

Effective Junior Programming

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Teaching technique to youngsters to ensure an enhanced career in tennis from a young age. The following tips and progressions should be added to your repertoire and skill set as a coach.

Remember that we are looking for fundamentally good technique by the age of 12 for boys and younger for girls to set our students onto a world class route to the top. For me I am looking for my students to be effective, efficient and consistent in their strokeplay. What I have written below will enhance all aspects of this.

Fundamentals

It's important to change a stroke if the stylistic characteristics impact the fundamental characteristics. Here I will touch on the different styles of and patterns before taking you through the serve, forehand, backhand and volley techniques.

Grips determine swing lines

Groundstrokes

Forehand

Continental/Eastern utilise an inside to outside with extension swing pattern

Semi Western/Western grips utilise an outside to inside with release swing pattern

Backhand

Single – Outside to in

Double – E/E - out to in with a 45 degree take back

C/E – out to in with a level take back

C/SW – in to out with a low/level take back (this utilises the most rotation)

Volleys

Forehand – Inside to Out

Backhand – Outside to In

Serve

Outside to Inside

For a gold medal stroke the tip of the racket should always be in front of the hand

The swoosh test will determine this!

Shadow swing a stroke and determine where the swoosh is heard. Close your eyes for this, ideally this should be early not late in the shot.

Teaching 3 main serve concepts

The aim of a good serve is to let the front side of the body do the work and the back side to do the hitting. Areas we will cover are the use of

- Pronation
- Upwards Energy
- Hips as a pivot point

Pronation

Pronation is the rotation and extension of the arm before it rotates around the elbow to create the correct service action.

To teach the serve concept use the following positions

Position 1 – Butt cap up

Position 2 – Butt cap to floor

Position 3 – Arm straight

Position 4 - Pronate

In order for pronation to work we need to ensure we have the right grip of a 2/1 (this is where the index knuckle is on bevel 2 and the pad of the hand on bevel 1)

Isolate these areas with the following progressions

- Ball bouncing with elbow or wrist of both into the ground
- Drop and hit behind you edge on
- Ball toss and hit on side of racket
- Half motion or full swing motion and hit on side

Pronate with strings

- Bounce down with strings
- Ball toss hit and recoil
- As above but finish with elbow up, wrist straight and butt to sky

The ball toss

- Use a plastic cup to ensure relaxed arms
- Bean bag on grip ensures the outside motion on takeback
- Combine both for the shape of the serve

The lower half of the body

When a student has a back foot up action the first move is to use the hips and then knee flexion

When a student has the platform stance knees flex and then the hips shifts forwards

In either scenario we are looking to drive with the right hip

It is important to maintain good posture throughout the serve and this means maintaining balance, by using the following practices this will help students gain a sense of balance and posture.

- Feet together and serve
- Serve with both feet and lift one leg throughout
- Serve on leading leg only whilst lifting the back knee for balance
- Serve with a crossed stance and on tip toes

Launch to contact point

The serve is the only stroke where the energy goes in a separate direction to the shot. The use of the left arm is also important for efficiency in the serve, by tucking the left up into the body as you launch proves more beneficial than driving up with the long and slow arm drop.

- Use the shot putt launch with the racket arm
- Place a ball in the right hip pocket and do the same whilst getting the ball to drop out
- Towel on the shoulder to ensure correct posture

Forehand Fundamentals

Rotational concepts

With the open stance kids will generally rotate off the ball unless the use of the mogul step or the power step are utilised. By using a ball tube on the shoulders we can demonstrate this concept quite easily.

Therefore the semi-open stance is generally the way to go with footwork requirements enhancing the body being thrown through the ball rather than off the ball.

Developmental Progressions

1. Balance and Posture

- Hit off a fed ball and hold posture on one leg (left leg if moving forwards, right leg if moving to side). Hold balance until ball hits back fence.
- Same as above except pivot through after shot
- Same as above but hop step and pivot through after shot

2. Swing Lines

Dependant on grip determines which swing line to work on as stated in the fundamentals.

Working on an outside swing line for Semi-Western/Western Grips

- Hit a two handed forehand
- Place right hand on the left wrist and hit
- Place hand on elbow and hit
- Ball under elbow and release ball no takeback to ensure an outside swing
- Place a bean bag on frame of racket. This should not drop off until the forward swing
- Placing a ball on the throat of the racket is even more effective

3. Using the left hand

- Catch the ball in the left hand drop and hit

4. Firing the Hips

- Place a ball ½ way in and ½ way out and ensure the ball drops out on the hit
- Pivot and recoil the hips
- Use a towel and ensure the hips pull the towel through the hands over just arm work

5. Lock in position

- Track the ball and hit with the butt cap
- Sandwich the hitting racket between two players rackets

6. *Leverage*

- Show the butt cup on the follow through to coach as quick as possible
- Use a clicker on the wrist for a silent forehand
- The use of a leverage band aids feel in the shot and enhances the shape
- Check the second hand and call out the number on the follow through
- Take one finger, then two and finally three of the racket whilst keeping the shape

7. *The Stopwatch*

This teaches to take the ball on the rise and take time away from your opponent

2. Use a stopwatch and time how long it is between the first bounce and the first step. You are looking for less than 0.5 seconds

The Single Handed Backhand Fundamentals

3 Basic concepts to utilise here are:-

1. Leverage
2. Use of a cocked wrist and extended arm
3. Preserve space between the contact point and body

The general grips here are Eastern Forehand or Extreme Eastern Forehand (also known as Semi-Western Backhand). Here again we are looking for an outside to in swing line.

Developmental Progressions

1. *Balance and Posture*

Here maintaining the chest out ensures great posture

- Use the Hit and balance postures as in the Forehand session

2. *Swing Lines*

- Use of the bean bag on the racket is useful here to keep the shape. This falls off ideally after the hit
- Grab the wrist with the left hand with thumb up and hit
- Place the left hand on the elbow and hit again

3. *The Left arm*

- Hold a water bottle to aid a feel for the use of the left arm in keeping shape

4. *Firing the Hips*

- Place a ball ½ way in and ½ way out and ensure the ball drops out on the hit
- Hit and use the golfer's toe finish to ensure the hips are used

5. *Lock in position*

- Track the ball and hit with the butt cap
- Sandwich the hitting racket between two players rackets
- Use a towel held by a partner or coach and pull through the hands

6. *Leverage*

- Use a clicker on the wrist for a silent Backhand
- Use a leverage band to keep the shape
- Take one finger, then two and finally three of the racket whilst keeping the shape

7. *The Stopwatch*

This teaches to take the ball on the rise and take time away from your opponent

- Use a stopwatch and time how long it is between the first bounce and the first step. You are looking for less than 0.5 seconds

Double Handed Backhand Fundamentals

Here we as coaches have 2 critical points to be aware of:

Are our player's extenders through the ball or natural rotators when hitting the double handed backhand?

With 3 main grips taken into consideration here are the characteristics to look for in double handed backhands as a coach.

Eastern / Eastern – The Agassi Grip!

Utilises an outside to inside swing pattern

The hands take on a 50/50 role when hitting the ball

The leverage shape is a triangle with shoulders and arms

This grip allows for the most amount of extension and least amount of rotation with hips

Considered an attacking shot with ability to hit the ball early easily

Takeback is 45 degrees with hands below racket

Follow through with both elbows to be extended

Continental / Eastern – Hewitt, Kournikova

Utilises an outside to inside swing

The top hand takes 60% of the work over the more passive hand

The leverage shape takes on a diamond with the left shoulder (right handed players) raised

This grip allows for some extension through the ball with rotation

For the higher balls a jump is required to be taught

Takeback is level or slightly above hands

Follow through forms an elbow up elbow down formation

Continental / Semi Western – Hingis, Clijsters, Sharapova, Williams Sisters

Utilises an inside to outside swing

The top hand now takes on 70% of the work rate

The leverage shape is in the form of a box

The front shoulder is higher than the back on set up

This grip allows for the most amount of rotation out of all 3 shots

Takeback is lower than the hands and further around the body

Both elbows finish up and away from the body

Developmental Progressions

1. *Balance and Posture*
 - As per forehands and backhands
2. *Swing Lines*
 - A bean bag around the throat of the racket enables an efficient takeback enhancing shape
3. *The top hand*
 - Hit choked up left handed forehands
4. *Firing the Hips*
 - Place a ball $\frac{1}{2}$ way in and $\frac{1}{2}$ way out and ensure the ball drops out on the hit. Works best for continental / semi-western backhands.
 - Use the golfers toe finish for the other grips
 - Use the towel or paired rackets held by a coach or partner
5. *Lock in position*

The lock in position is not as critical here as is the leverage shape!
6. *Leverage*
 - Use the leverage band and place above the elbow
 - Check the second hand and call out the number on the follow through
 - Take the little finger of both hands and hit, followed by two fingers off lower hand and little finger from top hand.
7. *The Stopwatch*

Only applicable on the continental / semi-western grip

 3. Use a stopwatch and time how long it is between the first bounce and the first step. You are looking for less than 0.5 seconds

Fundamental Volley work and Progressions

Swing Lines

Forehand – Inside to Outside

Backhand – Outside to Inside

Footwork

Low Balls – Step then hit with the back leg low

Mid balls – Step and hit at the same time

High balls – Step through the hit

Progressions

1. Swing Lines

Forehands

- Place left hand under elbow and catch the ball using the above footwork patterns
- Same as above but use racket to hit ball
- Place left hand behind the back and hit

Backhands

- As above but can place tip of racket on shoulder to help keep shape

2. Balance and Posture

- Hold the body after hit in all footwork positions

3. Leverage

- Leverage band here is a great tool
- Shadow then hit balls with a large water bottled, filled with 1/3 with water. The aim is to keep the water in the bottom at all time
- Use the clicker for silent volleys
- Continue with the finger test to ensure good shape and understanding

I hope you have had a great understanding of what to look for, teach and utilise with your students. Feel free to email at any time you wish andydowsett@ptruk.com and I will help you out with any aspect of your game with any students you have in your programme.