

Planning, Training and Competing

Planning the programme - 5:10:1

Maximising your player's potential is a long-term process. To help you and your players through this process it helps to plan your tennis programme into training cycles.

Training cycles allow you to break down your players' long-term goals into more manageable chunks of work. They also allow you to make sure that there is enough time allocated to training and improvement as well as match play.

We recommend splitting a year into three training cycles using our **5:10:1** formula.

The **5:10:1** formula is a simple yet effective way to plan a training programme and is appropriate for all players. Using this method a training cycle will consist of:

5 weeks of training : During this time players will not compete in important events and may well only play practice matches. They will make any significant changes to their game during this period, if they are needed, and will emphasise physical training in particular.

10 weeks of training and competition : During this period players will continue to develop their games, but they will also be competing in events and looking to show these improvements on the match court. They will not compete every week of the 10 weeks, but will compete fairly regularly.

1 week of rest : During this period the player will take a break from tennis. They should, however, continue with some light exercise and stretch regularly.

For each 16 week cycle the coach and player need to fill out a goal setting sheet. This goal setting sheet will drive the training programme for the whole of the 16 week cycle. The goals for the 16 week cycle should relate to the player's longer-term goals.

This method will allow you to run three training cycles every year. Three 16 week cycles makes 48 weeks. This gives you 4 weeks to play with. These 4 weeks will be for holidays, exams, or to add an extra week into the programme where necessary.

The **5:10:1** formula is a guide. As the coach you can adjust it to suit the needs of the players that you are working with. It may be that in one cycle you have a longer training period as you know that a player has some major technical work to do - such as a grip change.

The **5:10:1** training model gives you a framework to plan your players' training programmes. You now need to:

- Know how many hours your players should train for
- Know how many matches they should be playing
- Know how to plan a training week
- Know how to goal set for each training cycle

How much should my players train?

This is a really difficult question and the honest answer is 'it depends'. The answer we would give would vary depending on:

- The age of the player.
- The standard of the player.
- The mental approach of the player.
- The commitment of the player.
- The ambition of the player.
- The opportunity that the player realistically has to practise.
- Commitments to family, school (if applicable) and other sports.

The best way to answer is to start by looking at what levels of practice are necessary to reach an elite level. Once you have this information you can take into account all the factors above and come to a decision based on what's right for your player, their parents (if a junior) and you.

There are several models available that can indicate how much training a player should be doing - some of them very complicated! The best and the most simple that we have found is the 12 vs.12 rule.

It suggests that the age of 12 is a 'balance point' where the player should do the same number of tennis specific and fitness training hours per week as their age.

When the player is younger than 12 he/she should do slightly less hours per week than their age.

When the player is over 12 he/she should do slightly more hours per week than his/her age.

It is really useful to have this information as a coach, not because you are going to make all your players do that much training, but because you can now make decisions for each individual you coach based on knowledge.

We can not emphasise enough that it is the quality of the training sessions and the motivation of the player that are the most important factors. If you find that you are adding in more hours practice - but either quality or motivation is suffering as a result - then think again.

How should a player's week be scheduled?

It is just as important to plan a training week correctly as it is to train for the right number of hours. If one of your pupils is often tired or struggling for motivation it is worthwhile evaluating how their training week is scheduled and to see if any improvements can be made.

Any player that is making a significant commitment to their tennis will find the programme challenging in some way. This could include:

- Fatigue - too tired to play well and too tired to do well at school.
- No social life - no time with friends outside tennis.
- Not putting in enough tennis practice hours.
- Not having enough time to focus on school work.

The above can be helped by reviewing not just the number of hours your player is practising, but when those hours are taking place. There will never be an easy solution, but the following is the best advice we can give to help you find the right training week:

- Don't have all the training as after school training. It will become a chore very quickly. Look to find training times during the school day if possible - is it possible to get out on one lunch per week or to miss one P.E. session per week? Is before school a possibility?
- Make sure that your pupils have one full day off per week.
- Look at other things going on in your player's week. Which are the tough days at school? When do they have other sports? Work tennis sessions around this to avoid fatigue.
- Try to keep Fridays as lighter days. Experience shows us that children will be tired on Fridays and that a short sharp session on a Friday before a competition can work wonders.
- Don't schedule in competitions every weekend. Weekends are great for quality training time. Identify some weekends that are free from tournament and family commitments and schedule in some coaching and training sessions.

How much should my pupils compete?

The first and seemingly obvious question is - 'How much do your pupils want to compete?'

To a certain extent your individual players need to lead you here. There is no point in planning a competitive programme for your players that they are not motivated by.

Assuming that motivation to compete is not an issue, then planning the correct amount of competition into your pupils' programmes is vital. Both too much, and too little, competition can have detrimental effects.

Too Little Competition:

- Player does not develop tactical awareness and problem solving skills.
- Player can lack challenge and something 'to strive for' - so motivation can drop.
- Player is not able to put things from the practice court into action and complete the learning process.
- Player does not develop mental toughness to cope with the demands of the game.
- Player does not hit the number of tennis balls necessary to reach the required level (match play is also useful hitting time).
- Player's ranking does not improve, so misses out on further higher level competitive opportunities.

Too Much Competition:

- Player lacks training time during which they can make improvements necessary for long term success.
- Player develops a game style that is effective in junior events, rather than a game style that will be effective in the future.
- Player ends up making 'quick fixes' to issues with their game to be ready 'by the weekend'. The issues never really get addressed and the player's improvement eventually reaches a plateau.
- The player can get stale in competition and can end up cruising through matches.
- The player doesn't get enough time off and can get bored of tennis.
- The player starts to see tennis as a chore that keeps them away from their friends.
- The player and their family do not get enough quality family time.
- The player only has friends that are in tennis.

At this stage it is important to realise that there are also different types of competition that should make up a player's programme.

1. Practice Matches: Really important!! - and nearly always missing from a player's programme. Any aspiring player should be playing at least one full practice match per week or several practice sets.

2. Training Events: These are lower level tournaments, probably on a local level, such as match play events or club matches. These should be played on a fairly regular basis to get good match practice and to introduce new areas of the game into real life situations.

As the coach you need to educate parents and players so that they understand the purpose of such matches. Obviously it is important to put in 100% and try to win, but it is also about developing the game for more important matches in future months and years.

3. Main events: These are the bigger tournaments in the year. It might be junior nationals or a more local event depending on the level that your pupil is currently competing at. At these events all the development work should have been done so that your players can concentrate fully on putting it into practice and raising their game to a new level.

Do not, however, allow these more significant events to become so significant that they become highly pressurised, because your pupils will feel an expectation to get good results. You, your pupils' and hopefully their parents' approaches will be the same. The difference will be that as the coach you will have completed all the development work so that the player is ready to focus fully on putting it into practice, without worrying about whether or not they can do it.

So How Much Then..?

Age	Practice Matches and Training Events	Matches in Main Events (per yr)
Under 10	2 full sets or 2 abbreviated scoring matches per week	Up to 40 matches
Under 12	4 sets or 2 full matches per week	40-60 matches
Under 14	4 sets or 2 full matches per week	50-80 matches
Under 16	6 sets or 3 full matches per week	60-80 matches
Under 18	6 sets or 3 full matches per week	60-80 matches

Clearly this is just a guide, as stated above there are a lot of other factors that come into play. It should, however, at least give you a starting point from which to plan a tournament schedule.