after playing shots from the backcourt on either the forehand or backhand side, it is important to recover quickly to the center of the baseline and be in a ready position before the opponent makes contact for the return shot.

**Drill.** Partner rally using alternate forehand and backhand ground strokes (see Practice 2). Partners hit balls straight ahead and both alternate hitting on the forehand side and backhand side. After four successful hits by each player, the partners can take one step back and repeat the activity. If either makes an error, both players must take one step forward and try for four successful rallies each before moving back.

## Skills: The Serve and Return

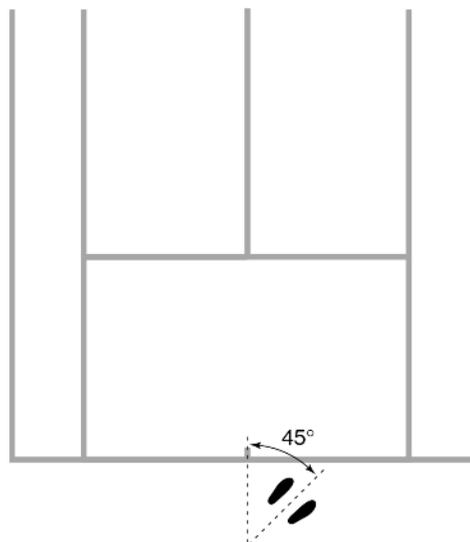
Demonstrate a full serve in slow motion from the baseline into the service court. Explain that serves must be hit from behind the baseline into the opposite service court. Each game begins with a serve in the deuce court, and the server plays the next serve into the ad court, alternating sides for every serve until the game is complete.

The following activities demonstrate a serve-and-return progression, and are done with a partner on the other side of the net:

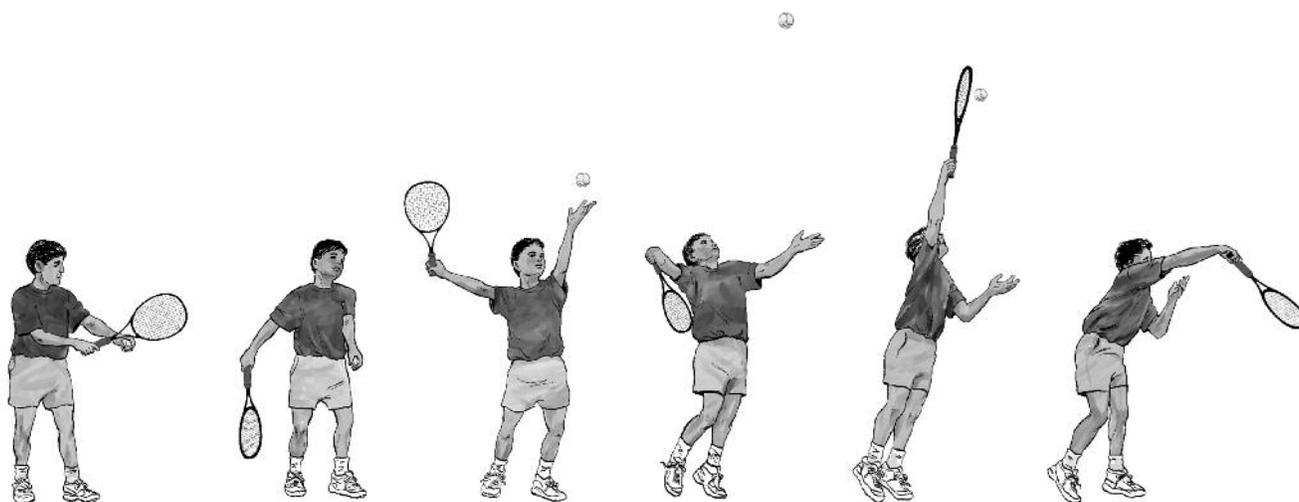
**Throw Over the Net to a Partner.** Since the serve is like an overhand throwing motion, have players throw a ball over the net to their partners, who catch it after one bounce and throw the ball back. Both players should start at the service line and move back to the baseline after a series of successful throws and catches. To reinforce a correct overhand throwing motion, foam (NERF) footballs can be used during this activity.

**Toss, Touch and Freeze.** Position players two steps away from the net with their racquets back and their arms bent at the elbow like a quarterback prepared to throw. Have players toss the ball up with the non-dominant hand, reach up to full extension and freeze at the contact point. The racquet face should be directed at the service court. Several players can be positioned along the net with their partners on the opposite side.

*Note: Make sure that players freeze at the point of contact so they can see the contact point and make any necessary corrections to the toss. To prevent them from over-swinging, see if they can make the ball bounce four times before it goes over the service line.*



**Foot Position**



**The Serve**

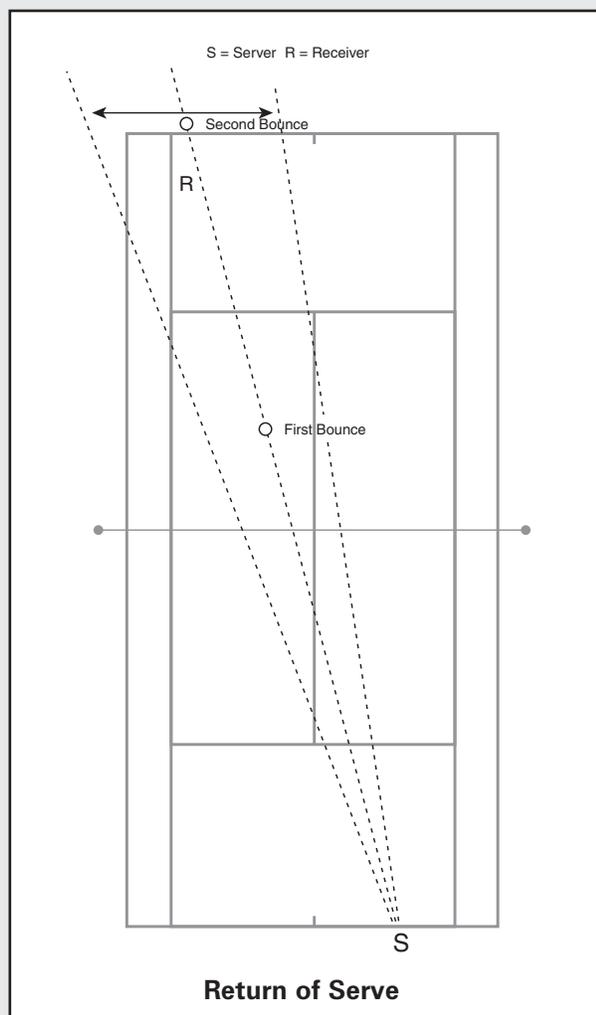
**Add a Step, Serve and Trap.** Begin all players four steps from the net. Have players toss, hit and follow through so the ball goes to their partner in the service court. After one bounce, the partner traps the ball on the racquet face with her hand and serves it back to her partner. The serves should be hit into the diagonal service court to a partner. After each time the partners can serve and trap, both players move back a step and repeat the activity.

*Note: As soon as players begin to move back behind the service line, don't let them serve at the same time as those only a few steps from the net. This will keep the players closer to the net from being hit by someone serving behind them.*

### Coaching Tips

Learn to serve and return from the playing situation of: one player serving from behind the baseline and the other player in position to make the return.

- Players should stand at a 45-degree angle to the net so they can rotate back on the backswing and forward for the hit and follow through.
- The contact point should be as high as the player can reach, over the right shoulder (if the player is right-handed) and in front of the forward foot.
- Returners should draw a line from the server through the middle of the service court to establish a good starting position for the return of serve.
- If the serve is hit hard, the returner should use a shorter backswing to allow time to contact the ball in front of the body.

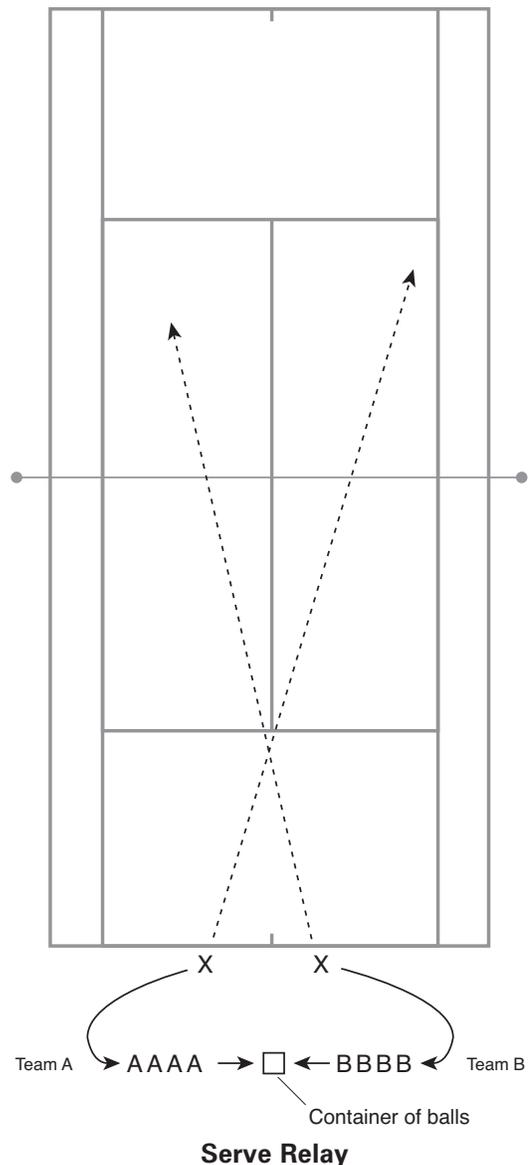


## Game

**Serve Relay.** Divide players into two teams with a supply of balls (basket, hopper or cart) behind the center of the court close to the fence. Each player serves from either three-quarters court or full court, depending on the skill level of the group. Both teams are in a line in back of the baseline along the fence. The first player in line moves from the fence to the baseline (or three-quarters court) and serves one ball. If the ball lands in the correct service court, the server goes to the end of the line and the next person becomes the server. If the serve is a fault, the server retrieves a ball from the basket placed between the lines and tries again. The server gets a maximum of three faults before the next player becomes the server. Continue the game until one team hits 10 successful serves

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis – With Serve.** Player plays driveway/playground tennis or wall tennis on your temporary court. Have players begin each rally with a serve. If they are using the garage door or wall, have them hit a serve to start each rally. Make a target on the wall about 4 feet above the ground and see how many serves hit the target.



## Practice 4

**Theme:** Volleys

**Objective:** To learn what to do when the player is at the net; after this practice, players should be able to execute all the positions necessary to play doubles and an all-court singles game

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Sarcasm has no place in a coach's vocabulary. Kids process sarcasm by wondering if we are lying to them. How would your relationship with your players change if they knew that everything you told them was true?



### Movement Activity

**Mini Tennis Warm-Up.** Have players warm up with forehand and backhand ground strokes from service line to service line using foam balls.

### Review: Serve and Return

Review the serve by showing a full swing and serving the ball from behind the baseline into the correct diagonal court. Have players divide into pairs and play "Add a step and trap" as described in Practice 3.

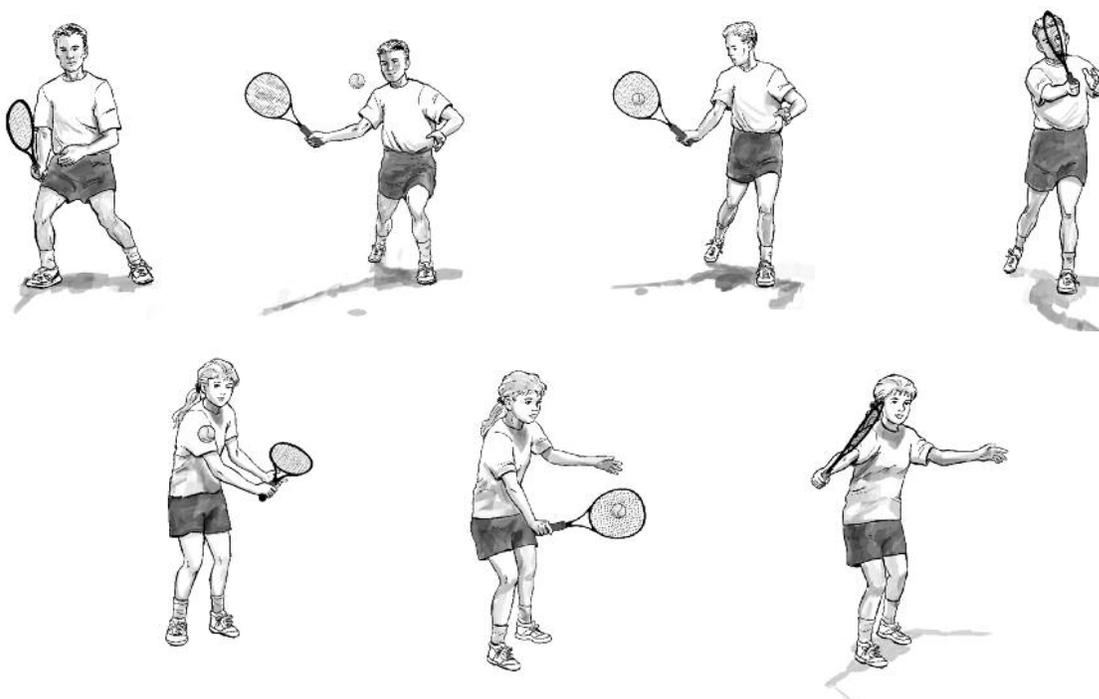
Take time to show positioning for the service return. Review that there are two major components to successfully returning the serve: the position of the receiver and the length of the backswing when returning the serve.

- **Position.** The right-to-left position of the receiver should be in the center of the angle made from the server's position to the outer edges of the service box the serve must go into. The depth of the receiver's position is determined by the velocity and depth of the serve. The receiver needs to be in front of the spot where the ball would bounce a second time. This means the receiver needs to stand closer in for shallow serves and farther back for deep serves (see diagram on page 109).
- **Backswing.** The harder the ball is served, the shorter the backswing of the receiver should be. A long backswing puts more power behind the ball. On a hard serve, the server supplies a lot of power; therefore, a long backswing on the part of the receiver will send the ball out of the court. In addition, since the receiver does not have the time to take a big backswing when the ball comes fast, the ball will often get past the receiver before she can hit it. On a softer serve, the receiver has time to lengthen the backswing, which will provide the necessary power for the return.

## Skills: The Volleys

**Volley Progression with a Partner.** Position players 6 feet apart in pairs on either side of the net. Players take turns tossing underhand or hitting a forehand volley through the following sequence:

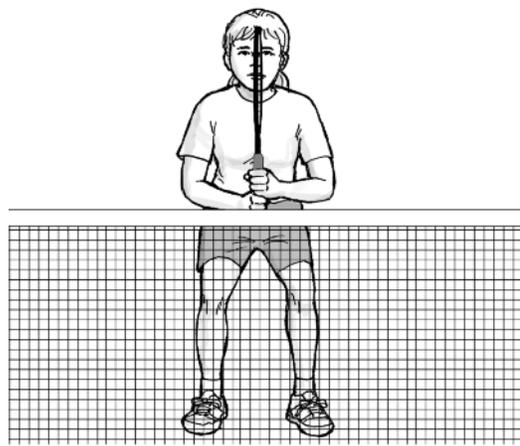
- Hold the racquet at its throat and bump the ball back to the feeder. Move the hand and racquet together so the stroke is not “wristy.” The hitters hold the racquet as if they were signaling “Stop” and gently volley balls back to the tosser. Switch feeders and hitters after five trials.
- Hold the racquet at the handle and gently volley the ball back to the tosser. Switch after five hits.
- Have volleyers turn so they are facing in the opposite direction and repeat the sequence with a backhand volley. Change tossers and hitters after five volleys



The Volley

### **Ground Stroke - Volley Combination.**

Position one player at the net and the partner at the opposite service line. From the service line, one player drop-hits a forehand, ground-stroke feed to her partner at the net. The player at the net volleys the ball back to the partner at the service line. The “feeder” traps the ball on the strings with her hand and repeats the ground stroke and volley return. Change positions after five hits each. This activity is much easier if you start with foam balls and move to low compression balls as the players master these skills.



Ready Position at the Net

## Coaching Tips

Learn to hit volleys from the playing situation where one player is at the net and the other player is in the backcourt.

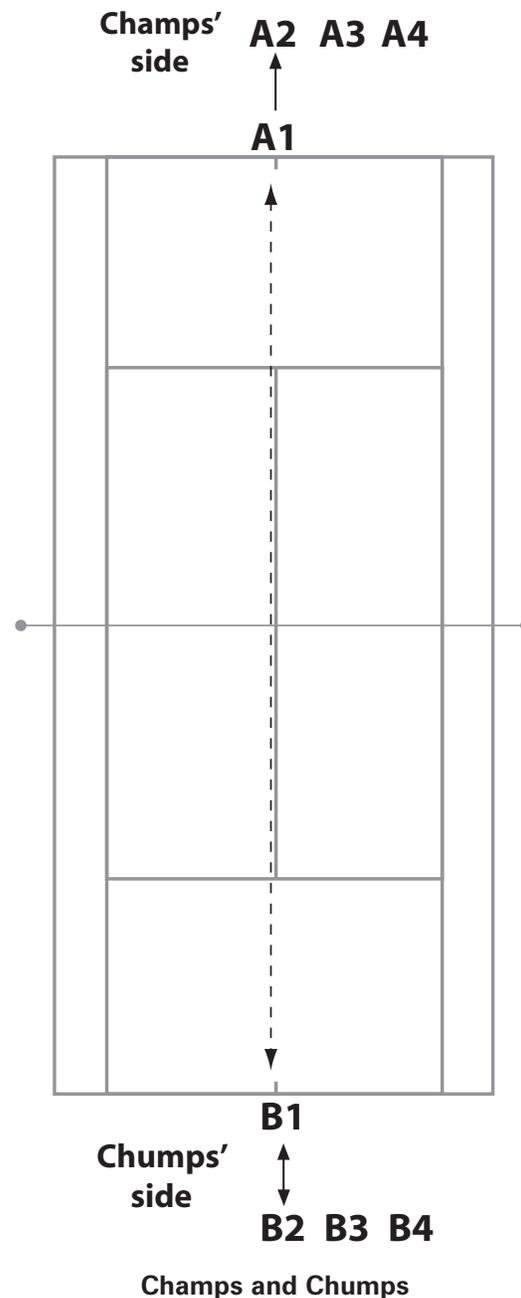
- In the ready position at the net, the racquet starts in a higher position than when at a ready position at the baseline.
- Work on quick hands at the net. Prepare the racquet face quickly with the hands, even before moving the feet.
- Move forward when the ball is moving slowly. This will allow the player to get the ball at a higher point over the net and allow the player to hit sharper angles.
- After the volley, recover to the side of the court where the ball lands on the opposite court.

## Game

**Champs and Chumps.** A minimum of six players is needed for this team game. Three or four players line up behind the baseline on each side of the court—one side of the court is designated as the Champs' side and the other as the Chumps' side. The first players from each side play out a point using the singles boundaries. The player who wins the point goes to the end of the Champs' line, while the player who loses the point goes to the end of the Chumps' line. The other players rotate through in order.

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Players play driveway/playground tennis or wall tennis with a foam ball. See if they can keep the ball in the air after it hits the wall for a continuous volley. Try for 10 volleys in a row, using both forehand and backhand volleys. If players are playing on the driveway, see if they and a partner can rally a foam ball.



## Practice 5

**Theme:** Overheads and Lobs

**Objective:** To complete the shot options for: a) Players at the net by introducing the overhead; and b) For players in the backcourt, when their opponent is at the net, by introducing the lob.

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

You are one of the greatest influences in the life of a child! You hold one of the keys to unlocking his or her potential.



### Movement Activities

**Alternate Forehands and Backhands from the Service Line.** Players rally balls with their partners from service line to service line using foam balls, but they must alternate hitting both forehands and backhands. They must move quickly to play each shot in the correct strike zone and recover to a good ready position after hitting.

**Bucket Head (tracking drill).** This is a fun activity that is great for judging balls with a high trajectory. It is a perfect drill for preparing players to get into position for an overhead. One player (or coach) hits a high arching shot over the net. The players on the opposite side of the net hold buckets (waste baskets, boxes, etc.) and try to catch the balls in their buckets before they bounce. This can be done in pairs or as a team. Count the number of balls in the bucket for each team after one minute.

### Review: Ground Stroke - Volley Combination

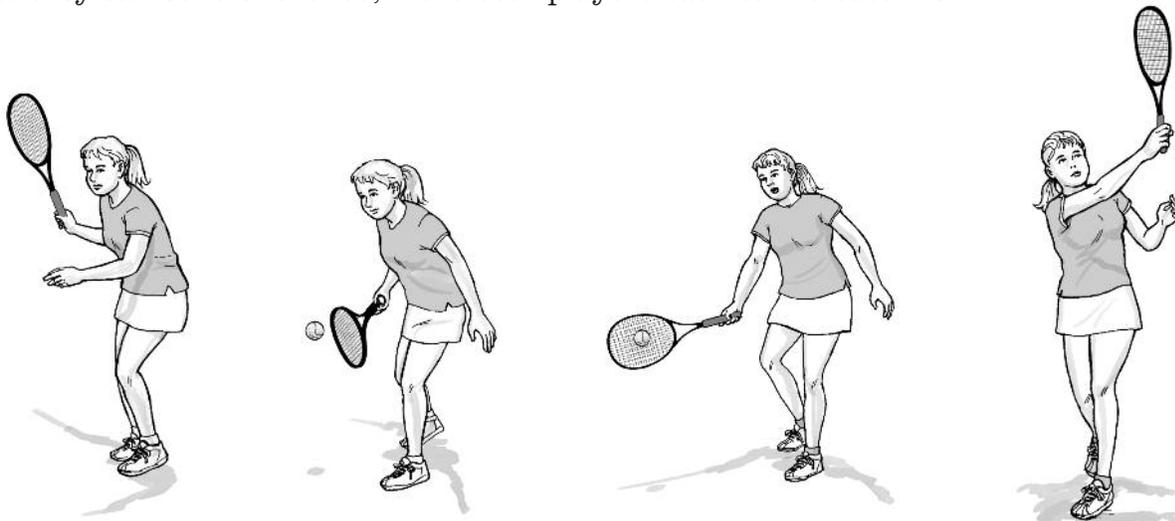
Position one player at the net and the partner at the opposite service line. From the service line, one player drop-hits a forehand, ground-stroke feed to a partner at the net. The player at the net volleys the ball back to the partner at the service line. Have the "feeder" trap the ball on the racquet face with his hand before they set up and repeat the ground-stroke feed-and-volley return. Change position after five hits each. After this review, see if the pair can keep one foam ball in play continuously, with one player volleying at the net and the other hitting ground strokes from the service line.

## Skills: Executing the Lob and the Overhead

**The Lob.** The lob is a ground stroke that is hit high over the net. It is used when a player is out of position as a way of giving more time to get back into position before the opponent can play the next shot. It is also used when the opponent is at the net. The objective is to lob the ball over the player at the net so he has to retreat to the backcourt to play the next shot.

To practice this shot, position partners between the service line and the baseline and have them rally so the ball lands on the service line, but with a higher trajectory than a normal ground stroke. Since the ball has a higher bounce, the players have to position themselves farther back behind the bounce to be able to play the ball in the strike zone.

Begin with forehand rallies using the lob, then change to all backhands. As soon as they can control the lob, move both players back to the baseline.



The Lob

**The Overhead.** The overhead is the shot that is played to return the lob. Players must move into the correct position so they can contact the ball at the same contact point as the serve. They must also time their swing so they can hit the descending ball at full reach and racquet extension.

There is a simple progression that will get players hitting lobs and overheads quickly:

- **Step 1:** Position one player at the net in the normal volley ready position and the other player between the service line and baseline. The deep player drop-hits a lob to the net person, who moves under the ball, reaches up and catches the ball with her hand.
- **Step 2:** After success with Step 1, give the net person a racquet. After the lob feed, the net person moves into position, reaches up, touches the ball and follows through across her body while directing the overhead back to the feeder. Have the feeder trap the ball on the racquet with his hand and have both players return to a good starting position. After both players have mastered this step, see if the pair can keep one ball going with lobs and overheads.

## Coaching Tips

Learn to play an overhead from the playing situation where one player is in the backcourt and the other is at the net. This will complete the options of the player at the net and she will be able to execute both an overhead and a volley.

Learning to play the lob when the player is in the backcourt and the opponent is at the net is a second option. This shot gives the player time to get back into position if he is pulled out of the court and also moves the opponent away from the net, toward the opposite baseline and into a less offensive position.

- If a lob is hit very high, it is best to play the overhead after the bounce.
- Lobs should be hit so the highest point of the lob's arc is directly over the net person's head.
- When moving back for the overhead, turn sideways for a shuffle or side step rather than back pedaling.
- The contact point for the overhead is the same as the serve.

## Game

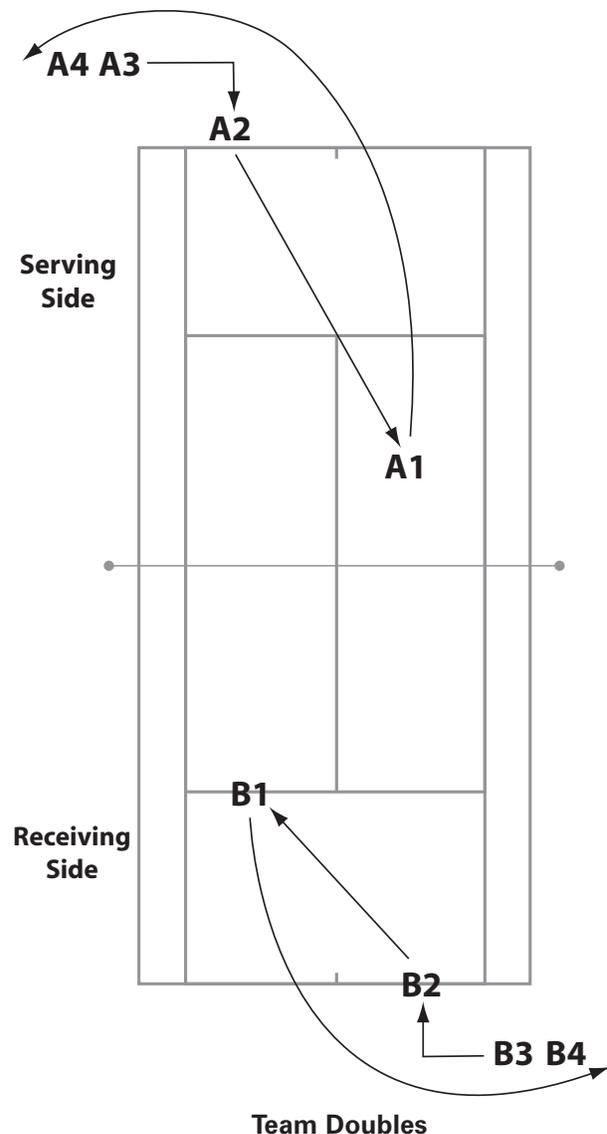
**Team Doubles.** This team game requires a minimum of six players. Four players assume the typical doubles positions on each side of the court, with one pair assuming the role of the serving side and the other pair serving as the returning side. Play out a point, beginning with either a drop hit or a serve.

After a point is played, players take turns rotating one spot on their side of the net. For example, player A1 would move to the back of the "A" line and player A2 would move to the net and player A3 would move to the baseline.

Games can be played to seven or 11 points, with teams switching sides of the court after each game. One side serves the entire game, and all serves are from the deuce side.

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Player plays driveway/playground tennis or wall tennis beginning each point or rally with a serve.



## Practice 6

**Theme:** Approaching the Net

**Objective:** To introduce the approach shot, or how to get from the baseline, where players hit ground strokes or lobs, to the net, where players can play the more offensive volleys and overheads

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

Plato said, "You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation." What are you learning about your kids? What are they learning about you?

### Movement Activities

**Alternate Forehands and Backhands from the Service Line.** Using foam balls, players will rally with their partners from service line to service line, alternating forehands and backhands. They must move quickly to play each shot in the correct strike zone and recover to a good ready position after hitting.

Then, have one player at the service line and the other player at the net. Hit all combinations of forehand and backhand volleys, such as forehand ground stroke to forehand volley and backhand ground stroke to backhand volley.

### Review: Volleys, Lobs and Overheads

Using foam balls, have one player begin in the net position and the other behind the service line. The player in the backcourt begins with two ground strokes so the net player can play an easy forehand volley and an easy backhand volley. The third shot from the backcourt is a lob, and the net player hits an overhead. Repeat this sequence to see how many ground strokes, lobs, volleys and overheads can be hit without a miss.

## Skill: The Approach Shot

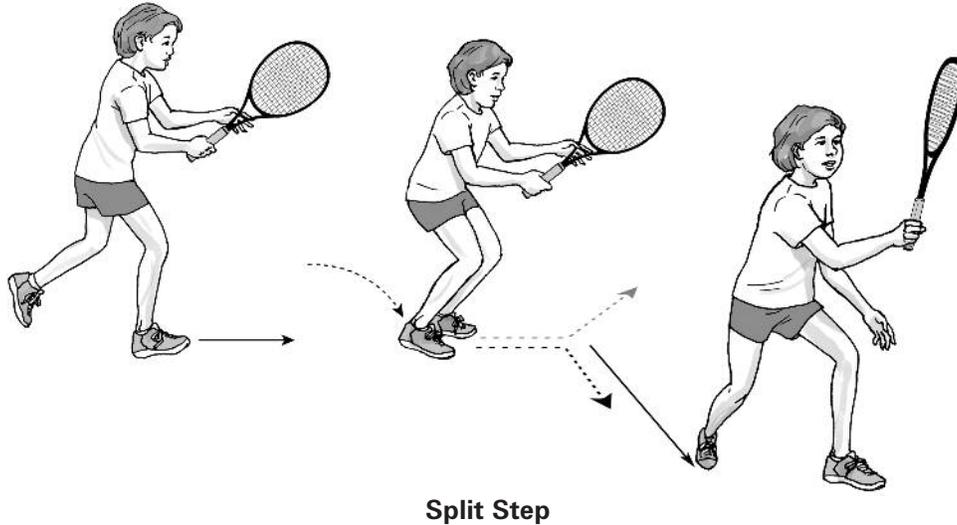
Hitting this transition shot effectively will allow the player to move from the backcourt, where the player usually hits shots that are either neutral or defensive, to the net, where the shots are generally offensive and the player can end the point with one shot. The playing situation is for one player to be in the backcourt and for the other player to be moving from the backcourt to the net with just one shot.

- **Step 1.** Have players in one single-file line at the baseline; the coach is a step inside the service line. The coach tosses up a ball and the first player moves forward quickly, gets sideways and moves through a forehand ground stroke, then quickly moves between the service line and net and assumes a ready position with a split step.

Do this on both the forehand and backhand sides.

Since the approach shot is hit from well inside the baseline and the player is moving toward the net at contact, only a short backswing is necessary to get the ball deep in the court. Have the players hit the approach shot with backspin to keep the ball low or with topspin to force the opponent into a weak return if there is an opening.

- **Step 2.** Toss or feed a short ball from the opposite side of the net. Players move forward to play the approach shot and immediately move forward to a good ready position between the net and service line. The coach tosses or hits a second ball so the player can hit a volley into the open court.



## Coaching Tips

Players will recognize that when they get a short ball, they can move forward, play a shot and move forward to the net position for either a volley or an overhead.

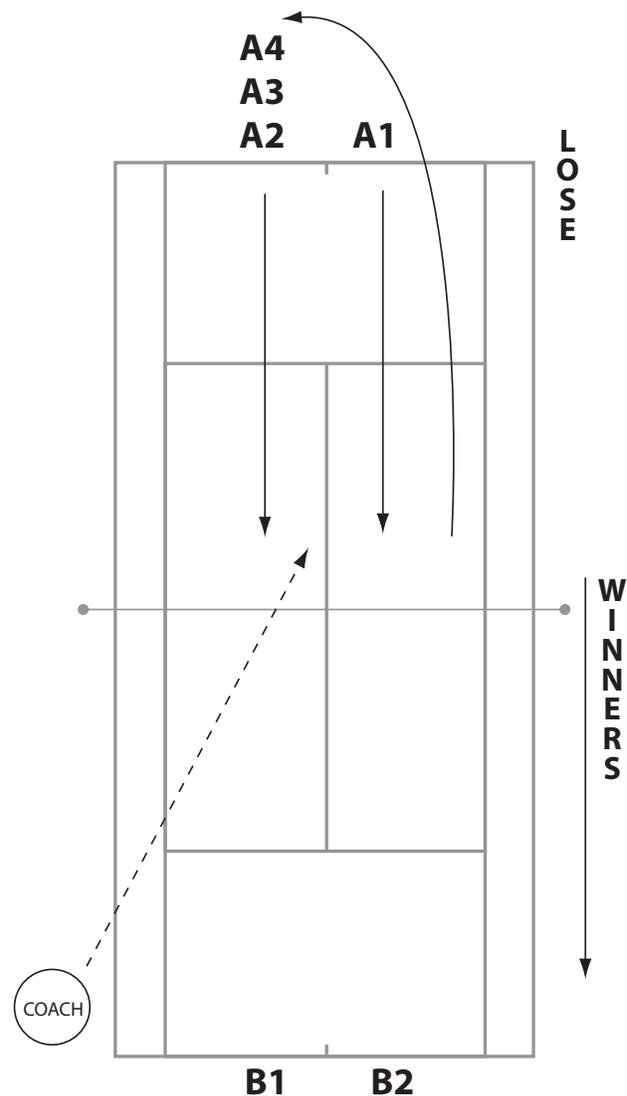
- After hitting the approach shot, the player should be at the net and set for a volley or an overhead by the time the opponent makes contact.
- At the time of contact by the opponent, the player should try to get two steps in for a volley and three steps back for an overhead before playing the shot.
- The goal after hitting the approach shot is to be in an offensive position at the net and win the point with the next shot, either a volley or an overhead.

## Game

**Champions of the Court Doubles.** This team game requires a minimum of six to eight players per court. A designated “champion” team (B1 and B2) competes against a line of challengers, with the champion team assuming a baseline position on one side of the court while the other players (i.e., the challengers) wait at the back of the opposite side of the court, with the first two (A1 and A2) assuming baseline positions.

The challengers play three points against the current champions. On the first point, the coach feeds a short ball to the challengers (A1 and A2); the challengers hit an approach shot and play the point out. On the second point, the coach feeds a volley to the same side. On the third point, the coach feeds an overhead.

If the challengers win two of three points from the champions, the challengers take the place of the champions and hustle to the other side of the court. The coach then counts, “3-2-1,” and feeds to the next challenging team while the losing team rotates to the back of the challengers’ line.



Champions of the Court Doubles

## Take Home Tennis

**Driveway/Playground or Wall Tennis.** Player plays driveway/playground tennis, scoring two points every time she wins a point at the net with a clean winner by hitting a volley or an overhead. If no partner is available, have players play wall tennis, emphasizing approach shots and volleys.

## Practice 7

**Theme:** Singles Play

**Objective:** To learn the proper court positioning and strategy for a singles match

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

There are no shortcuts to success. There is no easy way. Your effort will determine whether you win or lose in the game of life.

### Movement Activity

**Continuous Rally into the Doubles Alley.** Have partners hit foam balls back and forth over the net and into the doubles alley. See how many balls can be hit in the alley in a row. Start at the service line for this warm-up.

### Review: Approach Shots

Review the movement from the baseline to the short ball and hitting the ball while on the move so the player can get to the net and be ready for the next shot. Give the players different types of short balls to see if they can make the right decision. Divide the court into thirds and demonstrate or diagram how the ball should be hit down the line on a short ball on the right side of the court, down the line on a short ball on the left side of the court and down the center on a short ball in the middle of the court.

### Skills: Singles Positioning and Tactics

Have players in lines on both sides of the court. Announce the playing situation and see if the players can use the proper tactics and positioning while playing out the point.

**Situation #1:** Opponent hits hard but makes several unforced errors.

- Keep the ball in play by hitting deep and down the middle or deep and crosscourt.

**Situation #2:** Opponent hits short in the court.

- Hit an approach shot down the line and move to the net to end the point with a volley or an overhead.

**Situation #3:** Opponent has a strong forehand.

- Play as many shots as possible to the opponent's backhand side.

**Situation #4:** Both players are evenly matched in skills and conditioning.

- Try to play as many shots as possible with the player's strongest stroke.

**Situation #5:** Opponent is not in good physical condition.

- Keep the ball in play; the longer the point lasts, the better chance the player will have of winning the point.

## Coaching Tips

Players must be able to know the best position and tactic to use depending on the situation. Teach players to make informed decisions when playing in various situations, conditions or against different opponents.

- Some of the tactics involved at this level are quite simple. Some players can win matches by simply keeping the ball in play. The best shot selection would be to hit the ball deep and down the middle or deep and crosscourt.
- A second tactic is to move in on short balls, hit the approach shot down the line and follow the approach shot to the net so the player can end the point with a volley or an overhead.
- If the opponent has a strong side and a weak side, the player should recognize this and direct most shots to the opponent's weakness.
- If the player has a stronger side, she should be ready to move quickly when possible to play the shot on the stronger side.

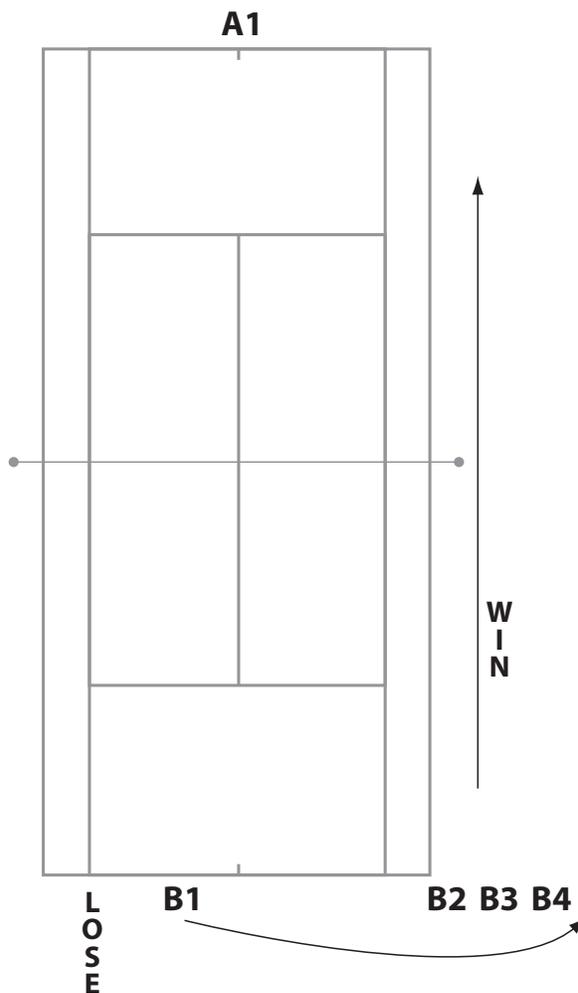
## Game

### Champion of the Court Singles.

A designated “champion” competes against a line of at least three players, with the champion assuming a baseline position on one side of the court (A1) and the other players (i.e., the challengers) waiting at the back of the opposite side of the court.

The first challenger (B1) assumes a position at the baseline and drop-hits the ball to the champion (A1). A point is then played out using the singles boundaries. If B1 wins, he is the new champion and runs to the other side of the court (the champion's side). If A1 wins, she stays and plays a point against B2.

*Note: This game can be varied by making the challengers have to win two or three points against the champion before they can assume the champion's position*



Champion of the Court Singles

## Take Home Tennis

### Driveway/Playground or Wall

**Tennis.** Player plays driveway/playground tennis and hits her best shot to her opponents' weak side at every opportunity. If the opponent has a weak volley, the player should play a ball to draw the opponent to the net and make him hit a volley on his next shot.

## Practice 8

**Theme:** Doubles Play

**Objective:** To learn the proper court positioning and strategy for a doubles match

### Gary's Youth Coaching Tip

The two most important things we do with athletes are to teach and to inspire them. How will you do BOTH today? You cannot change them. You can only change you. But what they see in you can have one of the most significant impacts on their entire life.



### Movement Activity

**Volleys and Ground Strokes into the Doubles Alley.** As in Practice 7, where players hit consecutive shots into the doubles alley, this time have one player at the net hitting volleys and the other at the service line hitting ground strokes with a foam ball. This is a cooperative warm-up and players should attempt to keep the ball in play and land all shots in the doubles alley. Change positions from the net to the service line after two minutes.

### Review: Singles Positioning and Tactics

Review singles positioning so players recover to the center of the baseline when in the backcourt and to the net position after an approach shot. Players should be aware of their opponent's weak side and strong side.

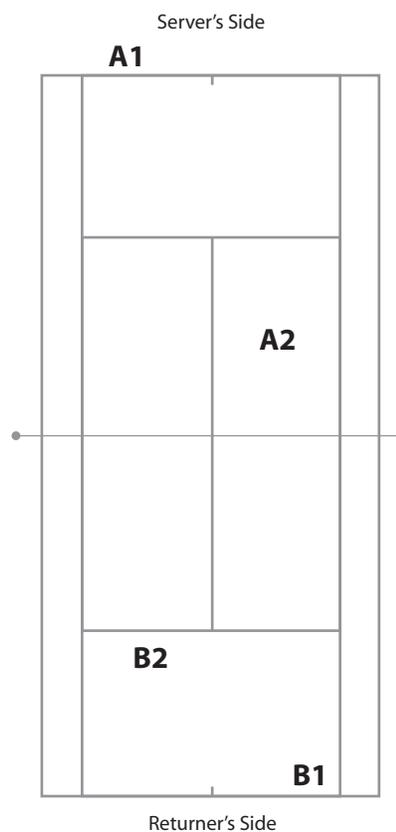
Play a few typical singles situations:

- Player A gets a short ball. Player B has a weak backhand ground stroke.
- Player A is hitting a shot from the baseline. Player B is at the net but does not move back well.

## Skill: All-Position Doubles

This game is ideal for working with players on positioning and shot selection. Once the players are set in the correct doubles positions, the point can begin with a serve. After the first point is played, have several balls available to feed to each player so they have the opportunity to play shots from every position on the court; all points are played out for each ball. Players rotate after three or four points are played.

For the proper doubles positions to start a point, see the diagram at the right. Player A1 is the server, A2 is the server's partner, B1 is the returner and B2 is the returner's partner.



**All-Position Doubles**

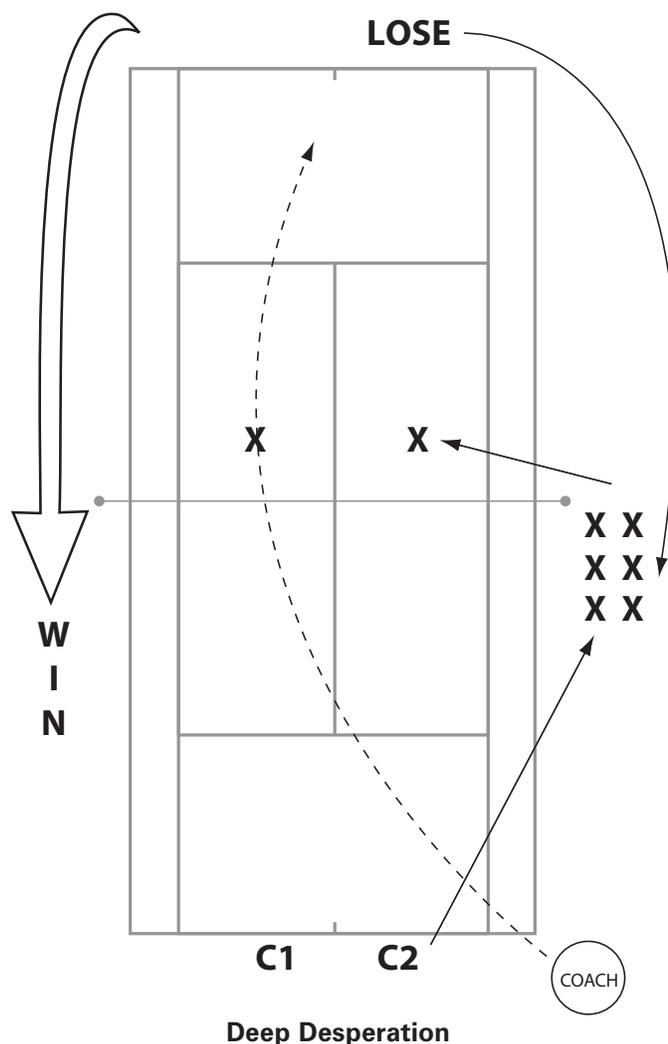
### Coaching Tips

- Playing doubles requires that all players know where they should be positioned on the court and also know what shot to hit and the direction the shot should be hit from these positions.
- In the most basic doubles sense, players are either in the backcourt or they are at the net. Players in the backcourt are in a defensive or neutral position and should hit their shots back to opponents who are deep in the court. Players at the net are in an offensive position and have the ability to win points with a single, well-placed shot to the side where the opponent is close to the net.
- If players in a doubles match are positioned with one at the net and one at the baseline, the baseline players should be thinking deep to deep and the net players should be thinking close to close. (That is, the baseline player should be hitting to the opposing baseline player, while the net player should be hitting at the opposing net player.)
- Other options are to make the opponents move and change positions by hitting a lob over the person at the net. This will keep the ball back deep in the court and force the opponents to change sides to play the shot.
- If there are two opponents at the net and the player is in the backcourt, it is best for the player to hit a) over either of the opponent's heads, or b) a passing shot down the middle. The middle shot is going over the lowest part of the net and gives the opponent's the least angle to volley the return into the court.
- Since the player in the backcourt is not in a position to win points, he should keep the ball in play so the partner at the net can win the points.
- If the opposing team has a weaker player, isolate that player whenever possible and direct as many shots as possible to the weaker player.

## Game

**Deep Desperation.** A minimum of 10 players are needed for this team game. To start, a doubles “champion” team (C1 and C2) is placed on one baseline. The other players line up with a partner at the net post, and the first team takes its position at the net. The coach begins each point with a high lob to the open court. The players at the net must chase down the lob (letting it bounce) and play out a point against the champion team. If the challenging team wins, it replaces the champions.

Regardless of which team wins, a new ball is fed high into the air to the next challenging team. If the challenging team loses the point, the players must move quickly to the end of the net post line and the next team of challengers comes in to play out the lob. Whoever is left in the champion position after a set amount of time wins the game.



## Take Home Tennis

**Jr. Team Tennis.** Continue to play on a driveway/playground tennis court or against a wall, and sign up for the next session of USTA Jr. Team Tennis.

# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 9: Introducing Your Kids to Tennis the QuickStart Way: After-School Programs and Camps

### How to Start an After-School Program

The previous practice sessions are an excellent way to introduce your kids to tennis and teach them the basics of the game. For those 10 and under, the next step is to get them involved in playing tennis on teams, which allows them to enjoy the sport in a fun atmosphere and to play with their friends—all of which increases their likelihood of sticking with tennis for life.

Once kids have been introduced to tennis, QuickStart Tennis is the ideal next step—and schools and after-school programs are a natural place to start. By utilizing smaller courts and modified equipment, schools can serve as the ideal location to help students take their love of the game to the next level. Kids will gain confidence by seeing their own immediate progress, making them more enthusiastic about continuing to play and improve.

### Your Role

Anyone can help to bring the QuickStart Tennis format to their school or community: Physical Education teachers, administrators, faculty, volunteers and/or after-school providers.

Ideally, the program will have support from the following:

- A QuickStart Tennis Coordinator
- Teachers, parents and volunteers to serve as organizers and program leaders

### Getting Started

To get your after-school program off the ground, you will need:

- An indoor or outdoor play area
  - If you do not have access to tennis courts, the QuickStart Tennis format can be played on blacktops, cement multi-purpose courts or gymnasium floors. Courts also can be set up on packed dirt or even on grass.
  - Existing markings on floors (badminton and volleyball lines) can be utilized. Flat rubber lines, chalk or tape can be used for playing surfaces that are not marked.

- A regulation tennis court can be turned into four 36-foot by 18-foot QuickStart Tennis format courts by hanging a net or rope with streamers through its center lengthwise from fence to fence. (See Chapter 2 for the configuration of the 36-foot and 60-foot QuickStart Tennis courts.)
- Junior tennis racquets (21 to 23 inches for 36-foot courts, and 23 to 25 inches for 60-foot courts)
- Lightweight nets and portable standards; or makeshift nets or barriers
  - A lowered badminton or volleyball net can be used
  - You can also improvise by using plastic barrier tape, yellow caution tape or rope with streamers
- Foam and/or low compression tennis balls

## Organizing Play

There are many successful models for organizing play. These range from organized team play to drop-in formats and round-robin tournaments. We recommend play formats that emphasize participation.

- Organized Team Play formats are a perfect bridge toward team programs at the middle school and high school levels.
  - Concept: To provide structured team matches with students remaining on the same team for an entire season.
  - How to: Students are divided into teams representing their class, their grade or their school. Team size should reflect the facilities, with the goal of creating matches where every player can remain active. The schedule of matches should allow each team to play each other at least once during the season.
- Flexible Team Competition
  - Concept: To allow for team competition in a situation where the student population changes from day to day.
  - How to: Divide students into teams and play a series of short scoring matches (e.g., 11-point games or 21-point games) or for a designated time (10-minute matches). Each team may have, for instance, four doubles squads. At the end of the period, points can be totaled to determine the day's winner.
- Round-Robin Tournament
  - Concept: Provide students with equal opportunity for singles or doubles play in a non-elimination format.
  - How to: Players are divided into four to five small groups of four to five students. Students will play all other students within that group. This usually results in records that have a distribution such as: 3-0, 1-2 and 0-3. For the second half of the intramural program, students are once again divided into groups (or flights) based upon their record.

## Grow Your Program

- Get to know other Physical Education teachers, parents and personnel of the school(s) and distribute information
- Offer to assist with P.E. classes (demonstrate the QuickStart Tennis format)
  - Kids are introduced to tennis in the P.E. classes, which transition into the local USTA Jr. Team Tennis League, NJTL or other after-school programs
- Recruit your local high school players to help teach younger kids
- Include everyone and keep it fun!

## School Tennis Resources

It is recommended that each school involved in hosting QuickStart Tennis after school also offer tennis during the school day through the physical education classes. The USTA can assist schools with teacher training, user-friendly lesson plans, equipment assistance and staff support for implementing tennis into the physical education curriculum.

For more information and to access the new *Physical Educators Guide for Teaching Tennis in Schools*, log onto [www.usta.com/schooltennis](http://www.usta.com/schooltennis).

## How to Organize Your QuickStart Tennis Camp (Ages 5-13 years old)

After-school programs are only one way to get your kids playing tennis. Another popular option is QuickStart Tennis camps. These are designed both to introduce kids to the game and to provide a building block for those who have picked up tennis in the schools and want to take it further.

Setting up a Park and Recreation Camp or a Summer Camp, while immensely rewarding, does have its challenges. And it helps to have a head start. Below are the necessary steps and some helpful hints so you can launch—and run—a successful QuickStart Tennis camp.

## Group Formats

It is important to know the number of junior players you have in each age group. This can be determined through registration. Thus, the registration form must include “Age of Player.” Another pivotal component is determining how many volunteers are available to help (see finding volunteer/parent assistance).

**Format A.** Group players into age groups that follow the practice plans of the book. Place the following age groups together: 5- to 6-year-olds, 7- to 8-year-olds, 9- to 10-year-olds and 11-and-up. In order to accomplish this grouping format, there should be enough players and a sufficient number of volunteers to assist in each group.

**Format B.** If the number of volunteers and the number of junior players do not allow you to implement “Format A,” it is important that you utilize your volunteers effectively and strategically.

**If you have too many junior players and not enough volunteers,** place your limited volunteers in the following age groups first: 5- to 6-year-olds and 7- to 8-year-olds. These age groups require extra attention because of their limited physical abilities and mental capacity. Ages 9 through 13 require less one-on-one attention because their physical abilities and mental capacity are more developed, thus less volunteer help is needed. (If possible, have the 9- to 10-year-olds play on a 60-foot court and the 11- to 13-year-olds play on a full-size, 78-foot court.)

**If you do not have enough juniors per group,** players need to join another age group. (A small group is defined as four players or fewer, and small groups can challenge the coach/volunteer to keep the players engaged and the group energized.) If a player lacks the physical ability, place this player in the age group below (i.e., place a lower-skilled 7-year-old in the 5- to 6-year-old age group). If a player has great physical ability, place him or her in the next age group up. If the 5- to 6-year-old age groups need to be combined with the 7- to 8-year old age group, implement the 5- to 6-year-old practice plan to ensure success for all.

### **Coaching Tip**

Players may need to start out on a court size smaller than is suggested for their age group. Coaches may want to do this if they do not know the skill level of their group and if they have players whose skill levels do not allow them to be successful on the suggested court size for their age. Once the players and/or group are successful, they move to the court size recommended for their age group.

### **Success: Be Prepared!**

- Registration of all players should occur before the start date. This will assist the coach in determining how many players they have in each age group, the number of parents/volunteers needed and the overall organization of the on-court program.
- The lead coach of the program is going to have to put in some extra work. Volunteers/parents need to be trained in the practice plans they will be coaching. Remember, if your volunteers/parents are trained, they will help you provide a quality program, which in turn will create a positive tennis experience for the junior players.
- Recommendations for on-court trainings: 5- to 6-year-old practice plans follow those prescribed in this book, 7- to 8-year-old practice plans follow those prescribed in this book, 9- to 13-year-old practice plan trainings are a combination of Chapters 6 and 7.
- Have all the practice plans ready to hand out to your volunteers/parents on the first day of the training. This will give them the opportunity to review the material before each day of the program.

- In addition, when volunteers/parents come out each day to assist, ensure that you hand out the practice plan they are responsible for so they can refer to it on court if needed.
- Designate responsibilities. Do this ahead of time. At your on-court training, provide a handout that outlines their responsibilities as a volunteer/parent (see volunteer/parent responsibilities).
- Before the start date, ensure that you have all the players grouped by age. This way, when the players come out for practice, you are organized and ready to communicate to them which court they need to go to. Once on the court, if you see that a player's ability is too high, move him or her up to the next age group.

### **Volunteer/Parent Responsibilities**

- Arrive 30 minutes early to set up your court, receive your practice plan handout for that day and ask any questions you may have.
- Ensure that players have an appropriate-sized racquet. Make sure you have extra racquets if needed.
- Volunteers/parents take their respective age groups to their courts and run through the practice plan for that day.
- Ensure safety for all players.

### **Finding Volunteer/Parent Assistance**

- On the registration form, include an area for parents to acknowledge if they can assist in the program or not.
- Go to your nearest clubs or tennis facilities and find out if they have any high school players who would be interested in volunteering their time to assist you.
- Go to your local high school to find out which clubs/organizations require their participants to volunteer.

### **Play**

It is important that players are rallying as soon as possible. At the end of each practice, designate a certain time to rally or implement a mini team tennis match. At the end of the summer camp session, have the last day be a team tennis match—because kids love to play and keep score! Go to the USTA Jr. Team Tennis chapter (Chapter 10) to read more.

### **Challenging Players**

Those players who keep returning to your program pose a challenge. How do we keep them interested and challenged? First, determine if their ability allows you to move them up to the next age group. If you cannot move them up to the next age group, challenge them within the group and match them to the other top players in the group if their ability allows. For example, players have to catch the ball off one bounce, but the returnee has to catch it out of the air.

Go to the back of the book or our website—[www.partners.quickstarttennis.com](http://www.partners.quickstarttennis.com)—to get new games and rally activities.

## How to Organize a Tournament

Organized play is an important part of QuickStart Tennis. If organized appropriately, the children are learning to play and compete in a way that is fun for them. Competition using the QuickStart Tennis format should emphasize children playing multiple opponents in a non-elimination format. Doing this can help learning become more meaningful, give players a sense of achievement and also can aid in the social development of children. The QuickStart Tennis format is a perfect way for children to first experience, in a positive manner, competition on a scaled-down court that is appropriate for their size, strength and ability.

It is very important that every effort is made to get it right for children in order for them to develop a love and understanding of the game. Essentially what that means is the competition length, scoring and format needs to be appropriate for the age of the child. These events are best held locally, with maximized play opportunities, and in a fun environment with the emphasis on participation instead of winning.

Children under the age of 10 generally prefer team competition, although children under the age of 7 are just learning what it means to work together as a member of a team. By age 8, children have a better understanding of working together and are beginning to understand the rules of play. As children get older and have achieved a better understanding of rules, they will learn about winning and losing.

Team competition for kids can be a great way to start children playing because it can potentially keep all kids playing. It should be structured to recognize individual performance and team results.

The chart opposite gives an idea of what is appropriate for each age group:

	<b>5- to 6-YEAR OLDS</b>	<b>7- to 8-YEAR OLDS</b>	<b>9- to 10-YEAR OLDS</b>
<b>Equipment</b>	36-foot courts, foam balls or oversized low compression balls, 17- to 21-inch racquets	36-foot courts, foam balls or oversized low compression balls, 19- to 23-inch racquets	60-foot courts, low compression balls, 23- or 25-inch racquets
<b>Goals for the event</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn simple games where points are scored</li> <li>• Cooperative activities</li> <li>• Learn basic rules, help others, pick up equipment</li> <li>• Being with friends</li> <li>• Local community-based events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make decisions and keep score</li> <li>• Learn to play using the basic rules of the game</li> <li>• Many playing opportunities in a short period of time</li> <li>• Play with friends in mixed teams and are able to play against teams</li> <li>• Learn the basic tenets of sportsmanship</li> <li>• Learn the basics of doubles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn to play as an individual</li> <li>• Many playing opportunities in short period of time</li> <li>• Learn to play doubles</li> <li>• Learn to apply the rules of doubles and singles</li> <li>• Learn to practice</li> <li>• Develop sportsmanship</li> <li>• Understand that sport has winners and losers</li> </ul>
<b>Format</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activity day with stations that emphasize skills needed to play on 36-foot court; emphasis on skills and coordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team-based events</li> <li>• Round robins</li> <li>• Non-elimination events</li> <li>• Jr. Team Tennis league play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Round robin, compass draws*</li> <li>• Non-elimination tournaments</li> <li>• Jr. Team Tennis league play</li> </ul>
<b>Length of event</b>	1 hour	1-1/2 to 2 hours	2 to 3 hours
<b>Length of matches / scoring</b>	Short activity stations lasting no more than 10 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10- to 15-minute timed matches</li> <li>• Matches consisting of best 2-out-of-3, 7-point games</li> <li>• One 7-point game and then switch partners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timed matches</li> <li>• 2 out of 3 short set, first to 4 games, 7-point game is used in lieu of a third set</li> <li>• One set to 4 games and then switch partners</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteer needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ratio of 1 adult to 4 children</li> <li>• Parents, volunteers, high school students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 volunteer per court to help with scoring and teaching the rules</li> <li>• Parents, volunteers, high school students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 volunteer per court to help with scoring and the rules</li> <li>• Parents, volunteers, high school students</li> </ul>
<b>Awards</b>	Snacks, prizes for all attending	Small participation items for everyone, snacks	Small participation items for everyone; awards for good sportsmanship, best effort, shot of the day

*\*A compass draw is a format that gives players an opportunity to play a number of matches (similar to a double elimination tournament). It works best for eight- or 16-player draws where there are no byes. At the end of each round, the winners continue in their tournament in the same direction, while the losers move to other points on the compass to form a new satellite tournament. Go to the appendix for more on compass draws.*

## Steps to Organizing Your 10-and-Under Event

1. What kind of competition/play day will work best for the participants?
2. Set the date:
  - a. Check the calendar for available dates
  - b. Look at potential conflicts (i.e., what else is going on in your area that might compete)
  - c. Can the event be run to boost upcoming programming (clinic, summer camp, etc.)?
  - d. Will you have an entry deadline or allow people to show up?
3. How many courts are available? This will help determine how many participants you can have.
4. Determine the budget. Your expenses will help determine the cost to participants.
5. Get the word out:
  - a. Send out entries
  - b. Contact schools
  - c. Work with your local CTA
  - d. E-mail blasts
  - e. Register the event on [tennislink.net](http://tennislink.net)
6. Recruit volunteers:
  - a. Parents
  - b. Local tennis players
  - c. High school/college students
7. Make sure you have everything necessary for the event:
  - a. Nets or caution tape
  - b. Masking tape to mark off court lines
  - c. Balls
  - d. Extra racquets for participants who do not have the correct size
  - e. Awards and prizes for participants
  - f. Activity equipment for station – bean bags, hula hoops, targets
  - g. Food, if it is a part of the event
  - h. Drawsheets
  - i. Scoring devices for each court
8. Day of the event – set up early!
9. Volunteer orientation – if this has not been conducted sooner.
10. Parent orientation.
11. Have a great event!

# Learn to Rally and Play

## Chapter 10: USTA Jr. Team Tennis and Its Benefits

Children love team games, and more importantly, they love to be with their friends. As opposed to individual sports, team sports emphasize cooperation, teamwork, camaraderie and friendship—valuable skills at all stages of growth and development.

Playing on a team makes tennis more fun for kids. It allows them to practice together and travel to matches together, fostering team spirit and, along with it, a love of tennis. Players who play on teams generally enjoy tennis more, which means they are more apt to stick with tennis into middle school, high school and beyond.

Teams are also a great motivation for kids, who will want to become better so they can do well for their team. USTA Jr. Team Tennis also provides the social interaction often missing in singles tournaments—including youth team sports staples such as uniforms and pizza parties.

USTA Jr. Team Tennis is all about turning an individual sport into a team sport. Not only is it fun and social, it's also practical. Team practices ensure that kids continue to develop their skills, and team matches give them a place to apply the lessons they've learned—so that while they're learning, they're also having a great time with friends.

### What Is USTA Jr. Team Tennis?

Designed for 5- to 18-year-olds, USTA Jr. Team Tennis gets kids playing right away on teams. It's easy to organize. Only two teams are needed to start a league and leagues can be played at local parks, schools or clubs. Teams are composed of players of similar ages so everyone gets to play with their friends and make new friends, too.

USTA Jr. Team Tennis offers five divisions of play: 8-and-under, 10-and-under, 12-and-under, 14-and-under, and 18-and-under. The 8- and 10-and-under divisions utilize the QuickStart Tennis format described in Chapter 2 and apply the new skills taught in Chapters 5 and 6. This format features age-appropriate equipment, smaller court sizes and modified scoring.

The other three divisions (12-, 14- and 18-and-under) play on full-size courts and use standard equipment and various play formats. In addition, for the 14- and 18-and-under divisions, teams have the option of playing locally only or competing in the National Championships. (The required play format for the National Championships is later in this chapter.)

## Start a Team

There are many USTA Jr. Team Tennis programs across the country, and you have the option of joining an existing league in your community or starting your own. Either way, it's easy and rewarding. If you are interested in joining an existing team, visit our website at [jrteamentennis.usta.com](http://jrteamentennis.usta.com) to find a program in your area. If you are looking to start a league, follow these four simple steps to start playing.

### 1. Evaluate Your Community

**Court Availability.** Based on the time of the year and the day of the week, court availability will vary. We recommend selecting times that give parents an opportunity to participate and help coach a team.

**Season.** We recommend playing your team tennis season in the spring/summer or fall months.

**Age Divisions.** It is important to determine what age groups you are targeting. Fair and competitive team play is easily achieved by using the following age divisions:

- 8 and under
- 10 and under
- 12 and under
- 14 and under
- 18 and under

### 2. Establish Rules and Play Format

**Rules.** Beyond the basic rules of tennis, local leagues can establish their own league regulations. It is best to keep regulations to a minimum, while making certain that any ground rules are necessary and clearly spelled out.

**Recommended Format.** By playing USTA Jr. Team Tennis using the QuickStart Tennis format for players 10 and under, kids will progress with their friends from smaller, age-appropriate-size courts and equipment to the full-size courts and equipment. As kids improve through competition, they may explore additional play opportunities (for players ages 12-18).

### 3. Organize Your Local League

All tennis leagues require some type of organizational structure to manage or administer their operation. This can be accomplished by one person or by a group of participants.

To run an effective league, you need to address the following areas: Administration (covers everything from court selection to setting the schedule), Budgets & Finance, League Fee Structure, Sponsorships and Liability.

The USTA provides powerful online tools to help you manage your league. By logging on to the TennisLink System at <http://tennislink.usta.com/teamtennis/main/homepage.aspx>, you not only register your league but also reduce paperwork while saving time.

#### 4. Local Promotion

There are many ways to reach kids in your community, and all have proven successful. Here are just a few options to explore:

**Local Schools.** Ask the principal and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) leaders to disseminate information to kids.

**Youth Service Organizations.** Partner with the local boys and girls club or other youth service organizations in your community.

**Current Tennis Players.** Many of your current players may have kids in your target audience.

**Advertising.** Newspaper ads, postcards and online promotions all can be effective tools in the recruiting process.

#### Do it with the Support of the USTA

The USTA wants to make it as easy as possible to get children involved in tennis. To do so, we can provide access to the following resources to make it simple to become a USTA Jr. Team Tennis organizer (to access these resources, go to [jrteamtennis.usta.com](http://jrteamtennis.usta.com)):

- Marketing materials for Jr. Team Tennis promotion
- TennisLink registration for league organization
- Established play formats and practice plans for all age groups
- Recreational coach workshops
- Scholarships and grants to help launch your program
- Official Jr. Team Tennis uniforms for each team
- Dedicated staff on a national, section and district level

#### National Championships

USTA Jr. Team Tennis offers youths in the 14- and 18-and-under age divisions the opportunity to advance to a national championship at both the advanced and intermediate levels. Each USTA section advances one team for each event (14-and-under Intermediate and Advanced, 18-and-under Intermediate and Advanced) for a total of four teams per section.

The National Championships introduce young players to competition in a way that minimizes competitive stress and maximizes learning opportunities. The fun aspect of tennis and team spirit is always emphasized, and the goal of the competition is to build a strong foundation for both athletic success and personal achievement.

The championships also are designed to:

- Provide a competitive opportunity for maximizing each player's physical and emotional development.

- Promote the spirit of competition and camaraderie in such a way that the self-esteem of each player is enhanced and strengthened.
- Provide a national competitive climate that focuses more on personal development and less on competitive outcomes.

Teams are coed and made up of at least six players—three boys and three girls—based on similar ages and skills. Each team must meet all eligibility requirements. For complete rules, please see the USTA Jr. Team Tennis Regulations at [jrteamtennis.usta.com](http://jrteamtennis.usta.com) or consult your USTA Section Coordinator.

## Placement by Age and Skill Level

Within USTA Jr. Team Tennis for the 12-, 14- and 18-and-under age divisions, players are further divided into three play levels—Beginner (NTRP 2.0 and below), Intermediate (NTRP 3.0 and below) and Advanced (NTRP 3.5 and above).

Parents and coaches are asked to place players in the appropriate level of play using NTRP levels. Players can always choose to move up to a higher age or skill level should they need the challenge.

## The National Tennis Rating Program

Players are placed on USTA Jr. Team Tennis teams based on their age and skill level as determined by the National Tennis Rating Program (NTRP). The coach, team manager and/or parent place players on teams, from the 12-and-under division on up. Use the following NTRP chart to help place your players (additional notes per level are added to aid you in placing players).

### General Characteristics of Various NTRP Playing Levels

- 1.0 Player is just starting to play tennis and is learning the basic skills of serving, forehands, backhands and volleys.
- 1.5 Player has limited experience and is working primarily on getting the ball in play.  
*Note to team manager: Player needs to coordinate moving when hitting the ball. In fact, player is still concentrating on getting the ball over the net from a stationary position. Player is learning to serve and keep score.*
- 2.0 Player lacks court experience and strokes need developing. Player is familiar with the basic positions for singles and doubles play.  
*Note to team manager: Player is now beginning to coordinate footwork but is not consistent in hitting the ball over the net. Player can serve to some degree, understands scoring as well as correct positions for serving and receiving, and has limited success with volleys.*
- 2.5 Player is learning to judge where the ball is going, although court coverage is limited. Player can sustain a short rally of slow pace with other players of the same ability.  
*Note to team manager: Player can keep score unassisted, can call own lines, can serve overhand from the baseline and has an understanding of the basic rules.*

3.0 Player is fairly consistent when hitting medium-paced shorts but is not comfortable with all strokes and lacks execution when trying for directional control, depth or power. The most common doubles formation is one-up, one-back.

*Note to team manager: Player is improving court coverage and can sustain a rally and serve with consistency. On ground strokes, player needs to improve control of height, depth, direction and speed.*

3.5 Player has achieved improved stroke dependability with directional control on moderate shots but needs to develop depth and variety. Player exhibits more aggressive net play, has improved court coverage and is developing teamwork in doubles.

*Note to team manager: Player is starting to recognize opportunities to attack short balls by coming to net. Player is developing more spin and power on the serve and seldom double faults.*

4.0 Player has dependable strokes, including directional control and depth on both forehand and backhand sides on moderate-paced shots, and occasionally forces errors when serving. Rallies may be lost due to impatience. Teamwork in doubles is evident.

*Note to team manager: Player has added variety in shot selection by using lobs, overheads, volleys and approach shots with some success. Player can develop a game plan.*

4.5 Player has developed use of power and spin and can handle pace. Player has sound footwork, can control depth of shots and attempts to vary game plan according to his/her opponents. Player can hit first serves with power and accuracy and place the second serve. Player tends to over-hit on difficult shots. Aggressive net play is common in doubles.

*Note to team manager: Player is developing an offensive weapon.*

5.0 Player has good shot anticipation and frequently has an outstanding shot or attribute around which a game may be structured. Player can regularly hit winners or force errors off short balls and can put away volleys. Player can successfully execute lobs, drop shots, half volleys and overhead smashes, and has good depth and spin on most second serves

*Note to team manager: Player is match-wise and uses shots that have a high percentage of success in both singles and doubles*

## Players in Wheelchairs

Players in wheelchairs are encouraged to participate in USTA Jr. Team Tennis. Integration—wheelchair players participating with able-bodied players—is the main objective. This practice is accepted and based on player ability. Players should use these same general characteristics to determine their NTRP skill level. The only differences are as follows:

- **Mobility:** While players in wheelchairs may have skills that would normally provide them a certain rating, the mobility factor suggests that when competing against able-bodied players, they should participate at an NTRP skill level that provides for competitive rather than compatible play.
- **Serving ability:** Due to the nature of the player's injury or disability, a powerful serve may not be possible. In this case, it may be more realistic to self-rate below 3.5, as serve strength becomes key beyond this level.
- **Two-Bounce Rule:** The wheelchair tennis player is allowed two bounces of the ball. The player must return the ball before it hits the ground a third time. The second bounce can be either in or out of the court boundaries.

## Dynamic and Static Stretching

It is important to prepare your body before you play tennis and to treat it kindly after you play. You can easily do this by following a simple warm-up exercise, pre-play stretching, warm-down exercise and post-play stretching routine. If you do this, you will have fewer injuries, feel better and recover sooner to play again the same or the next day. As people age, this routine becomes even more important. It is also important for serious younger players who spend many hours on the tennis court.

Recent research has demonstrated that dynamic stretching (i.e., stretching with movement) is best done before play, while static stretching (i.e., stretching without movement) is best done after play. Static stretching done before play, which has been recommended in the past, may actually adversely affect the ability of the muscles to perform in an optimal way.

When exercising or stretching, it is important to avoid sudden, jerky movements. Finally, if you feel pain, stop doing the exercise or stretch and, if necessary, seek medical attention. As with any exercise program, it is recommended that you consult your physician before beginning.

In summary, the recommended exercise/stretch routine for tennis players is as follows:

### **Before You Play Tennis**

- Warm-up Exercises
- Dynamic Stretching

### **After You Play Tennis**

- Warm-down Exercises
- Static Stretching

## Before You Play Tennis

### Warm-up Exercise

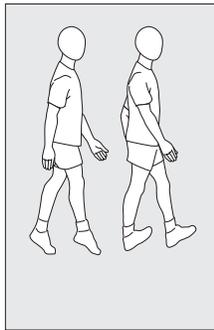
Begin with five minutes of warm-up activities such as walking, light jogging, jumping jacks or side shuffling. Mix the activities for variety. These activities should raise your body temperature, ready your heart and lungs for strenuous play and improve overall muscle function. The goal should be to reach the point of beginning to perspire.

### Dynamic Stretching

A dozen dynamic stretches are described on the following pages. Optimally, you should do all the stretches before you begin to play tennis. These dynamic stretches combine stretching with movement. The illustrations provided will help you to do the stretches correctly.

# Flexibility Exercises

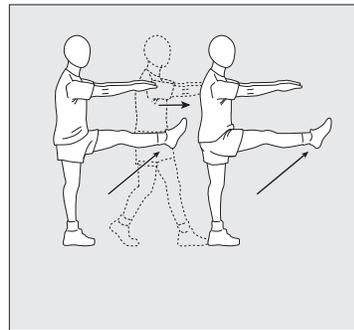
## Dynamic Stretching



### Toe and Heel Walks

*Target muscles: Calf and lower leg muscles*

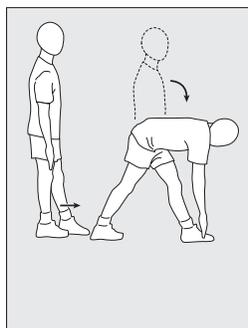
Walk on your toes from singles sideline to singles sideline. Repeat the same sequence walking on your heels.



### Straight-Leg March

*Target muscles: Hamstring (back of thigh) and hip muscles*

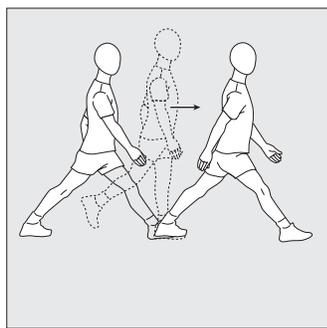
Put your arms straight out in front of you at shoulder height. With your knees straight, lift one leg up toward your hands as high as you can without discomfort or until you feel a stretch in the back of the leg. March from singles sideline to singles sideline and back again, while maintaining good balance.



### Alternate Toe Touch

*Target muscles: Hamstring (back of thigh) and hip muscles*

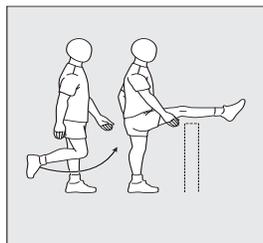
Stand with the left leg forward, while keeping the knees straight, but not locked. With your right hand, reach down toward the left foot as far as is comfortable (if possible, to the foot), to the point of feeling a light stretch in the back of your leg. Then stand up all the way, step forward with the right leg and reach for the right foot with the left hand. Walk from singles sideline to singles sideline and back again, alternating reaching for the left foot with the right hand and reaching for the right foot with the left hand. Be sure to stand up all the way between each step.



### Long Walks

*Target muscles: Hip flexors (front of hip) and quadriceps (front of thigh)*

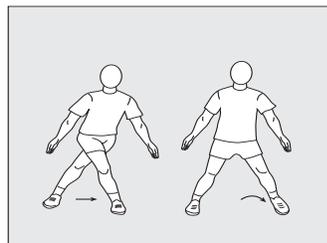
Long walking is walking with extra long steps. While walking, keep your back leg nearly straight and move the hips forward to the point where you feel a light stretch at the front of the hip on the same side as your back leg. Stretch both right and left hip flexors and quadriceps by walking from singles sideline to singles sideline and back again.



### Forward and Backward Hurdle

*Target muscles: Inner and outer thigh*

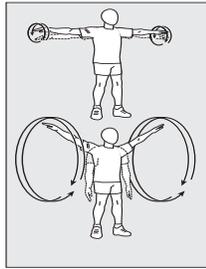
Move your right leg backward, up, and around to the front as if you were stepping over a hurdle that is approximately waist high. While alternating legs, walk from singles sideline to singles sideline. Reverse the motion, so you are walking backward to the starting point.



### Walking Side Hip Stretch

*Target muscles: Outer thigh*

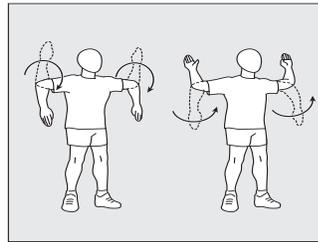
Facing the net, cross your right leg over the left leg and push the left hip out until you feel a light stretch in the outside of your hip. Stand up straight and step to the left with your left foot. Continue to "walk" sideways by repeating the steps described above. When you reach the singles sideline, reverse the movement and perform the exercise to the right.



### Forward and Backward Arm Circles

*Target muscles: Deltoid muscles and rotator cuff of the shoulder*

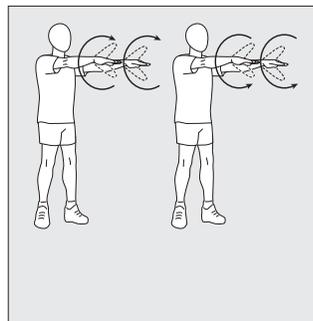
Hold your arms out to your sides at shoulder height with palms down and rotate them in small forward circles about 6 inches in diameter. Perform 10 forward circles and 10 backward circles. Then do 10 forward and 10 backward large arm circles, using the shoulders' full range of motion—you should feel a slight stretch in the shoulders as you perform the exercise.



### 90–90 Internal/External Rotation

*Target muscles: Rotator cuff of the shoulder*

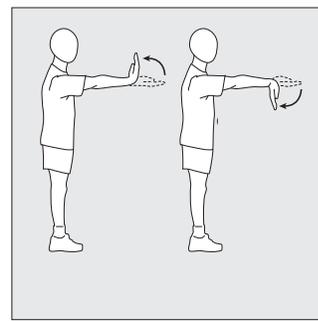
With your arms held out to your sides at shoulder height, bend the elbow 90 degrees so your fingers point up toward the sky. Using the shoulders' full range of motion, rotate your shoulders forward once and then backward once in a controlled manner. Do 10 repetitions.



### Wrist Circles

*Target muscles: Wrist flexors and extensors in the forearm*

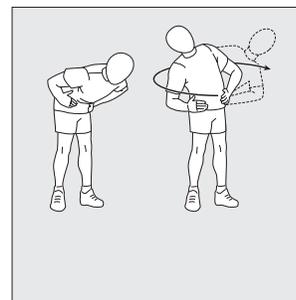
With both arms held out in front of your body at shoulder height and with the palms facing down rotate your wrists in clockwise circles. Use the full range of motion in the wrists when performing the circles so that you feel a slight stretch in the forearm muscles. Perform 10 clockwise circle repetitions. Then reverse and rotate your wrists in counterclockwise circles. Do 10 repetitions.



### Wrist Flexion and Extension

*Target muscles: Wrist flexors and extensors in the forearm*

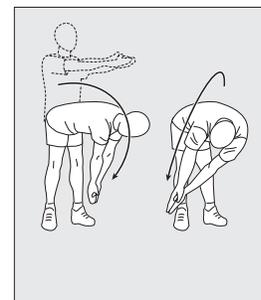
Standing with both arms in front of your body at shoulder height and with the palms facing the sky, alternate flexing and extending the wrists in a controlled manner. When flexing, bend the hands toward the body and when extending, extend them away from the body. Use the complete range of motion in the wrist so that you feel a stretch in the forearm muscles as you perform the exercise. The stretch should be felt in the back of the forearm as you flex the wrist and in the front of the forearm as you extend the wrist. Do 10 repetitions alternating one flexion and one extension.



### Standing Trunk Rotations

*Target muscles: Abdominal and lower back muscles*

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your hands on your hips. Then rotate your torso by leaning forward from the waist, then moving to the left, to the back, and to the right. Do 10 repetitions at a speed and range of motion that is comfortable for you. Then reverse the direction by moving first to the front, then to the right, to the back, and to the left for 10 repetitions.

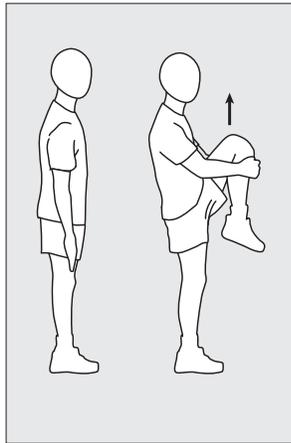


### Diagonal Chops

*Target muscles: Abdominal and lower back muscles*

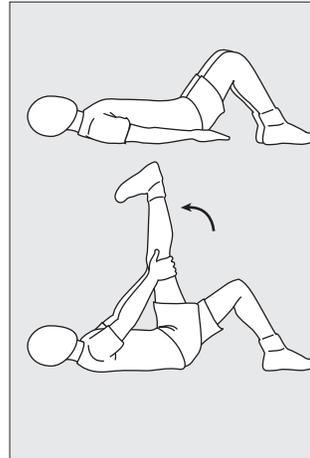
Stand up straight with your feet shoulder width apart and hold your arms together in front of you at shoulder height. Link your hands together and make a chopping movement (as if you are swinging an axe) as you rotate your body to the left and bring your hands down to the left of your legs. Stand up straight and repeat the exercise on the right side of the body. Perform 10 repetitions of one chop to the left and one to the right.

## Static Stretching



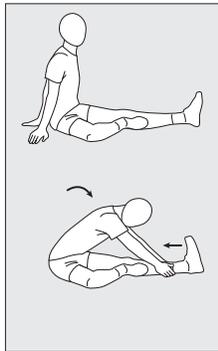
### Knee-Chest Flex

In a standing position, bend one leg and grasp it with both hands clasped just below the knee. Slowly pull the knee to your chest. Hold this position (and all the positions in the following exercises) for 15 to 30 seconds.



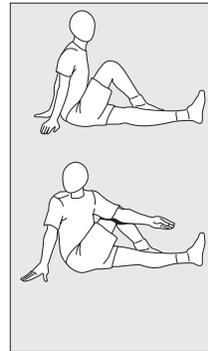
### Hamstring Stretch

In a lying position on your back, bend both knees. Straighten one leg and raise it toward the trunk. Use your hands to gently increase the stretch. Point your toes toward the face to stretch the calf.



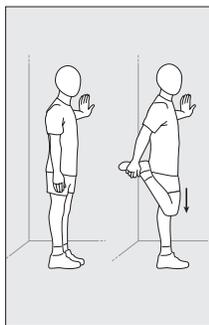
### Figure 4 Hamstring Stretch

In a sitting position, place the foot of the right leg against the inside of the knee of the left leg. Try to bring the chest to the thigh by bending forward from the hips. Keep the back straight. Pull your toes back to point toward your face.



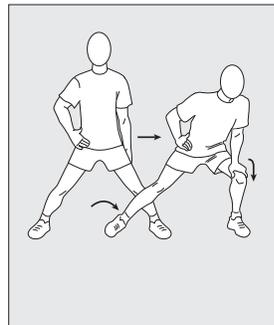
### Spinal Twist

In a sitting position, place the right foot on the outside of the left knee. Bring the left arm around the right knee, resting the elbow above the outside of the right knee. Slowly turn the head and upper body to the right. You'll wind up looking over your right shoulder.



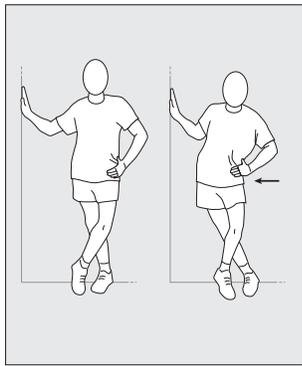
### Quadriceps Stork Stretch

If necessary for support, place one hand on a wall to the side of you. Stand on one leg. Bend the opposite knee while grasping the ankle. Keeping the back straight and the buttocks tucked under, bring your knee down as far as you can, trying to point it straight down to the floor. Do not turn the knee out or twist it.



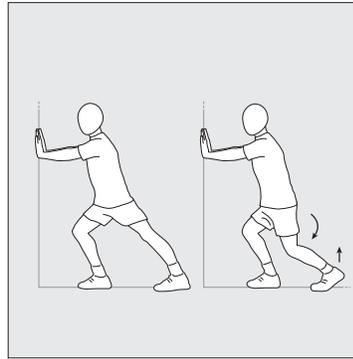
### Groin Stretch

Stand with legs greater than shoulder width apart. Place one hand above the knee, the other hand on the opposite hip. With toes pointed forward, slowly bend the knee your hand is on until you feel a stretch in the groin area. Roll your weight onto the inside of your foot.



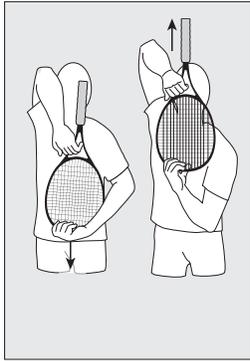
### Hip Stretch

Stand with your right hand on a wall, your weight on your right leg, and your left leg crossed in front of it. Gently push the right hip toward the wall. Increase the stretch by standing farther from the wall.



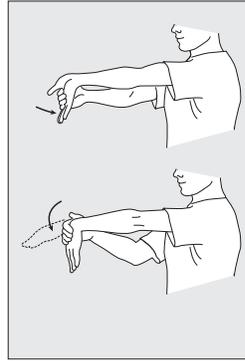
### Calf Stretch

Place both hands on a wall in front of you. Extend one leg behind you, while keeping the other forward. Keep the knee of the back leg straight, the heel on the floor, and the foot pointing forward. Bend the knee of the forward leg and lean your trunk forward. Do not arch the lower back. Then slightly bend the back leg, raise the heel 2 inches off the floor, and lean into the wall. This time, feel the stretch near the heel.



### Shoulder Stretch

With your left hand, hold a racquet behind your back by the throat or the handle with the head of the racquet pointing down. With your right hand, slowly pull the racquet head down, bringing your left elbow to your ear and pointing it to the ceiling. Then slowly pull up with the left arm, pointing the lower elbow to the floor.



### Forearm Stretch

Extend one arm straight in front of you with the palm up. Use the opposite hand to gently stretch the wrist back (extension). Turn the palm down and gently stretch the wrist downward (flexion).

## Compass Draw

This is a wonderful format to give players an opportunity to play lots of matches. It also can accommodate different ability levels in one draw. It works best for eight, 16, 32 or 64 players so that there are no byes in the draw.

At the end of each round, the winners continue in their tournament in the same direction, while the losers move to other points on the compass to form a new satellite tournament.

At the end of round 1:

- The winners go east
- The losers go west

At the end of round 2:

- The east losers go north
- The west losers go south

At the end of round 3:

- The east losers go northeast
- The north losers go northwest
- The west losers go southwest
- The south losers go southeast

At the end of round 4:

- The losers are out of the tournament (unless it is announced in writing before the start of the first match of the tournament that there will be semifinal play-offs);
- The winners play the finals on each draw sheet.

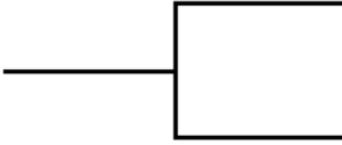
For a draw of 16 use only the top half of the draw at each compass point. Follow the same procedure as in a draw of 32 except that round 4 is the finals instead of the semifinals.

For a draw of 64 use two 32 draw sheets. Round 4 becomes the quarterfinals of each tournament instead of the semifinals. At the end of Round 4, all losers are out of the tournament. The draw sheet tournaments continue with their own semifinal matches until there is an eventual winner for each (The losers of the semifinals are out of the tournament).

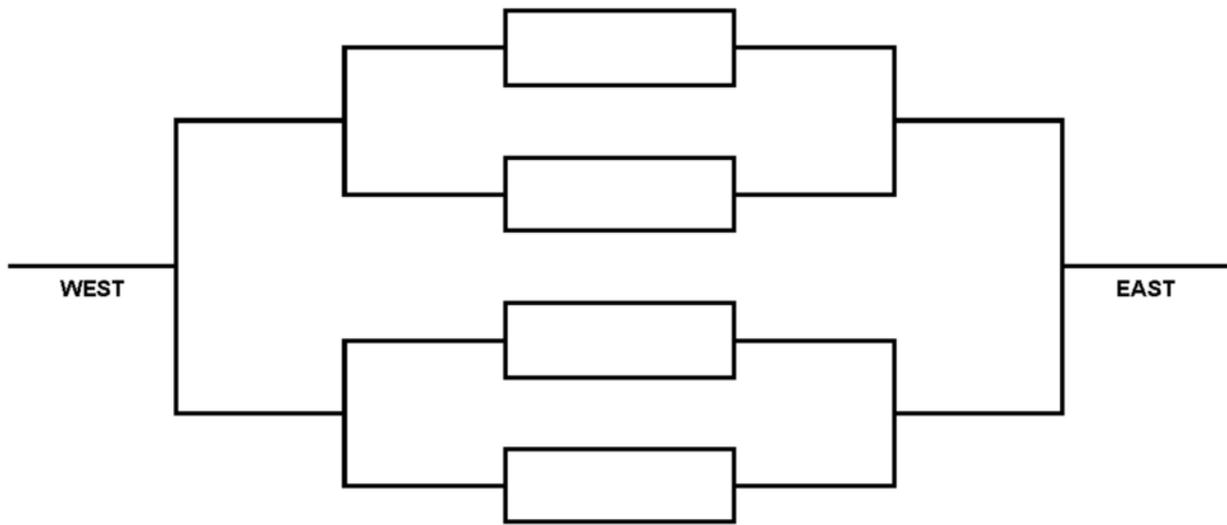
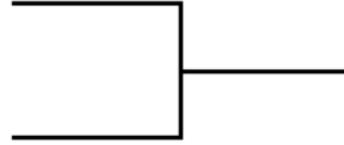
On the following pages are examples of a 32-, a 16- and an eight-player compass draw.

# 8 Player Compass Draw Sheet

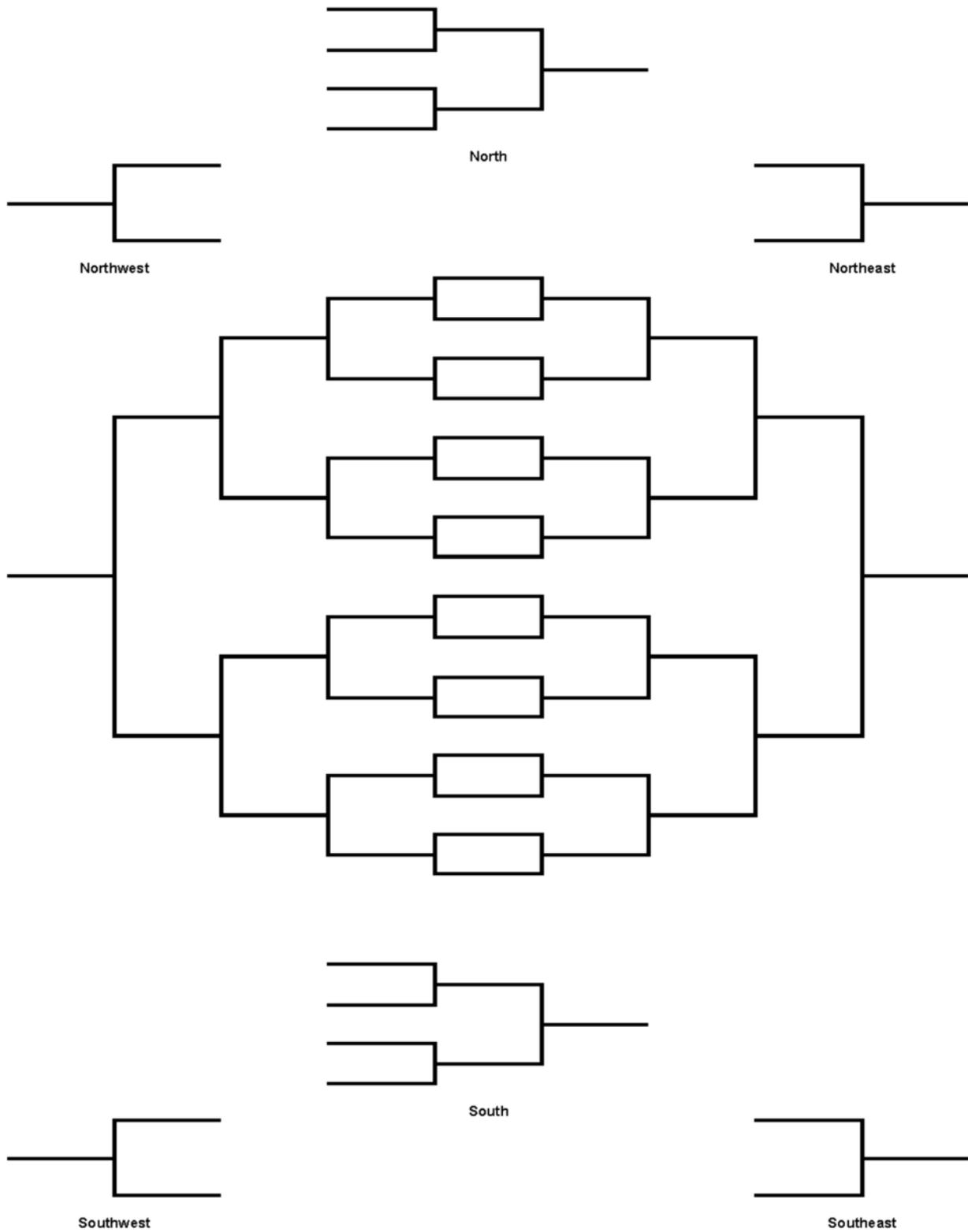
**NORTHWEST**  
(Semi-Final Losers from West)



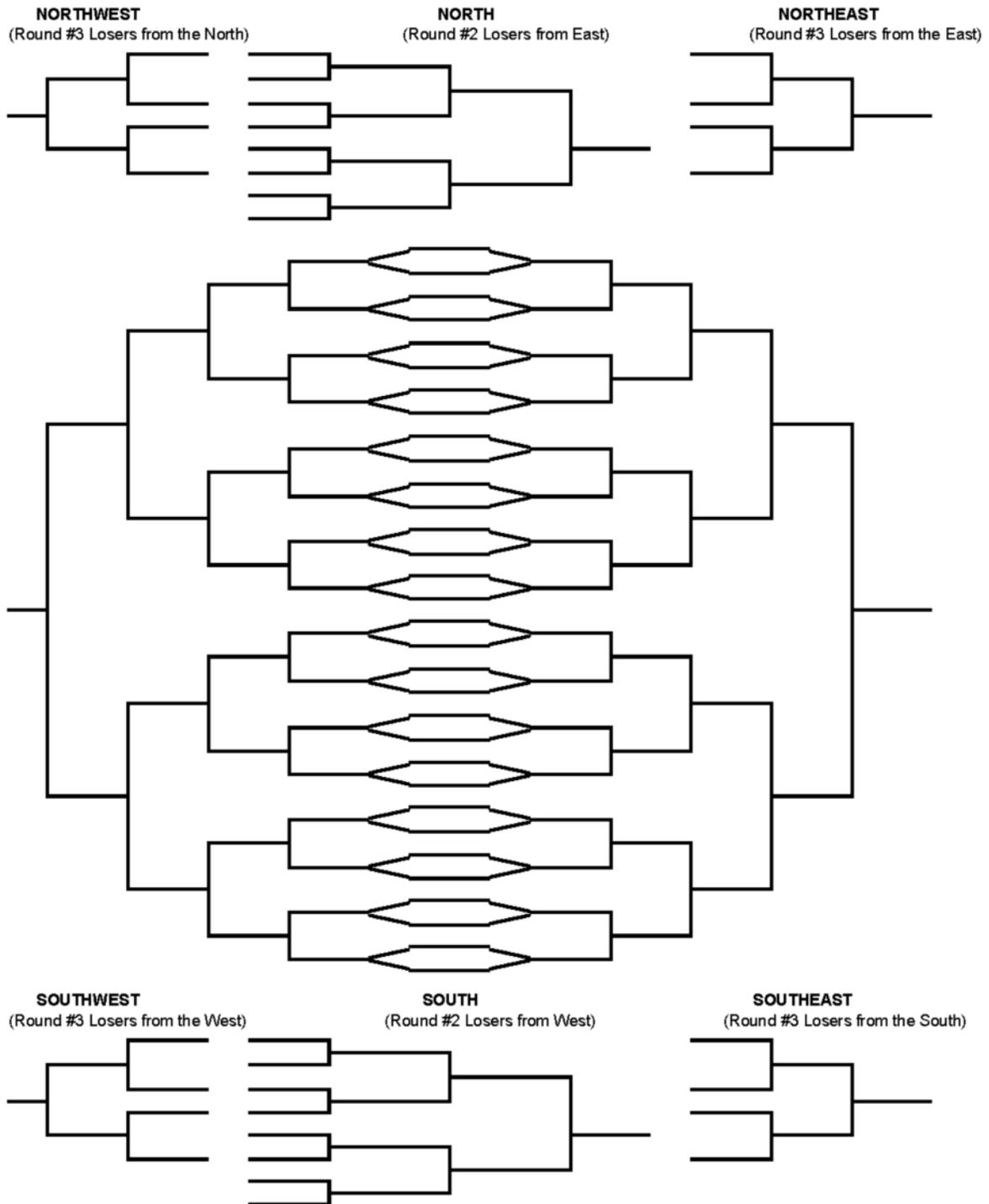
**NORTHEAST**  
(Semi-Final Losers from East)



# 16 Player Compass Draw Sheet



# 32 Player Compass Draw Sheet



## Resources

### Suppliers of Tennis Equipment

The following companies and vendors are suppliers of junior racquets, short courts, teaching aids, transition balls and entry-level tennis kits.

#### **Dunlop Sports Group America**

116 South Pleasantburg Drive  
Greenville, SC 29607  
888-215-1530  
864-552-4000  
864-552-4032 (fax)  
Email: [customerservice@dunlopsports.com](mailto:customerservice@dunlopsports.com)  
[www.dunlopsports.com](http://www.dunlopsports.com)

#### **Gamma Sports**

200 Waterfront Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222  
800-333-0337  
412-323-0335  
800-274-0317 (fax)  
[tsr@gammasports.com](mailto:tsr@gammasports.com)  
[www.gammasports.com](http://www.gammasports.com)

#### **Gopher Sport**

220 24th Avenue NW  
P.O. Box 998  
Owatonna, MN 55060-0998  
800-533-0446  
800-451-4855 (fax)  
[www.gophersport.com](http://www.gophersport.com)

#### **Head/Penn Racquet Sports**

306 S. 45th Avenue  
Phoenix, AZ 85043  
800-289-1497  
602-269-1492  
602-484-0533 (fax)  
[askus@us.head.com](mailto:askus@us.head.com)  
[www.head.com](http://www.head.com)

#### **Prince Sports, Inc.**

1 Advantage Court  
Bordentown, NJ 08505  
800-2-TENNIS  
609-291-5800  
609-291-5902 (fax)  
[www.princetennis.com](http://www.princetennis.com)

**Oncourt Offcourt**

6301 Gaston Avenue, Suite 650  
Dallas, TX 75214  
88-TENNIS-11  
214-823-3078  
214-823-3082 (fax)  
info@oncourtoffcourt.com  
www.oncourtoffcourt.com/

**Rocky Mountain Sports (Tretorn)**

650 South Taylor Avenue  
Louisville, CO 80027  
800-525-2852  
303-444-5340  
303-444-7526 (fax)  
info@rmsboulder.com  
www.rmsboulder.com

**Wilson Racquet Sports**

8700 West Bryn Mawr Avenue, 10th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60631  
800-333-8326  
773-714-6400  
800-272-6062 (fax)  
racquet@wilson.com  
www.wilson.com

**Books**

American Sport Education Program, **Coaching Youth Tennis, 3rd edition**.  
Champaign, IL, Human Kinetics, 2002.

United States Professional Tennis Association, **The Complete Guide-USPTA  
Little Tennis**. USPTA, Houston, 1998.

United States Tennis Association, **Friend at Court: The USTA Handbook of  
Tennis Rules and Regulations, 2007 edition**. USTA, White Plains, NY, 2007.

United States Tennis Association, **Illustrated Introduction to the Rules of  
Tennis, 2nd edition**. USTA, White Plains, NY, 2006.

**Videotapes**

**Backboard Tennis**, United States Tennis Association, White Plains, NY, 1998.

**Games Approach to Coaching Tennis**, United States Tennis Association, White  
Plains, NY, 2002.

**Teaching Group Tennis**, United States Tennis Association, White Plains, NY, 1998.

## Organizations

### **Professional Tennis Registry**

P.O. Box 4739  
Hilton Head Island, SC 29938  
800-421-6289

### **United States Professional Tennis Association**

3535 Briarpark Drive  
Houston, TX 77042  
800-877-8248

### **United States Tennis Association**

70 West Red Oak Lane  
White Plains, NY 10604  
914-696-7000

For more information on the different programs found in this book—including QuickStart Tennis, Jr. Team Tennis and more—go to [USTA.com](http://USTA.com) or call the USTA National Office at 914-696-7000.







