Coach Qualification Manual

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Introduction

Many of us are familiar with teaching. Some people find it difficult to distinguish between teaching and coaching. Sometimes coaches are teachers and vice versa. However, if you want to be a good coach you should at least know what distinguishes you!

In general terms, coaches work with people who have chosen to learn a specific set of skills in an environment which they have chosen and want to be in. Sometimes teachers have people to work with who do not want to be there! Coaching is about helping people improve their performance in a particular area – in our case, tennis. But it should also be about working with the ‘whole’ person, not just the performance skills. With children in particular, some coaches forget about the child as a person. Coaching is about helping players realise their potential – the talent that is stored in them, and which the coach can help to develop. Good coaches learn all they can about their players and create a true learning environment to which players want to return.

Perhaps the essence of coaching is to remember that coaching is about people and not tennis, so ‘coaching tennis’ is not the best of phrases – ‘coaching people to play tennis’ is a far better one! The best coaches never lose sight of the person in the player.

What is needed to be a good tennis coach?

First and foremost a coach needs three things:

- an interest in people – and the ability to show it
- an enthusiasm for the game itself
- a desire to help people learn to play and realise their potential

The reasons why you are coaching will not be the same as other people – they will be dependent on your own circumstances and experiences – and your personal philosophy. But you do need to know:

- why you are coaching (to earn money?, to give something back to the game?, to change your career?)
- what the most important issues are for you when you coach (to develop a world class player, to help children learn the game, to help business people have an activity?)
- what your strengths and weaknesses are as a coach
- whether you can be honest with yourself – if you can’t, you will find it hard to learn and improve as a coach and help your players. One thing is for certain, good coaches NEVER stop learning or wanting to learn
- what your ambitions are as a coach
- whether you are prepared to accept all the responsibility that goes with influencing other people’s lives – coaches do that, often without realising it.

You need to be able to:

- understand what motivate people to play tennis (adults will differ in their reasons and children may (initially at least) only be playing because a parent wants them to)
- recognise and develop other people’s abilities
- understand any difficulties people may have in learning to play and know how to help
- create a learning environment to which players will want to return. It is easy to attract players to their first coaching lesson – the hardest part and the measure of your skills as a coach and a person – is to keep them coming back. Never forget that you will very often be the main reason why player’s keep playing – however much they like the game, very few people come back to a coach they do not like or whose lessons are not interesting, fun and which challenge them appropriately.
To coach tennis you will need:

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You may already be coaching or perhaps you are starting your career. Remember, good coaches may be born, but everyone can be a better coach when they recognise what coaching is and are prepared to keep learning and improve.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF COACHING

Many people become coaches because they want to pass on their enthusiasm for the game to others. To show enthusiasm is a responsibility for all coaches, but it by no means the only one.

There are a number of issues about the role of a coach, which coaches should be concerned about both for the benefit of the players and themselves. These issues can be subdivided into responsibilities regarding others, especially players and those that are concerned with the role of coaching.

COACH RESPONSIBILITIES TO PLAYERS AND OTHERS IN THE GAME

Responsibilities towards children
For many coaches the majority of their coaching will be with children – those under the age of 18. This fact alone brings important responsibilities which centre on the ‘duty of care’. This effectively means that coaches must be mindful of the physical, emotional and social needs of children and protect them from any abuse of those needs.

The LTA has adopted, because of problems which arise on a frequent basis in tennis, a strong stance in relation to good practice, child protection and child abuse. As an organisation it has policies, procedures and training programmes for all those people (not just coaches) who work with children in tennis.

Responsibilities towards parents
Parents are the most important factor in the lives of young children. They will invariably be the person who brings the child to their first tennis lesson and they are certainly the providers of support, transport and finance for the child to continue playing.

Increasingly as the ‘player base’ increases, there will be children coming into tennis whose parents have never played the game themselves and whose own sporting background is in a team sport or not in any sport. Research shows that parents find it very difficult to think long term in terms of their children’s activities and so realise that it takes a long time to learn the game. They find it difficult to relate growth and development issues with their child’s sporting development.

Increasingly too as more players develop and become better players, spending time playing tournaments, the demands of the game on families and finances means that some parents become very (and sometimes too) involved in their children’s tennis. Again research shows that some parents, usually from a non sporting background, want a ‘return’ from their financial investment in coaching and tournaments.

One of the responsibilities of the coach is to work with parents – however hard that can be sometimes! It is important to ensure that tennis is a game which their children enjoy playing. As a coach you really can help parents understand how they can help their children develop...
and improve as players and as people. Encourage parents to see that tennis is a tremendous tool for learning physical and social skills, for meeting different people, for learning life skills such as fairness and consideration to others, and for learning how to win and lose well and how to have fun whilst doing this.

As a coach it is obvious that you need to communicate with parents frequently and that both they and you should be able to discuss any issues about their children’s tennis. In addition parents often need advice on other issues, for example:

The training programme which their children should follow
- Nutrition and fluid intake
- which tournaments their children should enter
- how often children should play and practise
- how tennis will fit in with other sports and activities for their children

Responsibilities towards the club or school where you coach
Most coaches work in a tennis club or school, either on a full or part time basis. It is important to understand that there are responsibilities as a coach in that relationship. These include:
- being professional – being on time, dressing and behaving appropriately
- being fair – charging reasonable fees, giving full time for each lesson, not using mobiles when coaching
- socialising with club members and taking time and interest in them
- working with club committees to promote the interests of the club

Responsibilities towards the game
As in every other sport, tennis is a game which is ‘bigger’ than any single individual. All of us as coaches have a responsibility for the future of the game in terms of attracting players, building good clubs and working with others – coaches, players, officials and the LTA. In the past many coaches have criticised each other, but they should do their utmost to understand the importance of co-operating and supporting each other so that their players, the game and themselves benefit and move forward.

Responsibility for fair play
Tennis is an excellent way for all players, but especially children, to learn the importance of fair play and of respect for others. You should ensure that everyone whom you coach knows your attitude towards cheating, gamesmanship and respect for the rules – and that you are not prepared to tolerate players whom you coach not being fair and honest. It should be very clear where you stand in relation to player’s behaviour.

Responsibility to ensure equality
Recent legislation has been necessary to ensure that everyone in this country, regardless of their gender, specific ability or ethnicity, is given the same opportunities. Tennis is no different from any other part of society and as a coach you must be very aware of the issues involved. Both boys and girls must be given the same opportunities, those with disabilities should be able to play (this may mean access, for example, for wheelchairs, or extra help for children with learning difficulties) and those from different ethnic backgrounds should have access to the sport.

Coaches may need to learn additional information and different skills in order to ensure equality – for example, working with girls sometimes needs different approaches when working with fitness training, coaching children from a different ethnic background may require an awareness of different cultural issues.

The LTA has a stated policy of equality throughout the sport and has specific procedures in place and ongoing action to ensure every group has access to tennis.

COACH RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS THE ROLE OF COACHING
As with almost every other profession, the LTA has a Code of Ethics for coaches and it is reproduced below. As a coach you should be very aware both of the details of the Code and
the implications which the different principles have for your role. In essence, as a coach if you adhere to the Code you will be following the standards necessary to be a responsible coach.

LTA CODE OF ETHICS AND CONDUCT FOR TENNIS COACHES

Coaches, who assent to this code, accept their responsibility to tennis players and their parents/families, to coaching and other colleagues, to the LTA as their National Governing Body, to their coaching employer and to society.

THE TENNIS COACH WILL FULFILL THE ROLE OF THE COACH AS DEFINED:

- Identify and meet the needs of individuals
- Improve performance through a progressive programme of safe, guided practice, measured performance and/or competition
- Create an environment in which individuals are motivated to maintain participation and improve performance

The Tennis Coach will identify and meet the needs of individuals:
- Determine, in consultation with players and relevant others (e.g. parents, teachers, etc), what information is confidential and respect that confidentiality.
- Encourage players and other coaches to develop and maintain integrity in their interactions with others both in victory and defeat. (A key role for a coach is to prepare players to respond to success and failure in a dignified manner.)

The Tennis Coach will improve performance through a progressive programme of safe, guided practice, measured performance and/or competition:
- Carry out all work in keeping with the regular and approved practice within tennis as determined by the LTA.
- Clarify in advance with players/employers the number of sessions, fees, method of payment; explain expected outcome and progression from the coaching.
- Provide constructive/positive feedback to players and other participants in a caring manner sensitive to their needs. Avoid overly negative feedback.
- Encourage and facilitate players’ independence and responsibility for their own behaviour, performance, decisions and actions.
- Involve the players in decisions that will affect them.
- At all times use appropriate training methods which in the long term will benefit the players, and avoid unsafe exercises and techniques which could be harmful.
- Ensure that the tasks/training set are suitable for the age, experience, ability and physical and psychological conditions of the players.
- Respect the fact that their goal as a coach may not always be the same as that of the player. Aim for excellence based upon realistic goals and due consideration for the player’s growth and development.
- Recognise individual differences in players and always think of the player’s long-term best interests.
- Set challenges for each player which are both achievable and motivating.
- Expect a similar level of reciprocal commitment from their players. In particular the player or parent/guardian should inform the coach of any change in circumstances that might affect the coach/player relationship.

Responsibility to follow the Code of Conduct in terms of children
You will be aware of the Child Protection issues which have already been outlined. In addition to the Code of Ethics given above, you should also be aware of the LTA Code of Conduct for coaches. This is because there is always a possibility that you could have allegations made against you concerning your behaviour with children. Sadly this is a fact of life, but as a coach you should be very sure to follow the Code of Conduct, since to do so is primarily a major part of reducing the likelihood of allegations being made and secondly should allegations be made about you, of defending yourself against them.
LTA Accreditation provides a simple check on safety and professional standards. There are two types of LTA Accreditation available to coaches and to coaching assistants, Registration and Licensing.

Both forms of accreditation mean that a coach or coaching assistant has met the following criteria:

- A minimum level of qualification
- A satisfactory criminal record check (repeated every three years)
- Valid first aid training, and a requirement to keep this up-to-date
- Signed up to the LTA’s professional standards (see below)

Licensed coaches have a higher level of qualification and also complete regular training to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

All LTA accredited coaches and coaching assistants are insured for their personal coaching activities.

**Registration**

This is a basic level of accreditation for coaches and coaching assistants.

Coaching assistants must have completed a minimum of a one-day qualification course, but some Registered coaches may have completed more advanced qualifications. Ask Registered coaches and assistants for specific information about their qualification.

**What are the benefits?**

- Public liability insurance
- Personal Accident Cover
- Access to great deals on racquets, balls and equipment
- British Tennis Membership
- Access to free legal and tax advice through BASELINE (the LTA’s business advice support line)
- Regular and relevant communication from the LTA Coaches' Team

**Licensing**

This is a higher level of accreditation. Only fully qualified coaches can obtain an LTA Coach Licence, by completing a course that equips them with the skills to provide individual coaching. Some Licensed Coaches may hold very advanced qualifications, remember to ask Licensed Coaches for specific information about their qualification.

Licensed Coaches must complete a minimum of 15 hours of additional training each year. This large time commitment helps to ensure that Licensed Coaches have up-to-date knowledge and skills and are more likely to be aware of important changes and modern standards.

Coach Licences last for one year.

**What are the benefits?**

- Public liability insurance - £10m worldwide
• Employer's liability insurance
• Income protection
• Physiotherapy cover
• British Tennis Membership
• Wimbledon ticket ballot
• Access to free legal and tax advice through BASELINE (the LTA's business advice support line)
• Tennisplayer.net - An on-line coaching resource video library
• Partner's Club (Discounted rates on various suppliers)

COMMUNICATION SKILLS
Tennis coaches are people working with players. For the coach to coach and the player to learn they must communicate. The first meeting could ‘set the scene’ for the future. People make decisions about each other in as little as 15 seconds.

Good communication is a skill and good coaches are highly effective communicators.

• They are effective because they use their skills of communication to excite, interest and motivate players.
• They show clearly by their behaviour and what they say that they think tennis is a wonderful game to play and that it is fun to learn.
• They demonstrate that they are interested in the player as an individual.

When you start to coach you must think carefully about how you communicate. Your behaviour is important. It may also help to know that how you speak is as important as what you say, – but neither is as important as how you behave as you coach.

• Your behaviour - your body language, can be more important than anything you say when you coach. It indicates whether you are interested and enthusiastic or even bored with the situation. Your behaviour will have an effect on the motivation of your players – and that effect can be positive or negative. Remember too, that you are a role model and your behaviour will ‘rub off’ onto your players.
• How you speak - the pitch, tone and volume of your voice must be appropriate to the situation and the player. With a group you will need to project your voice, whereas with an individual you can be quieter. The tone of your voice will indicate your feelings interested, enthusiastic, angry or tired for example.
• What you say is also important, but players, especially children, do not listen to long explanations. Keep what you say simple, understandable (no jargon!) and to the point.
  • do not give too much information at one time.

Communication methods vary because coaches are individuals. Some are quiet and calm, while others seem noisy and excitable, but all of them have things in common which allow them to communicate successfully.

When you begin to coach you must work hard to develop your communication skills. It is actually very important that you do so. Don’t try to copy another coach, but develop your own skills.

• Listen to players and ask questions to be sure they understand.
• Find your way of gaining player’s attention when you need to.
• Try to maintain eye contact, because communication is then much more effective.
• Always be positive and encouraging in your comments and feedback.

There are some additional considerations when you communicate with specific groups of people and some examples are given here.

When coaching players with a hearing disability, you will need to:

• give instructions before the activity, and try not to give more as they play
• face the player
• face the light if you are coaching indoors
• speak slowly – lip readers need to see the speaker’s mouth
• give time for an interpreter if there is one, but speak to the player, not the interpreter
• keep to essential information
• use gesture to indicate success or to attract attention don’t shout or cover your mouth
• explain jokes and questions, otherwise the player will be ‘left out’.

When coaching players in a wheelchair, you will need to:
• speak at their eye level
• avoid touching the wheelchair which is their personal space.

When coaching players with a speech impairment, you will need to:
• listen carefully and be patient
• show that you understand
• if necessary, ask the person to repeat or to write down what they have said.

When coaching players with a visual impairment, you will need to:
• explain the court layout
• use their names to attract attention
• tell players where you are
• identify any hazards to them.

When coaching players with learning difficulties, you will need to:
• find out what the disability is
• use gesture
• keep to essential information
• repeat the same information
• give time for players to understand.

When coaching very young children, you will need to:
• use short sentences with clear, basic information
• speak at their eye level
• face them
• use their language
• get the majority attending – you will never get all of the group!

When coaching less confident players, you will need to:
• encourage, encourage and encourage
• mean what you say.

COACHING STYLES

In addition to your communication skills, you will also need to think about your coaching style
the way in which you will coach players. For example, will you always tell players what to do
or will you set them off with an idea and ask them to find a way of solving the problem? Either
of these approaches indicate your coaching style and would also indicate that you understand
how people learn.

The way in which you coach will be heavily influenced by:
• your personality
• the way in which you were coached yourself
• how you have seen other coaches work
• how successful you think your coaching is.

If you want to be effective as a coach you must think about the coaching style you use and
when a particular style is appropriate.

Some coaches use a dictatorial approach where there is very little input from the player.
Others have such a relaxed style that they give very little instruction to the players. Neither of these is wrong and in specific instances could actually be the right approach. For example, with a large group you will probably need to give instructions - be rather dictatorial. However, if the player is involved in the learning - asking questions and developing an understanding of what to do - then a more co-operative style of coaching would be more appropriate.

An essential part of the co-operative style is that the coach uses questioning to develop understanding. Using questioning well is a skill in itself and depends on:

- the coach knowing when questions would be appropriate, rather than an instruction
- the questions being ‘open ended’ and ensuring that the player has to think about the answer
- the questions being specifically related to the task thus enabling the player to ‘see the point’ of them
- the questioning leading to a confirmation and then extension of the player’s understanding
- the player being comfortable with being questioned – the ‘atmosphere’ must be supportive, not critical
- the player feeling able to ask questions of the coach!

There are some additional considerations when you coach specific groups of people.

**When you are coaching groups, you will need to:**
- be more dictatorial, especially when safety issues are a concern be aware that to move on you may need to ask more closed questions
- avoid long discussions
- be alert to the person who always wants to make a point!

**When you are coaching very young children, you will need to:**
- ask simple, and probably, closed questions
- be more dictatorial
- be very supportive and encouraging.

**When you are coaching players with learning difficulties, you will need to:**
- possibly avoid questions be relaxed, but firm and very aware.

**When you are coaching girls, you will need to:**
- ask questions which they can answer with confidence
- be very supportive in your coaching style
- work with them ‘as a team’
- be relaxed, but firm.

**HOW PLAYERS LEARN**

The purpose of coaching is to improve the performance of the players, more quickly and more successfully than if they simply played by themselves. The fact that players can improve just playing by themselves should tell you that players learn in at least two ways:

- by copying what they see, i.e. they learn visually
- by continually trying something and slowly improving their technique, i.e. they learn by doing, trial and error and ‘feeling’ that the technique is right. but players also learn by:
  - listening, talking and perhaps reading i.e. verbally
  - processing information and working out what and how to do something – i.e. digitally/logically.

This is important information to you as a coach. If players learn in a variety of ways, you MUST present information in a variety of ways. This means that your coaching must include:

- verbal information: an explanation of what to do. Be sure to identify and repeat the important points and use language which the player will understand
• visual information: a demonstration to show what to do. Be sure that the player can see the action and knows what to look for. (More information on demonstrations is in section 3.4)
• time for players to think – so they work out what they need to do practical experience: time to practise the technique and refine it

The way in which a player learns will be individual to them, but all learning will be enhanced if:
players are motivated. They should be excited, interested and want to learn. They should be praised for their efforts and be confident enough to understand that mistakes are a necessary part of learning
• players understand what they are trying to do
• the relationship with the coach is good
• the atmosphere of the session, created by the coach, is fun, exciting and non-threatening
• the session is varied and players are not tired and bored.

As a coach all of this is your responsibility! Remember too that you are more likely to coach in the way in which you learn – and that may not suit a player. Try to coach in different ways and find out how they learn best.

Finally, remember
• Every player comes to a coaching session with different knowledge and abilities.
• Every player learns at a different rate and in a different way.
• Every player leaves the session with different knowledge, abilities and experiences.

So coach them all in the way in which they learn best!

ORGANISING SKILLS

Good coaches are good organisers - of time, players and resources. The benefits of a coach who can organise well are enormous.

Coaching sessions are well prepared if:
• facilities are booked and available
• players know where they should be and when to be there
• equipment is available.

Coaching sessions are well run if:
• the coach arrives early to prepare and greet players
• the coach knows how many players are coming
• the players are always sure what they should be doing
• sessions are well structured, varied and progressive and are relevant to the age and stage of the players (LTPD)
• the session finishes on time
• evaluation of the session is the norm
• future sessions are planned from lessons learned.

Good organisation also depends on:
• good planning
• the ability of the coach to think ahead
• the ability of the coach to take control
• the ability of the coach to re-organise quickly when necessary.

Throughout the Coach Qualification, you will be expected to demonstrate your understanding of all the above principles and put them into practice.
COACHING CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Coaches will work with a variety of different ages and abilities and will need to bear in mind that each group will have specific needs. The Winning Pathway clearly details the specific content for each age and stage.

COACHING CHILDREN

Children are not simply young adults - they are different physically, physiologically, mentally and socially. Consequently, as a coach you must be sure that your sessions are suitable for their age, ability and maturity. The Winning Pathway sets out clearly what are suitable activities.

- **Physically** they are still growing. Growth spurts can be very sudden and can affect co-ordination, as well as making the child tire quickly. Children mature at different times. You could have children in a group with the same chronological age, but whose developmental ages can be up to four years apart. Their bone structure and muscle development is immature and susceptible to injury.

  *As a coach you should recognise the effects of growth and lack of maturity on performance. Make sure that the equipment and court size is appropriate for the age and ability of the child. (see Mini Tennis section)*

- **Physiologically** children cannot work for the same length of time or at the same rate as adults. They have to work harder to obtain the same amount of energy from systems that are under-developed until post puberty. They also get hot and cold more quickly than adults.

  *As a coach you must ensure that your sessions have frequent breaks for a rest and a drink.*

- **Mentally** children and adults must go through the same stages when they learn skills, but children do not have the same range of experiences on which to base any learning. They also learn more through imitation than adults. They can find it difficult to make decisions if they are given too many choices. Concentration can be difficult over a long period of time, especially if they lose confidence or interest They need reassurance that they are doing the right thing!

  *As a coach remember that the best time for children to learn new (motor) skills is between the ages of 8 and 12, so structure your lessons to develop the skills they need. Make sure you show them what to do, rather than giving long explanations.*

Try to present information so that they have a limited range of things from which to decide, e.g. in tactical situations tell them to do either x or y, rather than offering them a whole range of options.

Make sure your sessions have plenty of variety and activity so that the children do not become bored. Use praise frequently and be sure to reward effort as well as ability.

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Make sure your sessions have plenty of variety and activity so that the children do not become bored. Use praise frequently and be sure to reward effort as well as ability.

- Socially children enjoy being with their friends and can become anxious and nervous if they are split up from them. They become excited quickly. Many young children are put off by competitive situations. Young girls, in particular, enjoy being in teams, rather than playing as individuals.

As a coach you should try to keep friends together at least until the children are familiar with you and the group. Try not to let them get over excited.

Be sure to arrange a variety of activities that do not always depend on competition. Sometimes working as a member of a small team will help children who do not yet enjoy competing as an individual.

**COACHING ADULTS**

It is very important when coaching adults to know WHY they have come to tennis coaching. Unlike children whose parents have brought them, adults have decided to come themselves and their motives for doing so will vary.

Adults have a number of previous experiences which will influence - not always positively - the rate at which they learn. For example, if an adult has played another racket or bat and ball game, the co-ordination skills required will help their tennis, but if they have learnt “bad” techniques or not enjoyed sport much at school, then you could find it more difficult to coach them.

As a coach you will need to take previous experience and confidence into account, because it will affect the rate of learning or even make you decide to leave a technique as it is.

Adults learn more from explanation than children do. They also understand the principles of a particular tactic or technique more easily than children. Some adults prefer to ‘process’ information before they try a technique or tactic. Give them time!

As a coach you must therefore explain and demonstrate in order to ‘reach’ as many in a group as possible. Be careful, though, to avoid long discussions with individual players when you have others in a group.

Remember the different reasons why adults come to coaching, when you structure your sessions – it could be exercise, to learn a new skill, to compete, or to make new friends. Remember too, adults have had to organise their time to come to coaching – time from their work and family. So they want to be there!

As a coach, if the motive for coming is exercise, then you must ensure that the session is very active, but if the intention is to improve and practise strokes, then ensure that the majority of the session is spent doing this. You must show that you understand and are accounting for the players’ interests. Your coaching programme should reflect all of this.

**COACHING GROUPS OF PLAYERS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES**

( differentiation)

Whenever you have a group of beginners or improvers, there will inevitably be a range of different abilities in the group. It is important to remember:

- every player is an individual
- every player learns and improves at a different rate

As a coach you MUST be able to construct practices where every player in the group is being challenged. The best way to do this is by differentiation.

Differentiation is the organisation of the same activity in such a way that every player can progress. In order to do this it will help to re-organise:

- the rules for the task
- the court area being used
- the equipment being used
The rules can be changed in a variety of ways
If the object of the practice is to improve consistency, then some players could be scoring only when the ball has crossed the net 3 times, others could be trying to achieve a rally which scores every time the ball goes beyond the service line, and others could be scoring whenever the ball crosses the net. All the players are therefore achieving, but at their own level.

Changing the court area
If the object of the practice is to develop the swing on the groundstrokes, then the length of the court area can be changed, depending on the player’s ability. The better players would play in the full length of the court, while others would play between the service lines. Other players could even have one player using a line between the service and base line and the partner playing to the baseline.

Changing the equipment
The availability of different sorts of tennis balls has greatly helped coaches working with different abilities in the same group. By using foam, Mini Tennis red, orange or green ball for some players and a real tennis ball for others, players have been able to rally at their own level. All coaches should be familiar with the different lengths of rackets available and these again help players of different abilities to work in the same group. Differentiation is therefore very different from mixed ability coaching, because every player in the group can work at their own level on the same activity.

With mixed ability coaching, it is usual to see a variety of different small groups each doing different things and the coach trying to coach all of them. Often the better players are left to play, the least able are given something ‘to get on with’ and the coach concentrates on the middle group. The result is that often only a few players in the group really enjoy the lesson and others make little or no progress.

The coach who can make good use of the principles of differentiation should be able to overcome the problems of different abilities in the same group while giving individual players the chance to be extended.

MINI TENNIS
www.lta.org.uk/Players/Juniors/

Red ball mini tennis is for players aged 8 and under. It is played on smaller courts with shorter rackets and softer balls. It’s just like the real thing and will give you the chance to have long rallies and play different types of shots, which should be lots of fun.

What age is red ball mini tennis aimed at?
Red ball mini tennis is for players aged 8 and under.

What ball is used?
A red sponge ball is used indoors and a red felt ball is used outdoors.

What size court is red ball played on?
A smaller court of 11m x 5.5m is used so it’s ok to use badminton court lines. Scroll through the pictures to the right to see what red ball mini tennis looks like on court.

What height is the net?
The net is lower than yellow ball tennis at a height of 80cm.
What racket is best to use?
A shorter racket of 43cm – 58 cm (17” – 23”) is recommended

Orange ball mini tennis is for players aged 8 and 9. It is played on slightly larger courts than red ball, with bigger rackets and balls that are not as soft as red balls. It’s the next stage to go through before you start playing on a full sized court and it will help players develop all the different shots, providing fun competition.

What age is orange ball mini tennis aimed at?
Orange ball mini tennis is for players aged 8 and 9. Or players who are 7 and have reached Red level 1.

What ball is used?
An orange ball is used. It has a low compression that makes it bounce lower, giving the player better control at an important stage of their development.

What size court is orange ball played on?
Orange ball is played on a singles court of 18m x 6.5m and a doubles court of 18m x 8.23m (so the full width of the singles court) Scroll through the pictures to the right to see the court looks like.

What height is the net?
80cm at the middle of the net.

What racket is best to use?
A racket of 58cm – 63 cm (23” – 25”) is recommended.

Green ball is the next step after orange ball mini tennis. It is played on a full tennis court, with bigger rackets and balls that are a little softer than yellow balls. It’s the next stage to go through before you start playing with a full compression yellow ball on a full sized court and it will help players work on and improve all aspects of their game.

What age is green ball mini tennis aimed at?
Green ball mini tennis is for players aged 10 and under who were born in 00 only.

What ball is used?
A green ball is used, which is ideal for players moving from orange ball to actual tennis balls.

What size court is green ball played on?
Green ball is played on a full tennis court for singles and doubles. Scroll through the pictures to the right to see what the court looks like.

What height is the net?
The net is at full height.

What racket is best to use?
A bigger racket of 63cm – 66cm (25” – 26”) is recommended.
THE COACHING PROCESS

It is possible for two coaches to have the same level of information and knowledge about tennis, but for one to be more successful with players.

Obviously, communication skills, knowledge of how people learn and organisational ability are important, but successful coaching is also based on the ability to use a number of other skills. Coaching is a process. The successful coach will move from one stage of that process to the next to give the session structure and a logical progression. Very importantly, the process will be related to the age and ability of the player.

The successful development of the player also depends on the coach’s skills of giving demonstrations, feeding and setting practices.

From the beginning, the process depends on the coach being able to:

- **Know the players** understand them as individuals with different ways of learning, being motivated and interested in tennis
- **Observe** watch the player in action and decide the most appropriate course of action in general terms to help them – e.g. tactical and technical development or physical development
- **Analyse** decide the specific requirement of the player in the general area chosen
- **Improve performance** set specific tasks and teaching points that improve the ability of the player
- **Develop the performance** set different progressive practices and drills that help the player incorporate what has been learned, into the decision making process - the game
- **Evaluate** decide whether the player’s game is at a higher level, what is needed next and what has been successful in the session

OBSERVATION

It is very easy to watch, but not so easy to gain meaningful information unless that observation is systematic. The coach must know what to observe.

The following must form the basis of the observation and initial assessment of the player:

- the player’s physical size and development in relation to others of the same age
- the level of co-ordination and movement which the player has
- the level of tennis ‘knowledge’ – is the player a complete beginner or an improver
- the attitude of the player in terms of wanting to learn and improve
- the ability of the player in the game and tactical situation.

From the observation the coach should be able to decide the general area of work for the session.

ANALYSIS

Observation gives the coach general information. Analysis is more specific than observation - it helps the coach decide the specific area of work for the session.

It should also be ongoing during the session because improvement rates will vary and the coach may need to change the session plan. Analysis also needs a logical ‘checklist’, which relates to the development of the player. As the player improves, certain skills become incorporated and learning new ones becomes important. For example, a complete beginner needs to place the ball for the serve, whereas high level player will do this automatically, but may have a specific problem in generating power on the serve.

By the end of your Observation and Analysis you should know which game situation and tactical intention you are going to work on with the player.

GAME SITUATIONS

- When Serving – first or second serve
- When Returning serve – first or second serve
- When both players are at the back of the court
• When you are approaching or at the net
• When your opponent is approaching or at the net

**TACTICAL INTENTIONS**

• Trading
• Building
• Finishing
• Neutralising
• Staying in the point
• Turning the point around

**IMPROVEMENT**

Players have coaching in order to improve. To do this they need tactical information, physical ability and technical expertise. Analysis gives the coach the information needed for the area of work chosen.

For improvement to take place the following points are important:

• The coach must combine coaching skills such as feeding and demonstration with coaching knowledge which includes the ability to plan both sessions and courses
• Personal communication skills are critical for effective learning and improvement.
• An understanding of how players learn is vital
• Knowledge of the player is essential. The principles of LTPD stages must be understood and applied.
• The understanding of how skills are learned is essential.
• The use of a variety of practices is necessary
• Improvement may take place quickly or over a long period of time.

**DEVELOPMENT**

As improvement takes place, the coach will become concerned with continuing that progress. Development in tennis terms should mean within the context of the game. The improved tactic should be tested and developed within the open game situation, the technique should be practised and developed to a skill used in the context of the game and the physical skill developed and applied in the full context of tennis.

The following points should be considered:

• How can a variety of games and practices be used to develop the area of work in the game itself?
• As different practices and drills move towards the game itself, decision making must be involved – the teaching situation becomes more open
• What sort of communication and motivation skills are required if the initial improvement becomes difficult to maintain in the game?

**EVALUATION**

It is very important that coaches are able to evaluate both the performance of the player and their own coaching performance. Evaluation involves making a judgement both on an ongoing basis and at the end of the session in order to modify the coaching. It is a major part of the coaching process.

The following points are important: _evaluation is valuable because it ensures that the coach is constantly monitoring the success of the material, the session and their own performance_

• evaluation involves monitoring the session as it takes place because progress may be more rapid or not as fast as was hoped
• evaluation involves making judgements at the end of the session to decide what was successful about the session and what could be improved. (The coaching methods and the players behaviour as well as the content are all important parts of the evaluation)
• evaluation should include information from players about how they thought the session went.

**THE TEACHING OF SKILL**
The purpose of coaching is to bring a permanent improvement in a player’s performance. That will only happen if the player has learned techniques and developed them into skills by practising them in the context of the game.

It is therefore very important that coaches understand how people learn tennis (motor) skills so that their coaching skills and knowledge can be used in the most effective way to help players progress. Many coaches have, in the past, used coaching methods that have not distinguished between short term (‘quick fix’) or long term learning. For example, they have taught the forehand in the first lesson, the backhand in the second and so on, but have not used coaching skills which are most appropriate to this short term learning approach. They have used ‘lines’ or ‘queues’ where players have hit one ball and then moved out of the line. The difficulty with this is that players do not learn movement patterns of themselves or flight paths of the incoming ball. Consequently the learning is not relevant to what then happens in the game. This is quite apart from how boring such an approach is the learner.

The short term learning approach has been the most widely used in tennis coaching because coaches have been unaware of the principles and stages by which people learn motor skills. Long term learning means that the techniques and skills learned are more effective and useful to the player because they are more adaptable for the open skill tennis environment.

In this approach the coach teaches a variety of skills in a single coaching session and relates them to the game itself. They also coach in a game related way.

Learning motor skills involves the player moving through three distinct stages, known as the Stages of Learning. At each stage the coaching skills used by the coach will be different. Consequently, not only should coaches be very aware of the different stages, but they must also know which coaching skills they should use at different stages.

In addition:

- players differ in terms of their previous learning and so they all come to tennis at different stages
- players learn at different rates and so move through the Stages of Learning at different speeds
- the motivation of players to learn is different at different times and this affects their rate of learning.

Every good coach must take these points into consideration

THE STAGES OF LEARNING

Stage 1 Understanding and thinking about what to do (cognitive stage)

The player needs to understand what to do, what needs improving and how to do this. This Stage of Learning has the following characteristics:

- the player will frequently make mistakes – often ‘big’ ones - this is a necessary part of learning a skill and coaches should not be concerned when it happens
- the action will look awkward, but this is part of the player learning the actual pattern of the movement
- repeated demonstrations will be useful for the player to see the pattern of the movement
- the player will need to ask questions to understand what to do – so the coach must create the opportunity the coach will need to give positive feedback because the player will not yet know what is the correct movement pattern
- quite short ‘blocks’ of identical practice will be useful for the player to get the general shape of the movement BUT there must be a short time to think between each attempt, and then variable practice (the ball in different place/pace) will be beneficial (because tennis is an open skill game)
- feeding should give the player time to think between each attempt

Practising the action (associative stage)

The player is improving and beginning to be able to repeat the action. This Stage of Learning has the following characteristics:

- the player will make fewer mistakes and they will be of less magnitude
the action will look less awkward as the player begins to repeat the action more fluently. Demonstrations will only be useful if the action is the same as the player’s, because the player is now developing a ‘personal’ movement pattern, rather than trying to follow a ‘general shape’. The coach will need to give positive feedback, because the practicing stage can take a long time and the earlier rapid success is no longer evident. Questioning by the coach will be beneficial in obtaining feedback from the player. Variable, random and distributed practice will be beneficial (see section 3.3). This is because the player has to recall the movement from the long term memory each time, thus re-enforcing the movement pattern. Feeding should begin to move the player about and be more related to the game and the different ball characteristics in order to develop a sound experience base the player will be able to say what is happening to the movement. The coach must ensure that small errors do not develop which change the movement pattern.

### Stage 3 Maintaining the movement and producing it automatically (Autonomous Stage)

This Stage of Learning has the following characteristics:
- The player will make few mistakes and will be able to think about something else e.g. the opponent, while they hit the ball.
- The actions will look fluent and the player’s movement will be co-ordinated.
- Demonstrations will not be necessary because the movement pattern is fixed.
- The coach will need to give positive feedback.
- Feedback from the player will indicate when there is a problem.
- All types of practice will be beneficial.
- Feeding should be related to the game.
- The player will be able to detect and rectify errors.
- The coach must ensure that small errors do not creep in which change the movement pattern.

### PRINCIPLES OF PRACTICE

Coaches will always use practices and exercises to develop players. Some practices will be more successful and useful than others. This is because practices must always be appropriate to:
- The skill level of the player.
- The needs of the game.
- The Stage of Learning of the player.

The intention of any practice should be to develop the potential of the player and help them learn a skill for their game.

There are different types of practice and coaches should not only know what these are, but also know when they are most suitable for the player’s learning. This will be related strongly to the player’s Stage of Learning in that technique or skill.

### Variable practice

The practice involves 1 particular technique (e.g. the forehand), which is practised in a variety of situations (e.g. wide, short, deep, low or high forehands) rather than exactly the same forehand from the same place on the court. This is important in an open skill game like tennis.

### Varied practice

The technique e.g. the volley, is practised intermittently with others (e.g. forehand, volley, backhand, forehand, volley, backhand, volley etc). This is obviously related to the game, but its importance in practice is that it forces the player to ‘retrieve’ a technique from the
memory several times over. Since, in the sequence outlined, the volley is the principal shot being practised, the player would have to hit volleys after hitting other shots and the coach could begin to judge how well the volley technique had been learned.

**Random practice**
This is when there is no pattern to the strokes (the game of tennis is random practice!). The player is then ‘forced’ to retrieve the movement pattern from the long term memory each time.

**Distributed practice**
The same technique is practised in short blocks with a different activity taking place in between each block. For example, practising the first serve with the volley, a slice serve or even a short talk, as the different activity.

**All of these types of practice are suitable for long term learning and are those most suitable for beginners and improvers.**

Although the player will appear to make slower progress when coaching is given for long term development, the learning will be of a higher quality with an improvement in the ability to transfer the technique to the open skill environment of tennis.

**Blocked practice**
In this type of practice, several techniques are practised, but in blocks of all the repetitions of technique 1, then of technique 2, then technique 3. So the practice session would be 1-1-1-1 etc, 2-2-2-2 etc, 3-3-3-3 etc.

**Massed practice**
A single technique is practised in one long unit, perhaps a basket full of balls on one technique.

Blocked and massed practice are best used when rapid short term results are needed or with experienced players whose technique is well refined.

They may also be suitable for young players if less mentally demanding approaches are needed. They may increase motivation because early rapid gains may help the player. **This is one reason why short blocks are useful at the first Stage of Learning**, and also why they may be useful if a player needs confidence in a skill.

In terms of long term learning these types of practice are not so useful because they do not make mental demands of the player. They do not demand understanding by the player, nor do they force ‘recall’ of the movement pattern, nor do they transfer readily in the open skill situation of tennis.

**Overlearning**
This is continued practice of a skill that has already been learned. Overlearning up to 100% of the learning time (repeating the length of time which the player took to learn the skill) is beneficial. It ‘grooves’ technique and may help develop a stress resistant skill as well as helping a player’s confidence. It is an important part of practice for skilled players. However, it is a form of practice frequently overused by tennis coaches with beginners and improvers for whom it is not suitable because they have not yet learned the technique fully.

**Whole/part/ part/whole practice**
This is when parts of a technique are practised in isolation from the whole technique. It is essential that the parts are realistic to the whole and that the whole can actually readily be split into parts. It is essential the parts are learned in the correct sequence and that they are integrated as soon as possible. **Tennis coaches tend to break techniques down too early before players have had a chance to develop a ‘rough’ technique.**

You will see from the information on Stages of Learning that the player must go through a stage of making mistakes - they are a very important part of the learning. They need to learn the co-ordination and the racket movement – that takes time.
So it is essential that the player is always given a number of opportunities to practise the whole technique BEFORE it is broken down.

**COACHING TOOLS**

There are particular skills which tennis coaches need if they are to coach well. These are:
- demonstration
- feeding
- player learning through observation
- goal setting
- feedback.

**DEMONSTRATION**

Demonstrations are intended to show and emphasise a movement or behaviour. All tennis coaches will be familiar with them as a major means of giving information to players, because so many players, especially children learn visually.

The following points are important:
- the players should all be able to see the demonstration
- the demonstration should be repeated several times
- the relevant details should be explained when working with a group, space should be given to those players who need to shadow/feel the action as they watch - these are kinaesthetic learners
- demonstrations are not appropriate at all stages of learning (see section on Stages of Learning).

There are several types of demonstration and it is important to consider which is appropriate when coaching different levels of players.
- **The ‘expert’ demonstration** (generally given by the coach) gives a skilful and complete demonstration of the technique. It focuses attention on what the player should try to do. However, it may not be the best demonstration for long term learning, especially with a beginner, because the player may not feel confident, nor does it require understanding - only the ability to try and imitate.

- **The ‘coping’ demonstration** gives an adequate, broadly correct demonstration of the technique. It could be given by another player. It may be more useful than the expert model, because the player could feel more confident in attempting to copy it and to try what another player can do. It also means that the player has to think and understand what is involved (problem solve). This will mean a longer term development of the skill which will be easier to transfer to different situations.

- **The ‘negative’ demonstration** is often used to show an error or a weakness. It is useful if it is used as a problem solving exercise for the player because it will show if the player understands what to do. It is not very useful if the coach simply tells the player what is wrong and does not get the player involved. It is important to show the player the correct action following a negative demonstration.

**FEEDING**

Tennis is a game in which a player has to respond to an incoming ball and hit it back into the opponent’s court. The coach must be able to feed the ball to the player at an appropriate level.

The coach must be able to: feed single balls from a hopper – from the right place and with the right pace, flight path, time intervals and placement so that real learning related to the game takes place
- rally feed a sequence of balls – again the position on the court and the fact that
subsequent feeds come from the relevant place is important
- feed the ball in the game itself – at the right pace and flight path for the level of the player
- feed in all these ways by racket or by hand.

The quality of the feeding must be related to:
- the player’s Stage of Learning on that particular technique
- the appropriate technical, tactical, mental, or physical factor which the coach is trying to develop
- the demands of the game on the player at that age and stage
- the players age and ability.

Feeding skills are an essential part of tennis coaching and should be practised

GOAL SETTING
Many people set themselves targets as they learn - e.g. ‘by this time next week I will do x, in this session I will do y’. Very often as a coach you will be unaware that players have set themselves these targets.

Goal setting is a process where both coach and player are aware what the ‘targets’ are because they have discussed and agreed them.

Goal setting can be a very useful motivational tool, but to be effective it must follow certain S.M.A.R.T.E.R. principles. This means that goal setting should be.
- Specific
- Measurable
- Agreed
- Realistic
- Timed
- Exciting
- Related to the player

Goals can be:
- short term - something which can be achieved in a session or few sessions
- medium term - something which can be achieved as part of a long term goal
- long term - something to be achieved after a period of time, between four months and four years.

Goals can be:
- performance based - the emphasis is on improving or performing a skill
- outcome based - the emphasis is on success or winning.

It is very important to know the player in agreeing goals, because players will prefer performance or outcome goals depending whether they learn best from the performance or outcome. In general terms performance based goals would be more suitable for beginners and improvers.

FEEDBACK
Feedback is the way in which players obtain information about:
- the performance
or
- the result - outcome of their performance.
Feedback can come from a variety of sources: the coach, the player, other players or parents/friends.

Some players learn best by being given information about the performance (e.g. how the service technique is progressing and what they have to do to continue the improvement).
This is known as Knowledge of Performance – KP.

Others learn best by seeing the result of their performance (e.g. the ball landed in the service box, so the action was good!) This is Knowledge of Results – KR.

When the coach knows the player well, then the feedback will be structured to meet the learning preference of the player. Good coaches will also structure the practices so that they help meet the learning preference of the players.

Often, tennis coaches give all the feedback, usually about what the player is doing incorrectly. Such feedback is essentially instruction and has a negative bias. However, feedback must also be used to re-enforce a good or correct performance. Very importantly, feedback should be two way - the player must contribute in some way. When teaching skills, you should know when and what sort of feedback is relevant at different Stages of Learning.