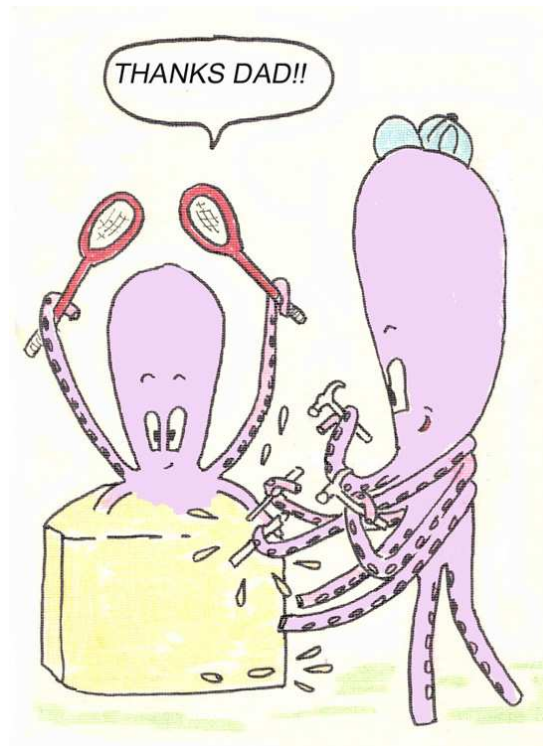


# **TEACH YOUR CHILD TENNIS, and enjoy it**

**AND, YOUR CHILD WILL LEARN MANY LIFE-  
TIME SKILLS IN THE PROCESS.**

**And, you can do this even if you can't  
play yourself.**



**By Hugh Waters III  
USPTA MASTER PRO**

## FORWARD

You can teach your child to play tennis. Not only can you do this, but you probably are the very best person to do it. After over forty years of being a teaching professional, I have witnessed many parent/child relationships on the tennis court. Armed with the information and knowledge from those years of watching the immediate relationships and also the long term ones, I have written this book to give guidance to parents wishing to teach their children the great game of tennis.

Even if you don't play tennis yourself, you can teach your child to play tennis in one-half hour a week. The book gives the ***"start to finish road map"*** of making your child into a happy tennis player.

The book will also discuss some of the bumps in the road between a parent and a child as well as problems the child may have within him or herself on the court. These situations are minor bumps and will not alter your path. You will find what to look for and how to anticipate and defuse potential bothersome occurrences..

The more than seventy lessons included in the book are separated into five major parts that guide you through the steps of this learning project.

Part one is the ***"THE PLAN"***. The "PLAN" starts with the assumption that you are interested in your child learning to play tennis. It has lessons that will build your confidence in your ability to teach your own child and lessons that will affirm to you that this is a wise decision.

Part two is ***"THE PARENT"***. Since you, the parent, are the key to this project, much emphasis is placed on helping you understand the game. Also this section gives you suggestions and ideas that you can use to motivate and teach your child. This Section is about you, and the things you need to do.

Part three is ***"THE CHILD"***. This Section discusses ways to discover what type of child you have, and how he or she might behave on the court, and what you can do to point your child in the right direction. Remember that once your child has learned tennis he or she will have a lifetime of fun playing the game. Keep in mind, you are only concerned with teaching your child to play tennis, not trying to turn your child into a major international star. However, if the game should "stick" and he or she develops a passion for the game, then, of course, be prepared to help your child move forward. My credo is: ***"To Play is to Win"***.

Part four is about ***"THE TEACHING TOOLS"***. These tools will aid you in this project. This includes help in understanding how children learn along with many ideas and suggestions that will lead you to success in this new, exciting and fun commitment. Additionally, markers are added to assist you in determining when a Tennis Professional might be needed and what kind of Pro he or she should be.

Part five is ***“THE INSTRUCTION”***. This is the ***“how to”*** part of the book. The Lessons in this section will give you the concepts of the tennis strokes so that you can teach them to your child.

It is my hope that with this book, you will have the tools, the encouragement, and the motivation needed to take on this project of teaching your child the game of tennis and that, ultimately, you and your child will have a lifetime of fun and joy on the tennis court. And as a plus, you will be teaching your child over forty LIFE SKILLS, (such as concentration, emotional control, etc) which are highlighted in the book. You will discover many more of these LIFE SKILLS as you proceed on the tennis court with your child

***Have a nice hit!***

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# THE PLAN

## ***The Plan...Lesson 1***

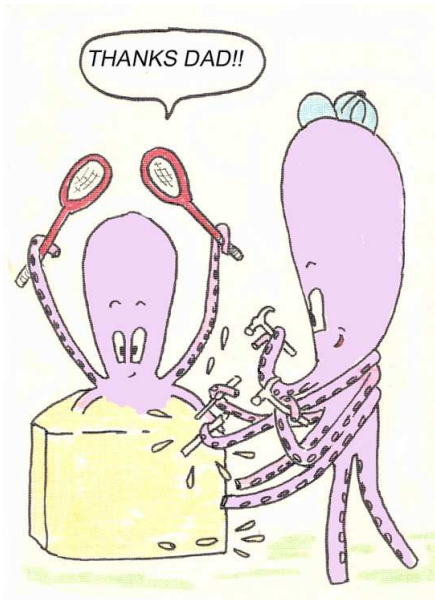
### **A WISE OLD SAYING ABOUT THE CHILD**

“The child is an uncertain being, and he receives his form according to the potentialities that you awaken in him.

If you awaken his ability to make shoes, he'll be a shoemaker; if you awaken the stonecutter in him, he'll be a stonecutter; and if you summon forth the scholar in him, he will be a scholar.

And this can be so because all the potentialities are inherent in him; what you awaken in him comes forth from him; the rest remains un-awakened, absorbed in sleep.”

....Paracelsus



**THERE'S A TENNIS  
PLAYER IN EACH CHILD....  
LET'S AWAKEN IT!**

## ***The Plan....Lesson 2***

# **WHY TENNIS FOR YOUR CHILD?**

**Tennis is ~~the~~ sport of a lifetime.**

That is one of the main reasons you I teach your child tennis. Many others will be presented later in this book.

We all know that the people in our country have become spectators instead of participants. They are becoming obese...fat!

**The Lifetime Skill: Tennis Will Make Your Child A Participant..**

Sure, children have lots of choices for physical activities. However, few active sports carry over into adult life. Tennis is one of those active sports.

Let's talk about some of the benefits of tennis for your child.

### **FOR STARTERS...**

No child sits on a bench in tennis. Everyone plays.

Tennis is not a contact sport there are no broken bones.

Tennis teaches many life skills; "like hard work pays off".

**The Life Skill: Hard work pays off.**

It is an individual sport where children can learn to count on themselves and make their own decisions.

**The Lifetime Skill: To count on one's self.**

Children learn to look an opponent in the eye, shake hands and say..."nice match" even if they lose.

Your child will learn to set goals and carry them out. Tennis players learn to stay focused for a long period of time.

**The Lifetime Skill: To set goals.**

**The Lifetime Skill: To stay focused for a long time.**



Tennis players learn to lose, get up, and try again. They also learn that there is no clock in tennis, and that you must fight to the very last point.

**Lifetime Skill: Not to give up.**

Tennis players learn time management.

Tennis players learn to develop a strategic plan.

And, this one you'll just love.....

**Tennis players are notoriously good students.**

Tennis is not only an excellent choice of a sport for your child....it should be a must.

***THAT'S WHY IT SHOULD BE TENNIS!***

**If tennis didn't exist....parents should invent it.**

Look what will happen.

## ***The Plan....Lesson 3***

### **WHAT YOU WILL ACHIEVE**

You want A good life for your children. Tennis can contribute toward this end.

You can use tennis to set a variety of goals for your child, play on a high school or college tennis team, or even become a tournament champion. While any of these are worthy goals and would be lots of fun; throughout this mission, you will also be building a very special relationship between you and your child - on the tennis court - that will last a lifetime.

And - you will give your child a healthy sport and the physical skills to stay fit for a lifetime.

We want to develop in your child an appreciation and an enjoyment of the following, (and all of these can be found on a tennis court):

1. Learning a skill.
2. Working hard and achieving success.
3. Physically participating in a sport.
3. Enjoying and understanding competition.
4. Passion for something.
5. Developing self-confidence.
6. Learning the value of sportsmanship.
7. Playing tennis with family.
8. The joy of watching others play.
9. The joy of watching competitive matches.
10. Enjoying social tennis.
11. And maybe, participating in high school and college athletics.
12. ***Maybe even a Scholarship to college.***

***IN SHORT WE WANT your child to become a tennis player and also learns many skills from the tennis court that help him/her become a SUCCESSFULL ADULT.***

Developing a Healthy life Style....

## ***The Plan....Lesson 4***

# ***TENNIS IS A FITNESS PROGRAM FOR AN ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE***

What we are talking about here is what has been labeled a “Positive Addiction.”

There must be programmed into the subconscious a need or desire for physical activity on a regular basis. Just like brushing your teeth, taking a bath, eating healthy foods, getting proper rest, etc., one must develop a “Positive Addiction” for exercise.

We won’t die if we don’t brush our teeth everyday, but we just feel guilty or uncomfortable if we don’t. We want exercise to be that much a part of us.

You don’t have to be a health nut, to enjoy exercise. You can’t guess how many children grow up hating exercise. And they hate it a lot. Exercise has not been presented to these children in a fun environment that will keep them wanting more. Tennis can do such a thing.

An old saying asks the question, “How long do you **HAVE** to exercise?”

As the saying goes...

**You *HAVE* to exercise every day of your life until you *WANT* to exercise,**

**Then you don’t *HAVE* to exercise any more; you will *WANT* to.**

This statement just says that if you do something long enough you will grow to love it.

## **LIFETIME SKILL: Learning to love Exercise**

# ***TENNIS PLAYERS JUST LOVE IT....***

The pay off?

## ***The Plan....Lesson 5***

### **THE PAYOFF**

All you would have to do is spend a week with me on the lesson court and you would witness middle-aged people and seniors starting tennis and moaning how they wished they had started or as a child.

Also, moms, with kids in school, who are just now starting to learn to play tennis, wishing they had started as a child. Obviously they have had no physical activities since childhood, and it is doubtful that they had much then.

Over and over the story is the same. Parents didn't do it and schools didn't do it. No one instilled in them an enjoyable form of exercise that could last a lifetime.

### **Need more good reasons. Check the following:**

Children who are physically fit score higher on academic tests and have much better memories, reaction times, and problem-solving skills....a University of Illinois study.

How about this piece of information: In Australia, children have almost 100 percent participation in after school sports. In that country 15 percent of these children are considered over weight. In Sweden 70 percent of children participate in after school sports and 17 percent are over weight. In the USA only 20 percent of children participate in after school sports and **35 per cent** are considered **over weight**.

Dr. Ralph Paffenbarger led a 20-year study of more than 10,000 Harvard alumni. He found that middle-aged men who participated in moderately vigorous sport (such as tennis) three hours per week cut their risk of coronary heart disease by 41 percent. (Source: *New England Journal of Medicine*).

And check this: Competitive tennis burns more calories than moderate aerobics, moderate inline skating, weightlifting, walking, baseball, and golf. (Source: *LGE Performance Systems*).

And this: Tennis is an aerobic and anaerobic activity. It improves cardiovascular fitness, leg strength, balance, speed, agility, and eye hand coordination. (Source: *Dr. Jack Groppe, Doctor of Biomechanics*).

And this: Tennis players had the highest scores in sociability, spontaneity, creativity, competitiveness, adventurousness, mental focus and assertiveness when compared to golfers, runners, weightlifters, inline skaters and downhill skiers. (Source: *Jim Gavin, PhD, Concordia University*).

Not to mention improvement in coordination, confidence, goal orientation, discipline, and organizational skills.

A recent Johns Hopkins University study shows that men who start playing tennis in their youth and are good at it (compared to those that are good at golf, football, baseball or basketball) are likely to continue playing the sport for years, and in doing so, keep heart disease at bay well into middle age. (Source: *USTA Good News in Tennis*).

And this: The Johns Hopkins study also revealed that men who play tennis well had only a 12% risk of heart disease, and men who play tennis moderately had a 15% risk. Men who didn't play tennis at all had a 28% rate of risk for heart disease. (Source: *USTA Good News in Tennis*).

And there is more, however we are stopping here.

**LIFETIME SKILLS: ALL OF THE ABOVE**

***DOESN'T TENNIS SOUND GREAT??***

You are elected.....

## ***The Plan....Lesson 6***

### **IF YOU DON'T DO IT....WHO WILL?**

There is no question of the need in your little child's life for exercise and recreation. Exercise and recreation reduce stress, and inspire and promote health.

The creation of a physically active lifestyle attitude in our children's lives is now entrusted to:

- ☐ Schools
- ☐ Recreation Departments
- ☐ Private institution like Boys' Clubs and YMCA's
- ☐ Local sports clubs.

The above are worthy, dedicated, and do add a lot of quality to your child's life. Yet, we still have a spectator society. Less than one percent of people have a daily exercise program.

The present system cannot do everything for each child!

To top it all off, schools are talking Physical Education out of their curriculum.

So you, the parent, are elected.

Nobody else is going to do it.

Isn't it nice that TENNIS can be a fun way to help you do this?

### ***SO LET'S GET ON WITH IT!!!***

The big question?????

## ***The Plan....Lesson 7***

### **NOW COMES THE QUESTION..CAN YOU DO IT?**

*The answer is; ...**OF COURSE!***

Most children who take up sports are encouraged by their parents to engage in the sport. According to the National Association for Sport and Physical Education's survey, 53 % of children were encouraged to participate in sports by their parents.

Many people fear that they cannot teach their own children. But, I ask, "why not?"

#### ***Who cares more about your child than you?***

So if you give it a try, and if there is a little trouble, you could start to think that the old adage about not teaching your children is correct.

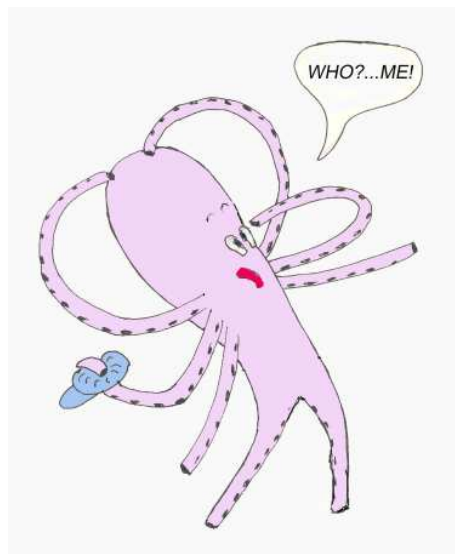
Sure, there are going to be a few problems. Remember, problems do not keep you from teaching your children such values as, honesty, manners, safety, healthy diet, and etc.

"That's different," you say. You say that those things are important. We are learning today that being fit is important too. Living to a fit and healthy old age is important too. And tennis can help do such a thing.

I had a friend who decided to teach his son tennis. He and his son came into my Pro Shop to get the son a racket. We looked at a bunch of rackets and he and his son picked one. He then took the son to the court to start his tennis career. In just one half hour, he returned and said. "I don't think tennis is for my son, can I get a refund on the racket?" I told him, "No!" "Gave him a lecture and sent him back out to the court.

You are not going to give up that easily. Sure, there are going to be a few problems. That's what this book is all about. You will get all the help you need to accomplish the goal of teaching your child tennis.

This book will help you accomplish the goal of teaching your children how to play the game of tennis and **enjoy it.**



We would like to convince you that maybe, just maybe, sportsmanship, self-esteem, hand-eye coordination, fitness, and an exercise lifestyle are important, too. These are just a few of the things that are lifetime skills that are learned from tennis, plus a lot more.

We do teach our children important things, whether they like it or not. When all is said and done, our kids don't dislike us for it. They don't dislike the things we taught them. They thank us for it and later in life, they will teach their children the same thing. The principle is the same. You think it is important and if you persist, and they will think it is important also and learn.

***IT IS THAT SIMPLE!***

Not a problem, even if....



## ***The Plan....Lesson 8***

# **SUPPOSE YOU ARE A NOT A TENNIS PLAYING PARENT?**

If you don't play yourself, there is a good chance you might do the best job of teaching your child tennis. You'll be less critical, less demanding, and be more impressed with your child's progress.

You'd be surprised how many good tennis players learned to play from their non-tennis-playing parent. These parents just toss the ball to the kid...brag on them...get them a few lessons, and poof...a happy tennis player.

The main impetus toward learning tennis will be the number of balls your child hits. If you throw ten thousand balls to your child, and you will have him or her hooked.

**You throw anyone enough balls and they'll learn to play tennis.**

It takes many swings at a ball to learn timing, eye focus, distance from the ball, movement to the ball and all that hand eye coordination.

You encourage your child to the court. You toss balls to him or her. You let him or her just hit the ball and you talk nice, and you keep their spirits up. Then you add a little instruction and that is about all you can do.

And all you do is spend one half hour per week enjoying the time spent with your child, doing this. Not so hard!!!! If you do this right your child will learn a very important Life-time Skill.

**LIFETIME SKILL: Enjoying a parent.**

***NO ONE CAN DO MUCH MORE!!***

Now the Plan...

## ***The Plan....Lesson 9***

# **THE “PLAN” FOR YOUR CHILD’S TENNIS LIFE**

Here is your plan to teach your child to play tennis, and it is simple.

By now in the book you obviously think it would be neat to teach your child to play tennis. This book is designed to give you the information that can make this a reality.

### **The Plan’s goal:**

That your child achieves the tennis skills necessary to compete in tennis at the level he or she desires, be it either social or competitive.

### **The Plan’s teacher:**

That you, a non-professional, maybe even a non-player can create an atmosphere where learning the skills of the game of tennis will be effective, fun, and rewarding for both of you.

### **The “Plan’s instruction;**

That this book will lay out a simple procedure for this to happen as well as giving insights to potential problems before they happen.

### **The Plan’s action:**

That you will, in a one-half an hour once a week, for five years, instill in your child a lifestyle of exercise and fun and skill in the sport of tennis.

### **The “Plan’s” results:**

That you will create a relationship for your child and tennis that can last a lifetime. That from the start, this will be an enjoyable thing for you and your child to do, and you can both do it until you are old and gray.

***One-half an hour a week is all that is required, and ...***

***This is quality time spent with your child!***

***IT’S GOING TO BE THAT SIMPLE***

Now it is all about you...

# THE PARENT

## ***The Parent....Lesson 10***

### ***LESSON ONE IS FUN WITH YOUR CHILD***

Now, Lets talk about having fun on a tennis court.

Fun is going to be the key to success in this project. You wouldn't want to play if you didn't have fun, so don't expect your child to want to play if he or she doesn't have fun.

You and your child should both have fun in the tennis process.

You must have fun too.

Having fun will be your primary objective at the start.

#### ***Your Son or Daughter has to have fun!***

How can you tell if your child is having fun? Here are some clues.

- ☐ There is a lot of laughter.
- ☐ He is focused
- ☐ There are statements like, "Just one more."
- ☐ She requests that you go hit some with her.
- ☐ And the biggest clue of all; ***you are having fun, too.***



If you don't enjoy your Tennis outings, your child surely won't. So, consider the both of you, and make sure you both have fun.

What is fun?

Fun comes in many hats. People get their enjoyment in many different ways on a tennis court. Your child will find his own pleasure in the game. Your child might be having fun in any of the following ways.

- ☐ Just hitting the ball is fun.
- ☐ Learning a new skill is fun.
- ☐ Self-improvement and just getting better is big fun.
- ☐ Competition is a challenge and is fun.
- ☐ Chit chatting and the being with you or her friends around a tennis court.

- ☐ Being a spectator and watching other people play is fun.
- ☐ Physical activity. Movement is fun, especially for a child.
- ☐ And eventually playing the game of tennis is what is fun.
- ☐ Beating you will be fun for him.
- ☐ ***Just being with you, Dad or Mom!*** This should be a major one. This could be the best reward for the both of you.

Any type of fun is OK. Don't try to choose how your child should enjoy the game. That will take its own course. He may only enjoy hitting the ball over the fence. This is a very likely scenario. Parents tell me all of the time; "He only wants to hit the ball as hard as he can." I say, "Just keep feeding balls, he will want to get the ball in the court sometime down the road." You can also encourage this by setting some reward goals if the ball lands inside of the fence.

Your goal is to get both of you to enjoy your time together and learn some tennis. It's not hard; you'll find that it is easy to like to play tennis.

## **SO DON'T BE TOO SERIOUS, TENNIS IS FUN!**

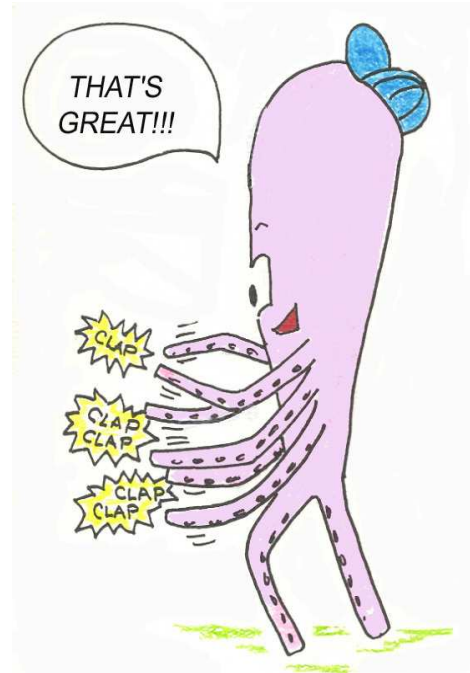
You'll wear many hats; here are just a few....

## The Parent....Lesson 11

### ***TENNIS PARENT DUTIES***

**AND HERE IS WHAT YOU WILL BE CALLED FROM TIME TO TIME:**

- The teacher.
- The coach.
- The confidant
- The trainer.
- The driver.
- The source of money.
- The human ball machine.
- The human ball picker-upper. Kids do not like to pick up balls.
- The doctor or nurse.
- The shrink.
- And most important...



**YOU ARE THE CHEERLEADER, THE  
ONE THAT ALWAYS HAS FAITH IN HIM OR  
HER.**

Next, What is an adult?

## ***The Parent....Lesson 12***

### **THE ADULT THEORY**

This theory is very simple.

In this program that you are undertaking with your child:

#### **There always needs to be an *Adult* on the court.**

Sometimes it is so easy to let your sweet, little angel get you to screaming at her on the court. When this happens you now have two children on the court. This is not good! This is not the way to have fun.

Remember the old joke about Albert? Well it goes like this...a lady in a grocery aisle heard a man speaking with a small boy in the next aisle. The small boy was creating quite a fuss. The father would say things like, "Don't cry Albert," "Be calm Albert," and "It's going to be alright Albert." After hearing much of this consoling, she was overcome with feeling for this man. Approaching him in the next aisle she complimented him on how nice he was treating his little boy, Albert. The man then responded, "Lady, I am Albert."

Bad episodes are not the end of the world, just something that we should try to avoid. There is no doubt that our lovely little children get to us at times. We have bad scenes at the dinner table and we get over it. We don't ban the child from the table for a month, as I have seen parents do with their child on the tennis court. We will get over less than positive episodes on a tennis court.

You may ask, "What is an adult?" The best answer this tennis pro has heard is..."To keep emotions appropriate." It is appropriate to cry at funeral. It is not appropriate to scream and holler if your child misses the ball. You'll have to take it from there.

From the book on "Transactional Analysis" which tries to separate the child, adult and parent within a person, there is a term for this. When your little girl gets you screaming at her. ***"It is called hooking your child."*** That's when you start acting like a child instead of an adult. Don't worry, we all do it, we just try not to.

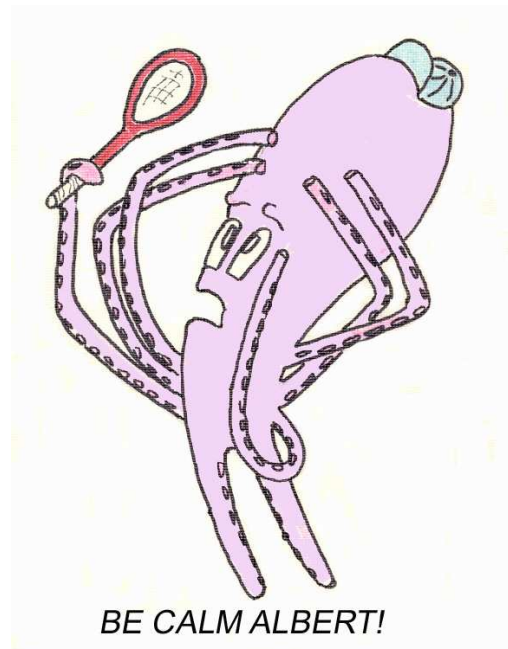
If you are having a "not-so-good day" on the court, then call it off, and come again some other day. Do something else that will be fun for your child. And call it off in a pleasant way. Avoid the temptation to blame the child.

The main point here is to be forewarned. Approach each session with a happy face and a resolve for the outing to be a positive encounter.

Keep saying to yourself.....

**.....BE CALM ALBERT!!!**

Let's get started....





## ***The Parent....Lesson 13***

### **YOUR FIRST ASSIGNMENT**

Since we have agreed that Tennis is the sport for you and your little boy or girl, let's get to it.

Your first assignment is to get the child out of the house and on to the tennis court, or to the site of your tennis session.

Many parents tell me, if only their child would ask to go hit, they would love to go and hit with him. However, in all probability your child will not ask to go and hit very often. You have to be the inspiration here. You have to make the effort.

Initial negative responses that might occur at the house when he or she has to leave a TV program, should turn into unlimited enthusiasm with you on the tennis court.

Getting your child out of the house or just getting started most of the time is the only difficulty you may have in your tennis sessions. Remember Newton's law about a body at rest, remains at rest unless acted upon by an outside force. You are the force.

You'll find that once on the court all will go well.

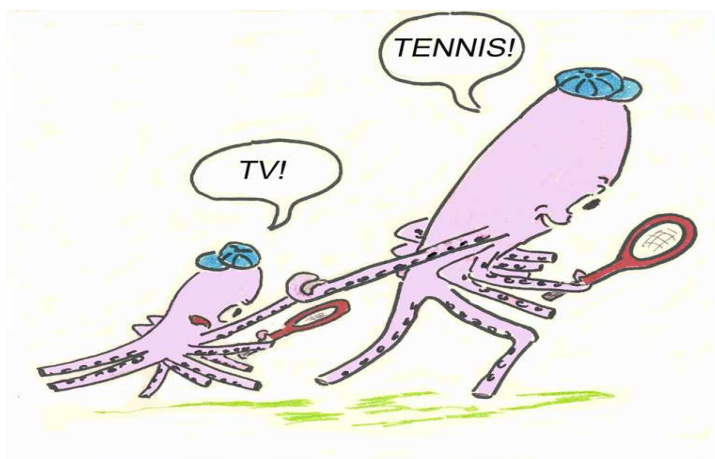
### **SO YOU HAVE TO SUPPLY THE INITIATIVE.**

This may take some imagination. For many, this may be the most difficult part of this process.

Be smart—pick times that don't conflict with the child's activities. Saturday morning cartoons can be big competition to your project.

***A regular time each week may do best.***

Just remember, rise above any initial negative response. They will love it, once the tennis balls begin to fly.



This is not to say that your child will not look forward to your weekly tennis outing some children are ***delighted to go***. But if you do get a little negativity, do not be deterred, press on to go to the court, or get him to agree to another time and reschedule.

Forewarned is forearmed. You now know that you may get some negative responses at the start...so you just plow forward and keep your spirits high.

**LIFETIME SKILL:.....**

## **TENNIS IS ITS OWN REWARD!!**

Suppose you are a Mom....

## ***The Parent....Lesson 14***

# **MOMS OFTEN DO IT BEST**

Did you get the impression this project was only for Dads?

## **Not so— Moms often do it best.**

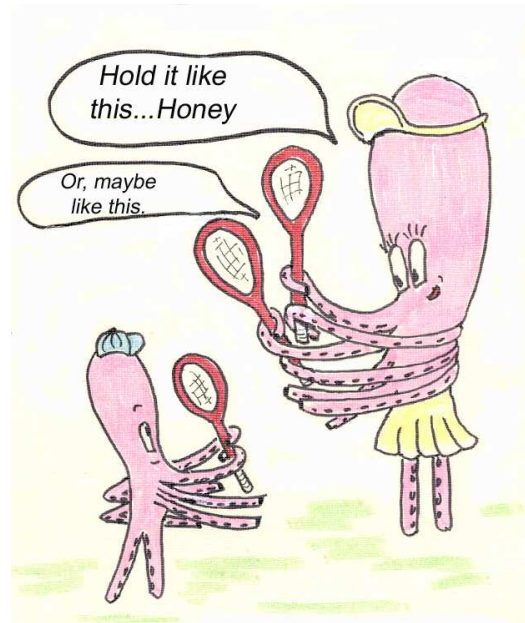
Children need encouragement and consolation on the tennis court just like they need it everywhere else.

Children need to feel un-pressured. They can need the kind of attention that Moms just seem to exude. Dads have to read books and study to learn to give this kind of attention.

There are many world-class players who were started by their mothers. In fact Jimmy Connors' mother gets the credit for starting and coaching him for years.

## **Mothers started most club players in tennis.**

So it doesn't really matter.....



## **MOM OR DAD.....OR BOTH!!!!**

Your new name is Coach...

## ***The Parent....Lesson 15***

### **YOU...THE COACH**

**You are now Coach Mom or Coach Dad.** So start calling yourself coach during your tennis sessions.

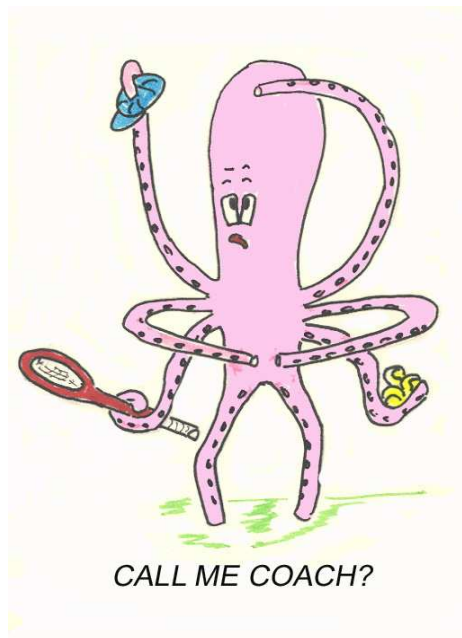
A coach is usually thought of as a person who knows all the answers, and slips the answers to his charge at just the right moment, and turns defeat into glorious victory.

There is no question about it....a good coach knows his job. However, one of the biggest jobs a good coach does is to observe and give information to the player. He is a feedback machine.

A young coach once got the job of coaching a seasoned champion-caliber basketball team. He was asked what he could possibly tell this group of champions that they didn't already know. His answer was, "These players know what to do". "My job will be to remind them."

To know the answer to a problem...you must first know the problem. Once the problem is defined, the answer is usually self-evident.

So you are the coach or observer, the feedback machine. You watch and you watch, and if you watch enough, you'll know what to do next.



### **YOUR MAIN JOB WILL BE TO OBSERVE.**

Take this example: Let's say that after you have worked with your child to the point he starts to play matches. You observe your little Slammer hitting his first serve as hard as he can every time. This results in the first serve hardly ever going into the proper court. His second serve is then pooped in and his opponent whacks it by him for a winner or else he double faults. This is not good strategy for winning a tennis match. He doesn't like it, yet he doesn't see the problem. You don't have to be a great coach to spot this problem.

Solution or hint: The answer is to take some power off of his first serve so that he gets his first serve in more often. Or maybe he just needs more practice.

So as you watch, you see the problem, and you know the answer. Now, you just have

to convince “Super Slam” to get rid of his super sonic serve and get the ball in the court. You know what I mean.

When he is on the court in a tough match, things don’t look the same as they do to you from the sidelines. You can explain what happened YET it doesn’t make sense to him or he doesn’t believe you or he doesn’t want to give up his most powerful of all tennis weapons—his first serve. Don’t argue, proof is what you need.

The answer here is simple— **chart his match**. When you start charting your child you are becoming a real coach. Things now become obvious not only to you, but to him.

For a simple chart for this problem, get a pencil and paper. Mark each serve either first or second serve. Mark if it is in or out. At the end of a match you will know how many first serves went into the proper court, how many second serves went in and how many double faults occurred. Now that there is a record of the first serves in the court it is possible to offer incentive for improvement in the future.

As the two of you go along; you could add a little more information to your chart. You could keep track of serves that go into the net and serves that go out. This could give more insight to problems with the serve.

You could go even further by adding how the opponent handled the serve.

When you add more data it takes more concentration on your part. You cannot chat while charting.

More on charting later. (See Charting in Teaching Tools)

You could also take notes or video him. Notes and videos are great as you can sit and discuss things at a later date. Viewing a video could even count as your half an hour on a rainy day. They love to watch themselves.

Your approach as a novice coach is to observe and help your child see what is happening. When he can see what is really happening he can figure it out by himself. He’ll surprise you.

**Just watch.....watch and watch.**

How should Coach Dad or Coach Mom coach?

## **LOOK TWICE...COACH ONCE**

Some important words coming up....

## ***The Parent....Lesson 16***

### **SPORTSMANSHIP**

Teaching your child sportsmanship is a must.

Tennis players closely adhere to good sportsmanship.

Tennis is unique in what it teaches about sportsmanship. In tennis, we umpire our own matches, and a player is required to bend the rules in his opponents favor. If he is in doubt about a call, he must give the point to his opponent. Tennis is one of the few sports where, if a player is not sure of a line call he can ask his opponent for assistance. He then must then accept his opponent's call.

If a ball is even "the tiniest bit on the line", he must award the point to his opponent. Not to put any other sport down, but just to show what valuable lessons are learned from tennis, especially when comparing this to some other sports in which rules are pushed to the limit. In some sports, rule-bending activities are conducted to the level of just "not getting caught."

In tennis we say, "nice shot". We applaud our opponent's good play. How unusual it would be to see a football player applauded for a touchdown by the other team. We know this type of behavior is not expected on a football field. Sportsmanship in football is expressed in different ways. However, the type of behavior expressed above is expected on a tennis court.

In tennis we apologize for a lucky break. If our shot hits the net, and by luck goes over, we say "sorry." Most tennis players actually mean it. They must then take the point, but they don't believe luck should be a part of the game.

Winning is not as important as playing. Ask any tennis player if they would rather win or play well. Hands down, most do not mind losing if they feel they played well.



So we shake hands after the match, and say "nice match," and go have a soda....

**....TOGETHER.**

In tennis we play our best friends, try to beat them, and it is OK.

Good sportsmanship is a key element in this tennis project.

Good sportsmanship is the child's pleasant attitude before, during, and after a match or a hit session. This should be the case whether winning or losing, whether hitting well or poorly.

Remember the great statement by Rudyard Kipling, which is on many tennis venues. That statement says that the player should treat the two imposters, victory and defeat the same. Great words!

Here are a few general rules for good sportsmanship:

- ☐ A good sport does not look down on lesser players, nor favor better players.
- ☐ A good sport has a pleasant statement to end a match, whether a winner or a loser. The good sport shakes the opponents hand, and simply says "Nice Match".
- ☐ A good sport keeps excuses to a minimum.
- ☐ A good sport can accept a compliment when losing, and give a simple reply, saying, "Thank You". This is no matter how he feels he played.
- ☐ A good sport does not throw antics on the tennis court. And this means no crying, shouting, or throwing the racket.
- ☐ A good sport knows tennis etiquette. He knows to be on time for matches, when is the right time to cross a tennis court, when and how to return a ball from an adjacent court, etc.
- ☐ A good sport plays fairly, makes good calls, and does not employ gamesmanship.

These general rules of sportsmanship are well-known to adults. They must be taught to juniors. We recommend that you try to teach your child good sportsmanship before the fact. In other words, anticipate the above problems and deal with them before there is an incident on the court.

Good sportsmanship should be a top priority with your child.

Now don't be too tough. A little emotion on the court is OK. And if he loses to a bigger, better player....

## **Excuses sometimes are a little OK.**

### **LIFETIME SKILL: Being a good sport.**

**How to act on a tennis court....**

## ***The Parent....Lesson 17***

# **ETIQUETTE AND RULES**

### **ETIQUETTE:**

Proper tennis etiquette around tennis players is a must. The etiquette rules are fairly simple and below are listed a few of them. Most tennis facilities will have a list of rules that apply to that site. Please obey these rules.

Most of the rules of etiquette are just common sense. Here are some of the main ones:

- ☐ First, much like when you are on a golf course, you must be quiet as a spectator and not move when players are making a shot. In tennis this means for an entire point.
- ☐ Do not move across or behind the tennis court while a point is being played.
- ☐ Be quiet if players can see or hear you while they are playing.
- ☐ Do not go on adjacent courts to retrieve a ball. Wait until the end of a point and ask for the ball. They will get it for you.
- ☐ If you have to cross a court to get to your assigned court, wait for point to end and request to cross. Request is always granted.
- ☐ Return balls on your court that come from adjacent courts. Between points get players attention and return the ball in a manner that is easy to catch.
- ☐ Be able to identify your balls. Never play with someone else's ball.
- ☐ Shake hands before and after a match, and say, "Nice match", no matter who wins.

### **RULES:**

The rules of tennis are simple. Contrary to anything you have heard, it is a fun way to play the game and not that hard to learn. Most little children know the names and concepts of Pokeymon and Harry Potter, so tennis rules will certainly not too difficult for them to learn. The rules are also a part of tennis tradition and they make the game what it is.

The concept of tennis scoring is simple— you must hit the ball into the other court, and your opponent must return it into your court before it bounces twice in his court. If your opponent returns the ball, it is now your turn, You must now return the ball to the opponent's court before it bounces twice. The first to not perform this simple task loses the point. Points add up to games. Games add up to sets, and sets add up to winning the match.



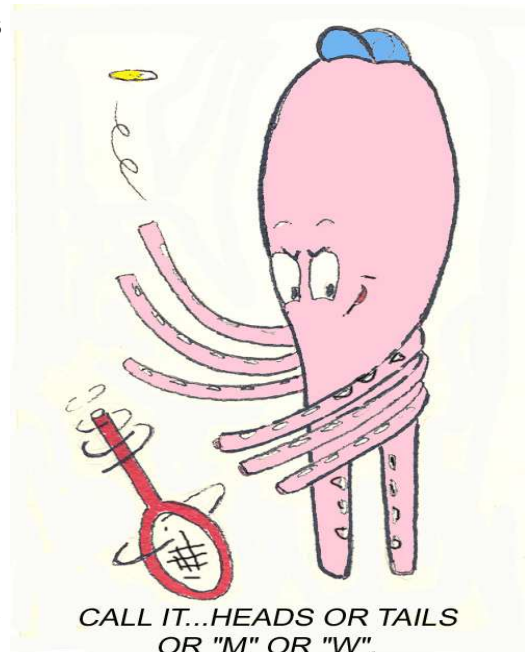
The points have names. These names do not make much sense, much like Pokeymon names. The points have the following names:

- ☐ Love..... Equals zero
- ☐ 15..... Equals one point
- ☐ 30..... Equals two points
- ☐ 40..... Equals three points
- ☐ Deuce..... Means that the score is tied at three points or more apiece.
  
- ☐ Ad..... The player who wins the deuce point now has the Advantage and needs one point to win the game.
- ☐ Game..... Equals one game.
- ☐ Set..... Equals winning six games with two games more that opponent.
- ☐ Match..... Equals winning two of three or three of five sets.

A complete set of rules can be obtained from the web site of the United States Tennis Association Book Store. The web site address is: [www.usta.com](http://www.usta.com). The rules are also contained in a small book called "A Friend at Court". This books sells for around five dollars from the USTA Book Store.

This book also contains "The Code". "The Code" is an explanation of the unwritten rules of tennis. It explains the true spirit of the game, and is a must read.

So get your copy of "A Friend at Court", read it and....



## **LIFETIME SKILL:**

**Playing by the rules and having respect for others.**

**Pass this good stuff on to your child....**

Next...Something very hard to do.....

## ***The Parent....Lesson 18***

### **THE LISTENING RULE**

The listening rule is one of the hardest for the parent to learn. The rule goes like this:

#### ***IF NO ONE IS LISTENING...STOP TALKING***

Even after you learn this rule, it is still hard to put to use.

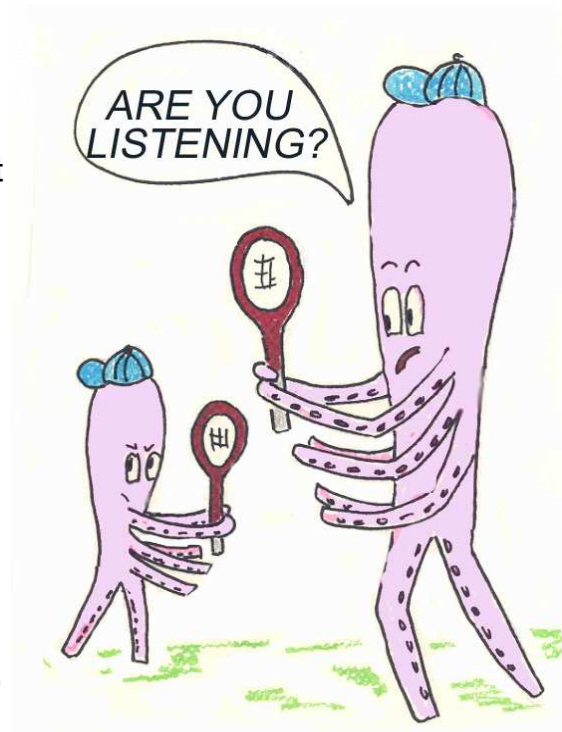
The principle is simple. If you are talking to your child and the child is not listening, then you are wasting your breath. You are talking to yourself.

It could be worse than that; you might even be creating a barrier to future communication.

Whenever you see your child obviously inattentive or, worse yet, deliberately not listening to what you are saying, it is time for you to stop talking or to change your tune. Save your thoughts for later. It is not that important right now. It is not like the lesson about crossing the street, which needs to be dealt with immediately.

This is where you can use your “Adult Rule” advantage. As irritating as it might be, stay in your adult role. You know how to sweeten up your child and make his little face smile again.

Don't let him learn how to shut you out— Change the subject, change the game, change the venue, or just call it all off. We want to keep those lines of communication open.



Remember the old saying which goes something like this: we are given two ears and one mouth, so we are supposed to listen twice as much as we talk.

### **KEEP ON LISTENING!!**

**Everyone argues with me about the next one....trust me....**

## ***The Parent....Lesson 19***

### **DON'T BEAT'M**

Nothing I can say to a parent brings a more surprised or skeptical response than.....

### ***Don't Beat Your Child.***

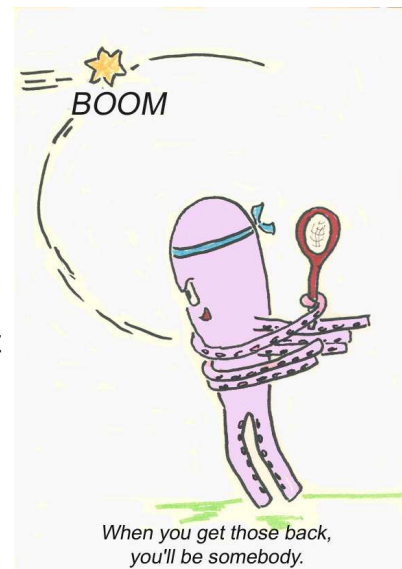
I get responses like:

- ☐ I don't believe in that.
- ☐ Surely the child will know he is being allowed to win.
- ☐ I think you should beat your child until you can't, then he will be somebody.

My advice is still the same. Please do not beat your child at tennis or any game.

Here is a conversation have had many times. The parent asks me, "Don't you think children should learn to lose?"

My reply is always the same, "Of course I think children should learn to lose, and to be a good sport; however you don't have to hit them with an ax to make this point." There is a whole life that's full of losses, disappointments and heartaches. They flunk classes, have fights, and there are a zillion players ready and eager to beat your child at anything. So, he will get an education in losing.



### **Winning against your child is not why you are doing this.**

Your child needs to learn to fail and to lose, but he needs to learn to succeed even more. Your job is to build him up and let him succeed.

They say that in teaching children to swim, if you throw a hundred children in the water, that some will swim, but not a good percentage. Beat the same hundred kids at tennis every time they play and about the same percentage will come back for more.

In both examples the majority of kids would fail or quit. These are bad odds for you and your child. We want one hundred per cent good results.

Some kids take to competition like ducks to water, but some don't.

A lot depends on the size of the task. If the father or mother plays tennis, the task for the child to win may be too big.

Just look at your child, is he smiling and enjoying the competition, if not.....

### ***Change the Game.***

This is the reason a lot of children would rather play Mom. Mom is a little easier to beat, most of the time. Even if Mom is too good, it is easier for her to let her child win.

Your child will probably not even suspect that you are letting up on him. Even if he suspects, he won't mind. It is possible that your child expects or wants you to let him win.

Certainly, if you are a player, let your child win if he hits a good shot. Sure you could run it down and return it, but don't do it. Encourage him by letting him win with a good shot.

If you are completely uncomfortable with all of this, then develop a handicap system to make it fair. Give him some points every game, and as he gets better, reduce the number of points. However, you can still lose some points on purpose. Keep the competition between you and your child low key. Someday you can have some real matches together when the egos are gone and skills are equal. If he gets better than you, he might let you win, however, he probably won't. Don't expect any reciprocity. He will probably love beating you. And you should be proud to have a son or daughter that, you coached, and is now better than you. Just mean you were a good coach.

Try to gauge your child's tolerance for defeat. If he loses too much he could quit tennis or not even try. If there is any doubt in your mind.....

## **DON'T BEAT YOUR KID.**

**It is possible to be a bad tennis parent.....**

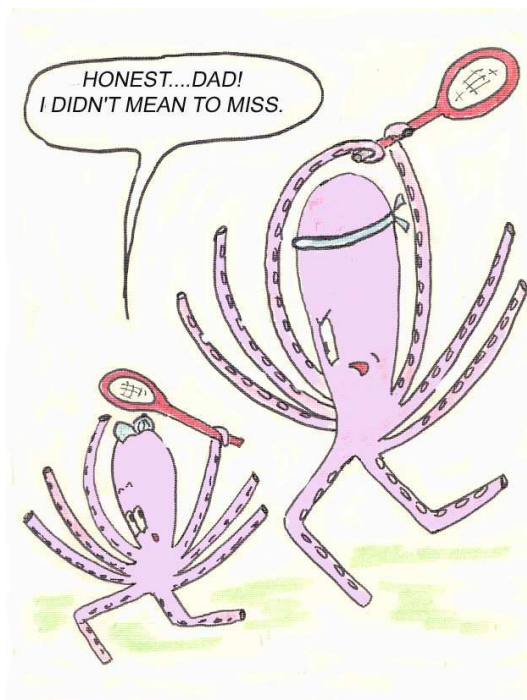
## ***The Parent....Lesson 20***

### **THE BAD TENNIS PARENT**

The ***Bad Tennis Parent*** gives us all a bad name.

Some bad qualities in the ***Bad Tennis Parent***:

- Sets expectations that are too high.
- Puts winning ahead of playing.
- Ignores cheating.
- Ignores court tantrums.
- Ignores swearing or abusive language
- Ignores obscene jesters.
- Ignores racket throwing.
- Ignores their child stalling or using gamesmanship.
- Has a tantrum when the child has a tantrum.
- Allows the child no self-expression on the court.
- Gets mad at child for losing.
- Fights with tournament directors over draws, seeding, etc.
- Makes like a big deal around other parents.
- Looks down on parents of juniors who are not as good as their child.
- Makes remarks about the debt the child owes for all the help the Parent has given.
- Talks bad about the Pro, other parents and other children.



Want to know the rules for being a good tennis parent? Just do the opposite of the list above.

You know what we are talking about. You know about those notorious little league parents.

### **YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO....**

Now, my story....

## ***The Parent....Lesson 21***

### **HERE'S MY STORY**

I fell in love with tennis when I was seventeen. Back then there was no High School tennis in my area, so I could only play at the local public courts. I was not good enough to play when I first went to the University of Florida. However, after two years in college and a two-year stint in the army, I made the U of F tennis team for my junior and senior years.

Playing college tennis was such an extraordinary experience for me that I became dedicated to trying to get every junior that I met to have the same experience. Playing tennis opened doors all over the campus for me, got me some awards, and helped pay some of the college costs. I consider my experience on the tennis team as a very significant factor in my life. So significant that I became a teaching pro and have been one for some forty years.

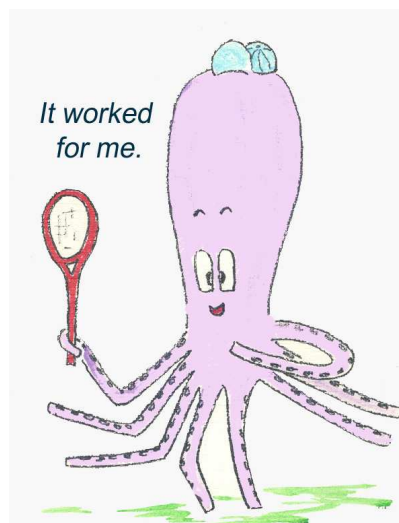
So, armed with two hard-nosed positions, I attacked the task of teaching my own children the love of tennis. Position One was that at the time I was young and not sure I would have the necessary funds to pay for college. So I committed the necessary time and effort to teach my children tennis, and to teach them to the level that they would be offered a college scholarship. Position Two was that I considered a person paying at least some of their own college expenses would be very developmental in being a successful adult. A scholarship to college would count for this one. So teaching my children tennis became a major drive in my life. What happened?

Much success. All four of my children love tennis. Three were offered college scholarships. Two tried the tour for a while. One was All American for two years at William and Mary. The forth-played High School tennis, and I had to pay some college costs.

As adults they play tennis. From time to time we have had family tennis outings. And now those with children are teaching their children tennis.

I did this project in one-half hour per week, per child.

And, I still think it is worthwhile to get a child into tennis.



**THAT'S MY STORY...I'M HAPPY WITH IT.**

# THE CHILD

## ***The Child...Lesson 22***

# **WHEN SHOULD YOU START YOUR CHILD?**

This is the most often asked question of a Tennis Professional.

“How old should my child be to start tennis?”

I say, the younger the better. The younger you start to work with your child, the more eager he will be, the more control you will have, and the easier the job in the long run.

However, the younger child does require more patience from the parent. The child's concentration will be very short at a tender age. The younger the child, the shorter the sessions will be, and you must be willing to call off a session in as little as five minutes.



**I started my children at about age four. I would pitch balls to them in the driveway. By age six they could hit fifty in a row over the net.**

**By age twelve their strokes were pretty well developed, and they were playing in some tournaments.**

That was seven or eight years of just clicking along pitching the tennis ball and being a dutiful parent.

A general approach for starting ages might be as follows:

Ages three to six:

- ❖ A great time to start. No pressure. You're the coach.
- ❖ Just pitch balls and encourage. This can be done anywhere.
- ❖ There are an array of teaching devices available on the market (see Teaching Tools, Lesson 12, Equipment).
- ❖ You don't have to know much about tennis to do this with your child.
- ❖ The important thing here is that the child hits a ball and has fun. Do what- ever it takes to make this happen, even if you have to use a tee or hit balloons.



- ❖ One of the most important things to work on is hand-eye coordination. Rolling a ball or playing catch can improve hand-eye coordination in the very young.

Ages six to twelve...a girl:

- ❖ Perfect time for a girl. Actually you should strive hard to get your little girl involved during this time frame. If you wait until after twelve to start tennis, many other sports and activities may have her attention.
- ❖ I recommend ten private lessons a year from a good pro for stroke production. And this is addition to your efforts. Break the ten lessons into groups of four or five lessons, skipping a few months in between. Give more lessons if you can afford it. If she doesn't have a good time with her tennis teacher, find one that she enjoys.
- ❖ Group lessons don't count toward the ten lessons a year or toward your one half hour a week. It's easy to get your child to go to a group lesson with her friends; the challenge here is to keep her in tennis if her friends drop out. It is easier to learn strokes in private, one on one lessons.
- ❖ In the meantime, you are pitching balls on the court with your daughter half hour a week.
- ❖ **Girls love to hit with their dad.**

Ages six to twelve...a boy:

- ❖ This child is ready. He will astound you with how fast he can learn. These guys are fun, even though they may be a little hard-headed.
- ❖ He loves competition. You may even get your best results by challenging him and saying things like, *"I bet you can't do this"*.
- ❖ Again, the recommendation is ten private lessons a year from a certified professional. Space them out over the year in groups of three, four, or five lessons.
- ❖ He can lose interest in a heartbeat. That is where you come in. When things like this happen, take a break and then start the program again.
- ❖ With this young man, a different kind of patience is required. Remember you are the adult.

Ages thirteen to eighteen...a girl:

- ❖ I told you to start earlier. Their available time for tennis makes it harder as they get into their teens, but don't let that stop you.
- ❖ They will love to hit the ball, and they want to have nice, beautiful strokes. That makes it easier to get them to learn strokes. The Pro can help a lot here.
- ❖ It's just hard to get them serious about their game. That's OK. Just keep going.

- ❖ This age group may need more lessons, unless you can teach strokes.
- ❖ This is the group that will hit with you for the rest of your life. A pretty nice reward for your effort.
- ❖ Remember, lessons do not take the place of your involvement, unless you sit and watch the lesson. This does not mean just being there, you have to be watching with interest.
- ❖ Nice equipment and clothing are important for a girl at this age.

Ages thirteen to eighteen...a boy:

- ❖ This guy can really learn to play tennis in a short time.
- ❖ Private lessons on strokes will pay off big time.
- ❖ To help your son, you should make yourself into a ball machine. Just pitch balls and get out of the way...that means protecting yourself from getting hit.
- ❖ Do not do much coaching, as he probably won't listen anyway.
- ❖ Encouraging and watching is very important in this age group. Seeing good player play is very beneficial.

So you see, there are no rules. Start as soon as you can and keep at it.

In the words of the famous tennis great Bill Tilden, "It takes five years to make a tennis player and ten years to make a champion." Your job is the first five years.

## **The Lifetime Skill:**

### **BEING A GOOD TENNIS PLAYER.**

Next...Some good news for some parents....

## *The Child....Lesson 23*

# TENNIS IS GREAT FOR THE NON-ATHLETIC CHILD

You know the child we mean—the klutzy child, the child who doesn't want to do sports, the child picked last in gym class, or the child who is at the computer 24/7.

The term non-athletic can apply to any child who has any degree of difficulty in sports. Children who wear glasses, are overweight, a little clumsy, shy, or just plain slow of foot are examples of being either a little or a lot un-athletic.

Children in wheelchairs and deaf children are included in this group.

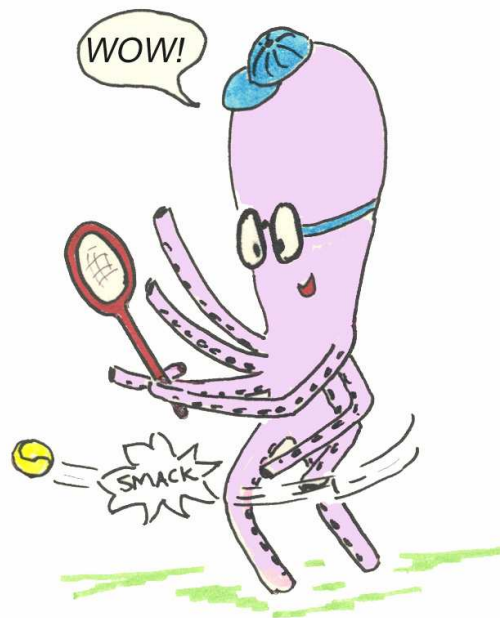
Tennis is a godsend for all of these children. Tennis offers these children a chance to participate in the sports world and be an athlete.

Tennis works well for all kids, including kids who have any physical challenge. This is because tennis is ninety percent a learned skill. Learning the skills can cut the gap with the kids with a lot of athletic ability.

Sure, you have to have athletic ability to reach the top of the game, but for the rest of us who play the game for recreation and physical fitness, tennis **skills** reign supreme.

Any child can learn to play tennis. It is just a matter of learning the stroking skills. This skill can be done with a little coaching and by just hitting a lot of balls.

For many years the powers, that be in the tennis world have complained that tennis does not attract the natural athletes to the game. One of the answers is that learning the skills of tennis may have too long a learning curve for the "real athlete". The athletically-gifted would rather sprint down a football field or track at high speed, and not be bothered by having to learn how. It is much easier for the child with a real athletic vent to achieve in other sports. Coaches seek out these natural athletes. This means that most kids are left out. Tennis comes to the rescue. Tennis non-athletes with good stroking skills have been beating the natural athletes at the game of tennis for years.



## **Tennis is a game of skill.**

There are different levels of the game of tennis that will accommodate any child's physical and skill level.

There are wonderful and exciting stories of children playing wheelchair tennis and deaf children playing tennis. There are World and National Championships for wheelchair and deaf athletes

What an opportunity for any child with a physical problem to become an athlete and enjoy the sports world.

If you are seeing your child *shy away from sports*....here is your opportunity to offer your child a bigger, brighter, healthier, and more fulfilling future.

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## **A DISADVANTAGE MAY BE AN ADVANTAGE IN TENNIS!**

**Next...thank heaven for little girls...**

## ***The Child....Lesson 24***

### **Your Little Girl**

Here are three things about girls.

First...Girls need physical and competitive sports just like boys.

Second...Girls do not have as many opportunities to play sports as boys. How many times have I heard adult women tell me, "I wish I had started tennis when I was a child", or, "I wish I had stuck with my tennis".

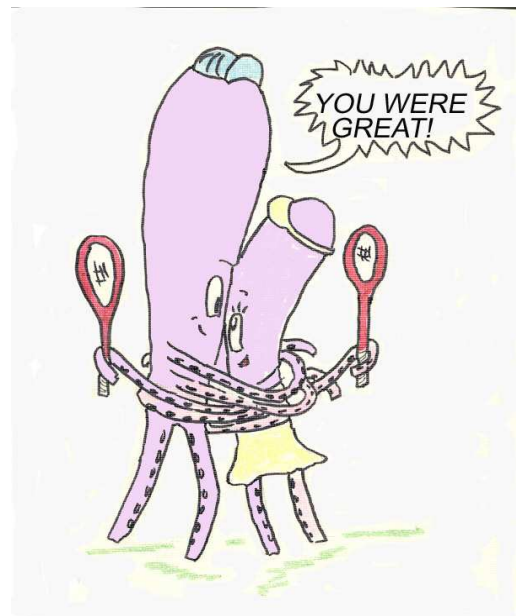
Third...Girls like to play tennis.

Poor little girls. Not many sports for the little girl.

The little girl subject is brought up here because if you have little girls they are, more than likely, going to depend on you to add sports to their life.

There has been a lot of progress over the past few years to include girls in athletic programs. However, most of this effort has been in team sports. And, the participation is far from the level of activities for boys.

For many years, there have been more college scholarships available in tennis for girls—than girls who want them.



Just to be clear, we are not putting down ballet, gymnastics, swimming and all those other sports that girls participate. We think these activities are great. The problem here is that most of these activities end by middle or high school and are certainly not pursued when one becomes an adult. Tennis needs to be added to the mix.

Tennis is a lifetime sport.

### **GIRLS WANT TO PLAY, TOO!**

**So you have several children....**

## ***The Child....Lesson 25***

### **MULTIPLE CHILDREN**

Suppose you have more than one child and you want to teach all of them tennis. This is great and will make for a great tennis family. The family can go to tennis matches, go on tennis vacations and even play tournaments together.

There is a world of opportunity for the tennis family to play tennis together. There are many tournaments for all the possible combinations of family members, and there are even National Championships in most of the divisions.

The United States Tennis Association (USTA) holds tournaments all over the country for: Mother/Daughter, Mother/Son, Senior Mother/Daughter, and Senior Mother/Son, Father/Daughter, Father/Son, Senior Father/Daughter, Senior Father/Son, Brother/Sister, Brother/Brother, Sister/Sister, Husband/Wife divisions for 35, 45, and 55 and over age groups. In the Senior Divisions the parent must be over 60 years old. There are now Parent/Child Divisions for parents that are over 70 years old. And, there are opportunities for Grandparents to play. So there are many opportunities for family tournament play if you wish. The opportunities are endless.

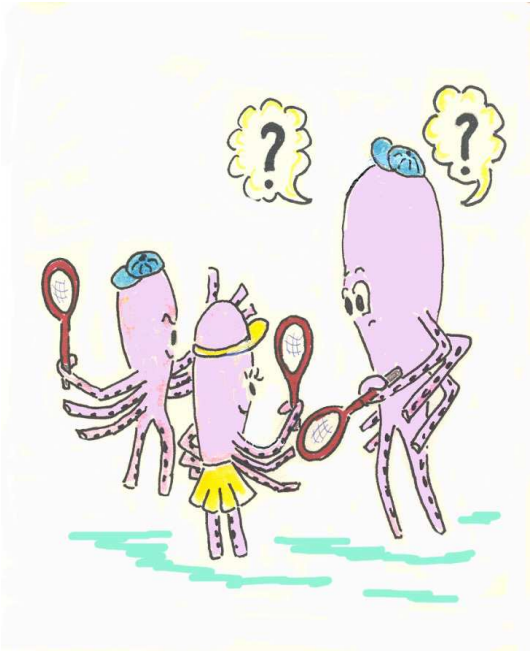
Many clubs and municipalities also offer programs and tournaments in many of the above events.

Now that you have decided to teach all of them tennis, here are some hints on how to handle the group.

The recommendations are still the same. One half an hour per week is needed for each child. So, this will increase the amount of your time that you should allocate each week for this project. One half an hour a week for each child should be the goal.

### **Each child needs your personal attention.**

If you have two, three, or four children to work with, it is a good idea to get the whole family involved. This includes both parents and all the children. This is a family outing and should be considered as....



..... ***quality family time with your children.***

Naturally the ideal way to work with several children is to spend some time with each child—one at a time—while the others work together on the court, or individually on a wall or a ball machine. This works well for older children, as they can hit together or alone. With younger children, I recommend the other parent help out while you work with the each child.

Take the example of the Williams sisters, Venus and Serena. Their father taught them at the same time, and they became great hitting partners for each other as they moved up into Professional Tennis. His success in this process is outstanding. He helped his two daughters achieve greatness on the tennis court and created a tennis family unit. It is obvious that the Williams sisters are there for each other.

In your tennis project—there is always the chance you will create a star. I am not referring to a World Champion star—just that one of your children may be the tennis star of the family. This child really takes to tennis and has some real talent for the game and this child progresses faster than the others. It will be easy for you to become enthralled with this particular child. And it is easy to start to devote extra time to her.

At this point the other child or children may start to lose interest as they see the star perform. This may seem to make it easier for you, as the others show less interest, you will have more time to devote to the star.

Should this happen in your family, I urge you to continue your program with the non-star children. Go back and read some of the lessons on keeping up the interest. A good time to work with the other children would be while the star is taking a lesson with the Tennis Pro. You can even let the other children watch the star's lesson. Children sometimes learn best by just watching. They listen better sometimes when they are not being directly spoken to as in their own personal lessons.

You have to keep working with these children and explaining how the family sticks together and each pulls for the others. You do this a lot. Try to take everyone to tournaments together. Enter each of the children in the tournament if possible.

Of course It would be better if the other members of the family fell in love with the progress the one child has made and just love his or her success on the court. This is ideal. It is important that you strive to make this happen.

A good story along this line is of Andy Roddick, 2003 World's number one player. He followed his older brother John around and enjoyed being with his brother and enjoyed his brother's tennis success. The family worked hard for John to become a great player, and in the process, Andy blossomed. At this writing John is Andy's tennis coach on tour.

***Reminder:***

Remember, you are not supposed to defeat any of your children on the court. And be very careful in letting them defeat each other. You be the judge. See how they react to each an other. If you decide that they can play each another, then you will have to do the lectures on sportsmanship and effort on the court. You can tell them about the analogy of the two people in the tug of war, and how they both get stronger in the contest (from Teaching Tools, Lesson 15).

Another approach would let them be hitting partners like the Williams sisters were to each other. In this approach, they are partners in the process of getting their games better. If you do it right, either approach will work. I like this approach best.

**The Lifetime Skill: Tennis is a tool to “Bond the family together.”!**

**Just throwing that first ball to your child can tell you something about your child...**



## *The Child....Lesson 26*

### THREE KINDS OF CHILDREN

When you pitch a ball to a child for the first time, the odds are that he or she will miss the ball.

After the miss, the child will probably react one of the three following ways:

- ◆ One, embarrassment or fear.
- ◆ Two, he or she giggles.
- ◆ or Three, “pitch me another one.”

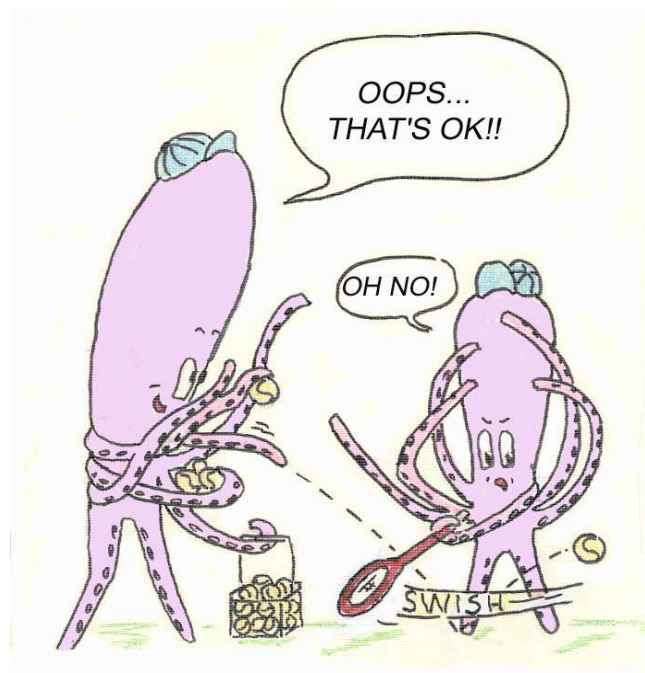
Without psychoanalyzing the child, this starts to tell you something about your child, and how to handle your little precious one. We would all prefer that our child react as the example in number three where she says... “Throw me another one” or “Let’s do that again”.

Number three has a lot confidence. She cannot believe she missed the ball. Not too many kids react this way. You won’t have to fear challenging her; she’ll eat the challenge up. Controlling her competitiveness may be a future problem. Just remember the tennis court is one of the best places to learn to control emotions. Some great person said long ago...**“that the sports field is where the skills of life are honed”**.

Child number one might be a little self-conscious. Go slow; find a place where the two of you can be alone to hit the ball. When she gets her tennis wings, tennis will be a great joy to her. Make double sure she makes racket/ball contact in your sessions.

Now child number two is going to be fun to work with. This is not a bad attitude at all. She will get serious in her time, especially if she wants to play tournaments or on the school team. You will have fun together.

Don’t worry about any of these reactions. The children all grow up. These attitudes are only mentioned so that you can react properly. You just say “nice shot” when they hit the ball and “oops” when they miss.



**The Lifetime Skill: An error in life or a missed tennis ball is just an “oops”.**

**Do you have a natural athlete, and does it matter?**

## ***The Child....Lesson 27***

# **THE NATURAL ATHLETE**

What is a *natural athlete*?

Who knows?

Every sport has a set of indices that mark that sport's *natural athlete*.

The usual prized physical skills are speed of foot, jumping ability, strength, and hand/eye coordination.

Your child may or may not measure up.

It has been my experience that many of the natural skills that seem so important for athletic success are marginally important.

Take this example: Send a group of second graders running across a field. Watch the children run across the field, and take note of their heads. Some of the children's heads bob up and down as they run, while the heads of others seem to stay level as they run.

Send these same children out for a pass in football or to chase down a fly-ball in baseball, and who do you think is going to catch the ball? The children who keep their heads still as they run....of course. The children who catch the ball are deemed naturals, and the ones who can't catch the ball are deemed something else and are rejected.

Coaches love to watch these children and pick out who they decide are the talented ones and reject the rest.

Now let's teach the head bobbles to hold their head's still as they run and you might see some different results.

The point here is that many of the skills that seem to point to the natural athlete could be learned. However, in most sports there is no time to learn them. The child is rejected almost from the start. It is only the driven child who can overcome this initial problem and stay in the sport.

Here is a proven fact: all physical skills can be improved. Of course each child has limitations and that some will always be faster, quicker or stronger. Still, all can participate and improve.

## **The Lifetime Skill: All physical skills can be improved.**

Tennis is so forgiving in this respect.

Tennis has such a long learning curve that there is time to learn or improve many of the physical attributes that seem to exist in the “*natural athlete*”.

For many years I have watched, tennis coaches try to pick the natural tennis player, only to miss the mark by a mile. There are too many factors that make up a good tennis player.

So, you as a tennis parent cannot be judgmental about the tennis talents of your child and don't let coaches or pros make judgments either. Just keep up the program and see what happens.

I have heard many parents proclaim that the first child, or whatever child has all the athletic talent and will be the tennis player. Or, as I have heard many times from a parent with a good playing first child tell me, “Jackie is good, but wait until you see little Jimmy, he is going to be much better, and he will be the Star.” They are wrong, well over half the time. This type of comparison is not good, and who knows?

So who is the natural athlete?....In tennis, who knows?

## **The Lifetime Skill: For everyone there is a place to be a star.**

**Next, an example of a tennis life....**

## ***The Child....Lesson 28***

### **A SAMPLE TENNIS LIFE CHART**

This could be your little girl's tennis life. All recorded in her Tennis Journal. This would be very similar were your child a boy.

Age 2-4:

Your daughter starts going to the courts with you during your practice times:

- ❖ She helps you pick up balls.
- ❖ She carries your racket.
- ❖ You pitch a few to her.
- ❖ You take her for a treat.
- ❖ She rolls balls on the floor with you at home.
- ❖ You play catch with her.
- ❖ This happens at least once a month.

Age 4-6:

You start an ongoing tennis program with her:

- ❖ This happens on a tennis court, the driveway, a wall, or whatever.
- ❖ Simple short sessions where you pitch balls to her are perfect for her to hit..
- ❖ She gets a treat for reaching a reachable goal.
- ❖ This happens at least once every two weeks, unless she wants to hit more.
- ❖ This should be fun for her—if not, you need to re-think what “you” are doing, and do a different approach.

Age 6-10:

Start your five-year program together and set these goals. And, this should happen on a continuous bases for the next five years:

- ❖ She hits with mom or dad one half-hour a week.
- ❖ She hits one hundred in a row on the wall.
- ❖ She plays in the club junior events.
- ❖ She starts to get ten lessons a year from a Certified Tennis Pro .

Age 8 or 11:

Now she starts to become competitive:

- ❖ She enters City junior novice tournament. Loses 6-0, 6-0 to a top seed (best player in the tournament).
- ❖ She continues to take ten lessons a year
- ❖ She hits one hundred forehands in a row, over the net with parent or pro.
- ❖ She beats mom for the first time.
- ❖ She wins a first round match in a sanctioned tournament.

#### Age 12:

- ❖ She gets to the semi-finals of a sanctioned tournament.
- ❖ She receives a ranking in the state girls 12 and under division.
- ❖ You start Family Life Trophy event. (You create an annual cup to be won by family member each year.) The family member who wins gets to keep trophy in room for the year. She beats mom, but loses to dad.
- ❖ She now has sufficient tennis skills to play tennis for the rest of her life.
- ❖ She continues taking ten lessons a year and hitting one half hour with a parent. If you are not good enough to hit with her, then arrange a hit session with a comparable junior, as you sit and watch. (Maybe she takes more than ten lessons a year, depending, of course, on the family budget).

#### Age 13:

- ❖ Dad wins annual cup again.
- ❖ She plays in the forth position on her Middle School team.
- ❖ She Continues to hit with a parent on an almost weekly basis. She is now improving your game. You the parent are hooked on the game.
- ❖ She is still taking lessons from a pro.

#### Age 14

- ❖ Dad wins annual cup 7-5, 6-4.
- ❖ She and mom win a mother daughter/ tournament.
- ❖ She Plays number three on Middle School team.
- ❖ She chooses to play tournaments in summer.

#### Age 15

- ❖ She goes to first tournament out of town.
- ❖ She wins Family Cup. Beats dad 4-6, 6-4, 6-0.
- ❖ She is ranked in top twenty in state.

#### Age 16

- ❖ She makes High School team, plays number three.
- ❖ Wins Family Cup fairly easily.

- ❖ Plays less tournaments. Does not get ranked.

#### Age 17

- ❖ Plays number two on High School team.
- ❖ Works in summer at a local tennis club, teaches the tots.
- ❖ Captain of High School team. Team is second in state.
- ❖ Achieves top ten state ranking in the 18 and under division.

#### Age 18

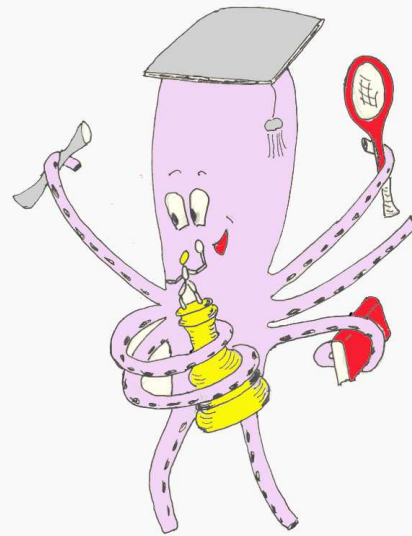
- ❖ Goes to a small college
- ❖ Receives partial athletic scholarship.
- ❖ Plays number three on school team.

#### Age 19-20:

- ❖ Continues to play on college team.
- ❖ Still getting athletic assistance scholarship from tennis.
- ❖ Teaches tennis in summer.

#### Age 21:

- ❖ Captain of College team.
- ❖ Elected one of the Outstanding Student/Athletes on campus.
- ❖ Finally tells you she appreciated how much tennis has meant to her.



THANKS, MOM! DAD!

#### Age 22-30

- ❖ Plays tennis at local club.
- ❖ Enjoys mixed doubles.
- ❖ Plays in City Championships.
- ❖ Has a child, a boy, you give this book to her.

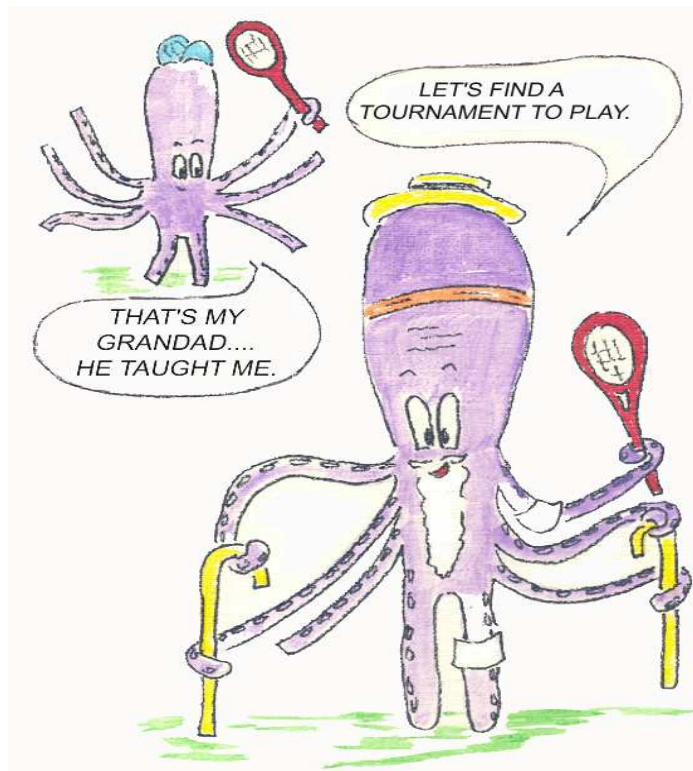
#### Age 30-50:

- ❖ Wins first Veteran tournament, 35 and over.
- ❖ Wins club doubles tournament.
- ❖ Wins Mother/Son tournament.
- ❖ Wins Office Doubles Tournament with boss.
- ❖ Loses Family Cup to dad.

- ❖ Loses Family Cup to son.

Age 50-Plus:

- ❖ Plays Senior League with friends.
- ❖ Plays Senior Mother/Son Tournaments.
- ❖ Loses Family Cup to grandson.



## The Lifetime Skill: Tennis is the Sport of a Lifetime

**Demons on a tennis court, and how to control them....**



## *The Child....Lesson 29*

### **THE THREE DEMONS... FEAR, ANGER, AND DISCOURAGEMENT**

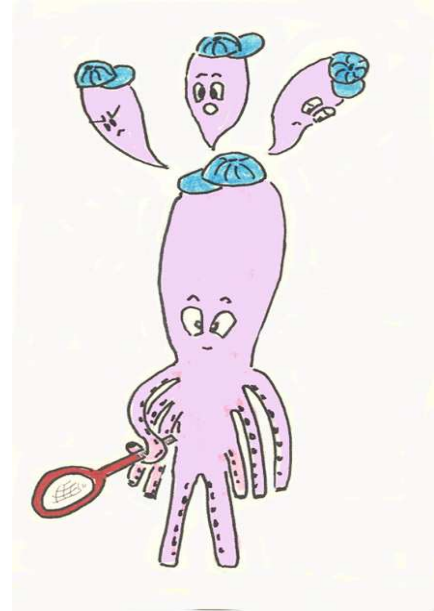
Any of the above three demons... fear, anger, and discouragement can make your tennis teaching job a little more difficult.

The three demons are only mentioned because they can have an effect on the parent. It is easy to get discouraged when you see one of the demons working on your child.

Also, should your child aspire to compete at the tournament level these demons can rear their ugly head. This can be devastating to the fun and excitement you both could experience by your child reaching higher levels in the sport.

**Fear:** Can you imagine fear on a tennis court?

It's there.....afraid to miss  
afraid to lose  
afraid to win  
afraid to look bad  
afraid you, the "**PARENT**" might disapprove.  
afraid of getting a bad ranking.  
afraid of not making the team.



If you sense that your little girl is scared out there—talk to her—you know what to say. It's just a game, all you can do is lose, etc. Help your child set some smaller goals.

### **Lifetime Skill: Learning to know when fear is appropriate.**

**Anger:** I know you have seen this one. It can drive you crazy. ....Easy Mom..... Think what to do. This demon can show up anywhere, at home, at school, and anywhere. What better place to work on this demon than on the tennis court. An excellent choice for you your little girl and you is in some fun doubles. Remember, as we have stressed before, you're the adult.

## **Lifetime Skill: Controlling anger.**

**Discouragement:** This one tugs at your heart.

Discouragement and quitting go hand in hand. It is not very pretty to see your child quit, or get down on herself. Positive words are in order here, and perhaps a change in approach. Goals that are not based on winning a tennis match could be set. Maybe an incentive program for a comeback in a match or for getting more games in the second set than the first...maybe for the total number of balls in play. Any different, more reachable goal would be a good choice.

### **Be sure you don't get discouraged at her discouragement.**

Everyone agrees that being positive is the best approach to almost everything. Being positive is easy when things are going well. ***However, being positive can only be helpful if you can be positive when things are bad.*** This is good advice for you the parent, as well as for your child.

## **Lifetime Skill: Staying upbeat when losing.**

Maybe we all need to work on this concept a little.

You are the roll model for your daughter, here. You must hide the three demons if you have any of them inside of you. She should see a confident, proud, loving and secure Mom or Dad.

Here is a great statement from years ago:

***“You can and must control your emotions”.***

Say this a lot and get these three demons off the tennis court and there will be nothing but joy and fun left.

## **The Lifetime Skill: Learning to control your emotions.**

**Next... There are lessons in losing.....**

## ***The Child....Lesson 30***

### **LESSONS IN LOSING**

Or, how to handle disappointments.

**No parent likes to see his or her child lose or fail at anything.**

We all love stories like the one about the bowler who set the pins in the alley where his child's ball would usually go. This was so that the child would always hit the pins. He would set the pins where-ever he thought his child's ball would go. He wanted nothing but positive results for the young child. He wanted his child to hit pins with every ball he bowled.

This was before the bowling alleys added bumpers on the alleys so that the ball can't go into the gutter. Now a child always has to hit some pins. If you bowl I am sure you can see how much the children enjoy bowling now that they can hit some pins.

We strongly advise this type of approach to tennis. Starting out you want your child to hit the ball every time, even if you have to use a balloon or a nerf ball instead of a tennis ball. It's your job to see that your child has success on the tennis court.

Still, there are lessons in losing. There are lessons in being cheated. There are lessons in being intimidated.

A tennis court may be one of the better places to learn some of the disappointments of the world.

These events are sure to happen. Children, however, are very resilient. They will survive, they learn, and they grow from these events. It may be quite surprising how quickly your child is on to a new adventure, totally forgetting the events that you were sure were traumatic. It might be that we parents react more to these things than the children.

I can remember well, when, as a child, when I would come home from one of these disasters and explained to my parents how we were cheated, how the other parent umpired the game, and how the other team was bigger and older. It was a good explanation for what had happened, my parents gave me a few appropriate words, and I went on my way. I suppose if my parents had been watching all of this, they would have reacted differently.

It is your job to help your child get over a mini disaster and learn from it. You will use the wisdom of the ages to explain this to him.

**The Lifetime Skill: We learn from losing.**

**A thing to understand.....**

## ***The Child....Lesson 31***

### **A TENNIS MATCH CAN BE LONELY**

This lesson is for when your child is playing a competitive match. When he is on the court in a tournament or a team match and losing...it can be very lonely. He's out there, he's down, he's losing, and he doesn't know what to do.

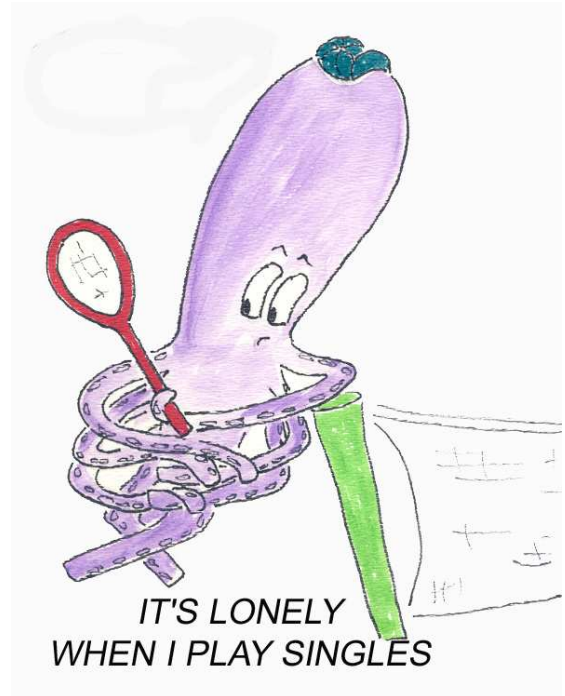
This is the kind of a match that can take three days to get over. It shouldn't, but sometimes it does. You need to be sympathetic and prepared.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Start now preparing your child for this defeat, and without being negative. It really shouldn't be the end of the world to lose a tennis match. So neither your son nor you should act that way. Losing to a better player is developmental. Keep stressing this.

Remember the famous Kipling statement I talked about before. It's about treating the two imposters, Victory and Defeat the same. Maybe this is a little easier said than done. It takes a little practice to do this. So start now.

And remember another saying out there..."Defeat is never fatal, victory is never final. The only thing that matters is to compete."

As you watch your child on the court you can tell he is losing by the look on his face. That look of defeat is a bad look. You must make sure you don't have that same look on your face.



**The Lifetime Skill: A positive attitude only does you good if you can stay positive when things are bad.**

That look on your face may indicate that you have given up also. There is no question that crowds can sway an athletic event. You may be a crowd of one. Make sure you are a positive crowd.

Watch the coaches on National TV—you don't see them moaning or flinching every time their charge makes an error.

Make sure your face gives a calm, confident look.

I tell parents all the time, “You can’t live every point your child plays.”

Just be there for them. Even the Pros playing for high stakes need someone in the stands pulling for them.

To prepare your child for the bad match, he has to have a contingency plan. What do he do when playing a better player, he is giving one hundred percent, and he is losing?

He can change his goal from winning the match to something else. This does not mean he totally gives up the goal of winning; however, it does mean he has another goal that can make the day worthwhile enough to keep fighting. Some other goals might be:

- Hitting less than five ball in the net until the end of the match.
- Hitting fifteen volleys into the court.
- Making no more than five errors until the end of the match.
- And, My favorite, getting one hundred balls in play before I lose.

The alternative goal I recommend is for him to count balls in play and attempt to get one hundred balls in play before he loses. Sometimes that can turn a match around.

Any second goal is great as long as it accomplishes something that moves closer to your main goal. Continuing to play hard when losing is a valuable experience. This match shouldn’t be wasted. Don’t let it be wasted by tanking or just going through the motions.

It’s not so lonely on the court if there is a positive ally on the sidelines and....

## **The Lifetime Skill: Surround your self with positive supporters**

**Uh Oh...Your kid is not an angel on the court....**

## *The Child....Lesson 32*

### **A SESSION THAT IS NOT SO GOOD!**

Try as you may, there is going to be a bad session.

- ❖ He just can't do it right.
- ❖ He is in a bad mood.
- ❖ He loses a match.
- ❖ He pitches a fit.
- ❖ Or, you're having a bad day.

Take a few minutes break to see if you can salvage the session or the day. If it is not possible, then call everything off and do something else. Remember, this is a five year project.

Don't say much. Your son is not going to hear you anyway. Just a few words will do best.

- ❖ Tough luck.
- ❖ We'll get it next time.
- ❖ Let's call this a bad day.
- ❖ Let's go to the pool.

Behaviorists tell us that we can change our emotions by changing our thoughts.

- ❖ Go get that treat.
- ❖ Change the subject.
- ❖ Go on the next errand.

In short, do anything else.

Play down the importance of the **BAD** scene.

Try not to get too involved.



**The Lifetime Skill: There is always another day.  
One day does not a career make.**

**Are we all seeing the same thing?**

## ***The Child...Lesson 33***

### **LINE CALLING**

This is just something to watch for.

Incorrect line calling occurs every now and then.

Sometimes little kids will cheat just like they tell fibs about things. They will change the rules or do anything to win. Making bad calls falls into this category. It is a phase that many pass through. This probably will pass.

However, occasionally when a child gets into competition he will make bad calls. This should be dealt with.

Most children who continually make bad calls, have parents who have ignored this behavior.

You don't have to do much to stop your child's bad calling. Where it is possible you simply correct the call, award the point to the opponents, and move on. This is why we recommend you play doubles with your child. On the court with the child, it is easy to make this correction and keep the whole process very matter of fact. Just say to your child "No, that was good," and to the other team, "Your point." In this situation do not discuss or lecture. Maybe, just a few words like, "We must always make good calls." It's over, the call is corrected and play continues.

It is a rule in tennis that if one player on a doubles team sees a ball as good and the other sees it out the point is considered good and awarded to the opponents.

If you do the above, your child will soon get the picture, and start calling balls correctly.

If the bad call comes in tournament competition, where you are not at liberty to correct the call, then you must deal with this matter after the match. This is not something that you do the moment the child comes off the court, but at some appropriate time when the two of you are alone.

This talk between you and your child should not be a discussion about any one call, but it should be a general lecture. This lecture should state that you suspect he is calling lines too close and the fact that you expect your child to make good calls. You should let him know that it is bad sportsmanship, and he is too good a person not to play fair and emphasize that you do not want your child making bad calls... You do not want your child being called a "Cheater." Play *the "Pride Card"*.

Should you abdicate your responsibility in this matter, you can rest assured the other children will let him know what they think, and they will call him a *cheater*.



No need for this. It takes so little to steer your child down the correct path. Just do it.

In tennis, if the ball touches even the tiniest bit of the line it is called GOOD.

In tennis, if a person is unsure of a call, then that person must call the ball...GOOD.



**The Lifetime Skill: Honesty is the best policy.**

**Good line calling is good Sportsmanship.**

**What is choking?**

## ***The Child....Lesson 34***

### **GETTING A LITTLE TIGHT IN A MATCH**

Your child will refer to getting tight on the court as ***choking***.

Choking is when one's victory is at hand; then through one's own effort, defeat is achieved.

Gagging, freezing up, blowing it, falling apart, or getting tight are all names for this phenomenon. Choking is the term most commonly used.

Not many matches can be as devastating to a player as when a player was on the verge of winning and then to become scared or whatever and gave the match away. Your child will be crushed when this happens

You must be very sympathetic when you see this happen to your child. Now is not the time for, "What you should have done." It is best to get away from the situation as quickly as possible. Change the venue, change the subject, or do something else.

Do not be so sympathetic that it seems that this has been something terrible. This should be treated as—ho hum—just another match. Your child is devastated, and you do not want this to infect future matches. Do not make this seem too important. You do not want your child to start forming negative tapes in his or her mind.

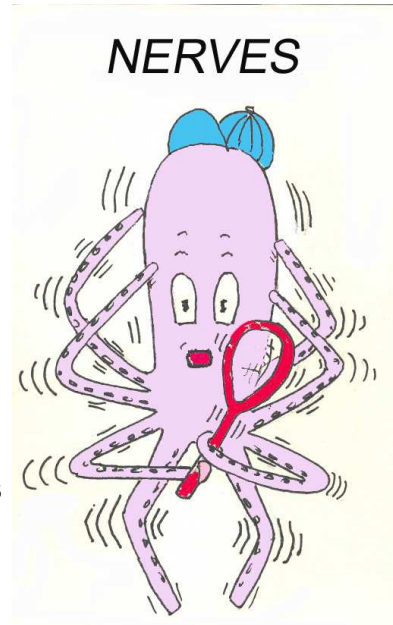
Everyone chokes sometimes. Even the top players, with ice water in their veins, choke. So it is not uncommon. Every tennis player can grimly recount losing from a huge lead.

Nothing you can say at the time will help much. Give it some time.

Positive words are certainly in order.

Choking can affect a player in different ways. Here are some of the ways that players do it to themselves. Maybe one of these traits can be spotted in your child and fixed.

- ❖ Just tightening up and slowing down.
- ❖ Losing focus and concentration.
- ❖ Flinching or jerking the racket when hitting the ball.
- ❖ Freezing up, where muscles are too tight to move properly.



- ❖ Speeding up or rushing shots.
- ❖ Over hitting.
- ❖ Trying something stupid, like coming to the net, when he had been winning by playing the baseline. Changing a winning game, which is a “NO NO” in tennis.
- ❖ Or, thinking about their acceptance speech for the championship presentation. This is thinking in the future and not in the present.

Psychologists treat this phenomenon in many different ways. Some say the player wants to win too badly. Some say the player didn't want it badly enough. Some say the player does not think himself worthy of winning. And it goes on and on.

Don't worry about all this stuff. Try to keep positive. Self-talk or what the child is saying in his head is a biggie here, and self-talk has to remain positive. Listen to your child talk to himself, and if it is not positive talk and then teach him how to talk positive to himself.

Remember this—being positive only does one good if one can be positive when things are bad. This goes for the parent as well as the child.

And after all is said and done, Vince Lombardi said it best, *“If you learn from a mistake, then it wasn't a mistake after all.”*

## **The Lifetime Skill:**

### **Stay positive, even in a bad situation.**

**Some thoughts on how you look on the court...**

## ***The Child....Lesson 35***

# **THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY LANGUAGE**

Body language is perhaps the only outward expression of confidence that you can see in a person.

One can almost judge, with a good deal of accuracy, how confident a person is feeling just by looking at their body language. So body language may tell all.

Everyone strives to be confident. However, confidence can be hard to get. Most believe that a person who has success after success achieves confidence.

Yet, as the stakes get higher even high levels of confidence can become rattled.

Take the example of the ten-foot plank lying on the floor. Everyone in the room believes that they can walk from one end of the plank to the other without falling off. They are confident they can do this. But, take the plank and put it between two buildings ten stories high, and the confidence diminishes to almost zero. As a matter of fact, their confidence may get so low that they will fall off.

So, what is confidence if it can come and go?

We heard in "The King and I" the mother telling her son as they embarked on a new adventure that,  
"Whenever you feel afraid.....Whistle a happy tune...  
*And as you fool the people you meet, you fool yourself as well.*"

Julie Andrews in "The Sound of Music" is frightened as she goes to a new job and sings, "I have confidence in me."

Remember the young man who was given the supposedly magic sword to go and fight the dragon. He went out with confidence and slew the dragon.

So we know it is possible to summon up confidence.

When a better player walks on to a tennis court, he knows he is the better player and he is confident that he will prevail. And usually, prevail he does.

Here is where body language comes in. The better player displays a very confident



pose. All his mannerisms speak of his confidence. ***He is sucking up all the confidence on the tennis court.*** Confidence is a finite quantity on a tennis court and it is hard to share.

The lesser player will very rarely strike this superior pose. If the lesser player can correct his body language and look confident, the better player will notice. Some of the confidence now oozes from the better player. He starts to wonder, "What makes this guy feel so great?"

Just because a player conjures up some confidence, however, doesn't mean he will win, but it does give him a better chance.

In watching tennis matches on television, announcers often make reference to the poor body language displayed by a particular player. There always seems to be a complementary loss in concentration during these displays of bad body language. It lifts his opponent up and brings the himself down. He has no confidence left. This player believes he has lost.

Body language and facial expressions in a small child are clear pictures of what is going on inside that little head. These same factors can also tell you much about any tennis player in a tennis match.

**Dejected posture is bad and a confident posture is good.**

**The Lifetime Skill:**

**Striking a confident pose helps create confidence.**

So in the process of teaching tennis to your child, maybe you can be instrumental in teaching her to look confident, and to "Put on a Happy Face."

There is discussion as to whether hiding your emotions will change them. This Pro takes the position that a confident look probably represents a confident soul.

In a small child, understanding what is going on in her head should be an easy way for a parent to know what to do next. A sour puss represents a bad attitude. So the parent needs to take action to change that mood. Unfortunately, our own face and body often reflect what we see. Her little mood can be contagious. So with the small child you have to put on your happy face first and then put a happy face on the child. You already know how to do this. You do it all the time. You redirect attention to something else. You talk about a successful or happy time.

As the child gets older this gets harder to do. So you will have to get smarter and come up with better ways to deal with a down or bad attitude.

Pictures are worth a thousand words and can tell the story. The video or still shot camera can capture good and bad postures and attitudes for review at a later time.

While you are teaching or watching your small child can check your own attitude. Have someone take the pictures or put the video camera on the tripod and see how you look. See if you are the wonderful, upbeat parent you think you are. This can make the whole process a lot more fun for everyone, including your child.

In the older child, the pictures that are taken should concentrate on capturing the moods of your child. Pictures should concentrate on up close facial expressions as well as body language from a distance.

Pictures should be taken both surreptitiously and in full view. When pictures are taken without the child's knowledge, true attitudes can be captured. In an older child this could have a remarkable impact, and maybe create a real attempt to change a bad body or facial expressions.

Results from this effort should result in better court attitude, as the child gets older. Should the pictures have a less than positive impact, don't be deterred—keep on taking the pictures. Later, you can demonstrate how the body language has improved over the years.

Keep the pictures. This is good stuff.

When the child knows the pictures are being taken to demonstrate his bad body language, a strange thing can happen. The child will then act as a perfect angel for the camera. He or she will not want you to have the bad stuff as evidence of his mini tantrums. This can be wonderful, it is a negative-positive..

You can always make the pretext that the pictures are being taken for the photo album—as you do when taking pictures of your child doing many things. At some point the child may request these pictures be taken, and this should help in achieving a positive, winning attitude.

So, having determined that bad body language is not a good thing, then how do you teach your child to keep a proper image.

Effort on every point of a match is needed. If you teach your child that the main thought is to play your best on every point rather than concentrating on winning, then no matter the score, he will look confident.

Stress the **effort factor** in all your teachings with your child. Make it clear that you look for effort all the time. And that if he gives his best all the time, winning will come. However, you have to be consistent yourself. You can't let winning take you over. You must look for and reward effort foremost in your mind on every point.

This will be a hard point for you to make to your child and maybe even to yourself. It is easy to give in to the winning drive, when everyone else keys on winning and losing.

Teach that good body language it will bring a confident player to the court.

There will always be losses and wins. Win or lose, this is .....

**....It is how you play the game that counts....Which is a LIFETIME SKILL.**

**Now some tools that will help this project along...**

# TEACHING TOOLS



## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 36***

### **THE LEARNING PROCESS**

Let's start with some thoughts on the subject of how we learn.

***We learn on our own.....We can only be helped to learn.***

You prop your baby up and coax him to walk toward you. However, it is the child who learns to walk.

**Teaching is just a short cut to experience.**

Encouraging your baby to walk only speeds up the learning of the walking skill.

When a teacher teaches us, it just saves us some of the time it would have taken us to figure it out on our own. Most of the time it saves a lot of time. Also the teacher may introduce things that the student might never have thought of on his own. This is your mission with your child—to introduce and teach tennis.

We all have a computer in our subconscious mind that we program to do all these acts that we do without thinking, and most of these acts are learned by trial and error.

The tennis stroke is something we want the subconscious to do for us. We teach the subconscious what to do, and then we let the computer in our brain do it for us. We tell the computer, hit the ball over there, and the computer responds. When we decide to hit the ball "over there", we do not tell the computer to watch the ball, to get the weight forward, to have a firm wrist and a litany of other directions. All of this must be programmed into the computer in our brain. The tennis stroke will be learned by trial and error and, some direction from you or a tennis pro.

**We program a tennis stroke into our brain.**

We learn to walk this way and we learn to talk this way. Your child will want to walk and talk—so he will try, make errors, fall down, get up, fall down, get up until he learns what keeps him up. Pretty soon he walks and talks.

It is the same with hitting a tennis ball. We swing, miss, swing, hit the ball, swing, miss, and so on. If we really want to hit the ball and do not get discouraged, we will learn a swing that works. Your child **will not** learn to hit a tennis ball unless introduced to the sport by you or someone.

Understanding the various parts of a tennis stroke is not necessary to learn a tennis stroke. There is an old saying that goes something like this. "True Athleticism is not

Academic.” This statement tells us not to over think the process, but let the athlete in a person perform. This is not to say that instruction is not worthwhile. Instruction is just a short cut.

## **Your child will learn to hit a tennis ball by swinging at one.**

After we’ve figured out how to hit the ball, we go through a similar process to learn how to get the ball to go where we want it to go. If we hit too high, we lower the next shot. If we hit too much to the left, we hit more to the right, and so on. Pretty soon we learn how to direct the ball. Being told how these things happen may speed up this understanding of the tennis stroke.

Here is a good place to mention a teaching technique. Most people when they miss a shot look only at them selves for correction. They give themselves instructions, “watch the ball” and etc. As you observe your child concentrate from time to time on the result of the shot. An example, suppose your child hits the ball in the net. You will then say, “That’s too low, honey. Aim higher on the next shot.” If it is too high on the next one, then you say, “Bring it down a little, now. Help her understand that corrections in where the ball goes can be made without major changes in technique.

Now back to the subject of learning. Learning to play tennis is not quite like learning to walk. Your son will want to walk whether you encourage him or not. However, your little son must be introduced to the game of tennis. He must be taken to the court or flat surface, where he will learn to hit a tennis ball.

Your main job will be.....***keeping his spirits alive and encouraging him to want to learn and to play tennis. Plus tossing a lot of balls for him to hit.***

Missing the ball too much will discourage his progress. Make sure missing the ball is cut to a minimum. For some just the joy of hitting the ball and playing tennis will be enough, others have to be encouraged.

Your skill and effort at making tennis something that is fun will be a big factor in all this. We will help you with all of this.

You create a pleasant tennis garden for him to learn in and you cultivate his progress. As Paracelsus said in Lesson One.....

## **Awaken the tennis player in your child.**

Let’s sweeten it up a bit....

## Teaching Tools....Lesson 37

### A SPOONFUL OF SUGAR

Mary Poppins sang it in the movie.

**“A spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down.”**

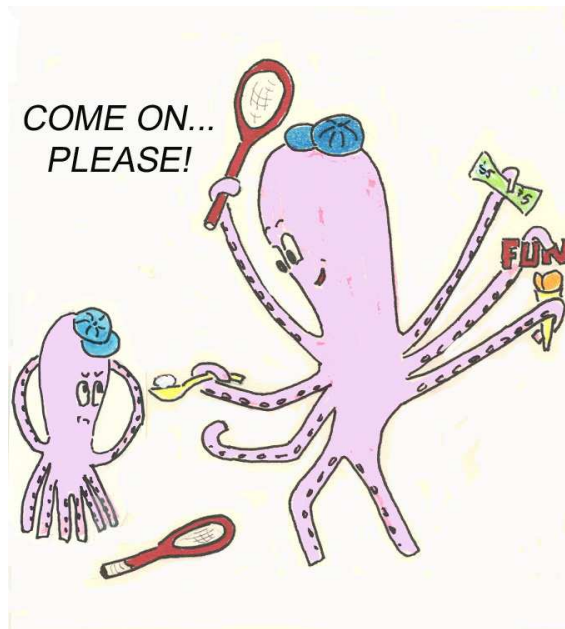
We recommend it!

If your kid learns to play and enjoy tennis, this project will be wonderful and easy for you.

If he doesn't seem to take to tennis, add a spoonful of sugar. This is not so hard to believe. If your son says he doesn't want to go hit some tennis balls, then you combine your tennis outing with an already proven fun event.

Things like:

1. Getting some ice cream along the way home.
2. Having Mom/Dad's time exclusively.
3. Going to a court with a playground.
4. Getting one of his friends to go.
5. Attaching it to some other fun event.
6. Showing him some tennis equipment he can work towards.
7. You may not like this one....if you go close to bedtime, all kids are ready to hit.



You know what your child likes. You already know which buttons to push to get him going. Just push one of those buttons.

A button like:

“I am going to hit on the wall. I need you to help me pick up balls, and we'll get some ice cream on the way back.”

Going with you should be fun enough. The odds are that he wants to go anywhere with you, and if he goes to the wall with you, he will surely want to hit.

Most of the time when this Pro hears a parent say, “My child just doesn’t want to go and play tennis.” It usually means that the parent doesn’t really want to go. I am thinking maybe this is a....***cop out!***

“But, I just don’t want to force him”. Still a cop out, you have to think of something if you really want tennis to be a part of his life.

Tennis is fun enough when learned. Just sweeten the process up if necessary.

## ***SELL TENNIS TO YOUR CHILD.***

**Ah, the joy of it.....**

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 38***

### **THE JOY OF HITTING A BALL**

Hitting a ball is one of the happy things in life, any ball with anything.

In all the thousands of people to whom I have taught tennis, I have never known any one that didn't enjoy hitting the ball. Even the people, who said they didn't really like tennis, did, in fact, say they enjoyed hitting.

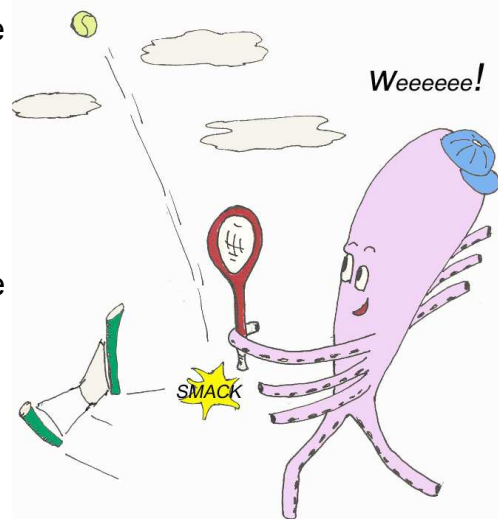
However, no one likes missing the ball.

When your daughter can hit more balls than she misses, she is going to have more fun.

Sometimes after she can hit the ball, things can get a little out of focus. We have to be careful as we progress—as we add competition, targets, the need to improve, added skills and so on, we may cause pressure. It is not always the parents causing the pressure. Children can pressure themselves. Pressure can cause her to start missing.

When this happens, spirits can drop, and the fun level can drop.

When you spot this happening, drop the level of skill back to where the ball is being hit again. Do not be afraid to call a session off if you cannot keep the fun level up.



### ***We only learn when we hit the ball.***

When she starts to hit the ball solidly again, you will notice a more relaxed and happier little girl.

When I teach a lessons, if I can keep the ball going back and forth with my student, and I don't have to talk much, the student thinks it is a great lesson. I don't have to say this. They tell me, "This was a great lesson". It is times like this when they learn a lot, and make progress. And I didn't have to do anything but keep the ball going and keep quiet.

### **Reinforce the hits and be quiet on the misses.**

Don't forget....the real joy of tennis is hitting the ball well.

**TALK LITTLE AND PITCH A LOT!!**

**Perhaps a little incentive....**

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 39***

# **THE PRINCIPAL OF THE CARROT**

Achievement is its own reward.

Improvement, winning, and any success is its own reward

We all operate on the reward system.

However, sometimes it is hard for a small child to see future rewards. So we must supply small rewards along the way. Things like:

- ☐ a good word
- ☐ bragging about him, especially when he can hear.
- ☐ an ice cream cone
- ☐ a movie
- ☐ any special treat

Don't bribe your daughter to get her to go to the court.

Don't try to buy cooperation.

Don't reward for going to your weekly sessions. This may seem like what you are doing, however, a treat is not a reward for going, but is an included part of the session, this is to add to the enjoyment of the event so that the overall effect of the session is pleasant.

To keep this straight, think of how you reward good grades in school. There is never a reward for just showing up at school—that is just expected. There is however, a reward for doing good work. You will note that when your son does good work, you don't really have to reward him. He is quite pleased with himself.

You set the bar on the tennis court just as the school sets the bar at school.

Here are some things that I feel are worth a little reward:

- ☐ a good attitude
- ☐ being a good sport



- ☐ extra practice
- ☐ working on certain deficiencies
- ☐ reaching goals
- ☐ a good effort
- ☐ and doing something that makes a bad session better

**Remember, each session should have a reachable goal.**

Reachable goals like:

- Fifty balls over the net
- 20 perfect swings
- Catch the ball 20 times
- Setting a new personal record in some hitting skill
- What ever you are trying to do during the session. Just pre-plan it.

All of this may sound like getting your son to play tennis is like pulling teeth. That is not the case at all. I fully expect that if you give a minimum of effort and are consistent in your program, your child will take to tennis like a duck to water.

This is only mentioned because I hear parents saying that their child is not interested in tennis and that they can't get him to play. I have said before that I view this situation as one where the parent doesn't really put forth the creativity or the parent does not understand how beneficial tennis will be for their child.

I hear players brag all the time about how wonderful tennis has been in their life—how tennis has opened doors, how tennis relieves their stress from work, and so on. Yet some don't see this value for their child. Beats me!

**SON, YOU'RE DOING GREAT!!**

**One of the best methods of reaching some goals.....**



## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 40***

### **THE VALUE OF COUNTING**

Counting is one of the most useful tools for stimulating and managing your child's interest and activity toward learning a skill.

**You can't manage what you can't measure.**

**Counting is a great way to measure.**

**Counting makes goal setting and achievement easy.**

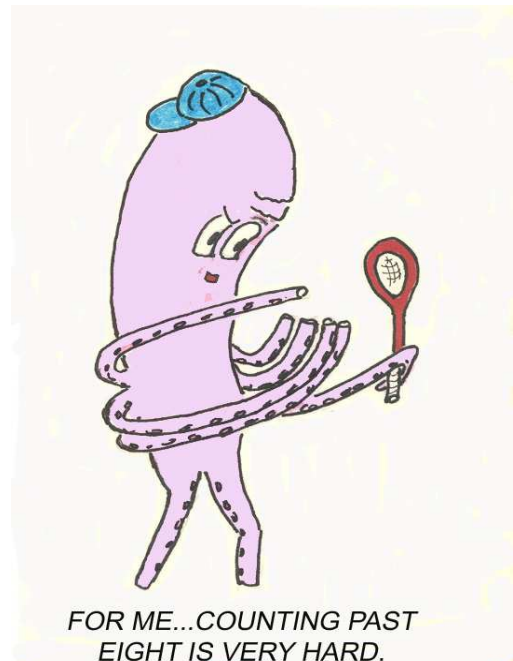
**Counting is a measuring tool that shows progress.**

Kids, in general, love competition. Counting is a form of controlled competition. Things like:

- ☐ start with hit five in a row
- ☐ hit 10, 25, 50, 100 in a row on the wall
- ☐ beat last weeks' record
- ☐ hit fifteen where dad can catch them
- ☐ serves in the court
- ☐ etc.

One of the milestones in my own children's lives was to hit 100 in a row on the wall. Actually some of this was done on a rebound net. All three achieved this goal by about the second grade. The rule at our house was that you got a bicycle in the third grade or when you hit 100 in a row on the wall. Some may think this too tough—but it worked. Now, I wasn't all that tough, occasionally I would ignore a scoop off of the ground to keep it going. You can make your own goals and rewards for achievement. You get the idea.

Counting should fall in the category of a fun game. It should make your son work harder and enjoy it more.



You may do the counting at first, but you should try to get your child to do the counting if he can.

### **The Lifetime Skill:**

**You can't manage what you can't measure.**

Counting by the child is excellent practice in mind control and focus, and this skill may come in handy should your child want to become competitive and play in tournaments.

In competitive matches, when playing a better player, it is sometimes beneficial to remove the goal of winning and to create an alternative goal of counting balls in play or errors made or some measurable part of the match. This can take the pressure away from just winning, and it can give some valuable information on how a child is playing. Counting in a tennis match also moves the conscious mind away from the shot to shot control of the match and lets the subconscious, where the stroke knowledge resides, take control of hitting the ball.

## **ONE, TWO, THREE... ETC.**

**Next, how to keep track of all this counting....**

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 41***

# **A TENNIS JOURNAL FOR YOUR CHILD**

Yes, a tennis journal.

You need to keep a Journal of all your tennis adventures with your daughter. This can be one of the neatest things you can do as a parent.

A Tennis Journal may also be one the most important tools for keeping you and your child on the tennis path. This is where you keep score of what you have done and what she has done.

You don't need to make this Journal too elaborate—you just need something simple. This is something you are going to keep, and you get to choose how you wish to record the history of your child's tennis. Just enter a notation every time you and your daughter do a "tennis thing".

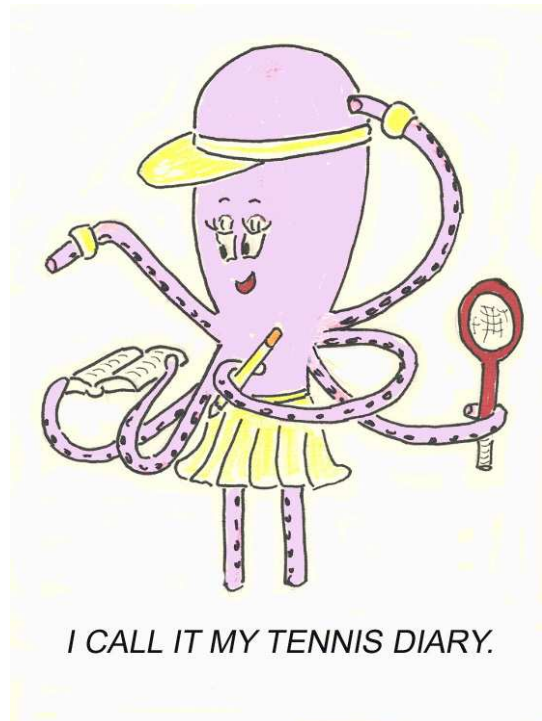
Set goals for each session and record how the session went and what your child did. It would be better if you both kept this journal, together. Record any other tennis events that happen in your tennis journal.

The journal will be a necessary component just in case you do a little rationalizing about the tennis activities you have shared with her. If you go to the court and do your one-half hour "fun tennis" every week, your Journal will document that. If you skip a few weeks, your Journal will show that, too. It is proof positive of what has happened.

Another very important reason for keeping a Journal is that it will be a record of her progress. All the cute things that happen along the way, should be included, her ups and her downs, her joy and her despair!

## **The Lifetime Skill: Keeping a Journal.**

One of the most important reasons for keeping this journal is the numbers that happen along the way. You have already learned the value of counting, now you have a place to keep these numbers. These numbers can inspire your daughter. They will be like a gold star as she improves her numbers.



This journal can be a big asset in keeping her on course. She will see her progress, she will become organized in her tennis and will know what to do next. Also, it may organize other parts of her life. Another lifetime skill learned with her tennis.

Teaching your child tennis could be a five year project Maybe longer if you like. Ah, but these years are going to be spent with your child anyhow, and this will give the two of you something very important to share. This will be quality time!

You may not do a half an hour session every week, however you can come close. There are going to be a few gaps in the program. Other activities can hinder this goal—like summer camp, vacations and such. However, a vacation could provide an opportunity to go to the court two or three times in a week.

Someday you and your big girl will have great fun going through this Journal. Everyone wishes they had a record of their life. So don't miss this chance to keep these wonderful moments with your child. **Here is a sample:**

**A TENNIS JOURNAL FOR.....Your Child's Name**  
**WEEK OF                      GOAL                      RESULT**

Aug. 23, ????	200 hand-fed balls over net. 50 serves from half way behind the service line in to court	Hit 200 over the net Hit 59 serves into court Started Rallying, and keep- ing score. Went to play- ground after. Good
Aug 30, ????	200 racket-fed balls over the net. 50 serves in to proper court. Rally 25 in a row over net.	?????
Sept 6, ????	Played three times at the beach	?????
Sept 13, ????		

**Now, the best and easiest tool you have....**

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 42***

### **WATCH YOUR CHILD**

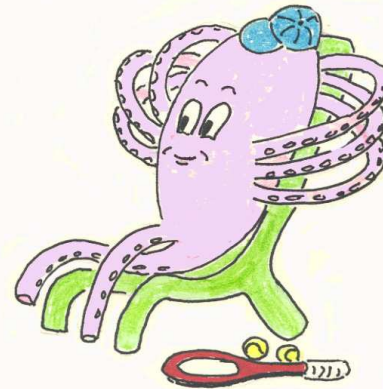
What an easy Teaching Tool. All you may have to do is watch—simple as it may seem. Some have watched their children to greatness.

#### **“Watch me Daddy” “Mommy come see.”**

You know they love for you to watch. However, don’t think you can fool them. You won’t get away with taking your child to the wall to hit and then go hit a few for yourself or talk to some friends. They know you are not watching.

Kids can become easily bored hitting by themselves. Next thing you know, you’ll spot them chasing butterflies.

Some children will derive genuine reward just from hitting a tennis ball against a wall. If your child is this way, you are off and running, and learning tennis is going to be a snap. All you have to do is get them to the wall.



ATTA GIRL...KEEP HITTING.

The rest of the little children need a more obvious reward—a few positive words from Mom or Dad, an approving look, or someone to help them count balls.

You can get some real results just by watching. It can pay off big time.

- ❖ “Let me see your serve.”
- ❖ “Let me see you hit ten in a row.”
- ❖ “Let me see you hit that target on the wall.”

This is particularly beneficial for those parents that can’t play tennis. You don’t even have to hit a ball—just watch and they will perform for you.

#### ***When you are watching, it means something!***

All you need is a chair, **TO WATCH YOUR CHILD!**

**Now, another easy method of teaching.....**

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 43***

# **ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO WATCH TENNIS**

Another easy Teaching Tool for you to use. Just make it possible for your child to watch tennis.

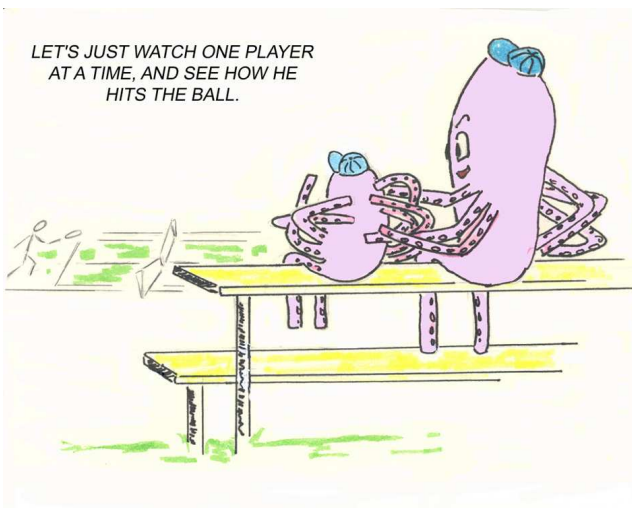
I have been told that children can do seventy-five percent of their learning from watching.

They can watch you, if you play. Demonstrate what you are trying to teach them, and don't need to talk much.

If you don't play yourself:

- ❖ Take your child to watch your College/High School tennis team match
- ❖ The two of you could watch good players play at a club or a park.
- ❖ Go to a tournament just to talk and watch.
- ❖ Watch tennis on TV.
- ❖ Take a video of good players or of your child.
- ❖ Many good videos can be found on the Internet.
- ❖ Watch a good player hit on the wall.

If the two of you watch enough, your child will pick someone she wants to play like, and then getting her to watch will be easy.



All of this watching goes into the learning process.

Watching sessions count toward your half hour per week. This could be a good rainy day session. Put it in the journal.

## **THIS IS GOOD USE OF THE TV SCREEN.**

**Next, more fun.....**

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 44***

### **PLAY GAMES**

Any task is more fun if you make a game of it. It is the most fun Teaching Tool.

Here is an opportunity for you to use your imagination. Before a tennis session with your little daughter, think of some games the two of you can play.

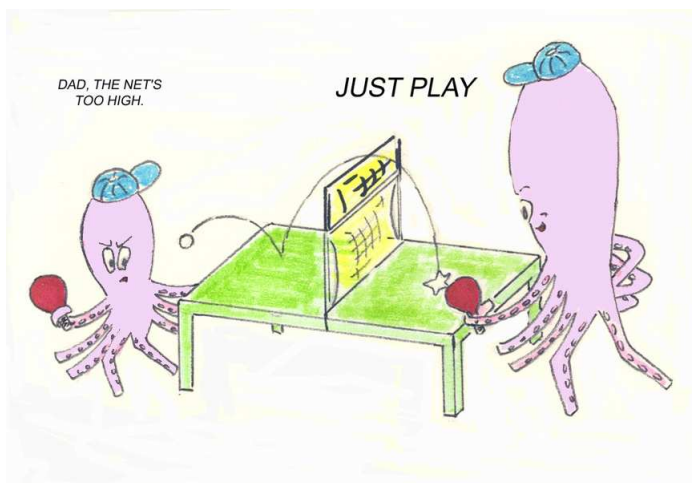
Just simple games, nothing elaborate. Plan some things that fit the venue where you will be playing, and make a game of it, and be sure to keep some kind of score.

I remember my dad setting up a ping-pong table on the back porch. Now this was not a real ping pong table, it was a table about four feet by three feet. It was pretty small, but we played. Pretty soon I would smack the ball for a winner. My father didn't like that, so he raised the net. He kept raising the net until I had to loop the ball back like he did. I didn't like it as much, but I wanted to play, so we looped the ball back until somebody got twenty-one points. The point here is that he manufactured the game of ping-pong to suit the needs of our small porch. I still have fond memories of that and I learned to be patient and steady.

### **The Lifetime Skill: Patience.**

Hint: Ping Pong is a good place to practice tennis strokes. A famous coach from years gone by started many players who reached national status on the Ping Pong table.

Many times, while teaching elementary school children to play tennis on a black top, I have devised games by taking some chalk and drawing boxes on the pavement. The children would have to hit the ball in a small area over a chalk line that served as a net. The rule was no hitting down, only up. They would learn to move, direct the ball and keep score in these games. It was a joy to see fifteen or so of these games taking place at once. Sometimes, we even ran tournaments on these chalk courts.



The children at the end of the program would all write me thank you cards. A couple of quotes:

“You taught me more tennis than I ever thought existed” Signed, Sally.

“Thanks for teaching us tennis, Coach Hue.” Your new friend Sam.

So these guys had some fun hitting a tennis ball on a black top.

You could even use the lines that already exist on a basketball court to make an improvised court.

Serving practice can always be made more interesting by keeping score. Have your child play an imaginary opponent. You can set the rules. If the first serve is to the backhand of the imaginary opponent, she wins. Let her do the playing and you keep score. You’ll be surprised how, in an imaginary game such as this, your child will experience a little pressure. Check the response—if there is too much pressure, change the game. A little pressure is good.

I had my grandson play Andy Roddick in a serving duel. My grandson got two points if he got his first serve in, one point for the second serve, and Andy got one point if my grandson double faulted. My grandson won 21-6 and told his mother.

Many great athletes tell how they would practice playing imaginary opponents in their mind. So playing imaginary opponents is good training.

Don’t forget, success breeds success. Devise games your daughter can win.

With a little practice, you’ll be a champion game inventor. You may even get so good you can devise a game for doing the dishes. Then you’ll be a real Tom Sawyer, remember he tricked his friends in to painting the fence for him, by making it seem like so much fun.

When you become a GAME MASTER you’ll have a very responsive child. She may decide to invent some games of her own. Use them!

When the game gets dull, invent a new one. Instead of “Tennis Anyone”, it will be....

**Hit the ball over the chalk line.**

**I told you it would be fun. Now a lesson for the both of you....**



## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 45***

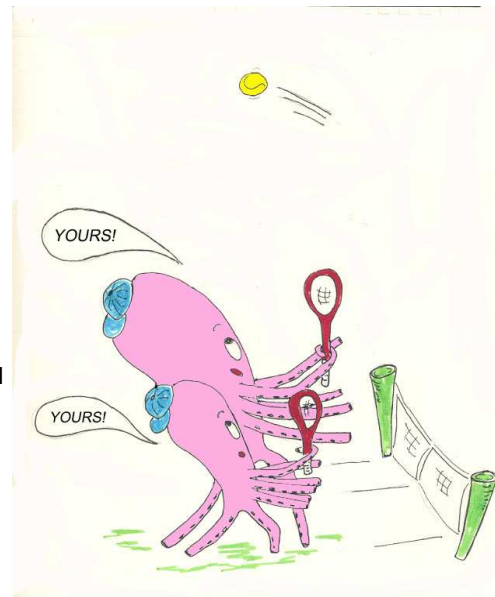
### **PLAY DOUBLES TOGETHER**

One of the best places to teach your child how to have heart and good sportsmanship is on the doubles tennis court with you as his partner. This can be a very effective Teaching Tool. You can do this even if you do not play well. There is always some people that are at your level.

You can show him all the good qualities by example. And you are right there beside him and can talk to him about the strategy of play. This is not always easy to do in a singles match—you see there is a rule in tennis that it is illegal to coach a player during a match. It is not only illegal to do, but is considered bad sportsmanship if you try. So if your child gets to the tournament level in tennis, you just have to sit there and be quiet, even though there are things that you would like to tell him. Sometimes this rule is unfortunate, as there will be times during tennis matches that a few words would help keep a player afloat in the match.

So when you are playing doubles with your child, you have that rare opportunity to talk about problems as they occur. Just remember the earlier lesson: “The Adult Theory”. In case you forgot, that message was that you are the adult on the court. So stay in your adult.

Who you going to play? Many adults are happy to play nice easy doubles with you and your son. You can play other parent/child combinations. Other parents are eager for this family action, just ask. Play other family members. My family, after thirty odd years still plays family doubles. Now there are also a few in-laws involved.



Play doubles in club and local parent-child events. If you look around, there are plenty of places to play, and it is well worth it. Play doubles with your son; you can talk strategy together. Play doubles with him; you can give it the “Ole College Try” together. Play doubles with him; you can help him learn to lose and be a good sport.

**If you cannot find any parent/child events, start one.**

**Next is one of the best places to start.**

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 46***

### **A WALL IS A GOOD PLACE TO LEARN**

You are going to love the Wall, or as it is called in tennis terms, a backboard. This is my favorite Teaching Tool.

The wall has many attributes. The biggest is that it is usually free. Also, you can practice every stroke in tennis on a wall. And all this can be done by anyone all alone, at almost any time.

If your child falls in love with the wall, you will soon have a tennis player. All you will have to do is watch, encourage, and count.

Many, many great players started on the wall. Monica Seles continued hitting on a wall even after she became number one in the world.

A wall can be almost any flat surface that will return a ball that is hit to it. Kids use almost anything to hit against—garage doors, building walls, bedroom walls, and so on.

You need to find a wall for your child to hit on. This wall should be convenient so that the two of you can get to it easily, when the mood strikes.

Don't forget your chalk to make targets on the wall.

So a sound consideration is to buy a wall for your home. There are all kinds of rebound devices that can be purchased that will fit on your house, on a fence, or in the garage. Most tennis magazine will have advertisements for these devices.

We do not recommend hitting against your home. Aside from broken windows and brown spots on the lawn, there is the noise factor. Walls can make noise. Any wall made of wood will sound like a small cannon each time it is hit, and will probably bring complaints from the neighbors. So in purchasing a rebound device, sound is a big consideration.

We recommend a rebound net for the home. This is some netting or fabric attached to a square frame with a bungee cord or springs. The bungee type cord or springs is laced around the support frame so that the hitting fabric acts like a vertical trampoline. Which is a thought—you could even take a child's trampoline and set it on end to hit against. Most sports stores have some kind of a rebound net. Get one. Put it in the garage so that it can be used in the winter or when it rains.

The rebound net serves three positive functions. One, it's quiet. Two, it's cheap. And Three, it gives a nice slow return so that your child can get a good look at the next ball. This is wonderful for the first phases of a kid's career. Also, it is portable.

You can even devise some games on the wall. By now you're good at making up games.

Your child will create his own world's record on the wall. This is something you will keep in his Tennis Journal.

The Wall record for balls hit against a wall and hit on one bounce is pretty high. I hesitate to tell you what the record is, because it is scary high. The record is over 4000. It is not necessary to challenge this record as it was done by a very good player and takes hours of concentration. Still, it will be fun for your child to set his or her own record.

Your child should, however, set a minimum goal of one hundred in a row. This means one hundred forehands in a row and one hundred backhands in a row. This is not too hard, and it teaches some of the necessary tennis skills, patience, rhythm, concentration, persistence, doggedness, and of course the skill of stroking. **Some of these skills are some of the skills of life.** This is not bad cross training for tennis and training for life.

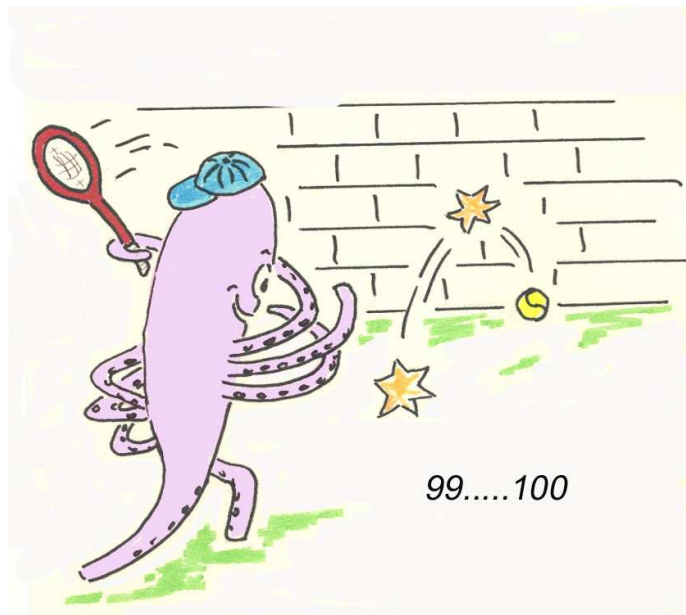
For learning control on the wall, get your chalk out. Make some targets on the wall or make a target on the rebound net with a magic marker. Now you can count the number of times your child hits the target.

You can get your Pro to show your child how to hit overheads, volleys and other shots on the wall as he progresses.

So you and your son find a wall, and you will soon love the sound of....

**WHAP....WHAP....WHAP....WHAP.....**

**Now, some equipment help....**



## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 47***

### **EQUIPMENT**

The two most important pieces of equipment you will need to teach your child, is the tennis racket and the tennis ball.

Starting out when she is just a little girl, two or three years old, you may use a ping pong paddle and a ping pong ball or a nerf ball, or perhaps one of those cheap toy plastic rackets and a balloon. All of the training at this point could probably be done in the living room. At the little bitty girl or boy stage, almost any kind of racket and ball you use will suffice to teach her some hand-eye coordination.

You might even have to start out rolling the ball until her eyes follow the ball and her little hand reaches out to meet the ball. A bounced ball changes speed at the bounce—the ball slows down. Little people have trouble judging this change in speed and direction.

The next stage would be to get her a real junior racket and some special soft teaching tennis balls (any tennis shop will have these). This is the equipment that you will use at your outdoor teaching venue.

Junior rackets come in graduated sizes so that a child can start with a very short racket and gradually move up to a full-sized racket. A short racket makes it easier to contact the ball.

Junior rackets are usually graduated in lengths starting at 21 inches long; they then go to 23 and 25 inches and then 27 inches. Twenty-seven inches is considered a full size racket. Rackets can legally go to 29 inches, however this size is not recommended for juniors.

It has always been my recommendation that ninety pounds of body weight is the threshold for using a full-sized or 27-inch racket. Some children who have played a long time and have good strokes may move to this size racket sooner.

A daughter in the four to six years of age category should start with the 21- or 23-inch racket as the first real tennis racket. And when she becomes very consistent in contact and direction or she is six to eight years old, she should move to a 25-inch racket. It may not take too long to move past the 25-inch racket, so be prepared to shell out a few more bucks for a new racket. Many Pros will offer a trade-in discount for the transition to a larger racket.

Length is not the only consideration in a tennis racket. Grip size and weight are two other racket choice considerations. “Starter” rackets come pretty much standard in grip size and weight, however these are important considerations when she moves to a

full-sized quality tennis racket. Any certified Tennis Pro can help with these decisions.

A general rule for grip size is this: While gripping the racket with a normal forehand tennis grip, the space between the fingers and the heel of the hand should be about the width of the person's little finger.

The weight of the racket is a little harder to determine. In general, she should move from a light racket to a heavier one as she progresses. Rackets today are in general very light, so starting out should be easy...get a light one. Be prepared, a good tennis racket will cost some bucks. But take heart, it will cost less than a piano. (If your child were taking music.)

Your child's next racket is another challenge, because the racket most people prefer in the Pro Shop is almost never the one with which they hit the best with. Good rackets have many, many features—too much for you to figure out. So to solve this problem, you should do what the Playing Pros do, and that is to try different rackets.

Most Teaching Pros or Pro Shops have a demo rack, so you can try many different rackets. Have your daughter try at least ten different rackets. Here is where you, the parent/adult come in, you want her to pick out the racket she hits best with, not the one that looks the best. Devise some little accuracy test, and test all the rackets with at least twenty shots. Get the selection down to two or three and then run the test again. If there is very little difference between the one that works the best and the one that looks the best, let her have the one she likes. This racket will usually be the more expensive. That's the best you can do, and it's what the best Pros do.

When she needs to have her racket restrung, you have a whole set of new decisions. My recommendations are that juniors play with 15-gauge string, strung at a tension, which is about the mid-point of the recommendations on the racket. Strings come in gauges—15, 16 and 17, plus a few in-between. The string gets narrower as the gauge number gets bigger. Thinner strings break easier, thus juniors prefer them. Beginning tennis players all consider it an act of achievement to break strings. The thin ones do play better for good players. It is only when a junior achieves tournament skill that she can make meaningful decisions on this subject. Thicker string offers more control and saves you money.

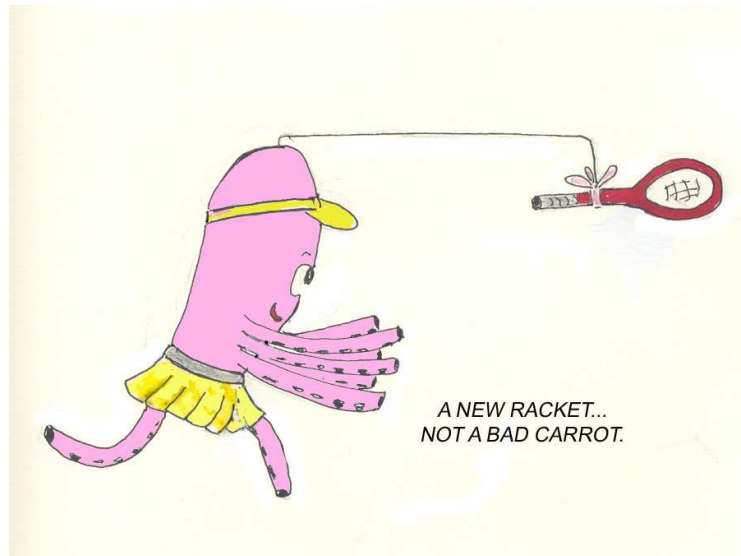
Tension is also a consideration when stringing a racket. Tighter strings break more often. Again, juniors prefer tight strings. Here are some general rules for string tension and gauge:

- ❖ Thin strings give more bite to the ball and thus more spin.
- ❖ Thicker strings offer more feel.
- ❖ Tight strings give less power.
- ❖ Loose strings give more power.
- ❖ Tight strings give more control if the stroke speed is fast.
- ❖ Loose strings give more control if the stroke speed is slow.

**No body has been able to figure it out much better than that.  
The accuracy test is the ultimate test for what is best for a player.**

Shoes, clothing, and accessories are the remaining equipment you and your child will need along the way. Most of the decisions on this equipment will be size and style, and I'm sure your child will make these decisions. As a matter of fact, the information given here on equipment is just for your info. Although this is good and wise information, you may be bypassed on these decisions, as most of these decisions will be made by your ....

**...Daughter or Son.**



**Where you going to play?.....**

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 48***

### **A PLACE TO PLAY**

Your child needs a place to play if you are going to turn him into the full-fledged tennis player.

The place that you pick for your child to learn and play should have all or almost all of the following:

- ❖ A Wall
- ❖ A Good Tennis Pro
- ❖ Tennis Programs
- ❖ Junior Tournaments
- ❖ Junior Teams/Leagues
- ❖ Parent/Child Events
- ❖ Good juniors, which are a good indication that the Club is the one you want
- ❖ Good Players
- ❖ And, a good friendly atmosphere where a kid can hang around and be welcomed

The Tennis Facility that you are looking for will probably have more than six courts. A minimum of six courts is necessary to conduct the type of programs that your child will need.

A good Tennis Pro is very essential in order for the club to have the programs you want available to your child. The Pro will make room for juniors and set standards of conduct and play. The Pro creates the atmosphere of most tennis clubs.

Most cities of any size have public facilities that will fit your needs. Usually public tennis facilities can be used for little or no cost. So, it is possible to accomplish your child's tennis project on a low budget.

Many Private Clubs can provide the necessary facilities and programs that I recommend. Private clubs do cost money, so they are great if one can fit your budget.

One more comment, and this has to do with the cold weather areas of the world. This can throw a crimp into a tennis career. Indoor courts are great if your area has them and you can get on them. If not, there is always a wall somewhere that can be hit on in the winter months.

Some people even move their home to get near a good tennis club like this.

Start right away looking for the.....

## **PERFECT PLACE TO PLAY.**

**Someone to help you.....**



## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 49***

# **YOUR CHILD'S TENNIS PRO**

The USPTA OR USPTR Certified Tennis Professional will probably be your best Teaching Tool for your daughter. Don't be without one.

The Tennis Pro will be able to get across points to your daughter that could make you want to pull your hair out when you try.

Our standard recommendation for tennis lessons for your child is at least ten lessons a year for a minimum of five years.

Her first Tennis Pro should be a Pro she really likes. This Pro should be able to inspire her to learn her strokes. If she is not inspired, do not hesitate to try another Pro.

We are not suggesting that you jump around town trying out all the Pros. We believe in finding the right Pro and sticking with him or her.

There are basically three phases in a child's tennis education, and we are trying to find the right Pro for each stage. The three stages require different skills from the Pro. However, some Pros can do it all. So, the first Pro might be perfect for her entire junior career, or you might have to change Pros as she progresses. The three Pro skills that apply to her tennis Pro are:

One....A Beginning Tennis Pro. This Pro should make her have fun and make her want to go to her lessons, while teaching her the basic strokes. You, the parent might be this pro—you will certainly learn from the Pro and you will supplement what the Pro says.

Two....The Tournament Pro. The Tournament Pro is just a name that indicates a Pro who is more into playing the game. This Pro understands and teaches how to use the strokes in playing competitive matches. This Pro prepares her for tournaments, to play High School tennis, or to just play better. He can teach strategy as well as perfecting her strokes.

Three....The College Pro. This Pro is a step up from the Tournament Pro. This Pro will be a little more intense, will be into drilling, will be into physical training, will be able to motivate her. She probably will make the decision to go to this level on her own.

Again we state that these three Pros can all be in one, and this would be best as this pro would understand your child from start to finish.

One of the biggest drawbacks to changing Pros is that they all see the game a little dif-

ferently. This means they are going to change something in her game. This always takes time and emotion to adjust to. Sometimes these changes are necessary and sometimes they are just the Pro's style. You should be involved and oversee this process. You are not going to make the decisions; you are just going to make sure this fits your daughter. This should be a three-way relationship between you, your child, and the Pro.

Many times the Pros will want to put her into a Clinic or Group Lesson. This is all right and will probably be good for her. However, this does not take the place of the recommended private lessons. Clinics are extra, and recommended, but they don't count as private lessons.

We have taken you, your daughter and perhaps several Tennis Pros from the beginning of her tennis to playing tennis at the College level. This will all be a lot of fun, and will be a good times for your daughter and you to be together. This will make it all worthwhile.

So get a good Tennis Professional, and remember the roles. The Tennis Pro is the instructor, your daughter is the athlete, and you are her.....

## **COACH....**

**LIFETIME SKILL: Learning from a coach or teacher and how to interact them.**

**You may want to move to the next level, or you may not....we recommend you do, it's a lot of fun and very educational...**

## Teaching Tools ....Lesson 50

# COMPETITION

Competition is my favorite Teaching Tool. However, lately competition for children has become an ugly word. Yet, everywhere you look there is competition for children. Competition to get into a school, competition to get into college, competition to get into the band, competition to become a cheerleader, and the list goes on and on.

Winning and losing is a big part of life. So children actually need training in how to accept losing and how to accept winning. I submit that the tennis court is a very good a leaning venue. So here are my thoughts on the value of competition.

Most children like competition, yet some say they don't. However, all children love to win. So, maybe the ones who shy away from competition might be afraid of losing or looking bad. All of these children, whether they are competitive or not, need to be taught that competition is not just about winning and losing. Competition in sports is where the fun is. It is also where we can hone the skills of life.

Take the little girl that says, "I just don't like beating my friends". This little girl needs to understand that tennis is just a game. That in fact, she may be doing her friend a favor, by actually making her friend better or teaching her friend how to lose.

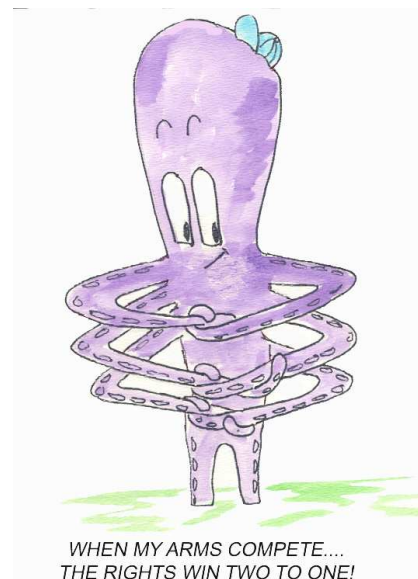
Competition does, however, needs to be controlled. In sports the control is called sportsmanship. If this little girl does not compete, then she is never going to learn sportsmanship.

## Competition is where you learn sportsmanship.

Take another example: Imagine two young boys are engaged in an arm wrestling competition. They do this everyday. One is much stronger and always wins. Aside from any fun these two might have in this competition, **they both get stronger.**

If the weaker were to quit, claiming that he was tired of feeding the ego of the stronger, or that he just couldn't win, both would lose. Neither would get stronger. **Actually the weaker has the most to gain from this competition. He will gain in strength at a faster rate than the stronger, until he approaches the strength of the stronger.**

The competition is also necessary for the stronger. If he were to withdraw from the competition saying that the



weaker was no contest, and he was wasting his time, he would cease to strengthen. If both wish to get stronger they should continue the competition.

There are lessons in winning and lessons in defeat. Your child may struggle with the defeat part for a while, but he will soon learn that you only get better by playing better players and that may mean losing.

Pound this lesson home a lot. And make sure your child gets a healthy understanding of the value of competition—with himself, with others, and with a tennis ball.

Competition is the fun part of the game, and it is what makes tennis a sport a person can do for a lifetime. And playing better players will make your child better.

The following lifetime skill is my favorite quotation.

## **The Lifetime Skill: To Play is To Win!**

**If you want competition, who you gonna call?....**

## ***Teaching Tools...Lesson 51***

### **TOURNAMENTS**

Tournaments are the lifeblood for ***getting better*** if your child wants to get competitive with better players.

Tournaments are the ***fun*** part of competitive tennis. They are fun for the junior and also for the parent. Your child will travel to different locations, and meet many different people

Tournaments are ***exciting***. Nothing can get a junior motivated to practice like the excitement of getting ready for a tournament.

Tournaments are an ***educational*** process for a junior tennis player. To play in a tournament, a junior must enter, prepare, find out when their match is scheduled and get to the match on time. A junior learns to deal with strangers and make new friends. Some of your child's lifetime friends will be found at a tennis tournament.

#### **Lifetime Skill: Making a commitment, preparing for it, getting there on time, and making new friends.**

Tennis tournaments can ***build inner strength***. In a tennis tournament *everyone* loses but one person...the eventual winner. So losing is a part of tennis tournaments, and your child must acclimate herself to this fact of life, and learn to enjoy the game.

Remember, playing better players is the best way to improve, and that involves some losing—maybe a lot of losing. We don't recommend that she lose every time she plays. There should be a blend of winning and losing. She has to win some, too. We recommend that you try to keep her on a course of winning and losing in a fifty-fifty ratio. I have recommended to juniors trying to get better, that they should play matches that would involve losing about two hundred sets a year, this involves playing two better players a week.

#### **Lifetime Skill: Losing is developmental.**

Some juniors just love tournaments, whether they win or lose. Others get a little discouraged from time to time. This is where the wise parent comes up with a few encouraging words, and all is well with the world again. A little time helps too.

To play tournaments well, a player should play a lot, and this would include at least two to four hundred sets a year, or four to eight sets a week. This is about three or four matches a week. This is not much for a junior who likes to play. Sometime a junior could play that many on the weekend. So looking ahead to her future, don't let

those numbers scare you.

If the your little girl wants to win in tournaments, she must learn to win, and that means she must play matches and tournaments. One of your jobs will be to help her find matches. She can play adults where you play. Most adults love to help a junior. And remember, ***almost any match is better than no match.***

The same holds true for tournaments. Almost any tournament is better than no tournament. Tournament play is how you learn to play tournaments.

Tournaments come in all levels, so help her find some tournament action. Her Pro will be a big help in this endeavor.

The United States Tennis Association sanctions tournaments all over the country for juniors. Any junior can play in almost any of these tournaments. The only requirement is joining the USTA. These tournaments are divided into age groups. Some areas offer tournaments for as young as a ten year old. All areas offer divisions of juniors in twelve-, fourteen-, sixteen-, and eighteen-and-under. Juniors who play in a certain number of these tournaments qualify to be ranked. So your daughter can strive for a ranking in the USTA. She can become ranked in her state, section, or she can even become nationally ranked.

Go ahead and join the USTA now. Go to [usta.com](http://usta.com) for information on becoming a member. The USTA is founded to help tennis grow, so it is a good investment anyway. This site is also a great site for getting tournament schedules, rules, rankings, and etc.

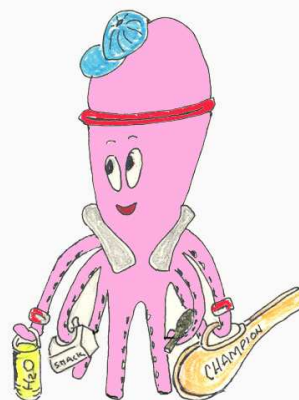
These USTA, Sectional or State rankings are where college coaches look for players to fill their tennis scholarship quotas on their tennis teams. So if her goal is to get a college scholarship in tennis or to play tennis at college, she must play in sanctioned tournaments. She should start sanctioned tournaments as young as possible if she wants to set a goal of playing tennis in College.

Your daughter doesn't have to be this ambitious to have fun playing tournaments. Just for the fun of it she can play USTA tournaments, local tournaments, club tournaments and doubles tournaments with....

**....YOU.**

**Some work that will really pay off....**

THE TOURNAMENT PLAYER



I got my headband, wristbands, rackets,  
sport drink, water jug, hat, extra shirt, towel,  
snack and practice balls.....I'M READY.

## ***Teaching Tools....Lesson 52***

### **CHARTING AND SAMPLE CHARTS**

Charting is simply sitting on the sidelines of a match and marking on a piece of paper selected things that are happening in a tennis match. A good time to start this is when your child starts to play competitive matches.

You can create a chart that can tell you anything you want to know about a your child's game and how he played a match.

Take the serve, for example. A chart can be maintained for keeping track of any of the following serve results:

- Serve hit into the net.
- Serve hit out.
- Second serve hit into the net.
- Second serve hit out.
- Serve hit to the opponents weakness.
- Double fault.
- Point won on first serve.
- Point won on second serve.
- First serve in play on a crucial point.

These are just a few of the types of information you might be looking for. Keeping track of any of these items will give valuable information on what is happening when your son is serving.

You don't have to start at a high level of difficulty. You can start by simply keeping track of balls in play or errors made. Add items to the chart as your child improves—anything that suits the situation. Start your charting today.

Much credit should be given to the parent who charts their child. Charting requires a good deal of concentration, and there will be no socializing with the other parents while your son plays. You'll have to keep your mind on the game. Sometimes both parents can help doing this, and this will also be a real learning process for you.

Use your imagination. Devise charts that fit the situation.

Charting can also solve disagreements that may arise between you and your child about his play. This happens when the two of you see things differently that happen on the court. Chart him, and you both will see it better in black and white.

And, a funny thing can happen when you do this. Suppose that you think your son is hitting most of his backhand errors into the net but, he disagrees. A pretty simple chart

can solve this.. In the next match he gets every backhand over the net. He is so determined to win this disagreement with you that he will get every backhand over the net.

So who is really the winner? You both are! You got him to get his backhand higher, and he plays better because of this. Yet, he thinks he was right. Take your defeat graciously and smile inside. This is an asset of rebellion.

Sometimes, even a chart won't make the point. If he looks at the evidence and chooses not to believe it, then you should drop the matter. The great football coach Vince Lombardi couldn't do it from here. Try a different approach at some other time.

There may come a time when you will chart a possible opponent's match to pick up clues about his weaknesses. It's be even better if your son charts the opponent. It will teach him to dissect an opponent's game.

The main point here is that charting is an excellent way for a player to understand what is happening on the tennis court. The tennis game is too complex and too fast for the human mind to assimilate the data into a useable form while playing a match.

For your convenience, there are hand held computers that help chart a tennis match. You can find these advertised in tennis magazines or on the internet. However, a piece of paper does just as well, so get a piece of paper and.....chart away.

## **Lifetime Skill:**

### **Collecting data and using it to solve a problem.**

**Now an example of a simple chart:**

**How to use this chart:** Simply place a mark in the appropriate row after each serve and after the end of each point. You can either use marks or for more information use the letter abbreviations as indicated. After each set total the marks, and you should have some good information. You can even do percentages and compare from match to match.

This first chart gives a lot of good information on errors.



## SIMPLE ERROR CHART

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### FIRST SERVE

GOOD \_\_\_\_\_

FALULT \_\_\_\_\_

### SECOND SERVE

GOOD \_\_\_\_\_

DOUBLFAULT \_\_\_\_\_

W = Winner

### RETURN OF FIRST SERVE

RETURNED \_\_\_\_\_

NOT RETURNED \_\_\_\_\_

### RETURN OF SECOND SERVE

RETURNED \_\_\_\_\_

NOT RETURNED \_\_\_\_\_

N = Net, O = Out, W = Winner

### ERRORS DURING PLAY

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### WINNERS DURING PLAY

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

FN = Forehand in Net, BO = Backhand Out, etc

## Another example of a simple chart

**How to use this chart:** This simple chart will provide valuable information for understanding one of the first strategies of playing tennis....KEEPING ERRORS TO A MINIMUM.

Every time a point is played, place a mark in the **SERVING POINTS** column or in the **RECEIVING POINTS** column depending on whether your child is serving or receiving. When you add these two columns together, it will give the total points played in the match.

Then at the end of each point, place a mark how the point ended in the appropriate row.

You will have to make a judgment on what is an error and what is a winner. Do not be too critical. There is such a thing as a Forced Error, which will, at this time, be called an opponent winner. Only count errors that you feel your child or the opponent **should** have gotten into play.

Total at the end of the match. You now can create percentages of errors to winners and what ever would be appropriate. Keep this Chart for future reference.

Errors will normally dominate in the beginning stages of a player's development. As the skill is improved, errors should diminish and the ratio of errors to winner should improve. I try to get a Junior to keep errors below ten per set.

### You can now start to see some possible strategies from this chart.

- ❖ If the opponent has a large number of winners, and your child has a large number of errors—this opponent is a better player than your child. Play could still be improved if your child could eliminate some errors, and keep more balls in play. Should this opponent be one that your child plays a lot, he should learn to count “balls in play”. As he gets more balls in play each time they play he will start to be more competitive.
- ❖ If both players make a lot of errors and your child loses, then it is obvious that making less errors will make winning this match possible. This is the type of match where progress can be made. Errors come when a player tries to hit too hard or to good a shot.
- ❖ If your child hits a lot of winners and the opponents errs a lot, then your child is better than the opponent and work can be done on finding types of errors and making corrections. Also, this is a good time to practice strategy or work on certain type of shots.

This chart is good for comparing errors to winners for your child and the opponent.

## SIMPLE CHART

\_\_\_\_\_ VS \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_ FINAL SCORE \_\_\_\_\_

	SERVING POINTS	RECEIVING POINTS	TOTAL
POINTS PLAYED			
YOUR CHILD'S ERRORS			
YOUR CHILD'S WINNERS			
OPPONENT'S WINNERS			
OPPONENT'S ERRORS			
TOTALS			

## **And yet another example of a chart.....**

**How to use this chart:** This chart is marked in a similar manner as the Simple Error Chart.

Mark your child's errors in the appropriate row. For example, if your child were to hit a forehand out you would place a mark in the FOREHAND HIT OUT row.

Your child's errors are the only errors that you mark in the stroke error sections. At this point, we are not too concerned about how your child hits winners or how the opponent makes errors or winners. Later when scouting an opponent, the reverse might be true. It is very beneficial when scouting an opponent to determine where he or she makes errors and where he or she hits winners.

The top part of the chart, the part above the row X's, is for serve and return of serve information. It has been determined that, at almost all levels of the game, the average number of shots per point for both players is about four. This means that each player averages about two shots in play per point, this means that half of the shots each player makes is either a serve or a return of serve. Special attention should be given to this area of the game.

### ***The serve and the return of serve are half the game.***

Totaling all the errors and winners from the chart will give the total number of points played. This will give all the information that is needed to create percentages which can be used to determine improvement. First serve errors, of course, are not added to this total, as the first serve error does not lose a point; however, this will be valuable in determining first serve percentage. Only include double faults into total errors.

After the match, this chart and the percentage figures should give you a good overview of where your child's weaknesses might be. Keep these match results into your Tennis Journal.

The next chart is excellent for determining what type of errors your child is making.

# ADVANCED ERROR/WINNER CHART

\_\_\_\_\_ VS \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

TYPE OF SHOT	SERVING PTS	RECEIVING PTS	TOTALS
FIRST SERVE FAULTS		ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ	
DOUBLE FAULTS		ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ	
RETURN OF SERVE...OUT	ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ		
RETURN OF SERVE...IN NET	ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ		
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX	
FOREHAND IN NET			
FOREHAND OUT			
BACKHAND IN NET			
BACKHAND OUT			
VOLLEY OUT			
VOLLEY IN NET			
OVERHEAD OUT			
OVERHEAD IN NET			
TOTAL ERRORS			
WINNERS			
OPPONENT			
OPPONENT WINNERS			
OPPONENT ERRORS			
TOTAL POINTS			

## Balls in Play Error Chart: (My favorite)

This chart is my personal favorite. It keeps track of everything in a match, and is designed to chart only your child's results. One of the nice things about this chart is that it keeps score. Sometimes it is hard to mark your chart and keep up with the score. This chart keeps track of what has happened on every point in a set or match. It also notes the different type of errors that your child makes in the match.

Another reason it is my personal favorite is that there is a column for balls in play. On each point that is played, you count the balls your child gets into play. This information can be very enlightening to an over-hitting child when he sees the very small numbers for his total balls in play in a match. You can use "balls in play" as a carrot for achieving continued effort throughout a match. A reward can even be offered for keeping the ball in play a certain number of times. This can be a good plan against a better player. This removes the onus of winning and losing from the match and substitutes a more meaningful "balls in play" goal.

An average set has about fifty to seventy total points played. So, your child should set a minimum of one hundred balls in play per set, as a goal. This is less than two balls in play per point. To keep this chart you simply:

- ❖ Mark the initials of the server in the first block of each point. Also, in this block you will put an "F" for a first serve fault when your child is serving and a D for a double fault.
- ❖ In the next two blocks place the initial of the type of error that your child hit. An example would be to place a "B" in the "N" block indicating a backhand in the net. You could even get more info by using a "BL" for hitting a backhand in the net attempting a down the line shot. Use "BC" for crosscourt errors and "VC" for a volley error that is missed going cross court.
- ❖ In the column with the "W" use the same code you used above for winners your child hits.
- ❖ In the "FE", Forced Error, column place a mark if your child's opponent has forced your child into an error. This is, in reality, marking a winner for the opponent. Be generous, and give your child a break if he or she really tried to return the ball. The opponent's winners will also go in this column. Again you can embellish your information by indicating backhand, forehand, and volley, return of serve" or overhead. Use your own code for these forced errors.
- ❖ In the "BIP" column, balls in play (this includes a serve in proper court). You simply count your child's balls into the court and place that number. The serve counts as a "ball in play" if it goes in.
- ❖ And finally you put in the score.

You now have a complete history of the match. Total the items you feel significant and compare to future matches. You can now see what has happened on important points like deuce and ad, which is a significant fact in winning tennis matches.

## BALL IN PLAY ERROR CHART

VS \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

[illegible]

N equals Error in the net. O equals Error out. W equals Winner. FE equals opponent Winner or Forced Error. BIP equals number of balls in play

Here are some of the symbols you can use on your charts to add to the information content:

F = Fault

DF = Double Fault

A = Ace, an un-returnable serve and not touched by the receiver

B = Backhand

FH = Forehand

V = Volley

OH = Overhead

After you have charted a number of matches, you might want to create your own chart to get the information you want. I find it best to use one chart for every set.

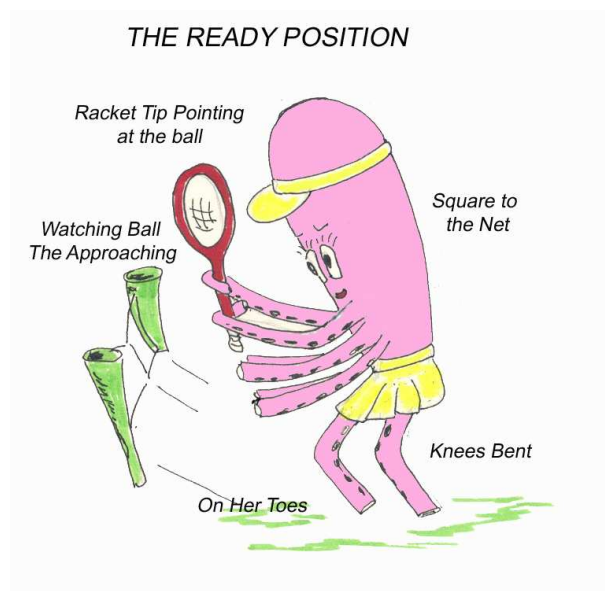
**Don't forget to include chart results in your "Tennis Journal."**

**LIFETIME SKILL: YOU CAN'T MANAGE WHAT YOU CAN'T MEASURE.**

**Now the "how-to" part....**



# INSTRUCTIONS



## *Instruction...Lesson 53*

# **TENNIS STROKES.. THE HEART OF YOUR CHILD'S GAME**

The tennis stroke is the heart of the tennis game.

All good tennis players have good tennis strokes.

The stroke is the skill of the game. Everything else is athletic.

Good and effective tennis strokes are long, fluid, and smooth and consistent.

There are five basic strokes that we will have you introduce to your child. These are the forehand, backhand, serve, forehand volley, and backhand volley.

My practice is to teach all of these strokes in succession and as quickly as possible. During the first five lessons I teach the forehand first, the backhand second, the serve third, and then the forehand and backhand volley. In each session I do a review of the previous sessions and then teach the new stroke. The review of the previous sessions might just be shadow swings of already learned strokes. Shadow swings are just practice swings without a ball. In later sessions I do a little shadow practice of each of these five strokes. That being said, your child will probably want to hit nothing but forehands. And that is OK—just try to get some of the other skills going as soon as possible.

Some of the lessons in this instruction section will be just for you. Although we are going deeply into these strokes for a beginner book, it is my belief that the better a person can see in their mind how the stroke is performed, the better that person can hit the ball or teach the strokes. These lessons are presented to help you better understand what it is you are trying to impart to your child.

We will use many analogies in the next few lessons to help you visualize what the tennis stroke is doing to the ball and how it looks and feels.

There will also be the important checkpoints for each individual stroke. We do not believe the game should be taught with checkpoints, but they are there and will give you ample guide to help your child have a beautiful tennis stroke. Move away from the checkpoints as soon as possible. Strive for the long, smooth, complete stroke.

Now let's teach some..... **TENNIS!!!**

Next...You can't hit what you can't see.....

## ***Instruction....Lesson 54***

# **WATCHING THE BALL IS SO IMPORTANT**

Ask any tennis pro what is the most important thing in playing good tennis.

The answer is always, ***Watching the Ball!***

This will be the first thing you will work on with your child. You **can** help your child do this.

Observe your daughter's eyes as she is hitting or catching the ball.

- ❖ Her eyes should be still and not darting around.
- ❖ You should see her eyes focus on the ball. They may even cross a little.
- ❖ Her head should not pull away when hitting the ball. A good steady head, all the way to contact is essential.
- ❖ Seeing the ball is a relaxed skill. If she is too tense, she may not be seeing properly.
- ❖ I have heard from good authority that, at the exact moment you step and your foot hits the ground, you are the same as legally blind. So being still or stationary is a big help.

When someone is watching the ball properly, they follow the ball with relaxed eye movement from where it originates all the way to the racket. The eyes must stay steady as they change focus as the ball approaches. Many say, "See the ball until it hits the racket." Others say, "That is impossible." We say watch it as long as you can. The head must remain still and the eyes focused on the contact spot until after the racket has made contact. Videoing this process can be very helpful as all this is happening faster than most people can see. In reviewing the video, run it frame by frame and it will be obvious where the eyes were at contact. Remember this video test as it will be helpful throughout your child's tennis career.

At first the bounce may be confusing to your daughter, and she may not be watching the changing path and speed of the ball. This is timing and getting use to the change in speed and direction of the ball. It will come to her eventually. Make sure she sees the ball after the bounce.

Here is how you help your daughter learn to see the ball. Devise or invent little training games, like seeing the seams on the ball; telling you the spin on the ball, reading the number on the ball, and etc. For a small child, you can take a tennis ball or a larger air-filled ball and, with a magic marker, put numbers or stripes on it.

Many people mistakenly believe they see the ball when in actuality they are not seeing the ball, as they should. They may see it when it is far away but not up when the ball

gets close. They think that they have seen the ball. In other cases their eyes dart ahead of the ball and back. This does not work, and making good contact is hard. And, as a result many of these people believe they are not coordinated. It just may be bad eye skills.

The training sessions for learning to see the ball should be done at close range with a tossed ball. The ball can either bounce or stay in the air. You should practice using both types of tosses. You toss and watch her eyes; however, if she is hitting the ball, with a tennis racket, for safety, **Watch Out!** And remember, **The ball should be tossed very slowly.**

Playing catch is a good exercise for watching the eye movements.

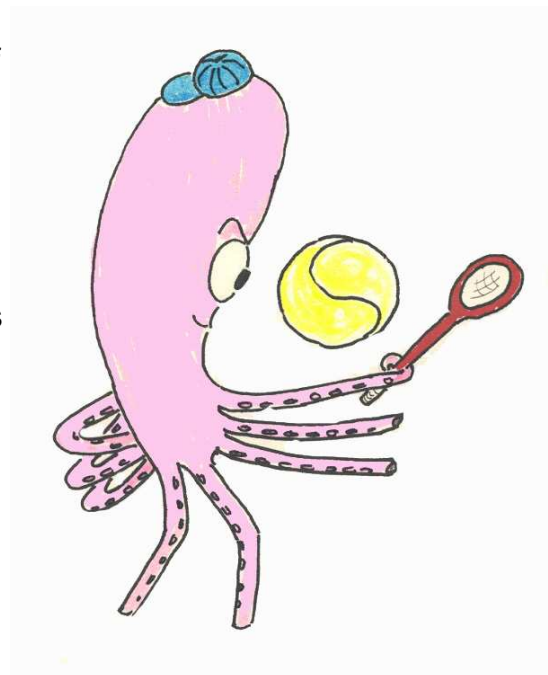
On each toss, ask her if she saw the ball. If you watch her eyes, you should be able to tell if she did, in fact, look at the ball. If you believe she did not follow the ball properly with her eyes, ask where she saw the ball. As strange as it seems, it is possible to look at the ball and not really focus on it.

Stay with these tossing/catch drills until she has learned to follow the ball with her eyes.

Many times it will be easy to determine if she does not see the ball—her head might turn too soon, she might blink, or she closes her eyes, and it will be obvious she couldn't have seen the ball at contact.

You should watch your daughter's eyes from now on. Not all the time, but from time to time do an eye check.

Pretty soon you will be able to say, "You didn't see that one," and that will be enough to cause her to concentrate on watching the ball.



## **MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD SEES THE BALL!!**

Next, how you feed balls to your child is so important....

## *Instruction....Lesson 55*

# HOW YOU SHOULD TOSS TO YOUR CHILD IS CRITICAL

The TOSS will be a major teaching tool in the beginning of your child's tennis adventure. Tossing the ball is the easiest ball for your child to stroke properly and make good contact.

The TOSS we are referring to here is the ball that you feed your child to hit. This is done by hand. Tennis Pros usually do the feeding by hitting the ball with the racket, and you may do this later. I still do hand feeding for some things, even with very good players.

Starting out, we recommend you feed by hand. I can't over-emphasize the importance of a proper toss if you want your daughter to make good consistent contact. Your ability to feed well-directed balls will have a big influence on how well early sessions proceed. The younger the child, the more this is true. Even if you are a skilled player feed the ball by hand with a young beginner child.

If you are bouncing the ball for her to hit, my suggestion is that you toss the ball as you would throw a dart. Make the ball bounce so that it arrives in your daughter's strike zone, which is about two feet from her body and about waist high. The slower this ball arrives, the better. If you are throwing balls for her to catch, then throw underhanded.

**If you are tossing for her to hit, then toss as you would throw a dart.**

Make a mental image of where you want the ball to go. To do this have your child hold her racket where she should make contact with the ball. That is where you want the ball to go. Now have her take her racket back, keeping your imaginary target in your mind.

Get her attention by saying, **"READY."** Then tell her to, **"WATCH THE BALL"**. Then bounce the ball to the imaginary contact point. Try to control the speed of tosses to match her timing.

Be careful, you could get drilled with the ball. Get behind the net for some protection. If it is too dangerous, stand beside your daughter and drop the ball into the strike zone. Now watch out for the racket. It can get wild at times.

The **"Ready"** term is a command that is used to get attention and to have the child get into the correct position for the drill. Each of the five strokes we will talk about may have its own **"Ready Position"**.

First sessions like the above are usually started on the forehand. The same process will be used for the backhand and any strokes that need gentle well-directed feeding of balls.

The same process is used when she makes her first step to the ball. You will have to create a new imaginary target for the toss. Do the same thing again when she is ready to take a few steps.

Set a goal for each session to achieve a measurable result. It may be for the number tossed, the number hit, or the number hit over the net.

## **TOSS MANY, MANY.....**

**Another simple tool for Stroke Production....**

## ***Instruction....Lesson 56***

### **THE DROP AND HIT**

The “DROP AND HIT” exercise is another wonderful teaching tool that enables your child to work on her strokes. Your daughter can easily practice one hundred shots in one half hour.

The process is simple. Have your child stand sideways to the net with her racket back in the ready position. Then with the other hand she drops the ball or tosses it up a little, so when it hits the ground it bounces up about waist high a few feet away. It should come to her in her perfect contact position, which is the same as when you dropped the ball for her.

Bring your chalk with you in case she has a problem with this drill. Make a circle where she should stand and another where she should drop or bounce the ball on the court. She may have to practice a few to get the ball to bounce in the circle.

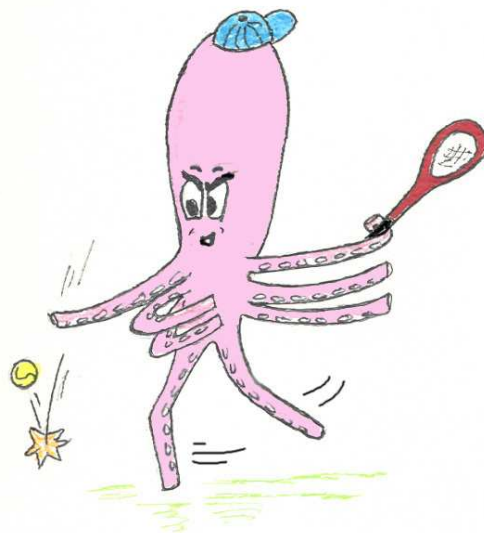
After the ball is dropped and it bounces, she steps toward the ball, swings and follows through to the follow through position. (See the Lessons on the forehand and back-hand for the follow through positions.) She should hold the follow through position for a moment to see if the position is correct, and be sure she has balance.

#### **Ready, Drop the Ball, Step, Swing, Follow Through, and Freeze.**

The reason this drill is so effective is that it doesn't require the timing skill that is needed on a ball tossed or hit to her. She can go at her own pace. She can keep her balance and perform perfect strokes. Also, she can do this by herself.

I have used this drill extensively with clinic type situations. It works great. All the children can hit at the same time and get lots of hitting in the lesson. If you have several children, this will be good for you. Children of different sizes, skills, and ages can drill on the same court at the same time. All the while, you are grading the follow-through positions.

When you start your child doing the Drop and Hit Drill, start her about half way to the net. This diminishes the feeling that she has to hit the ball hard to get it over the net.



Keep the drill smooth and easy. As she progress, you can move her back.

Again, set some goal for the session, either balls over the net or at a target, and record at the end.

Use the Drop and Hit Drill for stroking practice, and the tossed ball for timing practice. Alternate these two drills. When she can do a perfect follow through on the tossed ball, she is ready for the RALLY.

## **PERFECT PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT!**

**Now, the fun part.....**



## ***Instruction....Lesson 57***

### **GETTING TO THE RALLY**

In tennis terminology, a “rally” is when two players hit the ball back and forth across the net. A rally has to be more than one exchange over the net.

All tennis players love to rally. This is a fun part of the tennis lessons that the two of you will do together. It is a non-competitive form of tennis play. In the rally the two players are basically partners in the game, as they try to keep the rally going as long as possible.

In this rally game the two players try to hit to each other. They try to hit in such a manner as to make returning the ball easy.

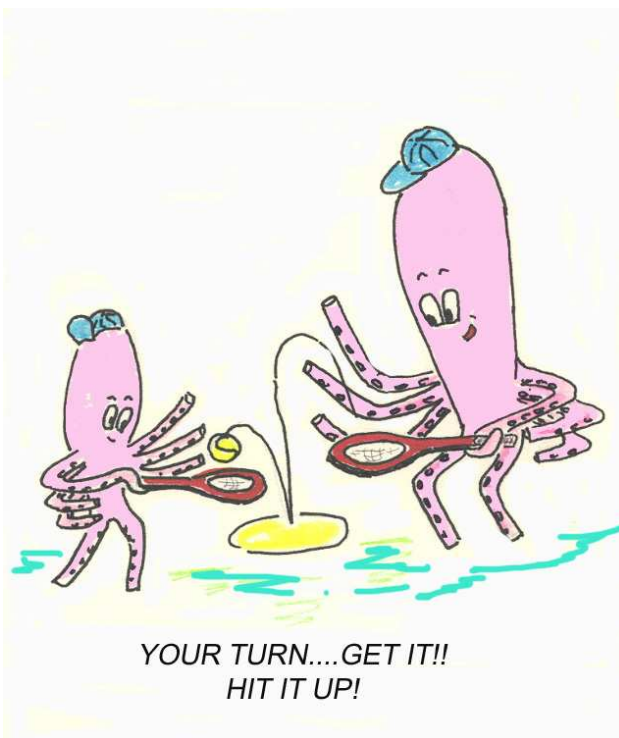
Now, how to get to the rally: Some of the first skills that beginning children like to do are basic ball and racket handling skills like bouncing the ball down and bumping the ball up. To start learning to rally, have your child learn to bump the ball up, let it bounce, bump it up again, let it bounce, bump up, bounce, and so on. He should bump the ball about four feet up into the air.

When he can do this fairly consistently; it is time for you to get your chalk out again. Draw a circle on the court about two feet across. Now the bounce should land in the circle. This may not happen every time, but he should work on getting the ball in the circle most of the time.

When this skill is achieved it is time for you to jump in, and alternate bumping the ball up and letting it land in the circle with you son. Even if you are a non-player, you can do this.

When the two of you can do ten in a row in the circle, take a step back. Do ten in a row from the new distance and step back and hit and then step back again. You can continue this process of getting further apart until you can get the net between the two of you.

***You are now RALLYING.***



You will get to where you and your child can rally the ball over the net many times. This will be one of the first real stepping-stones in your child's progress. When you get to this stage, do some counting and establish your own World's Record in balls over the net in a row. Put this in your Journal so you don't forget. Attempt a new record every week. Progress in this record will be very rewarding to everyone.

You can Rally just forehands, or you could just do backhands. Any type of Rally is OK.

**NOTE: Here are some tips on getting into rallying:**

As the two of you get further apart in your "bump up drill" you will notice that the ball will be hit with less height or less arc. Don't let this happen, as it will make the process harder, and control will be diminished. As you get further apart, hit the ball a little higher. Try to keep the ball going with a high trajectory. If you start to lose control, move closer together and get a bigger arc on the flight of the ball.

Try to keep the trajectory, or arc of the flight of the ball, the same. This means as you get further apart the ball will have to go higher. The ball should go up in the air about as high as the distance between the two of you. There will come a point where the height of the arc will have to be lower or you will be hitting moon balls. This usually happens when the two of you start to hitting over the net. However, remember, a good high arc over the net will promote longer rally's. Just remember that the net is the first obstacle to hitting into the other court, so a high arc will give good clearance over the net.

Another excellent method of getting to the rally stage is a technique used by many Pros. This technique he called "Bounce, Hit".

To do this, a player would say, "Bounce" whenever the ball bounces and "Hit" whenever the ball is hit by both players. This is a wonderful exercise for a player to become aware of the speed and flight of the ball. Awareness is the key here. Also, it is pretty hard to do this exercise and not watch the ball. This is great for older children.

You probably may not experience a high level of success with a young child, but with an older child you could easily expect good results. Give it a try.

**BOUNCE, HIT, BOUNCE, HIT, BOUNCE,  
BOUNCE, BOUNCE.**

Control yes, power no....

## ***Instruction....Lesson 58***

# **THE PURPOSE OF A GOOD STROKE IS ACCURACY**

The real problem in tennis is making the ball go where you want it to go.

Most think hitting the ball will be the problem. Yet in a few hours, everyone hits the ball, they just don't have much of an idea where it is going.

Watch your son hit his first ball. The joy here is in contact with the ball. Next he will become enthralled with how far it goes. This is natural. Children love to smack'em. So at first let some of this free spirit happen.

Somewhere in the session; however, you should add a target. This is not a big part of the beginning sessions; but try, as you go along, you will slowly transform the emphasis toward a target. You may have to flip back and forth between letting him hit with full power and then seeking some control of the ball.

**Start to work on "some control," after good contact has been established.**

There are techniques on how to hit the ball and there are techniques on where to hit the ball. You will go back and forth with these two different concepts as you bring your child along. You work on the stroke. Then you try to get some direction, and woops, just like that the stroke is gone. So you go back and work on the stroke. Then you work on direction, and etc.

**The stroke must be the initial goal.  
Direction comes second.**

To direct a ball; a player needs to know two things. First, he must know where his target is; and second, he must know where the ball is. He knows where the ball is by watching it. He knows where his target is because he sees it in his mind's eye.

This is not like throwing a football or baseball, where the thrower sees the target and throws toward it. Tennis is more like a field goal kicker, who sees the goal posts in his mind, concentrates on the ball and directs the ball to that target in his mind.

The serve in tennis is a good example of this. We pick our target in the service court, toss the ball in the



air and keep our eyes on the ball until the contact has been made, all the while making the racket go toward the mental image of the target. Hitting other types of strokes on the court while moving requires more practice. A player must have an understanding of where he or she is on the court and where the target is located. This takes time and much playing.

When working on better direction, play games with your son, such as hitting into a circle on a wall or an area of the court. Start with a big target that is easy to hit.

Make some targets for practice. Kids love to hit at tennis cans on the court. It is up to you to make some exciting targets to hit. A lot of Pros have the kids aim at themselves. This is something else the kids love to do. Remember, the Pro is skilled enough to stop the ball before it hits him, so be careful if you want to try this yourself. Also, remember kids don't care if you are looking, so stay loose in case you get hit.

Direction is one of our ultimate goals. It may not come right away. However,

## **ACCURACY IS SUPREME!**

Stroking coming up.....

## *Instruction....Lesson 59*

# TEACHING YOUR CHILD STROKES

As we watch good players hit the ball it looks too easy.

Good tennis strokes are simple. What is presented here is as simple as I can make it.

**Different Tennis Instructors and different tennis books key in on different parts of the tennis swing. I have found that the most reliable way to acquire an outstanding tennis stroke is to concentrate on the follow-through. A complete follow-through which finishes where it is supposed to is the easiest and simplest way of achieving a good swing.**

So if you have your child work on the follow-through positions on each stroke, I will guarantee excellent tennis strokes.

One of the keys to a good tennis forehand, backhand, and serve strokes is to use the same stroke every time. Good tennis players have one stroke that they use over and over. Poor players hit the same shot with many different swings. This makes the game too complex.

**If the racket starts in the same place and ends in the same place every time, it indicates that the racket has made pretty much the same path every time.**

The parts of the swing before and during contact are important—there is no question about this. However, I have found that if students achieve a proper follow-through position, the other parts will fall into place.

When a person is hitting a tennis ball, many things can go through their mind. They could be thinking watch the ball, weight forward, racket back, or a zillion other things. Yet, we know that we can only think of one thing at a time.

Since we can only have one thought at a time, let's work on one particular thing or thought until it is automatic. The tennis swing should be that automatic thing. If you have to think about the swing in a match, you can't be watching the ball.

**One thought at a time, please.**

I have students who are working hard putting all the things that should happen on a particular stroke but without good results. I direct that student to concentrate on only one thing, and that one thing is to achieve the follow-through position for the stroke ten times in a row. Sounds easy, but it may take several attempts for that student to think about just one thing ten times in a row without regard to where the ball goes.

When they get ten perfect follow-throughs in a row, most of the shots come off very well. I then ask, “Did you like those shots?” The student will almost always say, “Yes”. And I ask, “Why would you think of anything else? That’s all you need.” That’s what concentration is all about, focusing on one thing. And that one thing in learning a particular stroke is the follow-through position.

We only think about this one thing until it becomes automatic. At that point, we can use our one thought on watching the ball.

One more point on this subject—almost all tennis players’ strokes look different when they hit the tennis ball. Each player’s stroke is unique. This means his strokes differ from all other players. The point here is that all players may look different, but their strokes all do the same thing. In the part of the swing from the contact point to about a foot after contact, they all do the same thing.

### **Follow-through is for control; back swing is for power.**

We will say this again and again, but it is so important. The follow-through is the control mechanism in a tennis stroke. The back swing is the power mechanism.

Limiting the back swing can be a big factor in getting control of the stroke and not over hitting. It is also a big factor in being able to follow-through properly. Little kids just want to snatch the racket back and whale away.

One method of controlling the back swing in a student’s beginning stages is to back the student to a wall or fence. This allows no back swing and will seem awkward to the child at first. But this can cure the problem of too much back swing and will become natural in a short while. This will also help teach the feel of the ball, and accuracy will improve. You will be amazed at how accurate her shots will become with no back swing.

As you work with your daughter we recommend that you stress that she learn all her follow-through positions and use them. The follow-through positions will be explained in the lesson on each stroke. You will have to work with her to learn these positions. To do this you can try some of the following:

- ❖ Demonstrate the position yourself.
- ❖ Ask a good player to show their slow motion perfect swing.
- ❖ Show her sequence photos of good players hitting the ball.
- ❖ Do a video of her swing.
- ❖ Shadow swing a lot. At least twenty-five perfect swings a session.

Almost every class of beginners I teach learn a perfect forehand swing in the first lesson. Getting them to use that swing at a moving ball is the real challenge. So get her to have a good swing and work toward using it on the court.

One more note on this. The sooner in life she develops a good swing the better. I have seen children who were taught strokes at a very early age, who then did not touch a tennis racket for many years, only to come back years later and have a nice stroke and approach to the ball. So teach.....

***.....THE FOLLOW-THROUGH FROM THE START.***

It's all so simple if you can just get the right pictures in your mind.

## *Instruction....Lesson 60*

# THE THEORY OF A TENNIS STROKE

This lesson is mostly for the parent. As you understand what is supposed to be happening in a tennis stroke you can better teach your child. Now let's see if we can get this mental picture in your mind.

Imagine as a racket travels through the air in an ordinary tennis stroke, it leaves a smoke trail the shape of the racket frame in its wake. We refer to this smoke trail as the shape of the stroke.

The shape would be like a tube the size of the racket face, tracing the entire path the racket has taken.

**This smoke tube is of course curled at the start and curled at the end. But, if we just look at the contact zone, the part of the tube that is from just before the ball contact is made to about one foot or so after, we would see that part of the tube to be fairly straight. This part of the tube should resemble the barrel of a gun. If you were to get down and look through that tube you would see it is pointing or looking right where the ball went. It should be pointing at the target. Bingo, the ball goes where the stroke or racket is going. So all you have to do is point the barrel of the stroke at the target and the ball will go there.**

Beginners start out in this game trying to direct the ball at the point of contact. This is where the ball goes where the racket is pointed or facing at the exact moment of impact. This would be like tapping or bunting the ball. We would rather understand that the stroke does not deal in a single point but sweeps the ball toward the target, down the imaginary barrel of the gun.

In the case of a bullet from a gun, the bullet is kept in the barrel of the gun by the barrel and directed to the target. In the tennis stroke, the only way the ball can stay in the barrel is if it stays on the racket strings. If the ball jumps off or rolls off the strings, the ball will escape the barrel and go somewhere else.

So the two principals to be taught and taught in tennis stroke production are:

- ❖ **The racket must stroke toward the target.**
- ❖ **The ball must stay on the strings long enough to achieve the path of the racket.**

Still using the gun analogy, consider if a person were given a gun with crooked sights. If they shot the gun at a target, they would probably miss. However, if they shot the gun enough, they would soon learn to compensate, and they might even shoot as straight as if the sights were perfect. Remember our forefathers in the early days could



shoot straight with crooked guns and sights. They shot the gun enough to understand where it was shooting and they adjusted.

Now if that same person were given a different gun with different sights each time they shot, they would be very confused, and they would stay confused. They could never figure out where to aim.

This is the value of the gun analogy to the tennis stroke. Some people play the game using a different stroke each time they hit the ball. Which means that they are using a different barrel on each shot. Good players use the same stroke almost every time they hit. We want your child to use just one stroke, every time she hits a forehand, serve or backhand. We want her using the same gun barrel all the time. Even if it is not a perfect set of sights or barrel, she will learn where the stroke is going, and her shots will become very consistent. Achieving the correct follow-through position each swing insures that she is using the same stroke every time.

All of the above was said so that you understand the importance of the follow-through position on each stroke. These positions will be presented in following lessons.

Remember,

**THE KEY IS THE FOLLOW-THROUGH.**

**WHICH IS A LIFETIME SKILL.**

Next, the first big weapon.....

## ***Instruction....Lesson 61***

# **TEACHING THE FOREHAND**

The forehand will be your child's main tennis stroke for many years to come.

An old tennis proverb states:

To play without a backhand is difficult...

To play without a forehand is impossible.

That old proverb has taken a hit with the advent of the two handed backhand. Now many two-handed backhands are equal to and sometimes even superior to the forehand. Still the forehand is the major weapon for most players.

The forehand lesson starts with the grip. Explanations of the forehand grip are the same in almost every tennis book ever written.

### **“Shake hands with the racket”.**

In this grip the palm of the hand is in the same plane as the strings in the racket, or the face of the racket. However, we don't want to worry too much about the forehand grip. Good players seem to have every grip in the book. On other strokes like the backhand, serve and volley, the proper grip will be a lot more important.

The next step in the forehand lesson will be to learn to swing the racket to the follow-through position. Start out with the left side to the net position (right handed player). This is called a closed stance. Many Pros teach an open stance on the forehand. However, I feel that in learning the forehand it is better with the side to the net. It helps to learn the shoulder turn that is so important to a good stroke. Your child can easily change to an open stance in the future if it is deemed necessary. The following are the checkpoints for this position:

- ❖ Have your daughter swing at a real or an imaginary ball and follow-through and touch the left shoulder with her right hand (if she is a right-handed player). We don't care if she hits a ball or not.
- ❖ In the follow-through position her right elbow should be pointed where the ball was supposed to go.
- ❖ The right hip should swing with the stroke and end up closer to the net than the left.
- ❖ She should end up standing fairly erect.
- ❖ Racket “behind” or “over” the left shoulder.
- ❖ She should be balanced with her weight on the left foot, which is nearest to the net.
- ❖ The trailing foot should have only the toe contacting the ground, indicating that all the weight has transferred.
- ❖ Simple as that. You see this position all the time in the golf swing. Just

look at the position of any good golfer and you have a picture of what we are discussing.

When you are pitching balls to her, try to make her stroke correct even if she does not hit the ball. When a player finishes a follow-through even if the ball is missed indicates that the person intended to hit through the contact point and not just to swing to the point of contact. This is a very important point.

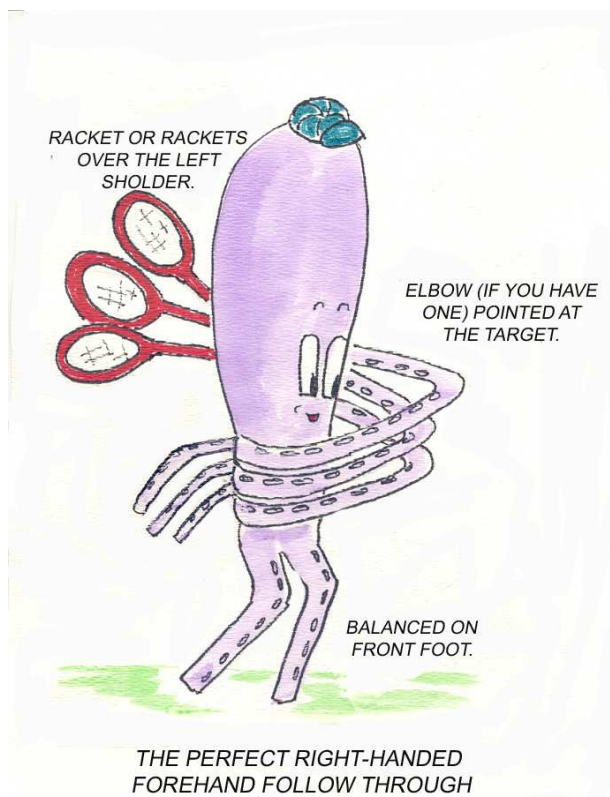
When a person stops the swing before the complete follow-through is made on a missed ball, we don't know if the person missed the ball because they stopped the swing, or they stopped the swing because they missed the ball. We need to know if the intention was to swing through the contact point to the follow-through position. Your child should learn to swing through the contact point no matter what. The only way we can be sure that has happened is to finish correctly every time.

I had a student once who was stroking the ball just fine. However, when I hit the ball a little wide, he ran and tapped the ball back with a swing that stopped on contact. I then said, "You didn't follow-through." Then to my horror he replied, "I know, I had to choose between swinging right or getting the ball back."

This student did not grasp the stroking concept at all. The stroke concept is that the path of the stroke would gather the ball up and direct it back to me, the target. Tapping the ball gave this student only a tiny moment of contact and the racket face had to be square to me for this shot to go where it was supposed to go. This tapping the ball back to me worked fairly well with the slow balls I was feeding. The contact point would point would have been very hard to find with a ball coming at a much faster pace. It would also have been very difficult if the student wanted to hit the ball very hard.

If your daughter is having trouble swinging through the contact point, then try this: find a tennis racket, which has no strings in it, and have your child swing at moving balls with this racket. The ball will shoot right through the racket. This is a good exercise. The swing should be smooth to completion. Keep this up until the swing is very smooth. This drill will give you good insight into what she is trying to do with her swing.

You can switch back and forth between the hollow and the real racket, until all the swings look the same.



All tennis strokes are arm and body strokes. When the elbow points where the ball went, it indicates that the upper arm and body were used in the stroke. If the elbow ends up low to the chest or down by her stomach or side then the upper arm was not used. In this case the stroke was executed with most of the stroke happening below the elbow.

If the right hip is closest to the net then the body has rotated.

When the elbow ends up high and pointing to the target the whole arm and shoulder were used and correct position for the hip indicates that the body and hips were used.

If the weight is on the front foot with the back toe pointing at the ground, then the weight has transferred properly.

All of these things are essential ingredients for powerful and accurate tennis shots.

Shadow swinging is a great way to practice this stroke. You don't even have to be on the court to do shadow swings. (See next lesson on Shadow Swings.)

Posing or freezing will help a lot. Pitch her a ball and after she hits it have her freeze in the follow-through position for a count of two or three. Look for correct position and balance. Correct any errors and do it again.

Sometimes we say, "Do it a million times". Well... maybe not a million times but do it a lot. At the beginning of a session do at least twenty-five perfect hit and follow-throughs. Don't worry where the ball goes at first. With time she will be able to groove the correct swing and get control.

When hitting with you, if she can rally the ball back and forth across the net twenty-five times without missing, and do her follow through....her forehand is on its way.

## **THE FOLLOW-THROUGH POSITION IS THE SAME EVERY TIME.**

**Now a little practice.....**

## *Instruction....Lesson 62*

# SHADOW SWINGS MAKE PERFECT STROKES

Shadow swinging can produce a **Perfect Swing**.

Shadow swinging is one of the most useful tools that you will have to teach your daughter the **Perfect Swings**. It is a great tool to teach muscles, muscle memory.

Shadow swinging is practicing a tennis stroke by swinging at an imaginary tennis ball. Some people just call this practice swings.

Make this into some a game or competition. Maybe you could play a Gymnastics type game where every shot is graded from one to ten. If they stick the follow-through they get 7, 8, 9 or 10 on the swing as though you were an Olympic judge.

Shadow swinging can be done indoors or out. It can be done in front of you, the tennis pro or when your daughter is alone. Also, this is a good rainy day session in the garage or family room.

Your child, no matter what age you start, should do some shadow swinging practice. Beginners or advanced players can benefit. Everyone is searching for his or her **Perfect Swing**. You see top players take practice swings between points. Golfers do it all the time. (Golfers will drive you crazy taking practice swings.)

The biggest and best tennis gift you can give your child is to help her learn **Perfect Swings** on all her strokes.

Perfect shadow swinging practice will transfer into **Perfect Swings** on the court with a real live tennis ball. The muscular memory learned in the shadow swing is the same as the real live swing.

### **What an easy way to practice.**

The shadow swing practice should start in slow motion; very, very slow-motion. During the slow motion stroke the check points of the **Perfect Swing** can be observed.

Explanations of the various swings are handled in the "Instruction Lessons" for each stroke. You should establish the checkpoints for five basic tennis strokes, which are the forehand ground stroke, backhand ground stroke, forehand volley, backhand volley and the serve.

Checkpoints for these strokes should include the following:

- ❖ The "**Ready Position**"... You should always start any shadow drill from the

ready position. This has your daughter facing the net with the racket in the ready position. (The exception would be the serve, which you will start in the serve position). Start each shadow stroke with the ready command. "Ready". She will then jump into the ready position on the balls of her feet, knees bent and the tip of the racket pointing straight ahead.

- ❖ The "**Turn into the Hitting Position**"...This is a sequence of check points in the following order.
  - The shoulder turn is first movement to make.
  - The racket moves back in sync with the shoulder turn and is fully in the racket-back position.
  - Next is the step into the final hitting position.
  - Now she is ready to stroke with the racket in the racket-back position.
- ❖ The "**Contact Point**"...This is one of the easiest checkpoints. Have your daughter stop the racket where she thinks she will make first contact with the ball. Now you can check a bunch of things:
  - The Racket Face should be perpendicular to the ground or square to the imaginary ball.
  - The Racket Face should be looking at the intended target. To help with this you can purchase a laser pointer at any office supply store. Push the pointer through the center of the string bed on her racket. Turn it on and the laser beam will point to where the racket face is pointing or looking. This is fun to do. You can't see the laser in full daylight so this must be done indoors or at night.
  - The Racket should be at the proper height above the ground for the stroke that she is practicing.
  - The Racket Face should make this imaginary contact in front of the body and in front of the foot nearest to the net.
- ❖ The "**Follow Through**"...This is what this Pro thinks is the most important checkpoint. Freeze and hold the position for a few seconds to make sure she is balanced, and then,
- ❖ She finishes with the **Ready Position** again.

Shadow swinging is not just for beginners. I have often used shadow drills to practice certain movements and stroking. Take the example of the attacking movements and the strokes when going to the net. This shadow drill could start with either a shadow serve or a shadow approach shot, then movement toward the net, a low volley, more movement forward, a high volley at the net and then an overhead. These moves can be practiced until they are perfect. Then there is a good chance they could be duplicated in a match on the court. This is pretty advanced stuff, but it is a wonderful technique to teach these skills. Any particular move and shot can be practiced in this way.

It is not advocated that strokes be taught by checkpoint, steps or by the numbers method. The swing should be taught as a fluid swing, however it is necessary that she understand the correct path of the racket that you will teach in shadow swinging.

If you have any problems verbalizing the swings, you can video her and show her where her swing deviates from the desired swing. Later video pictures can be used to check swings against a live ball on the tennis court.

Demonstration is another good method to get the point across, if you can do it.

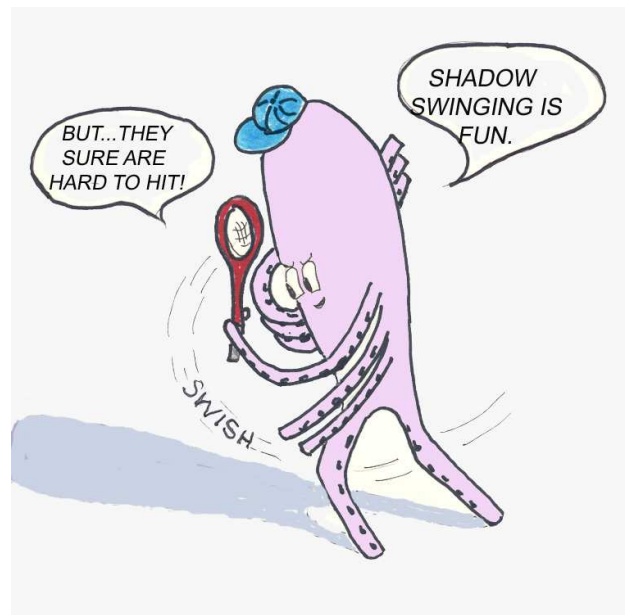
Shadow swinging can also be done in front of a mirror, sliding glass door or any place she can see her reflection. This can do wonders helping her see what she is doing and is also a good place for you to help her make corrections. She can also practice shadow swinging alone and this is a plus.

When most of the checkpoints are achieved, she is ready for a full swing at playing speed but still at an imaginary ball. Now the checkpoints are:

- ❖ Smoothness
- ❖ Racket square to the imaginary ball and going toward the real target.
- ❖ She should have a full body rotation.
- ❖ She should have a nice rhythm of the swing, which is a slow to faster motion through the hitting zone, but not too fast.
- ❖ And the good follow through position.
- ❖ These swings should look the same every time.

Your daughter cannot do too much shadow swinging. Perhaps she might like to do some shadow swings on her own between sessions. Wouldn't that be nice?

The next step is to make **Perfect Swings** on the court hitting tennis balls. If she can do this you are very far along in your initial goals to teach good tennis strokes.



Please understand that swinging at a moving ball on the tennis court is very different from a shadow swing. It requires timing and can only be learned by swinging at moving tennis balls on the tennis court. If you want your child to have a Perfect Swing on the court, you will teach her to shadow swing.....

**...PERFECTLY.....**

***Next, the ball and strings meet.....***

## ***Instruction....Lesson 63***

# **BALL ON THE STRINGS**

And now some information to help you better understand what should happen when your son hits a tennis ball.

All tennis, forehand, backhand, etc. have some things in common. Every time a tennis ball is correctly directed to a target, two things happen.

- ❖ **One, the racket has made a path to the target from the contact point.**
- ❖ **Two, the ball has to stay on the racket strings long enough to achieve the path of the racket.**

The longer the ball stays on the strings, the more opportunity to control its flight.

All tennis pros talk about the ball staying on the strings. It is an elusive concept to beginners.

The more the ball stays on your son's strings when he hits, the more he will feel the control. When this happens, it feels good and he will like it. He will smile a lot.

To help you get a better understanding of this concept, you have to imagine that the ball is thrown from the racket rather than just hit. The ball is caught in the strings and flung toward the target. Think in terms of the contact point being a racket path rather than a single point, and that tiny little path of contact is going toward the target.

One of the main actions that helps in keeping the ball on the strings is racket acceleration. If the racket gains speed at contact and continues to gain speed after contact, the ball will stay on the racket strings longer. Contrary to this, if the racket is losing speed at contact, the ball will leave almost instantaneously. We call the first case "carrying the ball" and the second we call "a hit." Most beginners start off just tapping, bunting, or punching the ball. We call this type of contact, a hit, as opposed to being the desired stroking motion..

This is much like hammering a nail. The hammer stroke is designed to stop at contact. If the hammer were aimed at an imaginary nail, the hammer would still attempt to stop at the imaginary contact point. It is only as players learn their strokes that they can hit through the ball creating that beautiful stroking motion.

So, the racket should be traveling faster after contact than before. Don't expect this from your son for a while.

**A good stroke is a pulling action.**



Pulling the racket to the ball, then pulling the ball will give him a good feel for the ball and good results. The racket is pulled toward the ball, it gathers up the ball and continues pulling after contact. The ball is then thrown off of the racket.

A constant pull will create acceleration. A pull also is stronger than any other method of moving the racket. This is why they put the horses in front of the wagon instead of behind. Keep your son pulling after contact.

In the meantime, here are some things you can do to help him get the feel of the stroke. One of the biggest reasons players hit with a decelerating racket is that they start the racket too fast, so that when they get to the ball they chicken out and start stopping the racket, they tighten up, or they just can't swing any faster.

To keep this from happening, we need to shorten your son's back swing until the proper motion is achieved. Little kids take the racket way, way back. They take enormous back swings. Help him to limit his back swing by backing him up to a fence or wall. This should restrict the back swing. Now pitch balls to him. Someday when he gets the feel of the stroke we will want him to take a bigger back swing. The back swing is the power mechanism in the tennis stroke. Here is a good rule of thumb:

**Back swing is for power. Follow-through is for control.**

For now, however, we would like to keep his back swing somewhat restricted. It will get bigger as he gains control and seeks power.

Another obstacle to not accelerating the racket is just pure tension in the hitting arm. To help with this we get him to loosen his grip and relax a little. A tight grip can tighten the whole arm and sometimes the whole body.

As you pitch to your son you say things like:

- ❖ Carry the ball on your racket.
- ❖ Let the racket throw the ball to me.
- ❖ Pull on the ball.
- ❖ Smooth.
- ❖ Easy.
- ❖ Slow.
- ❖ Nice.

You say things like this until some phrase or word gives him the feeling we are looking for.

You'll know when he is feeling the ball. You can see the ball on the racket. The sound will be different—the sound should be a long sound, not a sharp sound. He will become more relaxed and happy as he feels the ball on the strings.

A main ingredient of the tennis stroke is

## **SLOW TO FAST.**

**Some proof coming up and a better understanding of all this....**

## ***Instruction....Lesson 64***

### **THE RUSSIAN ANALYSIS**

A study by the Russian Table Tennis Team in the 1960's will help to explain what is happening when a tennis racket strokes a tennis ball. This type of study has not been done in tennis, but much of this Table Tennis, or Ping Pong study does apply to tennis.

The Russians were concerned that their players were not measuring up to international competition.

So, the Russian experts used special camera equipment to measure the changing paddle speed before and after contact with the ball. This study only was done on the forehand drive.

Their conclusions were that the strength, timing and smoothness of the drives of top-flight players are not determined so much by the form of movement as by the ***rhythmical*** structure of the swing—mainly the correct ***increase of speed when driving the ball***.

In other words, they say that it doesn't matter so much how a person swings the racket—circular back swing, straight back swing, or whatever. The important thing is that the racket travel faster after contact.

***Racket speed should be greater after contact than before contact.***

They used the analysis to make a table indicating the speeds of the swings of various players studied before and after contact. The comparisons are measured in centimeters per second.

The top international players showed marked acceleration after contact.

Three international players:

- ❖ 18 cm/sec before contact and 2304 cm/sec after.
- ❖ 20 cm/sec before contact and 2560 cm/sec after.
- ❖ 23 cm/sec before contact and 2250 cm/sec after.

Four Russian players:

- ❖ 345 cm/sec before contact and 345 cm/sec after.
- ❖ 224 cm/sec before contact and 1059 cm/sec after.
- ❖ 29 cm/sec before contact and 752 cm/sec after.
- ❖ 419 cm/sec before contact and 280 cm/sec after.

In this last example the player was almost stopping the paddle on contact.

This study also shows that the better player's racket travels significantly slower before contact than the Russian players and gets greater acceleration after. The International players literally put the paddle on the ball and then made their stroke.

Now don't jump on this with both feet. It will be a while before your son can accomplish this type of swing. This information is for you. Watch good players stroke the ball; study what is happening during their stroke. Then look for the same in your son's swing. At least you will know what you are looking for.

This study is the only one of its kind to my knowledge. But it does tell us what to do:

## **TO ACCELERATE THROUGH THE BALL!**

**Now the stroke on the other side of the body...**

## ***Instruction....Lesson 65***

# **TEACHING THE BACKHAND**

The path of the racket on the backhand is a mirror image of the forehand. Although, the body mechanics are different, the racket ball relationship will still be the same. The racket still carries the ball to the target.

We recommend you start your daughter or son with a two-handed backhand.

We recommend all small children start with two hands. Older children can choose one or two hands. Most girls maintain two hands throughout their tennis career. Pete Sampras changed his backhand from two hands to a one in his teens—so the options are open. There isn't a correct way, just the right way for each player.

If your child is learning a one-handed backhand, then the Eastern is the recommended grip.

The grip is important in the backhand—make sure you get this right. To show your child how this grip should be, place the racket's face between the child's left arm and chest (for a right-handed player). Then have your child grip the handle with the right hand, with the palm of the hand on the top edge of the racket's grip. This grip is called an Eastern Backhand grip. Any certified pro can show you this grip.

Now, for the two-handed grip for a right handed person. First, place a one-handed backhand grip on the racket handle with the right hand, and then place the left hand on the racket handle above the right hand. The left hand will be a typical forehand grip.

Again, for the right handed player try to achieve a backhand grip with the right hand and a forehand grip with the left.

When trying to learn a two-handed backhand most juniors will keep their forehand grip with the right hand and then grab the racket above the right hand with a left handed forehand grip. This creates a two-handed backhand with both hands using a forehand grip.

The problem with the two forehanded backhand is twofold. The First problem is when it comes time to make a backhand volley. A volley is a ball which is hit before it bounces. The volley is best done using just one hand and with the Eastern backhand grip, as described above. With the two forehand grip the child would now have to learn to change grips when coming to the net. The Second problem involves a very wide backhand ground stroke where some players drop the left hand from the racket for added reach and make a one handed backhand shot. This shot would then be hit with a very awkward looking and ineffectual backhand using a forehand grip. If this player had learned with a proper backhand grip, this shot would be much easier.

So when your daughter hits a backhand, she should use a backhand grip with the right and a forehand grip with her left.

The difference in the two gripping styles also influences which arm is dominant. With the two forehand grips the stroke acts just like a left handed forehand, where the racket is mostly controlled by the left arm and assisted by the right.

With a backhand grip on the right hand and a forehand grip on the left, the right arm can do most of the pulling action with the left assisting. This stroke will mechanically act more like the conventional one-handed backhand. This will assist in hitting the one handed backhand volleys and will make a transition to a one handed backhand much easier, should that be desired in the future. This is good future planning, however, this approach will take a little more work to get her to adjust. Changing grips is a very difficult task, and it gets more difficult the longer you wait.

Remember, the racket face should perform the same whether a one handed or a two handed backhand is used.

Now that the grip is settled, let's teach your daughter the two-handed backhand. To do this we will do the same drills as we did on the forehand. This should be much easier for her to do. With the two hands she will be much stronger and have much more control than she showed on the first forehands. You will note that not as much back swing is needed to swing the racket.

With little people the two-hand stroke is so much easier that I am not totally opposed to starting with two hands on both sides. I do, however recommend that the forehand become one hand as soon as possible. Then again there are good examples of top players playing with two hands on both sides. So there you go, no absolutes, one hand or two. The only disadvantage to a two handed backhand is reach; the feet have to get all the way over to the ball.

As quick as she can hit her two-handed backhand start tossing to her forehand, then her backhand, then her forehand alternating tosses so that she learns the transition and grip change for the two strokes.

She can practice this shadow swinging.

Check Points for the backhand.

- ❖ Start in the ready position.
- ❖ Shoulder turn. During the shoulder turn the grip on the right hand is changed to the backhand grip.
- ❖ Step toward the ball with the right foot. At this point the grip is changed and the racket is in the back swing position.
- ❖ Swing at the ball and follow through. The left hand should touch the right shoulder and the elbow should now point at the target. If you watch any good two-handed players, you will see the racket follows through until it is straight down

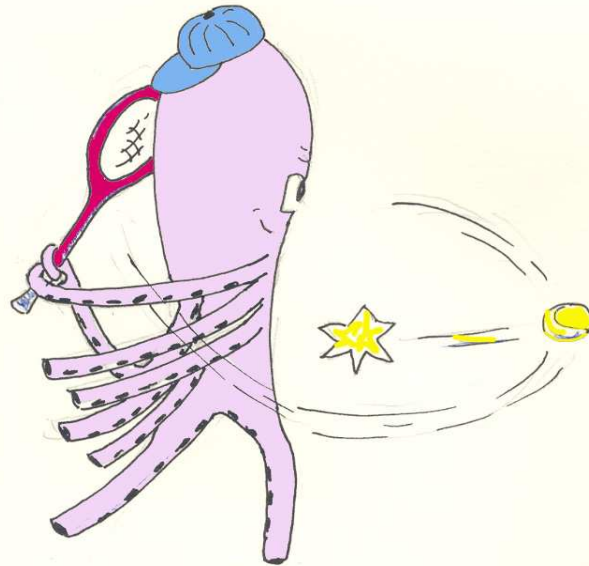
the player's back.

- ❖ The left hip should be in front of the right hip. All the weight on the front foot.
- ❖ She should have an erect and balanced body when the stroke is finished.

She now has learned the basics of her ground strokes. From here she just practices toward perfect strokes on every shot.

**BACKHAND...  
FOREHAND...  
BACKHAND...  
FOREHAND....**

*BACKHAND FOLLOW THROUGH*



**YOU'RE DOING GREAT!!**

Now what makes it all work.....

## ***Instruction...Lesson 66***

### **DRILLING**

Drilling is a necessary part of learning any skill.

Tennis is no exception.

Here is a report about Chess Grand Masters. There was an attempt to discover why the Grand Masters were so much better than other chess players. Nothing could be found, their intelligence—their concentration, their passion, the environment or anything—which made any real difference. Just one thing was found, and that is that the Grand Masters just play more chess than the others.

This is very good news for tennis players. It means that to get better than everyone else, all you need to do is play more than they do. Remember, playing tennis is fun. So to get better, you also have to have a lot of fun.

It is my opinion that the above is true—that the more balls a player hits the easier it is for them to learn. So we encourage you to use your journal and to keep track of balls hit. If you can get your son hitting on his own and keeping track of his hits, you have him hooked, and your job will be twice as easy.

This Pro uses the ten thousand figure in teaching tennis. If you and your child are working on a particular stroke, it is suggested that hitting ten thousand times be a goal. It is kind of fun working toward this goal, and it will make that shot a part of him. Some kids can get it sooner than that, but you'll have to decide when the stroke is right.

Now don't let this frighten you—ten thousand hits are just two hundred hits a week for one year. Not too hard to do. Anyone can do two hundred hits in a half an hour.

If you figure the instructions in this book out to the end, we are saying one half an hour per week for five years. That is two hundred and sixty sessions. You will have plenty of time to get it all in. And you get an additional plus, your son is going to learn to love tennis, and he will do most of this on his own. If it, in fact, takes ten thousand times to create a habit, then we don't want to have to make the habit any harder than necessary to learn. That is why we have kept the teaching of the strokes as simple as possible. Just a simple follow-through position on most strokes. Try your best not to get too involved in each little part of the stroke production. Just give him simple instruction and a lot of balls to hit. It is only when you see an obvious violation of the checkpoints, that you should do more teaching.

Drilling may be boring or not. That is why we have entire lessons about rewards, incentives and little games you can play. You can always make it fun by making a game of it.



**When you get good at something, you like doing it!**

Each session with him should be fun. No telling how he will have fun in this game, but he must learn his strokes. One thing is for sure; he is not going to have fun playing tennis for long unless he can hit the ball in the court, and he will need good strokes for that.

So set the program up any way that works. You'll figure it out if you plan your sessions just a little, and don't forget the.....

**....SPOONFULL OF SUGAR.**

**Next, the first shot in a match...**

## *Instruction...Lesson 67*

### TEACHING THE SERVE

The general feeling among tennis teachers is that the serve is the most complicated of the tennis strokes. The serve is supposed to be very hard to learn, and most players never really hit the serve quite the way they would like.

However, the serve could be the simplest of all the strokes to learn.

We recommend that you start your child on the serve as soon as possible.

The simplest way to teach him the serve is to tell him to just throw the ball up and hit it. This works in many cases. The process of teaching the serve can cause as many problems as it solves. People just get mixed up trying to time the two arms and the ball correctly. So try the **throw it up and hit it** routine first.

Don't worry too much about the motion if he can get a good racket on the ball and get a little power. All juniors need to have their serve adjusted as they get older anyway. All of them start with a forehand grip, which has to be changed to a backhand grip at some time.

The grip that works for most kids in the beginning is a frying pan grip. This grip is achieved by picking up a racket lying on the ground—with the hand on top of the grip. Like you would pick up a frying pan. This grip is ok to start with, but try to get his fingers spread apart. Get the index finger pointing up the racket handle a little. This is much like playing ping-pong with the index finger on the blade of the paddle. This can be achieved by having the racket handle lying across the palm of the hand in a more diagonal position, which is more parallel to the forearm, as opposed to lying perpendicular to the forearm.

However, let's suppose he just can't seem to launch the ball and hit it. That's where you step in. You toss the ball for him, so he does not have to coordinate the two arms. It's quite simple—stand beside him, have him start to swing the racket, and you make the toss at the same time. Time your toss by making your arm do the same thing as his toss arm would do if he were doing the toss. Now stay loose and out of the way of his racket. It doesn't seem possible, but this will be easier than you think. You toss and he hits—it takes teamwork. Do this a lot. You'll get the rhythm. You two will have a lot of laughs with this drill. Let him hit it hard, this will make him reach back farther and hopefully create that long and potentially powerful motion that is desired. He'll like this. Don't worry where the ball goes because the serve takes a while to get grooved. Take your time and just work on timing.

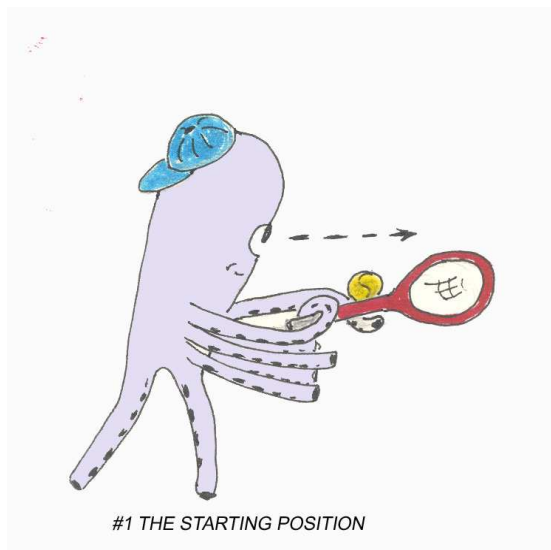
Next, it is time to work on the motion of the swing arm. The motion is the same as a throwing motion. You may have to let him throw an old racket or stick to get the feel of

an overhand throwing of the racket over the net.

**To get the feel of the service motion,  
try practice throwing a stick or an old racket.**

You should play catch with your child to make sure they know how to throw a ball.

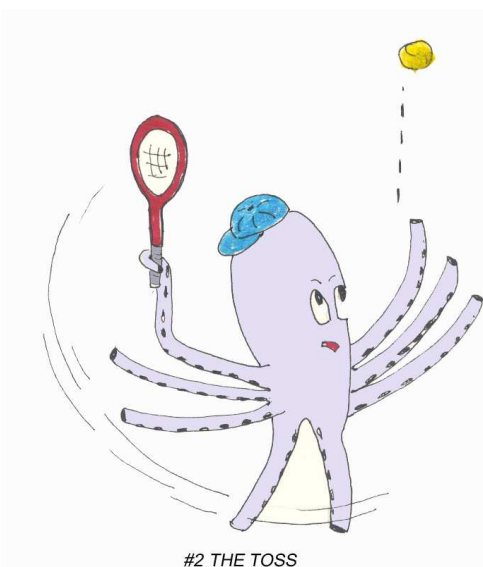
Here is another drill to try if he is still having trouble. Take a string and tie it up high, so that the end hangs down at the height you feel he should make contact with the ball. He should just be able to barely reach the end of the string when he and the racket are fully extended. Then let him swing away at the end of the string. This should create a nice motion. Have him really wind up and swing. This swing should be his natural swing and should be duplicated when hitting a ball.



Now start to work on the timing of the toss arm with the swing at the string. Get a rhythm. Have him say, "TOSS" when he thinks he tosses the ball and "HIT" when he hits the string. You'll know when the timing is right.

When he can time his arms, toss the ball, make a good swing, and make good contact with the ball, he is ready to hit at the court.

Start the on-court practice very close to the net, so that he can get the ball over the net. As his skill improves, move back a little at a time.



Check point #1. The Starting Position (See figure #1)

The stance is just what you see all the time on the court—sideways to the net. Cradle the racket at the throat in the fingertips of the toss hand, and point the tip of the racket at the potential target. Eyes should be looking at potential target and getting the picture of the target in his mind.

Check point #2 (The Toss, See figure #2)

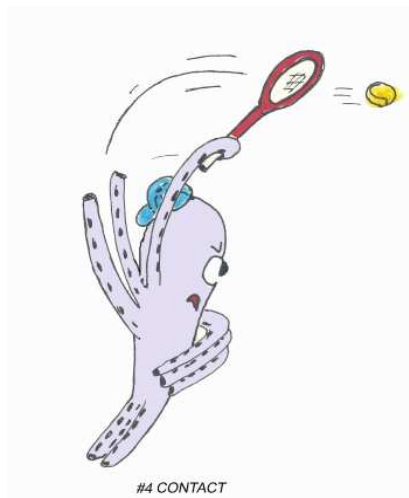
Start the ball and the racket in motion at the same time. They both go down together and come up together. The toss arm goes to full extension and the ball is released at that point. The racket arm should also be high with the elbow above the shoulder.

Check point #3. The Back Scratch Position (See figure #3)

The racket should continue swinging down behind the back in preparation for hitting the ball. The racket should not get too close to the body and should be performing a nice smooth loop behind the back. Weight should be forward on front foot, and eyes should be fixed on the ball.

Check point #4 The Contact (See figure #4)

Contact with the ball should be made at full extension, just like when he swung at the hanging string. Contact should be made 12 to 18 inches in front of the front foot. It's very important that



#4 CONTACT

the head stays up and the eyes are on the ball until after contact. His head should be still during the swing. He should toss the ball and try to swing the racket through the contact point and toward the target.

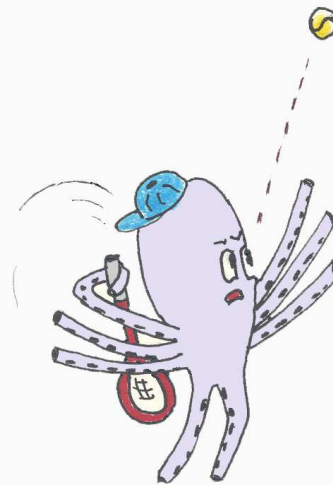
Remember, the path of the racket determines where the ball goes.

Check point #5. The Follow-Through (See figure #5)

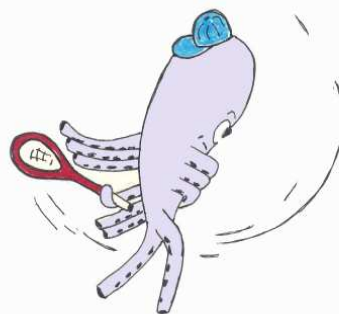
When he masters the swinging motion and gets it down kind of pat he should start to try to achieve the "follow-through position." The follow-through should end with the racket past the front foot and behind the back. The follow through for the right-hander would be to swing past the left foot. The right elbow should end

resting against the stomach. The right shoulder should be closer to the target than the left. This is what would happen if he were throwing the racket. The back foot should swing onto the court indicating that the weight has moved forward toward the target. This is like the footwork of a baseball pitcher.

The swing should be one continuous motion or, as we say, one piece. In the beginning, the racket arm swings down and back past the front of his legs, loops around behind the back, swings up to and through the contact zone, forward toward the target and down past the left leg.



#3 BACK SCRATCH POSITION



#5 Follow Through

Another good exercise that will assist in a continuous and smooth loop is to put a tennis ball in a sock. Tie the sock to about a three foot piece of string or rope and swing it like it were a racket. The sock will swing down, back, up and over his head, down behind his back, then up to where contact should be made, then forward and down past the left leg. If the sock is not swung correctly and continuously it will flop down. Do this over and over again until he can swing the sock in a nice smooth, continuous motion. Then try it with the racket. Have him keep a loose grip.

“Shadow swing” the serve motion a lot.

Review of the check points for the serve.

- ❖ Side to the net.
- ❖ Racket tip pointing at the target.
- ❖ Tips of the fingers of the toss hand cradling the racket throat.
- ❖ Both hands start in motion together.
- ❖ Toss arm goes up and tosses the ball. Toss should be no more than four feet above the extended toss hand.
- ❖ Racket behind the back, elbow high.
- ❖ Contact point is in front of the front foot with the racket arm fully extended.
- ❖ Racket face pointing or looking at the target.
- ❖ Eyes on the contact point until racket is past the contact point. Check the eyes on contact a lot, this is very important and your child can easily turn or lower his head too soon.
- ❖ Follow through across the body.
- ❖ Racket ends up past the front foot.
- ❖ Elbow of the racket arm resting on stomach.
- ❖ Racket arm shoulder closer to net than the other shoulder.
- ❖ Step with back foot toward imaginary target.

All these check points make the serve seem like it is difficult. However, the serve is just one continuous fluid motion with a little coordination of the two arms.

For practice with a real ball, it is best if you do some of the serving at a non-target. Serve at the backstop from the service line and then gradually back away until he can serve the full length of the court and get the ball to the backstop in the air. Serving only at the court will make him shorten and stop his swing to get the ball in. He'll do enough of this when he plays. Do two kinds of practice—swing at the backstop and swing at the court.

Swinging at the backstop develops power. Swinging at the court develops accuracy. But, make sure you practice both.

One more thing on the development of accuracy—make a target or window just above the net. Threading the racket handle of another racket down through the net so that only the racket head is above the net can easily make this target. Or just put a clothespin on the net. Either makes a fine target. This also creates the concept of hitting the

serve through a window over the net.

A window over the net is an excellent target concept for serving with accuracy. There is a window over the net that can represent every spot on the service court. If you bowl, you will understand the concept of this in “spot” bowling. The window moves the target closer. Golfers do this when they pick a spot to aim at along the path of a putt to the cup.

As soon as he can hit the serve, you should start journal entries for serve records. Things like number “in a row over the net,” “number in a row in the proper court,” etc.

The serve is a very important part of the game of tennis. Approximately twenty-five percent of all the shots a player will hit in a tennis match will be the serve. A player has plenty of time to execute the shot; and if he misses, he gets another chance. So there is no excuse to double fault. Double faults take the heart out of a young player as well as add gray hair to your head. Get it right in practice.

Have him throw the ball up and hit it a lot.

## **TEN THOUSAND SERVES...count them.**

**Now, the ball that doesn't bounce.....**

## ***Instruction....Lesson 68***

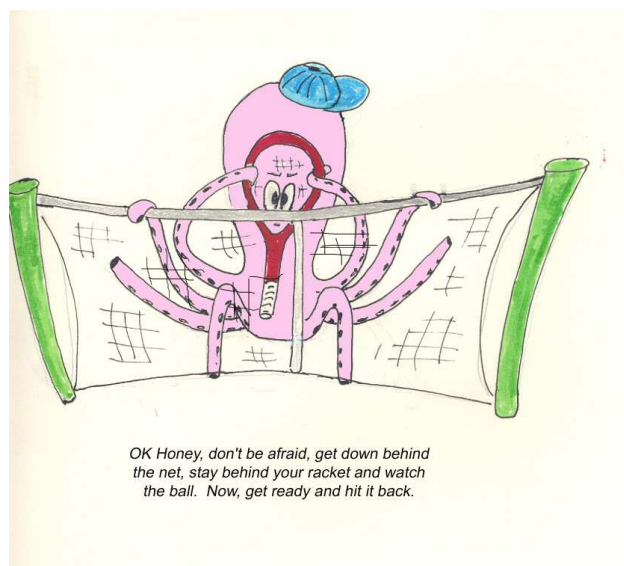
### **TEACHING THE VOLLEY**

***Now let's learn how to hit the ball that doesn't bounce. If a ball is hit before it bounces, it is called a "Volley."***

This is the easiest shot you will teach your daughter.

NOTE: Just because you teach her the volley, doesn't mean she should come to the net when she plays. That will be reserved for a much more advanced game. Coming to the net during a tennis point requires good footwork and well-trained reactions. When you are at the net there is much less time to go to a shot and much less time to prepare for it. Balls at the net are traveling much faster than balls that hit the ground first. A ball can lose up to two-thirds of its speed upon striking the ground. So have her stay back unless drawn to the net in a match or practicing at the net. However, you should start right away teaching her the mechanics of the volley.

She will love the volley. Start her at the net, have her stand so close to the net that she can touch it with her racket. She should hold the racket half way up the handle, like choking up on the bat in baseball. The racket face will be in the same position as a traffic policeman holding a stop sign. The racket tip will be straight up in the air. You will then pitch under-hand toward the racket. She will bump the ball back. All kids can do this. She will love this drill as she will get all balls in the court, she won't miss if she is watching the ball. As her skill improves, you can toss her a ball for which she may have to move the racket a little. Do a little volley drill each week.



If you have any problem with this approach to the volley or if she is frightened, try this. Have her hold the racket in front of her face. She will hold with one hand on each side of the frame and look through the strings as you pitch the ball to her. She can get down low behind the net so that between the racket and the net, she cannot get hit. Do this until she quits flinching or closing her eyes. When she gets comfortable with this, go back to the traffic cop pose.

One of the main things here is that she learns to block the ball with her racket and that she loses her fear of the ball coming at her. Teach her to stay behind her racket and low behind the net.

The next step is to try to teach her the backhand volley. The main thing here is that

she hit the forehand on one side of the racket face and the backhand on the other face or side. If she keeps her forehand grip it will look funny on the backhand at first; however, we are not going to worry about that yet. She will fight the grip as you feed the ball one side and then the other. Eventually she will learn to either change the grip for each side or try to get a grip that will do both. Try to encourage a grip that will do both sides. This grip is called a continental grip and is between the backhand grip and the forehand grip, with the palm of the hand down on the top edge of the handle. Again, any Tennis Pro and most good players can show you this grip.

It used to be thought that a player did not have time to change grips at the net. However, many now do it with success, so don't worry. Just do the best you can. It takes a lot of balls for all of this to become automatic, so be patient.

As she is getting better, move her hand down the racket handle and move her back from the net. However, eventually there will be a ball that will be too low and she will have to drop the racket head. Try to get her to keep her wrist cocked up and the racket tip up as much up as possible. As she gets further away from the net she will have to bend her knees to keep the racket tip up. The ball should be as close to eye level as possible. Never let her racket tip point straight down.

**Take low volleys in front, racket tip up, and eyes as near as possible to the level of the ball.**

She is now ready to learn the real volley. A volley is still a stroke; it is just a stroke with no backswing. The backswing is a power function. To hit harder you would draw the racket back further from the contact point. The follow-through is what directs the ball.

**Again, backswing is for power. Follow-through is for control.**

Since the ball is usually coming pretty fast at the net, we don't need backswing yet. The momentum of the incoming ball will give enough power to get the ball back. Anyway she doesn't need power at this stage of her game.

Try to have her keep the racket in front of her. If the racket is forward toward the incoming ball, it will always be in front of her body.

**Keep the racket in front of the body and make contact with the ball in front of the body.**

Usually if the volley is taken as we have described, a simple block of the ball will be sufficient. As the skill improves, try to have her push the ball back. This will be the start of the direction part of the swing.

The next move is to teach her to move to the ball. Get her to step toward the ball with the foot further away from the ball while keeping the racket in front. Her racket should move in to the volley position as she steps. The trick here is to move the racket toward

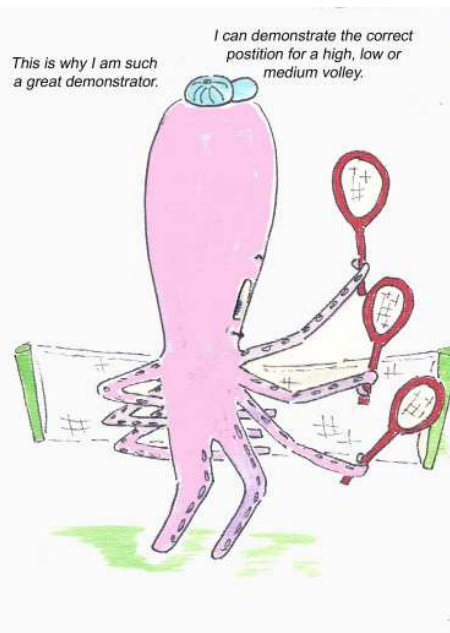


the ball.

### **The racket moves toward an on coming ball.**

Here is another good trick to help make her understand the point of the racket moving toward the ball and waiting for the ball. I have used this approach many times, and it is done by tacking some netting onto a racket without any strings. This now becomes a basket-racket. Make the basket part big enough to hold fifteen or twenty balls. Now you can hit or pitch a bunch of balls for her to catch. She will hold the basket-racket and catch balls very much like a person would catch a ball with one hand. The racket should be head high, in front of the body, and very close to her head. This is a good volley position. She's on her way. Keep feeding.

This racket-basket is great for little ones who can run around the court catching stray balls while you hit with another child. Kids love to do this, and it is good training for tracking the ball with a racket.



#### **Check Points for the Volley:**

- ❖ Ready position, on the balls of the feet, facing the net and with the racket tip pointing at the incoming ball.
- ❖ Step toward the approaching ball with the foot away from the ball.
- ❖ Racket does not move back but moves toward the ball.
- ❖ Racket face is square to the net with tip pointing up as much as possible.
- ❖ Proper grip for either the forehand or the backhand.
- ❖ Head close to the racket and at the same level as the ball.
- ❖ Knees bent.
- ❖ Eyes on the contact point.

With a much older girl or a boy, you would do the same procedures we have outlined. Progress will have just been a little faster. There is nothing more fun to a tennis player than putting a ball away at the...

## **....NET.**

**Now let's add a little flair.....**

## ***Instruction....Lesson 69***

### **HELP YOUR CHILD PICK A STYLE**

At this point your girl should have her basic tennis strokes. She will only make minor changes in her strokes from now on. Now let's help her pick a style.

Back in the heyday of Bjorn Borg, all the kids tried to copy Borg's style. Some went so far as to dress like him—the headband, the walk and some could actually stroke like him. Sometimes you had to look twice to make sure it wasn't Borg. And for some it paid off, they won matches with this style. We don't want your daughter to go that far. However, a touch of this attitude could be helpful.

Go with her to watch some good players play with the goal in mind to find a hero. Make sure you watch really good players. Today it might be necessary to do some of this on TV. However, there is nothing like being up close to a real live tennis match to get the real feel and excitement of what is happening.

Almost all children who do some ball person shifts at a tennis tournament get excited about their tennis game. See if you can get your child signed up to be a ball person at a tournament somewhere. This can help her find a favorite player.

Help her choose a player who will best emphasize her assets. If she is going to be tall, slender, and graceful, you may want to choose a player who has some of these attributes. If you do this on TV, videotape some of these matches and watch them several times. Also, show this video in slow motion.

Go to a tournament where this new heroine will play. When you are courtside, you can concentrate on just the one player. Don't watch the ball, just study the person and see if some of her skills will rub off on your child. Everybody plays better after they have watched good players play. Your child will now be able to visualize these strokes.

If she finds a player who she really likes, get her a poster of this player for her room. Almost all of the great players in all sports had posters or pictures of a player whom they admired on their bedroom wall. Don't worry, she will develop her own style. What you are doing here is just helping her in her development.

### **HELP YOUR CHILD HAVE A HERO.**

**Putting some of this together.....**

## *Instruction....Lesson 70*

# COMBINING POWER AND CONTROL

After your child achieves the basic stroking skills, the next goal to improve play would be to add velocity to your child's shots without losing too much control.

The ability to hit the tennis ball hard is not very well understood. Some players, for some unknown reason, can hit the ball harder than others of similar abilities. It seems that everyone has some limiting factor. We do know this as fact; that the only person who can hit the ball "in the court" with power is the one who can hit it hard.

However, I believe that every human athletic talent can be improved with effort. Following are a few thoughts on increasing velocity in your child's game. More velocity on the serve is definitely a desirable goal.

To help us understand how to improve velocity of the tennis ball, take the example of the tactics used by typing instructors. Here, the goal is to achieve more speed in typing skills without losing accuracy. To do this, a student is directed to type much faster than normal, ignoring accuracy, and then reducing his speed to a slower zone that achieves accuracy. If a student could type thirty words per minute with good accuracy, he would then increase his speed up to fifty wpm without regard to errors. When fifty wpm are achieved, he is instructed to slow his rate down to about forty wpm and recapture accuracy. The next step would be to drive speeds up to seventy wpm, etc.

This Pro feels that 70 to 75% of maximum power is the best combination of power and control.

Take another example of the search for power. This one is from golfer Jack Nicklaus. Nicklaus said, "Jack Grout did me another favor by always encouraging me to hit the ball hard. He put high priority on distance, first because it is the most obvious and enjoyable goal of a youngster, and second and most important, because it is an asset. Another reason for the, hit it hard and long and worry about direction later, philosophy was the muscular and mental inhibitions that can permanently afflict golfers who become accuracy conscious too soon. Such people can very rarely make themselves give the ball a really good belt in later years, whereas uninhibited swingers learn to control their shots as they mature."

The above is an example of why those who start tennis as adults have trouble with swinging freely at the ball. They start out too concerned about getting the ball in, and in doing so they tense up. Tensing up is a sure way to reduce power in tennis. Power comes with free and loose swings.

Do not get me wrong. I love power, but I love control more. I have always told juniors, **"Hit as hard as you like, but don't miss."**

So temper the above with your child. You should not have too much trouble getting your child to swing out. Swinging away is built into them. You will have to *control* the power more than encourage it. So, you should have times when you and your child try to do nothing but hit the ball hard.

One of the drills that I have used for hitting a serve harder, is to serve to the back fence. This means that the child hits his serve all the way to the back fence in the air. This Pro equates distance to power. In other words, the person who can hit the longest can hit the ball the hardest.

Include in your overall program for your child some power exercises. Let him swing away and.....

**....GO FOR IT!**

**What's next?**

## ***Instruction....Lesson 71***

### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

What's next. I'll tell you what is next. You and your child are going to have some laughs and some tennis fun.

Congratulations! If you have read this far, you have enough information and direction to complete the five-year plan to make your child a tennis player.

Even though there was information on competition and tournaments, this book was not designed to create a tournament player, but to bring your child to a level that she or he could really enjoy tennis and start to play tournaments if they want to.

There is much more to this game than is included here. Strategy is not included in this book. Certain strokes like the overhead, the drop shot, the half volley, and the approach shot are not included. You will need to get this information from other books or your tennis pro.

Since we do not know at what age you are starting your child, we had to provide the full gambit of the game. If you start your child at an age six or below, your child will be ten or twelve after five years and will be perfectly set up to play tournaments if they want to.

If you started to teach your child at ten or twelve years of age they might want to play competitively before five years are up. Children in this age range are very competitive, so it would not be unusual for them to play before you are through teaching the strokes. That's OK. Tournaments are exciting and developmental. So your five years in the program would be very different for this child.

In this book I have tried to open the door for you and your child to progress up to the tournament level or just to have a lifetime of playing social tennis with friends and family.

So you and your child have some fun with this endeavor. It is worth it, and you two now have a lifetime of tennis ahead....

**Have a Nice Hit!**

